"TravelerHost" (formerly TexBox)
Tourism & Community Network Portal

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What is the TravelerHost Tourism & Community Network?

The TravelerHost Tourism & Community Network (hereafter TravelerHost Network) is a network of free-standing kiosks and virtual portals installed in a state's rest area and travel information centers. A pilot project called TexBox was developed and deployed at seven Texas Department of Transportation Safety Rest Areas. TexBoxes, during the pilot, provided important travel information and services to the traveling public. The TravelerHost Network will create numerous additional benefits, a few include:

- a new "marketing" venue for rural communities and businesses interested in growing tourism in their area
- hubs for regional and community collaboration and networking
- valuable capabilities to link and disseminate critical emergency/medical services to rural areas
- a system to capture critical information about the traveling public, their activities, preferences and feedback

Purpose

The purpose of the TravelerHost Network is to provide:

      1) a complete "package" of answers to questions that traveler's might have, and

      2) customized information about the places they are traveling through.

For a state like Iowa, the intent of the TravelerHost Network is to help the State and communities be better hosts to visitors and do a better job of "Marketing Iowa". In addition, the TravelerHost Network can provide dynamic, interesting and timely information to users at locations where it is not practical to have the facilities staffed.

In addition, the TravelerHost Network can serve as a template that can easily be adapted to other U.S. states or in other nations worldwide.

A Proven—tested Concept

TexBox, the "beta" version of TravelerHost was successfully pilot tested in seven locations in Texas from April 2003 until August 2005. The project received considerable publicity from a variety of sources including

- AAA—Texas Journey Magazine (Nov/Dec 2003)
- Dallas Morning News—Dec. 5, 2003
- Lifescapes Magazine—The Agriculture Program, Texas A&M University (Vol. 3, No. 2 Fall, 2003)
- Maintenance Matters—TxDOT's Maintenance Newsletter, (Winter 2003/04)
- High Plains Journal—July 7, 2003
- Amarillo Globe News—June 30, 2003
- Kiosk Market Place—June 24, 2003

A Regional Tourism Development Hub?
The TravelerHost Network can become a tourism hub, creating a communication and collaboration network to assist communities and businesses to share information and resources. The TravelerHost Network is a system that can provide "marketing" exposure for rural communities to millions of travelers who stop in Iowa communities and tourism attractions and Travel Information Centers annually.

Partners in the TravelerHost Network
A cornerstone of the TravelerHost Network is that the "content" of each TravelerHost will be developed and maintained by regional groups (local COC, CVB's, etc.) who live near the Iowa visitor facilities. Local responsibility can transform the project into a community grassroots-based effort. This design distributes responsibility of developing and maintaining the content to local groups who are one of the primary beneficiaries of the system, besides the traveling public.

The TravelerHost Network can provide important travel information with updated technology that satisfies travelers needs. Traveler's characteristics are changing and "customers" are technology savvy. Recently Travel Industry Association of America reported that over 80% of people do their travel research online.

Iowa's tourist destinations (Travel Info. Centers) can become more important for nearby communities because the information technology infrastructure outlined in this proposal might very well establish Iowa tourism centers as "Hubs" for community and regional tourism development. The TravelerHost Network can answer customer's questions while it can also address several other important issues that are facing the tourism industry, rural communities, and citizens in the State. A few of these are outlined briefly below.

Addressing the Needs of Both User Groups
The The TravelerHost Network can help the state of Iowa and the Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area to satisfy the needs of **communities**' *and* **travelers**. Communities need to promote their areas to the traveling public, and travelers in the state need travel information and ways to find tourism opportunities. The The TravelerHost Network accomplishes this while satisfying several goals for the State of Iowa, its citizens, and the people that are visiting the State. A few of these include:

Easing Traveler's—Travel Anxieties—Safety & Security
- The TravelerHost Network will provide important safety and security information which can potentially reduce traffic fatalities and ensure that traveler's concerns are minimized, while maximizing public awareness of safety issues.

Create Tourism Marketing Opportunities for Communities and Businesses
- The TravelerHost Network will provide communities a way to attract travelers to spend some time in their region. Marketing for these areas is constantly a challenge. TravelHost Kiosks at designated Silos and Smokestacks sites would provide useful information to travelers and create a new vehicle to reach potential

