

**Slide 1:**

Welcome to the International Bridge Trade Corridor, or IBTC, virtual public hearing. This is a pre-recorded presentation. My name is Eric Davila, and I am the Chief Development Engineer for the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority, or RMA. On behalf of the RMA and the Texas Department of Transportation, welcome, and thank you for participating in this virtual public hearing for the proposed IBTC project in Hidalgo County, Texas.

This hearing presentation is available for online viewing starting on Thursday, March 17, 2022, and will be shown at the in-person Public Hearing on Thursday, March 17, 2022, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Hidalgo County Precinct 2 Community Resource Center located at 1429 S Tower Rd, Alamo, TX 78516.

The comment process for the virtual public hearing will be described near the end of this presentation. The hearing materials, project information and details on the in-person option can also be found at the RMA website at [www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html](http://www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html) or at [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov) keyword search "IBTC."

During the video, you may pause the presentation and navigate forward or backward using your video player.

**Slide 2:**

Given the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 outbreak, along with our commitment to protecting public health during this pandemic, the RMA and TxDOT are offering this public hearing in an online format and providing an in-person option for individuals who would like to participate in-person instead of online.

In-person attendees will be able to view the same presentation delivered in the online public hearing on a screen, review hard copies of project materials, ask questions about the project to team staff or consultants in a socially-distanced setting, and leave written comments.

All project information can be found on the project website at [www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html](http://www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html) or at [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov) keyword search "IBTC."

**Slide 3:**

The RMA is partnering with TxDOT for the IBTC project and is receiving federal funds to support development and construction. The RMA is required to assess the potential environmental effects of the proposed project per the federal funding requirements. The process that is followed is called the National Environmental Policy Act process, or "NEPA". The NEPA process analyzes potential impacts to the natural and manmade environment and guides decisionmakers to make an informed decision on whether or not to proceed with the project.

On December 9, 2019, TxDOT received a signed Memorandum of Understanding from the Federal Highway Administration that permits TxDOT to assume responsibility from the Federal Highway Administration for reviewing and approving certain assigned NEPA projects. This review and approval process applies to this project.

**Slide 4:**

This public hearing is being held to update the public on the status of the project and gather further input.

We will describe the proposed project and explain the purpose of the public hearing, provide a project overview, explain the right-of-way process, describe the environmental assessment process, summarize the proposed project's next steps and outline the methods for submitting comments. You are encouraged to submit comments on the proposed project after reviewing the hearing materials and listening to this presentation.

**Slide 5:**

The purpose for this public hearing is to encourage and maintain effective communications with the public and to provide an update on the project status and recommendations. An important part of this communication is to notify the public that the draft environmental assessment is available for review. In addition, this public hearing is being conducted to comply with State and Federal requirements such as Chapter 26 of the Parks and Wildlife Code. The public hearing also offers an opportunity to receive your feedback or comments on the proposed improvements. A record of the public participation in this public hearing will be prepared and this documentation will be made available to the public once complete.

Your input and comments are an important part of this process, and we encourage you to provide comments. Your continued participation throughout the planning and development of this project is very important to us. We encourage you to talk with your neighbors and refer them to us so they can also make comments and be included in this process.

**Slide 6:**

The hearing notice was published in *The Monitor* on Tuesday, February 15, 2022 and Wednesday, February 23, 2022, as well as Wednesday, March 2, 2022. The notice was also published in the *Brownsville Herald* and in Spanish in *El Periódico* on Wednesday, March 2, 2022. It was also published in Spanish in *El Nuevo Herald* on Thursday, March 3, 2022.

Letters were mailed and emailed to elected officials on Tuesday, February 22, 2022, and notices were mailed to adjacent property owners on Friday, February 25, 2022.

