



# An 'A' for Accessibility

By water, land and air, people and goods move easily through the area

**A**s far as Ron Massey is concerned, getting in and out of the Coastal Bend area is simply a breeze.

"I've lived all over the world," says Massey, assistant city manager of Corpus Christi and interim director of Corpus Christi International Airport. "In Corpus Christi there is good connectivity with the highways, and, of course, we have a port. It's excellent from the standpoint of moving product by rail or truck to the port and then sending it out by water."

Furthermore, the roads are seldom congested. "When you experience a delay, it might be five minutes," says Massey, who's dealt with traffic slowdowns in Boston and Washington, D.C.

John LaRue, executive director of the Port of Corpus Christi, agrees. "We can get to San Antonio from the port with one traffic light," he says. "That's hard to beat."

The Port of Corpus Christi's proximity to the Gulf of Mexico also can't be beat: It is one of Texas' shortest, most direct routes. "It's a very straight channel," LaRue says. "Some channels are more like the Mississippi (River), winding."

The port, sixth largest in the United States, handles more than 90 million tons of cargo a year. Now 45 feet deep, it will have a depth of 52 feet if Congress appropriates funds for the dredging.

If all goes as planned, the first phase will commence in 2008. The project will take five to seven years to complete, LaRue says. "It's almost a \$300 million project; it doesn't get done overnight."

The port currently is developing an additional 1,200 acres of land, and at least three companies are interested in sites there.

## RAIL LINES, ROADS AND RUNWAYS

It's easy to see why Corpus Christi and vicinity are a transportation planner's delight. The port is served by three rail carriers: Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Union Pacific and KCS Railway (Texas Mexican Railway). In addition, the public docks are served by 26 miles of port-owned rail lines operated by Corpus Christi Terminal Railroad.

"Trucks and barges, ships and railcars can move in and out rather quickly," says Fred Babin, manager of transportation for the port.

Indeed, the highway system is as accessible as the railway and waterway. Several key highways, including Interstate 37 and U.S. 59, 77, 181 and 281, connect the area to U.S. cities and to Mexico.

The airport's manageable size minimizes air-traffic and security delays, Massey says. Spacious and modern thanks to a new terminal, the airport hosts five carriers with daily flights to Atlanta, Austin, Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston. (Interestingly, much of the jet fuel used at Dallas/Fort Worth is shipped by pipeline from Corpus Christi.)

Along with several regional airports, Corpus Christi International is also a hub for general aviation activity.

"Whether it's by highway, rail or water, the access here is about as good as you're going to find," LaRue says.

— Pam George

The JFK Causeway in Corpus Christi connects the mainland with North Padre Island. PHOTO BY BRIAN MCCORD