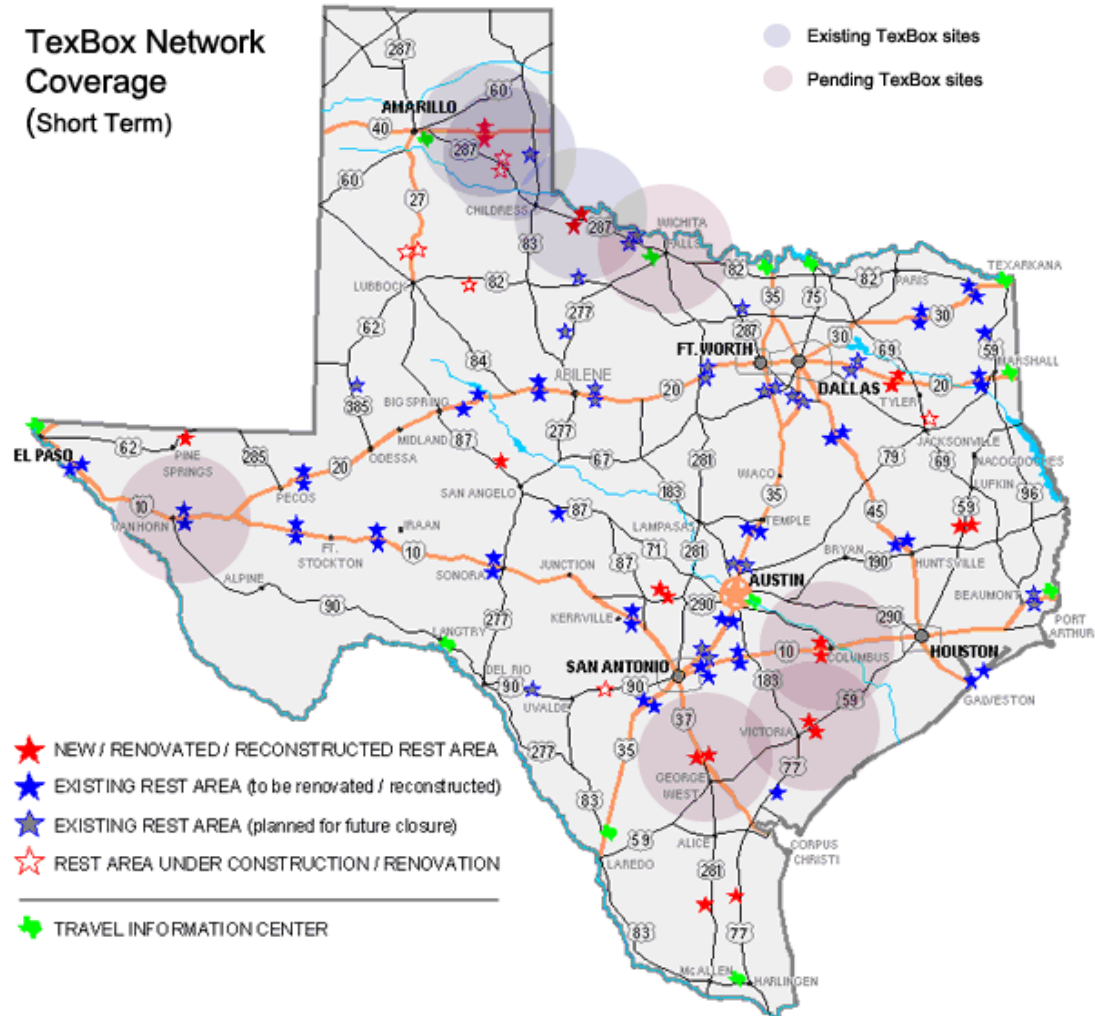customers who at the present time are driving by with little knowledge about the area.

Avoid Creating a New Government Agency or Bureaucracy
- The TravelHost Network will provide additional information without creating a need for additional on-site personnel. The design of the TravelHost system facilitates gathering information and providing a network for inputting, accessing and updating the information. The majority of content production and management will be the responsibility of the communities where the Rest Areas are located.

Collect Important Information About Tourism's Impact in Texas
- Embedded in the Travel Kiosks technology is a mechanism to capture important information about users of the system. Several strategies have been developed and can be used including Tourism Market Match and Texas INFRONT to gather important information about tourism in the State. In addition, this information will be invaluable to policy makers and researchers interested in studying tourism's impacts.

Below are images of the TexBox (TravelerHost) pilot project

Andy Skadberg demonstrating the TexBox at the Donley, County Safety Rest Area Grand Opening April 3, 2003

TexBox & Map Dispenser at the Donley, County Safety Rest Area Grand Opening April 3, 2003

TexBox Home Page

TexBox Traveler Query Page

Three of the first locations for TexBox kiosks

New TxDOT Rest Area on I-40 between Amarillo and Oklahoma state line

Donley, County Safety Rest Area
(Highway 287 near Hedley East of Amarillo)

**Hardeman, County Safety Rest Area Grand Opening
(Highway 287 near Quanah East of Amarillo)**