



Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)
Rail Division:
22nd Annual Southwestern Rail Conference

Don Franks, Rail Division Director



May 19, 2026

New Rail Division Director's Experience



Figure 1 – Don Franks



Figure 2 – Hulcher Services



Figure 3 – Progress Rail



Figure 4 – Trinity Industries

Overview TxDOT's Planning & Modal Programs

Multimodal Mission: Deliver a safe, reliable, integrated system to move people & freight

Connecting Texas 2050 aligns all modes around safety, mobility, connectivity, economic vitality, and stewardship.

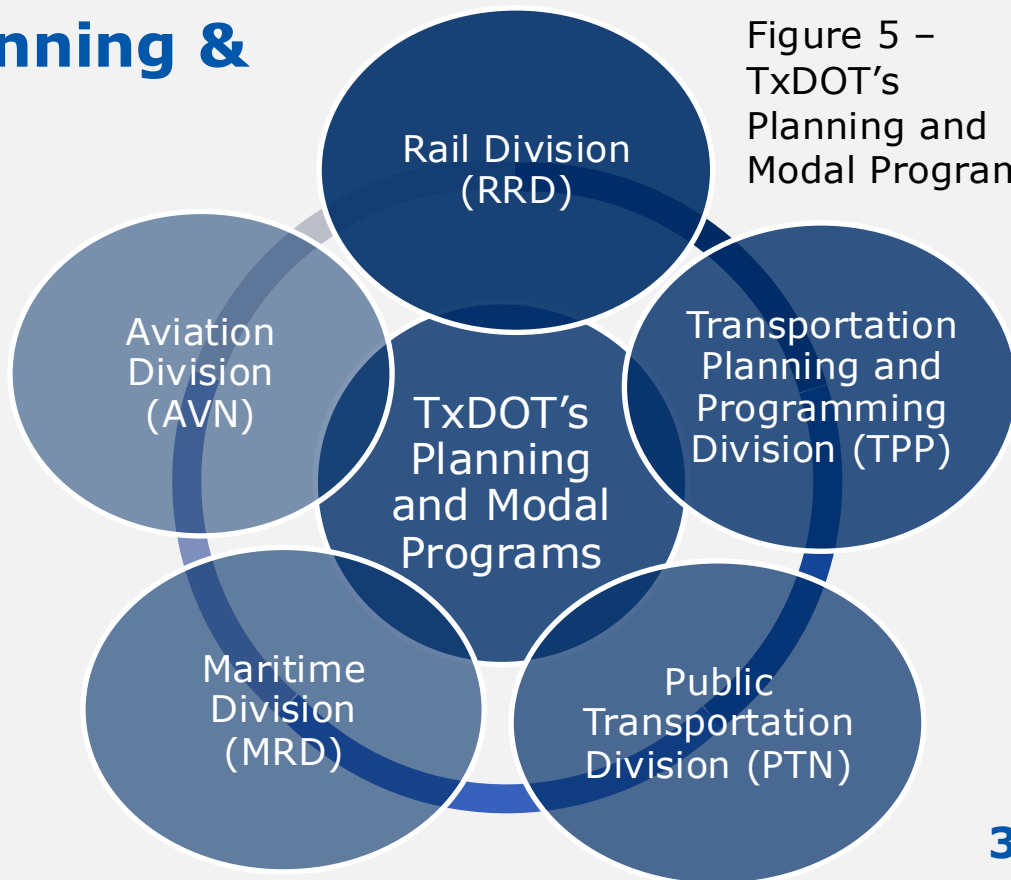


Figure 5 – TxDOT's Planning and Modal Programs

Texas Rail Network

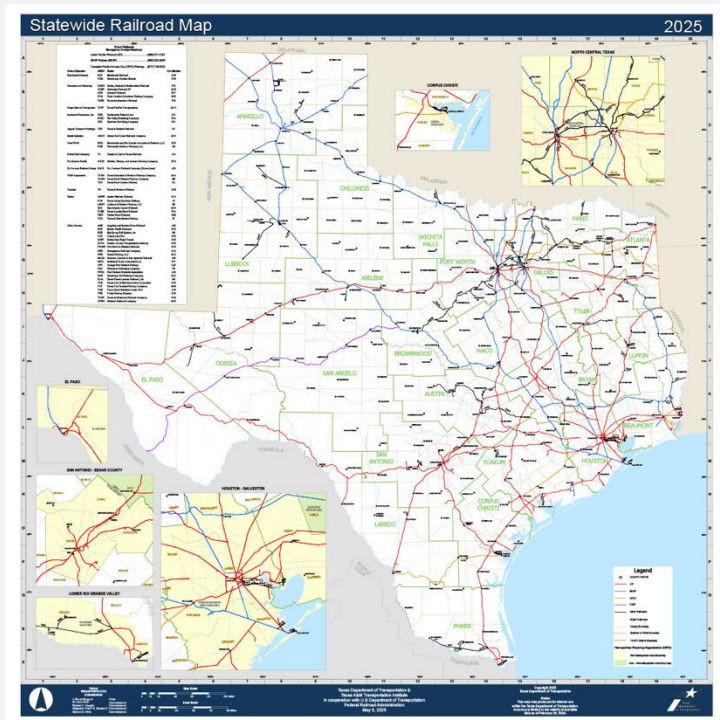


Figure 6 – Railroad Map



10,500 Miles of Track



3 Class I Railroads &
51 Short Line Railroads



4 Passenger/Commuter Rail

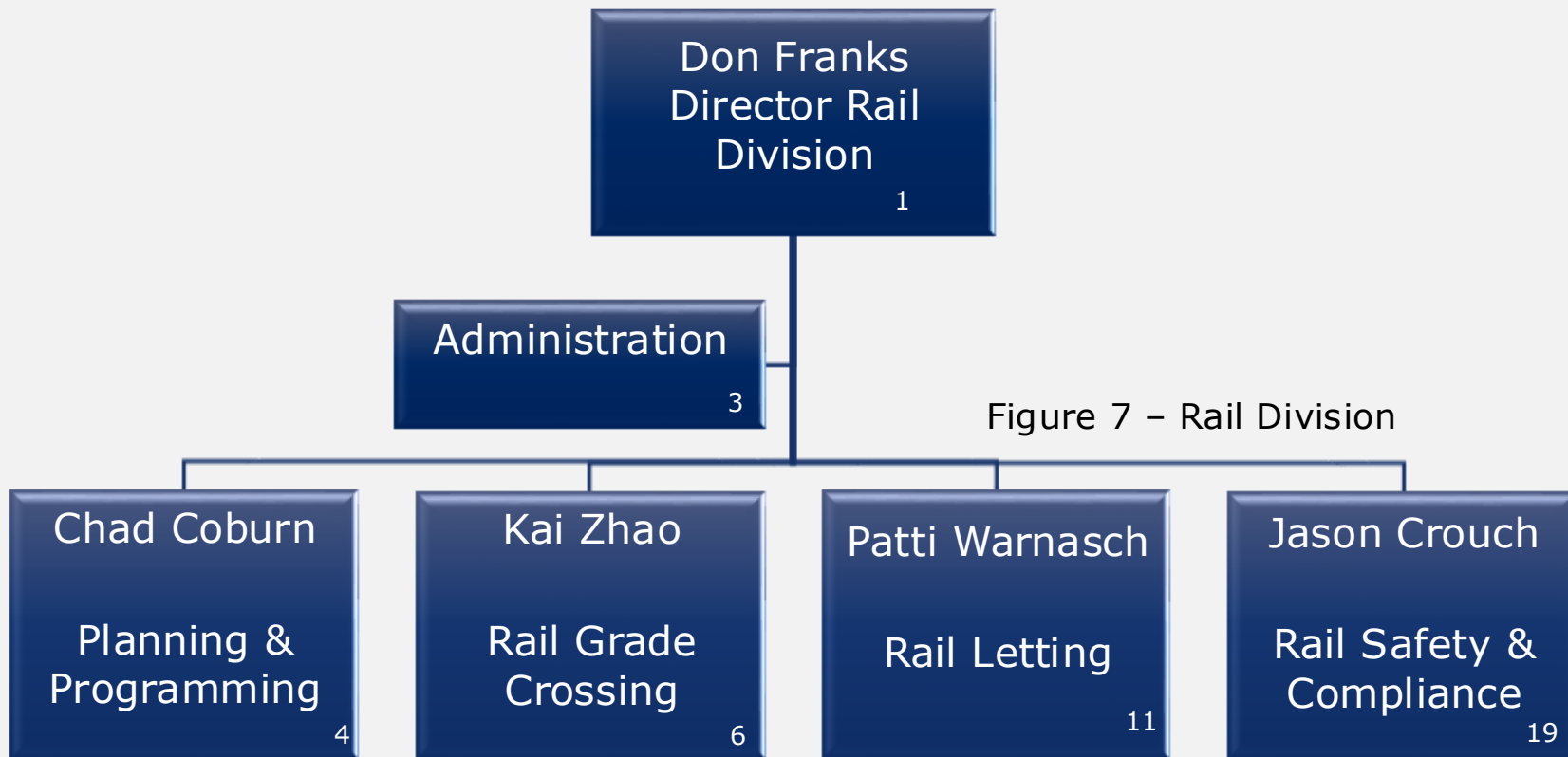


14,000 Crossings



5,177 Bridges

TxDOT Rail Division Organization Chart



Rail Division Sections' Overview

Planning & Programming

- Oversees State Rail Plan, Federal/state grants, and rail corridor studies.
- Manages state-owned South Orient Railroad.
- Creates dashboards.

Rail Letting

- Clears railroad agreements for TxDOT-let construction and maintenance projects.

Rail Grade Crossing

- Administers projects and funding to improve rail highway crossings.
 - Section 130
 - Replanking
 - Signal Payment