**Slide 7:**

The map on the screen shows the general area for this 13.15-mile long project. The proposed project would construct a new location, non-tolled facility beginning at 365 Tollway (FM 3072) and extends 5.43 miles east and then in a northeast direction. The alignment splits just west of FM 1423 (Val Verde Road) and travels north and east from there. The northern leg continues 4.21 miles to Interstate Highway 2. The east leg travels 3.51 miles east to where it is proposed to connect to FM 493.

**Slide 8:**

When establishing the Purpose for the IBTC project, the following needs were identified:

Within the project area, many of the east/west existing roadways south of Interstate 2 and north of US 281 (Military Highway) are neither direct nor continuous, which leads to inefficient movement of vehicular traffic from cross-border travel at the international bridges.

Regional population growth and economic development are the two major factors placing increasing pressure on the transportation infrastructure of Hidalgo County, where our population has doubled between 1990 and 2010 and is projected to increase another 185 percent by 2040.

Hidalgo County's economy is largely driven by international freight movement and cross-border travel between the United States and Mexico. From 2007 to 2016, US trade with Mexico increased by 34.8 percent and is expected to continue rising.

The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge is the seventh busiest truck-crossing port in the country, and since opening in 2010, the Donna International Bridge has seen a 58 percent increase in crossings. As economic, population, and trade growth continue, the lack of north-south connectivity will increasingly restrict movement of people, freight, and services in and throughout the region.

Given these substantial needs, the purpose of the proposed project is to improve local/regional mobility for moving people and goods from international ports of entry in the area north to Interstate 2 between US 281 and FM 493.

#### **Slide 9:**

The proposed project would be constructed in two phases following right-of-way acquisition which would include all of the right-of-way needed for the project. The additional right-of-way beyond what is needed for the Phase One would provide for future expansion of Phase Two when needed, and as determined by future traffic conditions.

For ease of reference in this presentation, the different sections of the project are referred to as "legs" and the center of the project where the legs connect is referred to as the future Valley View Interchange.

Phase I, or the interim design, would construct new location frontage roads in the east and west legs, and mainlanes in the north leg, including an overpass at Business 83. Phase I would also provide improvements at intersections with existing local roadways by adding center turn lanes and shoulder improvements. A high-water bridge would be constructed across the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) main floodway.

Phase II, or the ultimate design, would include frontage roads, ramps, and overpasses at FM 2557 (Stewart Road), FM 907 (Alamo Road), FM 1423 (Valley View Road), and County Road 1822.

#### **Slide 10**

Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations will be made for each of the proposed Phases per TxDOT's policies and guidelines.

The proposed bicycle and pedestrian accommodations will be as follows:

- between 365 Tollway to Border Road and the Valley View Interchange to FM 493, bicycle and pedestrian elements can be accommodated by a 5-foot-wide sidewalk as well as the 10-foot shoulder at the edge of the proposed right-of-way.
- between Border Road and CR 1821, the roadway can accommodate a 5-foot-wide sidewalk and bicyclists on the 10-foot shoulder; however, they would be along the perimeter of the interchange footprint.
- and, between CR 1821 to I-2/US 83, bicycle and pedestrian elements can also be accommodated by a 5-foot-wide sidewalk and a 10-foot paved shoulder within the existing right-of-way.

**Slide 11:**

The west leg extends from 365 Tollway at FM 3072 to the future Valley View Interchange.

**Slide 12:**

This slide shows the proposed typical sections for Phase I and II of the proposed west leg of IBTC. Phase I would construct two frontage roads consisting of four 12-foot-wide lanes (two in each direction) with 10-foot-wide outside shoulders and 4-foot-wide inside shoulders.

Phase II would be constructed between the Phase I frontage roads, as determined necessary based on future traffic conditions, and would consist of six 12-foot-wide mainlanes (three in each direction) with 10-foot-wide inside and outside shoulders, divided by a concrete barrier.

The proposed west leg improvements would be constructed within a variable right-of-way width up to 400 feet.

Bicycle and pedestrian elements would be accommodated by a 5-foot-wide sidewalk as well as the 10-foot wide shoulder for both Phases I and II.

