



- CLASSIFIEDS
- AUTOMOTIVE
- REAL ESTATE
- EMPLOYMENT
- MERCHANDISE

Affordable Health Care Clinic
Walk-Ins Welcome
 390 West Texas Ave Waskom, Tx 903-687-2500

E-mail this page Print this page Most E-mailed/Most printed S M L Type size

Transportation, jail, courthouse top county priorities

By Sandra Cason, News Messenger

Saturday, February 07, 2009

From rural roads to high speed rail, transportation is a top priority for Harrison County this year, said Judge Richard Anderson.

Other discussions that will no doubt crop up in commissioners court meetings in 2009 are completion of the old courthouse restoration project, possible solutions to the adult inmate housing crisis and new methods of dealing with juvenile offenders, plus the selection of a route for the proposed Interstate Highway 69.



Courtney Case/News Messenger (ENLARGE)

Scott Slade of Marshall, center, and Ralph Meisenhimer of Jefferson, of the Harrison County Road and Bridge Department lead as the crew repairs Liberty Church Road Friday in Marshall.

ROADS

The oil and gas industry, coupled with timber harvesting may exempt the local population from some of the brunt of recession, but it is a mixed blessing.

County roads are paved with an asphalt oil and dirt mix that simply will not withstand the wear and tear caused by trucks hauling equipment and products to and from drilling sites and timber cutting operations, Anderson said.

In the past, it has been the policy to have those companies which cause the damage reimburse the county for paving materials.

Under a new agreement, adopted in 2008, industries damaging county roads must pay for a cement stabilization foundation, which Anderson said, has proven to be "a very durable surface."

The policy is that the company will bear the cost of purchasing the sturdier material

and the county will put it down.

"There has been a lot of increase in drilling activity because of Cotton Valley wells, which are one layer above Haynesville Shale," Anderson said, "and our 743 miles of roads are taking a beating. We're going to hold them accountable for the damage they do."

The judge added, however, that the new plan "has been well received by the oil companies."

Another move which should improve the county roads is an increased budget allocation.

The amount set aside in 2007-2008 was \$576,000, Anderson said. "We've increased that to \$800,000 in this current budget." Add to that another \$100,000 set aside for road work to be contracted out, and this year's figure is almost double that of the previous year.

The county's fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

RAIL

Anderson believes recent changes in state and federal government may bode well for the implementation of high speed passenger rail service across Texas and the United States.

It is a "good thing" that new Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives Joe Straus is "a moderate," Anderson said.

"He will work to build a consensus. Republicans and Democrats are of the opinion that we should see less division; less rancor," the judge added. "That means he's smart, that he's got a vision — something I've been working on for three years."

Anderson was referring to his efforts to unite officials from counties not only across Texas, but also into Louisiana, in a push for construction of passenger rails which would parallel existing freight tracks.

Amtrak's Midwest route already provides east/west passenger service on its Texas Eagle from Los Angeles to San Antonio, with the route continuing in a north/south direction to Fort Worth and Dallas, on to Marshall and other East Texas cities, and to Shreveport, La.; Texarkana, Little Rock, St. Louis and Chicago.

Advertisement

Save a lot
food stores

Taste the difference.

Marshall, Texas

MOST POPULAR STORIES

- ▶ MHS senior overcomes aunt's death
- ▶ Police Report
- ▶ POLICE REPORT: Unwelcome guest gets cozy
- ▶ Mardi Gras Upriver comes to a close
- ▶ One hurt in head-on wreck

Communities in(more)

Therapist Seeking(more)

PROPERTY MANAGER real estate and/or(more)

Communities in(more)

Drivers needed. Must have 2 yrs exp. Local & long distance. Contact Ronnie...(more)

Marshall Manor Nursing and (more)

LVN Needed! Busy clinic(more)

PROPERTY MANAGER real estate and/or(more)

Healthcare Our growth is your (more)

Drivers needed. Must have 2 yrs exp. Local & long distance. Contact Ronnie...(more)

VIEW ALL TOP JOBS NewsMessenger TOP CARS

Chevrolet Tahoe,4.8L V8 16V MPFI OHV, Special Purpose Vehicle...(more)

Dodge Grand Caravan,3.8L V6 12V OHV 215 hp 245 lb-ft torque, Special Purpose Vehicle...(more)

Chevrolet Corvette,6.0L V8 16V MPFI OHV, Two Seater...(more)

Chevrolet Silverado 1500,4.8L V8 16V, Standard Pickup Truck...(more)

Chrysler Sebring,2.4L I4 16V MPFI DOHC, Midsize Car...(more)

-View All Top Cars -Place an Ad-

One of the most often voiced complaints against Amtrak is the train's tardiness. A check of scheduled arrivals at the Marshall Depot recently indicated the Eagle was running two hours late.