- Updates crossing inventory

Rail Safety & Compliance

- Partners with Federal Railroad Administration & Federal Transit Administration to enforce rail safety.
- Conducts inspections and investigations

Statewide Off-System Grade Separation Grants

- 89th Texas Legislature funded \$250M program at TxDOT
- Improves safety, relieves congestion, and fuels economic growth
- Targets high-rail-activity communities



Off-System Grade Separation Program: Demand, Award, and Leverage

- 58 submissions from 37 entities requested \$2.5B
- Advancing to detailed application:
 - 20 of 30 Urban projects (\$1.5B)
 - 5 of 18 Rural projects (\$238M)
 - 9 Pedestrian projects (\$60.5M)
- Commission awarded \$160M to five projects
- \$89.6M reserved to leverage future federal grants



Figure 8 – Project Locations

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Grants



Federal Railroad Administration

Figure 9 –
Federal Railroad
Administration

- **TxDOT FRA-Federal-State Partnership grant proposal (\$1B)** for 14 rail-highway grade separations. Funding decision expected by Summer 2026
- Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) grant applications for **Rail Crossing Elimination (RCE)** are due June 8th and **Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI)** are due June 22nd.

Pedestrian Bridge & Houston Grade Separations

- The 89th Texas Legislature allocated \$20M to advance Houston rail safety projects
