CENTER FOR TRANSPORTATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Texas at Austin | Prepared for the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

The TxDOT Adopt-a-Highway Program 40th Anniversary: History, Benefits and Successes

Background

Launched in 1985 by Tyler District Engineer Bobby Evans and Public Information Officer Billy Black, the Adopt-a-Highway (AAH) Program is highly successful. See Exhibit 1.

The Adopt-a-Highway program in Tyler spread by word of mouth to adjoining districts and eventually to employees of other states who had seen the signs on AAH sites with the Adopting Group's name and inquired about the program.

Over 30 years later, Bobby indicated he could not have envisioned that the program would be implemented in twenty-four other districts, forty-eight states and several countries.

Volunteer Groups across Texas have adopted more than 3,300 two-mile highway sections – about 6,600 miles when counting both sides. Clean-ups are conducted up to four times per year which saves tax payers money while helping reduce litter along Texas roadways.

The Group Types are: Business, Civic, Family, Government, Other, Religious, School and Scouts. A survey was conducted with volunteers to obtain information about their experiences.

Surveys were distributed statewide with 92 valid responses.

Key Survey Results

Of the groups that responded to the survey, 91% clean one section and the remaining clean two to four sections. Approximately 1,320 bags of litter are collected by the surveyed Groups during each clean up. Approximately 4,702 bags of litter are collected annually.

- Based on these values and the TxDOT AAH statewide database of all sites, 49,739 bags of litter are picked up during each clean-up and 166,472 bags are picked up yearly.
- Using 20 pounds of litter per bag on average, approximately 497 tons of litter are picked up by volunteers statewide during each clean-up cycle and 1,665 tons of litter are picked up statewide each year.
- 94.6% of surveyed AAH Groups rated the AAH Program either Very Effective or Effective.
- Groups received positive comments for their clean-up efforts from Businesses (15%), Residents, (36%), Family & Friends (34%) and TxDOT employees (15%).
- Groups reported litter has Increased on their sites since site adoption (8%), Remained about the same (61%) or Decreased (32%) even with increases in population and traffic especially in metro areas.

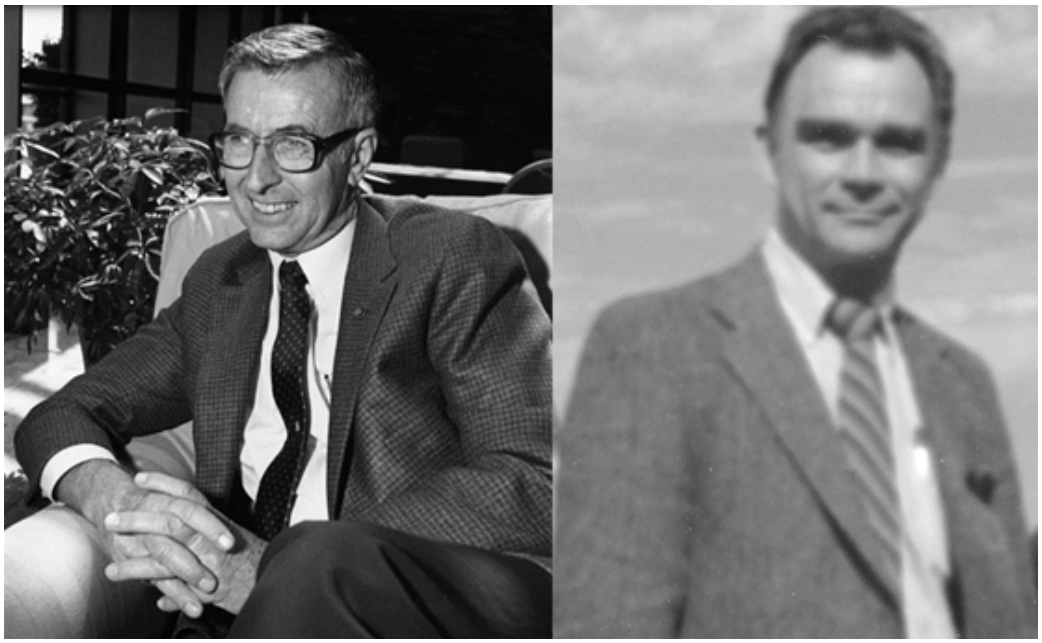


Exhibit 1. Bobby Evans - Tyler District Engineer (left) [Geoff Appold TxDOT] and Billy Black Public Information Officer (right) [Transportation News April, 1985]

Adopt-a-Highway Program

Volunteer groups agree to pick up litter for a 2-year period. Groups may choose from available routes on state-maintained roadways except Interstate Highways or routes with high speed traffic or high average daily traffic. Each group appoints a leader who works with the district Adopt-a-Highway coordinator to schedule when to clean up litter, pick up safety vests and litter bags from the district maintenance section, and where the group will meet before the cleanup.

