

**TxDOT names former Secretary of State, Perry aide
Phil Wilson executive director, will pay \$292,500 to
start and ask Legislature for more**



By

Michael Lindenberger/Reporter

Gov. Rick Perry's influence over the state's 12,000-employee transportation department - and the way billions of dollars of highway projects in North Texas and elsewhere will be developed -- deepened today, as the state highway chiefs selected a new boss for the Texas Department of Transportation with deep political ties to the governor.

Austin veteran Phil Wilson will become the highest paid executive director in the history of the department, and will become the first boss in its modern history who is not a professional engineer.

Wilson, who is both a former deputy chief of staff for Perry and the governor;'s previous appointee as Secretary of State, will be paid \$292,500 a year, \$100,000 more than Amadeo Saenz who retired last month after a restructuring panel issued a 69-page report critical of the agency's over-dependence on engineering and lack of nimbleness in its management.

That salary will pay him more than all but a handful of state employees, and put him in a category previously only populated by university presidents, medical research center directors, sports coaches and pension fund executives.

By contrast, the new salary is more than \$100,000 more than what Texas pays the executive in charge of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the commissioner of the Texas Education Commissioner or the Texas Attorney General, who is paid \$150,000.

Ted Houghton, one of the five Texas Transportation Commission members who govern TxDOT, led the search committee for a replacement for Saenz. All five members were appointed by Perry, and four of the five are long-time businessmen. Chairwoman Deirdre Delisi is a former chief of staff for the governor and now serves as his top policy adviser for his campaign for the Republican nomination for president.

"Phil's experience as a public servant and member of the Texas business community has prepared him well to lead the department as it continues to modernize," said Houghton,

an El Paso resident. "While TxDOT is certainly a national leader in transportation infrastructure development, there are opportunities for Phil to guide the department through this period of transition, emerging a more responsive and efficient organization."

Wilson did not speak at Thursday's meeting, but was quoted in a press release by the department expressing gratitude for the job. "I am honored to be selected as the next executive director of TxDOT," he said. "This is an agency with a rich history in successfully building for our future with dedicated employees. I look forward to working with the agency, Commission, Legislature and local communities on the most efficient and effective ways to build infrastructure for Texas."

When the three-member restructuring council issued its report in January, it made many recommendations aimed at giving the commissioners a road map for how to respond to an even more scathing external management audit from the year before. The report was released just as lawmakers, many still frustrated with the direction the department has headed in under the influence of Perry's push for privatization of toll roads, were returning to Austin for the 2011 session.

The report was cited as evidence that TxDOT could reform itself, an argument the agency mostly won. It fended off all the most serious efforts to restructure the department and came out of the session with approval to pay its next executive director much more than typical state agency executives make.

Delisi also said that the commission will at a later date be asking the Legislative Budget Board for approval to pay Wilson more than the \$292,500 salary it announced today. But the 2011 law requires that before such a request can be honored, TxDOT must conduct a survey to establish that he is underpaid. The department said it would do, but did not say by when.

Wilson's direct business experience is limited. He currently works as a senior vice president for government relations for Luminant, a power generating company that is a subsidiary of the firm previously known as TXU.

However, department spokeswoman Karen Amacker noted that in both his role as the Governor's appointee as Secretary of State and his work on Perry's competitiveness council has given him valuable business-related insight.

Wilson also served as Perry's representative on the Emerging Technology Fund and Texas Enterprise Fund.

For Perry, just as he turns his attention to Washington, the move means a further tightening of influence by the governor on an agency he has long kept close.

His appointment of his long-time friend and former Austin roommate Ric Williamson to the Texas Transportation Commission helped usher in a era of private toll roads that is

still producing results in North Texas, where two major toll projects are being financed by private firms and several more are expected in the next couple of years.

As chairman, Williamson helped pushed through what many Perry observers have called his most important policy achievement - massive changes to the Texas Transportation Code that provided the legal basis for what has become an enormous growth industry in the state: The proliferation of privately financed toll roads.

When Williamson died in late 2008, Perry appointed his former chief of staff Deirdre Delisi to succeed him, and from that perch Delisi has managed to improve relationships with a once-hostile Legislature to the point of winning back authority for more private toll roads in North Texas, where two are under way now and another several billion dollars' worth are being discussed.

Delisi is now Perry's chief policy advisor for his Presidential campaign.

New Texas Interim Transpo Chief Wants More Travel Options, Not Just More Lanes

(Houston — KUHF) A trip along a Houston freeway can be a terrifying trip for the white-knuckled driver. There are entrance ramps that shoot motorists into fast-moving lanes with little warning. Exits to the left force drivers to make quick, calculated lane changes. Combine that with wrecks, breakdowns, and poorly tied-down mattresses that fly off the backs of trucks.

