The university has established a new state transportation center to better coordinate and fund transportation research and to strengthen the state's economy and infrastructures of the future.

Announced Feb. 19, the Nebraska Transportation Center connects UNL's existing transportation research programs into one umbrella organization that promises to expand and provide better service to the state in the critical area of transportation.

Laurence Rilett, director of the Mid-America Transportation Center, will also serve as the NTC director. Rilett is a distinguished professor of civil engineering and Keith W. Klaasmeyer chair in engineering and technology at UNL. The announcement of Rilett as the center's director marks another important step forward in a transformation that began about a year ago.

The NTC will develop partnerships with state and local governments, and Nebraska businesses to foster growth in transportation research. Strengthening academic degree programs and developing new transportation technologies are the center's other primary goals. The center will initially be housed in Nebraska Hall. The university plans to find a more permanent home in the near future.

The center will consist of various transportation programs, including the Mid-America Transportation Center, the Midwest Roadside Safety Facility and other engineering programs at UNL, as well as structural and safety engineering, transportation systems engineering and technology transfer. NTC will also work with public administration and finance programs offered at the University of Nebraska at Omaha; safety education programs created at the University of Nebraska at Kearney; and health programs developed at the medical center.

"We have worked long and hard to make this new center come to fruition at the University of Nebraska," said David Allen, dean of the College of Engineering. "It would not have been possible without the help of many people, most especially John Craig at the Nebraska Department of Roads. Dr. Rilett is to be congratulated for his untiring efforts to create the Nebraska Transportation Center which promises to provide new research opportunities, as well as improved transportation networks for the state of Nebraska for years to come."

Tackling the increasingly complex problem facing the state's transportation system means research teams must be multi-disciplinary, Rilett said.

"In my opinion, the greatest benefit of the NTC is that it will allow transportation researchers from across the University of Nebraska system to more readily collaborate by bringing significant faculty and student resources into a single entity," Rilett said. "As such, we will be able to attract top quality faculty and students to the University of Nebraska because of the culture of excellence in transportation that we are developing. I have no doubt that NTC will be a significant benefit to the university and the state of Nebraska."

A number of people were instrumental in the creation of the NTC including Allen; Dean Sicking, director of the Midwest Roadside Facility and professor of civil engineering; and Prem Paul, UNL's vice chancellor for research. The Nebraska Department of Roads is providing transportation research funding and some of the initial seed funding for the NTC.

"The NTC will help us address challenges that are unique to our region, and we are confident this partnership will ultimately make our transportation system more efficient and safer," said Craig, director of the Nebraska Department of Roads.

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