

Former Perry aide, corporate lawyer to head TxDOT overhaul

Jay Kimbrough, often tabbed when agencies are troubled, will get \$360,000 in salary and benefits, while Howard Wolf will work as a volunteer



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The reconstruction of the Texas Department of Transportation took on two experienced architects Friday.

Jay Kimbrough , a former chief of staff for Gov. Rick Perry, will be paid almost \$360,000 in salary and benefits over the next 14 months to run the day-to-day operations of a small team being assembled.

Howard Wolf , who retired from the Fulbright & Jaworski law firm in 2003 after 44 years and is acting chairman and general counsel of Falcon Seaboard Co., a corporation owned by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst , will assume more of a chief executive officer role, officials said. Wolf, 75 , is serving as a volunteer and will not be paid a salary.

Their task: Take the voluminous analysis and recommendations of a recent, 627-page management review of TxDOT, as well as earlier critiques by the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission and various auditors, and make genuine change at the agency in charge of Texas highways, airports, rural transit and ferries.

Given the \$2 million cost of that management review released in late May, Kimbrough's compensation and what will be paid to other team members, managing an overhaul of TxDOT could cost something close to \$3 million . Bill Meadows, who serves on the five-member Texas Transportation Commission, which brought on Kimbrough and Wolf, said it would be money well-spent. Meadows said although the agency's district offices do

yeomanly work building and maintaining transportation facilities, he has been less satisfied with what's going on at the top.

"My frustrations have really been more management, vision, direction," Meadows said. With money drying up for TxDOT, Meadows said, "we better be creative, we better be innovative, we better be open. My experience is that we are not always there."

Kimbrough, 62 , has specialized over the past 15 years in parachuting into troubled Texas government bureaucracies and, through an aggressive management style appropriate to his early adulthood as a Marine, making things change. Aside from his most high profile jobs, serving as conservator briefly of the Texas Youth Commission in 2007 and as Perry's chief of staff in 2008 and 2009 , Kimbrough also intervened at the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, the Texas Commission on Private Security and, most recently, the biodefense program at Texas A&M University. Until this hiring Friday by TxDOT, he was a special adviser to the A&M board of regents.

Kimbrough has "a great track record," said state Rep. Joe Pickett, D-El Paso , chairman of the House Transportation Committee. "I know the guy. He's not going to take any (guff) from anyone, including me."

Wolf, aside from his long and varied service as a partner with Fulbright & Jaworski, has served on a number of corporate boards over the years, often as chairman. He has been in private law practice in Austin since 2004 . He served two terms on the Sunset Advisory Commission, starting in 2003 , as a Dewhurst appointee.

The massive review of TxDOT by Grant Thornton , one of the six largest accounting firms in the world, cited TxDOT's insular culture of engineers — overwhelmingly with degrees from the University of Texas and Texas A&M — as "a tremendous strength, but also can act as a tremendous inhibitor to internal change and to the ability to understand, accept and respond to an evolving external environment."

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