**Slide 13:**

The east leg extends from the future Valley View Interchange to FM 493.

**Slide 14:**

This slide shows the proposed typical sections for Phases I and II of the proposed east leg of IBTC. Phase I would construct one frontage road with two 12-foot-wide lanes (one in each direction) with 10-foot-wide inside and outside shoulders.

Phase II would be constructed north of the Phase I frontage roads, as determined necessary based on future traffic conditions, would convert the Phase I frontage roads to both be westbound lanes, and would construct eastbound frontage roads and mainlanes in-between the east and west frontage roads. The overall configuration would provide for six 12-foot-wide mainlanes (three in each direction) with 10-foot-wide inside and outside shoulders, divided by a concrete barrier, and four 12-foot-wide frontage roads (two in each direction on either side of the mainlanes), with 10-foot-wide outside shoulders and 4-foot-wide inside shoulders.

The proposed east leg improvements would be constructed within a variable right-of-way width from 300 feet up to 400 feet.

Bicycle and pedestrian elements would be accommodated by a 5-foot-wide sidewalk as well as the 10-foot wide shoulder for both Phases I and II.

**Slide 15:**

The north leg extends from the future Valley View Interchange to I-2, including the proposed direct connectors at I-2.

**Slide 16:**

This slide shows the proposed typical sections for Phases I and II of the proposed north leg of IBTC. Phase I would construct four 12-foot-wide mainlanes (two in each direction) with 10-foot-wide outside shoulders and 4-foot-wide inside shoulders, divided by a concrete barrier.

Phase II would widen the Phase I mainlanes, as determined necessary based on future traffic conditions, and would consist of six 12-foot-wide mainlanes (three in each direction) with 10-foot-wide inside and outside shoulders, divided by a concrete barrier. In addition, direct connectors would be constructed at I-2. These can be viewed in detail in the schematics shown at the in-person hearing or online at the project webpage.

The proposed north leg improvements would be constructed within a variable right-of-way width from 170 feet up to 250 feet.

Bicycle and pedestrian elements would be accommodated by a 5-foot-wide sidewalk as well as the 10-foot-wide shoulder for both Phases I and II.

**Slide 17:**

The proposed IBTC project will construct a non-tolled highway on new location. The proposed project would utilize approximately 59.1 acres of existing transportation right-of-way, acquire an additional approximate 678.0 acres of right-of-way and secure approximately 28.3 acres of permanent easements for drainage and irrigation. The RMA has performed early acquisition of 38.2 acres of right-of-way to date.

The total construction cost of the project is estimated at \$128 million dollars for Phase I and \$120 million dollars for Phase II (in current dollars).

**Slide 18:**

Information on the right-of-way acquisition process is available at [www.hcrma.net/ibt.html](http://www.hcrma.net/ibt.html) or [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov). This includes access to Relocation Assistance, Landowner's Bill of Rights, and State Purchase of Right-of-Way documents.

If you have any questions, right-of-way professionals representing the RMA will be at the in-person meeting. Information concerning services and benefits to affected property owners and information about the tentative schedule for right-of-way can be obtained from the Hidalgo County RMA office. Please call me at (956) 402-4762 or contact me by email at [eric.davila@hcrma.net](mailto:eric.davila@hcrma.net).

**Slide 19:**

As mentioned earlier federal compliance with NEPA requires us to prepare an Environmental Assessment (or "EA"). The EA sets out to accomplish four objectives: it compares the build and no-build alternatives, documents existing conditions, evaluates potential effects to determine if they are considered significant, and summarizes coordination with the public and resource agencies.

A series of technical reports were prepared in support of the EA to assess potential effects to the natural and human environment, including but not limited to: vegetation, farmland soils, threatened and endangered species, water resources, air quality, cultural resources, hazardous materials, community impacts, and traffic noise impacts.

