

Texas Transportation Commission tells DOT execs not to jump the gun on audit

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By MICHAEL A. LINDENBERGER / The Dallas Morning News

The Texas Transportation Commission on Tuesday warned the executives in charge of the Texas Department of Transportation that commissioners, not the agency's career executives, will decide how to respond to an audit released last month that called for profound change in culture at the agency.

"I just want to remind everybody, do not get out in front of the commission on this issue," Commissioner Fred Underwood said Tuesday, and then repeated himself for emphasis.

Amadeo Saenz, executive director of the 12,000-employee agency, had just finished explaining TxDOT's internal response to the recommendations contained in the 628-page audit, produced over the past year by the [Grant Thornton](#) accounting firm.

Saenz defended his agency in part, even as he accepted some criticism. But his comments did not address many of the thorniest issues the commissioners themselves will have to decide as they determine how to respond to the audit report.

Saenz, for instance, did not discuss the auditors' conclusions that the agency relies far too heavily on engineers for leadership, that it must change "its singularly entrenched culture," or that its top executive ranks should be reorganized with new jobs open to external candidates.

He credited the report, however, for providing new ways of looking at the agency's operations, and said he's committed to making whatever changes the commission embraces.

Commission chairwoman Deirdre Delisi said commissioners will develop a plan for how to address the suggestions contained in the report.

Ultimately, some of those decisions could be made for the department by the Texas Legislature when it returns to Austin in 2011.