- Design and construct the Pedestrian Bridge near Milby High School
- Design two grade separations at Little York & Hirsch Road and Tidwell & Hirsch Road



Figure 10 – Seal of Houston

Senate Bill 2366 – Short Line Railroad Grant Program



The Texas Transportation Commission approved the regulatory framework for Short Line Improvement State Fund Program on April 30, 2026.



However, does not make an appropriation of funds.

South Orient Rail Line (Texas Pacifico Map)



Figure 11 – Texas Pacifico Map

Presidio Freight Rail Inspection Facility

- New inspection facility at Presidio strengthens South Orient Rail Line operations
- Multi-year effort to reconnect the South Orient Line with Mexico nearing completion.
- The Smith Detection Center scanner installation is in process with testing to take place Fall 2026.



Figure 12 – Presidio Freight Rail Inspection Facility

Presidio Photos

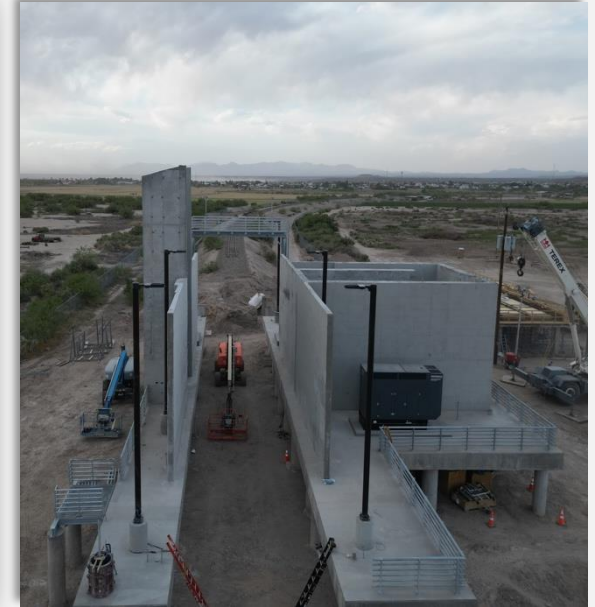


Figure 13 – Presidio Freight Rail Inspection Facility

Rail Letting Section Update

- Cleared 450 rail-related TxDOT projects in FY25.
- Enhanced Rail Scope of Work with clearer instructions and embedded QR guidance for safety training and project delivery.
- Educated districts/contractors on increased railroad insurance requirements.
- Held 2nd TxDOT Rail Conference, March 24-26, to align stakeholders and advance projects.



