

## HCTRA's Executive Director Wesley E. Freise Retires

**W**esley E. Freise, P.E., Executive Director of the Harris County Toll Road Authority since 1985, retired from the agency effective October 31, 2000. Mr. Freise, who has a total of 25 years in the transportation industry that began with Southern Pacific in 1972, joined the Harris County Toll Road Authority in February of 1984 as Assistant Director of Engineering. Named Executive Director in 1985, Mr. Freise has overseen all phases of financing, design and construction of the entire 86 miles of the Harris County Toll Road system, and has been responsible for setting the structure for toll operations and collections.

"When we first started operations in our office on Benmar, we didn't even have a trash can to call our own," Mr. Freise recalled. "The toll road itself was just a piece of tape stretched out across a map." "Today," he continued, "HCTRA employs over 650 people within the Administrative, Operations and Services Divisions and has an operating budget of \$29 million annually. While we had

visionary dreams for HCTRA's future way back then, it is with a great sense of pride that I can look back on how far we've come in just a few short years."

While Wesley E. Freise, P.E., may be retiring as HCTRA's Executive Director, he has ensured the agency's continued growth with the Westpark Toll Road project well on its way to construction beginning in early 2001. Negotiations are also in progress with Ft. Bend County to help implement their plans for a toll facility, and the extension of the Hardy Toll Road into downtown is becoming more of a reality with Mr. Freise as a spearhead for that project. The extension of the Grand Parkway project from I-10 to US 59 north is also very likely to be built as a toll facility, thanks in large part to Mr. Freise.

Throughout his 25 year career, Wesley Freise has dedicated his life's work to the transportation industry. Harris County has been extremely fortunate to have had the benefit of his extensive background, experience and visionary foresight for the past 17 years,

to guide the Toll Road Authority from a "piece of tape stretched out on a map" to the 86 miles of toll road which now serve over 5 million patrons weekly. His commitment to achieve the goals of Harris County and his dedication to HCTRA and its employees have enriched not only the economic health of the community it serves, but also the lives of many. HCTRA will continue to grow in its success, thanks to the inroads literally paved by Mr. Freise. His many contributions and achievements will long be appreciated by all who have had the privilege of knowing and working with him, as well as by those who benefit from the transportation system he created.

Although Mr. Freise is retiring from HCTRA, he is not retiring completely. He has started his own consulting firm, W. P. Engineering Consultants Inc., and will be doing consulting work for HCTRA in the immediate future. ■

## Bernard Koudelka Named HCTRA's New Executive Director

**H**arris County Commissioners' Court unanimously approved Bernard J. Koudelka, P.E., as HCTRA's new Executive Director effective November 21, 2000. Mr. Koudelka, who served as HCTRA's Assistant Director of Operations for the past five years, was handed the agency's reins after Wesley E. Freise, P.E., announced his retirement from that position effective October 31, 2000.

"I greatly appreciate the opportunity to serve Harris County in this new capacity," Mr. Koudelka said. "The Toll Road Authority has always offered a dynamic environment for minds to grow. There are new challenges to rise to on a daily basis," he continued, "which present themselves in such variety that everyone, from the administrative staff to our field personnel, has the opportunity to develop

both personally and professionally. I am looking forward to the new challenges that face all of us within the agency and to feeling my way into the new responsibilities this position holds to ensure a confidence level for everyone concerned," he said.

Mr. Koudelka, a 1977 graduate of the University of Houston, began his professional career working for the Texas Department of Transportation while still an engineering student. "I worked with TxDoT for 10 years, from 1970 to 1980, beginning my training with traffic surveillance and working up through engineering design," Mr. Koudelka recalled. "In 1980 I joined the Harris County Flood Control group where I stayed for four years, then transferred to HCTRA in 1984 where I was involved with the early design and construction of the Hardy Toll Road and the

Sam Houston Tollway," he said. During his HCTRA career, Mr. Koudelka has worked not only in the engineering department, but has managed the maintenance, operations and services divisions as well.

The background and experience Mr. Koudelka brings to the table will serve him well as the agency continues to expand. "We have over 650 employees now, and over the next five years we will be committing to hundreds of millions of dollars in new construction projects. The challenges will be great," he continued, "and I am looking forward to working through this transition period and effectively fulfilling my obligations and responsibilities as HCTRA's Executive Director," he concluded. ■