At the group safety meeting, the leader conducts a safety briefing to discuss the guidelines established by TxDOT and ensures all group members have reviewed the TxDOT YouTube safety video and safety tips card. Proper attire, use of sun screen and proper hydration are also discussed.

Other safety steps discussed include:

1. Stay within the highway right of way and never move to the roadside to pick up litter.
2. Always face traffic during litter pickup.
3. Children 7 – 18 can help pick up litter with adult supervision. One adult is needed for every 3 children under 15.
4. Never put needles, broken glass or liquid filled bottles in your litter bag.
5. Watch for snakes and other animals.
6. Always have a first aid kit on hand.
7. Close all AAH traffic control signs when finished.

Group members carpool to reduce the number of vehicles on site. Group safety is always the top priority.

After cleanup the group leader fills out an online form documenting the number of bags collected and their location on the site. Filled bags are picked up by TxDOT maintenance workers.

Benefits of Volunteering

Groups were asked what benefits they receive from volunteering to pick up litter along Texas highways. The following benefits are top choices, more than one benefit might have been selected by each volunteer Group:

Benefits	% of Groups
1. Cleaner Roadsides	80.4%
2. Physical Activity	56.5%
3. Litter Awareness	55.4%
4. Social Bonding	44.6%
5. Team Mentoring	35.9%
6. Stress Relief	31.5%
7. Organizational Recognition	27.2%

Cleaner roadsides – the goal of the AAH program is also the top benefit cited by the Groups that were surveyed On the opposite end of the spectrum, Organizational Recognition which could be related to Groups seeking a type of advertising through their volunteer efforts, was listed by just over 25% of the Groups as 'a' benefit (not '*the*' benefit) gained from volunteering.

Towns and cities find litter pickups as a way to address an issue that affects everyone. Volunteers see litter pickup as a way to improve the value of homes and other property while increasing self-esteem and civic pride. Litter pickup helps keep the right of way of highways leading to their town neat and clean, which is their "front yard". This increases tourist trade and sales to motorists driving through their town who are more inclined to stop and buy gas, or shop if the town looks neat and clean.

Using Social Media

Volunteers were asked if they used social media to post information about their site cleanups. Forty-eight Groups indicated they post photos and/or interacted with the public through social media. Forty Groups indicated they use Facebook, thirteen Groups use Instagram, two Groups use Linkedin and two Groups use School websites to post information about Adopt-a-Highway and clean-up of their site. Thirty-eight Groups indicated they did not use social media to share information about clean ups.

TxDOT sources estimate that Adopt-a-Highway volunteer litter pickup saves Texas taxpayers approximately $3 million to $5 million a year.

Program Operations and Management

The TxDOT Travel Information Division (TRV) has general oversight of the AAH program statewide. TRV manages the Adopt-a-Highway database operations, develops rules and guidelines for section adoption, safety of volunteers and rules to ensure good management practices.

TRV also has developed and maintains online forms for groups wishing to adopt a highway section. These include forms regarding eligibility, AAH sign details and format, the online AAH application form and the online Pick up Report. The Report captures information such as the number of volunteers present, number of bags of litter collected, and date of collection.

The Statewide Adopt-a-Highway Coordinator manages AAH program administration including database development and is the point of contact for the 25 district AAH coordinators who manage and operate the program.

The Statewide Coordinator also directs marketing and communications for the AAH program including public and media relations.

District AAH Coordinators manage new group applications and set up agreements. District Coordinators work with maintenance sections to ensure availability of litter bags and safety vests and coordinate litter collection to ensure filled litter bags are removed in a timely fashion.

The Coordinator orders signs for new AAH sections, answers public questions about the AAH program, and participates in community events to bring more interest to the AAH program.

If the District Coordinator finds that a TxDOT work zone will be in place on the Group's site during the proposed clean up date, a different date will be scheduled.

In this way, TxDOT TRV, districts and AAH Groups work together to make Texas highways clean and attractive.

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Report Date:
May 28, 2026

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