We spoke with the Texas Department of Transportation's new interim executive director about some of Houston's particular traffic woes. He knows more lanes could solve some of the problem, but he's thinking broader and wants Houston to tackle light rail expansion and up freight efficiency.

John Barton has been with the agency for 25 years, rising through the ranks from a high school summer job as a maintenance worker. He moved on to a full-time position after getting his engineering degree from Texas A&M. Before taking the interim director's post, Barton was an assistant director for engineering operations where he helped direct long and short-term planning, so he's accustomed to thinking big.

Barton says areas of concern include U.S. Highway 290, which carries heavy commuter traffic from downtown to Houston's northwest suburbs. He also cites the intersection of east-west Interstate 10 and north-south Interstate 45 north of downtown. South of downtown, there's that thrill-ride ramp that funnels drivers from U.S. Highway 59 onto busy northbound I-45. While the idea of added lanes may sound attractive to some commuters, Barton says just building new roads alone won't solve the problem. He says there needs to be a strong focus on mobility issues in the center of the city and that requires multiple solutions.

Houston currently has one operating light rail line, which carries riders on a seven-mile trip from downtown that passes through the city's Museum District and Medical Center. The line ends near Reliant Stadium to the south, making it convenient for Texans football fans. Other rail lines are now under development but as it stands right now, commuters in the outlying areas have to rely on buses and park-and-rides if they want to use public transit. Barton says the city needs commuter rail alternatives along with new ways of moving freight on rail and water.

As for how to pay for projects, Barton admits it's not easy to attract funding and Texas needs to come up with more cost-effective solutions. Barton cites as an example partnerships with local governmental entities that can put up some of the costs. He says there is also a lot of capital in privately-held interests, and transportation in a huge metro area like Houston is a solid investment that many companies may be willing to make.

Along with money, Barton says investment from the private sector brings new ideas on how to design and build more effective solutions.

Road projects currently in the works for the Houston area include the widening of two segments of the South Beltway, one of two loops that circle the city. The road will be widened from two lanes to four lanes in each direction. Construction is also getting underway on a new segment of the Grand Parkway, which officials say will eventually become a third loop around the metro area.

Scott, Rider

From: Coby Chase [Coby.Chase@txdot.gov]
Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2011 1:40 PM
To: Coby Chase
Subject: 2011 09 29 FEDERAL UPDATE SPECIAL EDITION

SHORT VERSION: We've hired someone who spends federal dollars.

NEW TXDOT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Okay, this isn't a purely federal matter, but this person will deal with a lot of federal funds so I'm using that connection, tenuous as it may be. You'll see this a few times if you're on more than one TxDOT email list.

Phil Wilson Selected to Lead Texas Department of Transportation

AUSTIN - During their regular monthly meeting Thursday, the Texas Transportation Commission selected Phil Wilson as the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) 19th executive director, effective October 17, 2011. Wilson currently serves as senior vice president of public affairs for Luminant, an electric generation company headquartered in Dallas, and previously served as Texas Secretary of State.

As secretary, Wilson was responsible for elections and acted as the governor's chief liaison on the Texas-Mexico border and issues with Mexico. He has also served as Chairman of the Governor's Competitiveness Council, where Wilson helped identify ways the state could improve its economic position for continued long-term success. Wilson's public service also includes time as an aide to U.S. Senator Phil Gramm and on the senior staff of Governor Rick Perry.

"Phil's experience as a public servant and member of the Texas business community has prepared him well to lead the department as it continues to modernize," said Ted Houghton, Texas Transportation commissioner and chair of the commission's executive director search committee. "While TxDOT is certainly a national leader in transportation infrastructure development, there are opportunities for Phil to guide the department through this period of transition, emerging a more responsive and efficient organization."

"I am honored to be selected as the next executive director of TxDOT. This is an agency with a rich history in successfully building for our future with dedicated employees," said Wilson. "I look forward to working with the agency, Commission, Legislature and local communities on the most efficient and effective ways to build infrastructure for Texas."

During his time as secretary of state, Wilson led a number of transportation-related programs, including the Border Colonia Access Program and the Texas Interagency Work Group on the Texas and Mexico Border Affairs initiative. The secretary of state also serves as the state's chief economic development officer, and in that role, Wilson worked with TxDOT professionals in bringing new opportunities to the state.

As a chair of the Governor's Competitiveness Council, Wilson and his colleagues made several transportation recommendations to improve the state's competitiveness, including proposals to reexamine public-private partnerships, expand inland ports, repair and maintain the state's existing infrastructure and advancement of rail relocation efforts.