Rail Grade Crossing Section Update



- Active Grade Crossing Agreements:
 - All Section 130 projects– 163 totaling ~\$117M
 - All Replanking projects– 116 totaling ~\$ 30M
 - Shortline Section 130 projects– 37 totaling \$21M
 - Shortline Replanking projects – 43 totaling \$10M
- Standardized horizontal directional drilling (HDD) via Section 130 Blanket Purchase Order eliminated delays and advanced Section 130 projects.
- Updated 4,550 rail crossing records via West Texas field verification and Laredo/Pharr districts Google Earth desk reviews.

TxDOT State Rail Safety Program Update

- Strong Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) partnership strengthens statewide rail safety oversight.
- 14 FRA-certified rail safety investigators strategically placed statewide
- 5,177 rail bridges actively monitored for safety and integrity

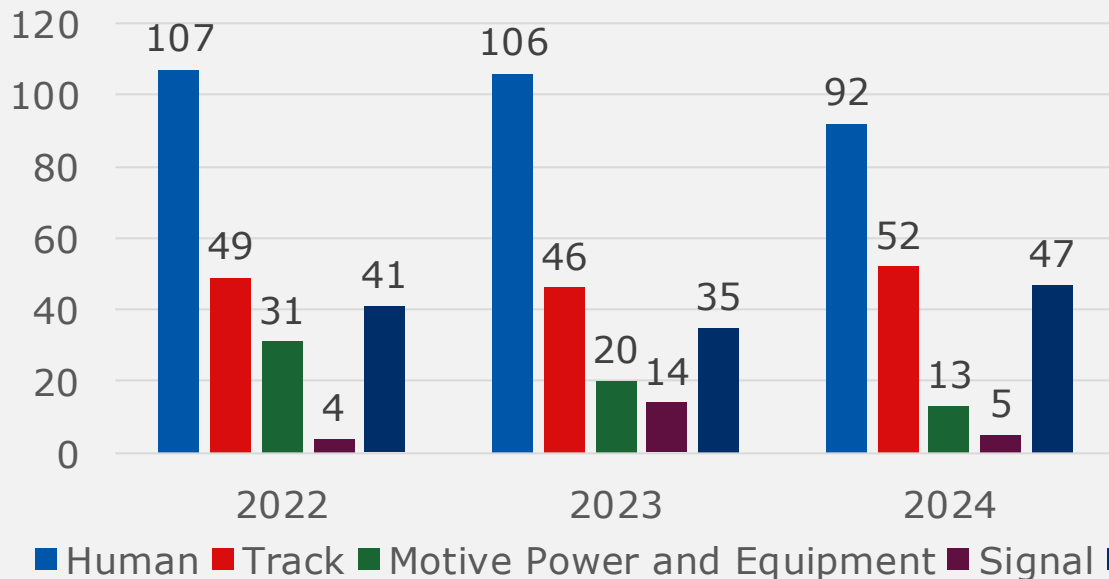


Highlighting FRA Rail Safety Risks



Figure 14 – FRA Rail Safety Risks

Accident Factors in Railroad Accidents from 2022-24



According to [Rail Safety Overview Report \(1.12\)](#) by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Figure 15 – Accident Factors in Railroad Accidents

TxDOT State Safety Oversight (SSO) Program

- TxDOT SSO ranks 2nd nationally for rail systems overseen and is the 5th largest recipient of Federal Transit Administration safety funds.
- TxDOT delivers a robust compliance framework focused on risk-based inspections.
- TxDOT fosters strong collaboration with Regional Transit Agencies, overseeing six currently, with a seventh expected soon.



Figure 16 – Dallas Area Rapid Transit

TxDOT SSO Safety Program Risks



Figure 17 – Houston Metro

- Enhanced Monitoring: Drive safety improvements at DART/Houston Metro
- Criminal Activity Reporting: Improve data integrity & federal reporting credibility
- Roadway Worker Protection: Enforce core protections to prevent worker injuries and fatalities
- Risk-Based Inspections: Targets highest risk conditions to maximize safety impact

**SEE TRACKS?
THINK TRAIN!**



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