Playing a part in delays is the fact that passenger rail service must yield to freight. A second set of tracks within existing railroad right-of-way would end the dilemma, Anderson said.

In October of 2008, the U.S. Congress passed a "railroad bill" that called for expenditures of \$15 billion to develop passenger service.

With a new administration now in Washington that is "extremely shovel-ready," Anderson is optimistic any economic stimulus package will include railroad construction jobs. "The railroad bill was not fully funded," he said. "I'm hoping Congress will say 'here's the idea' and the new administration will say 'here's the money; let's do it.'"

Anderson envisions a situation similar to the Work Projects Administration of The Great Depression era, pointing to buildings put in place in Harrison County during the 1930s, which remain in use and are in good shape. Marshall Junior High School and West End Park are among them, he said. The judge said local officials met in November with members of the North Texas Council of Governments to discuss the rerouting of passenger rail service from Union Station in Dallas to the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport.

Such a change would allow Marshall passengers to board at the local station and travel at approximately 150 mph to DFW, eliminating a drive to Shreveport and a commuter flight to Dallas.

Talks have also been held between East Texas and North Louisiana councils regarding the extension of high speed rail service from Harrison County across the state line. And Ouachita COG in Monroe, La., has opened discussions with its Mississippi counterparts to extend bullet train service to Jackson.

Anderson said he hopes to host a high speed rail summit here in the future.

Bullet trains criss-crossing the country will eliminate the nation's dependency on oil producing nations, Anderson said. "As long as we remain addicted to driving, the Mideast can manipulate us" by raising and lowering prices.

Anderson declined to reveal precisely what improvements would be made to Amtrak service here this year. He did say, however, "Texarkana has a full-time revenue agent and that's working for them. We'll make an announcement in the next couple of weeks."

J.G. "Griff" Hubbard is Amtrak's product line revenue agent, currently serving Marshall and a number of other East Texas counties.

COURTHOUSE

A 10-year renovation project — financed through a mix of local donations and grants from Texas Historical Commission — will be completed this year. County officials will move out of the newer courthouse and into the 107-year-old facility "during the second quarter of '09," Anderson said.

During a recent commissioners court meeting, the judge reported that the final phase of construction, the building's interior, is expected to cost \$2.235 million, "substantially less than the \$2.6 million estimate."

Funds will be included in future budgets to prevent the building from ever again falling into a state of disrepair, the judge has pledged, adding the county's maintenance crew will receive special training regarding care of a historic structure.

JAIL

During the first meeting of 2007, commissioners rejected a bid for construction of a new jail facility because the \$6.2 million figure exceeded by more than a million dollars revenue made available through the sale of bonds.

Since then, officials have struggled to keep the rising inmate population under control while, at the same time, seeking other options for expansion.

After scrapping the proposal to build a 96-bed facility on a county owned parking lot to the west of the existing jail, the county launched an investigation of re-adaptive use of an existing structure — the old Blue Buckle Building on Alamo Boulevard being among them.

"We are now exploring other options for adaptive re-use," Anderson said. "We have received preliminary cost measures and we are trying to get them scaled back."

Any jail expansion project will involve the sale of additional bonds, the judge said.

Anderson added discussions are under way regarding the use of "juvenile and adult ankle bracelets" for those accused of minor crimes. "We're looking at a cost of \$4 per day versus \$40 per day," he said. The latter is the sum the county pays per prisoner housed in Gregg County Jail.

The local facility is authorized by Texas Commission on Jail Standards to house 150 inmates, and with an average daily population reaching 180 and more, the number housed out of county involves a considerable expense.

The cost was discussed during a recent commission meeting, at which time County Auditor Marc Palmer said the county had already run through approximately half of the \$300,000 budgeted for that purpose this year.

INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 69

Now that the prospect of a Trans Texas Corridor has been nixed by the state legislature, Anderson said Harrison County will continue its push for construction of the interstate highway along a route parallel and adjacent to U.S. Highway 59.