The Draft EA is available for public review online in the following website [www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html](http://www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html) or [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov) keyword search "IBTC." Once public hearing comments have been addressed, a final Environmental Assessment will be prepared.

**Slide 20:**

It was determined that approximately 204 acres of farmland soil impacts would occur; however, further evaluation was not required per Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). The project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the ocelot, a federally endangered species. Voluntary Conservation Measures will be implemented during the project design and construction, including several site-specific best management practices.

The project would potentially impact 18 state listed species and 35 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Best management practices will be implemented where possible to avoid impacts to these species.

No wetlands were identified in the project area. The proposed project would anticipate impacts to Waters of the U.S. including the Donna Reservoir, La Cruz Resaca, and several watercourses throughout project limits. US Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 permitting will be required.

Portions of the project limits are located within a FEMA designated 100-year floodplain. The proposed project would not increase the base flood elevation to a level that would violate applicable floodplain regulations and ordinances.

The proposed project would cross the IBWC Main Floodway; however, no impacts are anticipated. If the proposed plans change to include impacts to the IBWC levees, HCRMA would coordinate these anticipated impacts with the IBWC.

**Slide 21:**

Potential impacts to 10 archeological resources will be mitigated by research-oriented data recovery in advance of construction. The project is expected to have no adverse effects to historic properties and would pose a de minimis impact to resources under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966.

The project is located in an area designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency as in attainment or unclassifiable for all national ambient air quality standards; therefore, the transportation conformity rules do not apply and impacts to air quality are not anticipated.

A traffic noise analysis was completed, and it was determined that some receivers would be impacted by the proposed project. The analysis concluded that noise abatement (noise barrier) was reasonable and feasible along the Village Grove community. A noise workshop will be conducted with the community after the NEPA process is complete.

There is a low probability of encountering hazardous materials concerns during project construction. The Donna Reservoir and Canal System, which is categorized by the Environmental Protection Agency as a Superfund Site, would be crossed by the north leg. Coordination with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the US Environmental Protection Agency has been conducted to control and minimize potential impacts to greatest extent practicable at this site.

The proposed project is located within the Hidalgo County Irrigation District #2 and would result in a "use" of historic sites of state and local significance. Therefore, Chapter 26 of the Parks and Wildlife Code applies.

Potential community impacts were analyzed. The proposed project is expected to improve mobility, enhance access throughout the community, and improve travel time reliability. The project area contains minority and low-income populations. Although the project would permanently alter some travel patterns for the surrounding community, these changes are not expected to result in disproportionately high or adverse impacts to these populations.

The proposed project would potentially result in 85 displacements; 80 residential and 5 other structures. Of these, 29 residential displacements have previously occurred during the early right-of-way acquisitions. The remaining right-of-way to be acquired would result in 51 residential displacements and 5 other structures. The proposed project is not anticipated to result in commercial displacements. Relocation assistance is available for displaced persons and businesses.

**Slide 22:**

On March 19, 2019 a public meeting was conducted to present the proposed project to the public and seek initial feedback regarding the proposed improvements. Additionally, the RMA conducted a townhall meeting with the members of the Val Verde community on January 10, 2019, to seek their input and feedback on how the project would affect their community.

In the next steps of the environmental process, all comments received during the comment period, will be analyzed, addressed, and included in the official public hearing summary report. Public comments will be considered as the project design is finalized before environmental clearance is issued. Environmental clearance is anticipated in late 2022, upon which the detailed engineering design will begin.

Construction of Phase I is anticipated to begin in Spring 2025. Phase II would be constructed as needed based on future traffic conditions and funding availability in the future.

The projects schedule and dates are preliminary and subject to change.

**Slide 23:**

Comments can be provided at the in-person hearing by filling out a comment card and dropping in the comment box. You can also download the comment card from the project webpage at

[www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html](http://www.hcrma.net/ibtc.html) or [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov) keyword search “IBTC” and send by email to [IBTC@blantonassociates.com](mailto:IBTC@blantonassociates.com) or by mail to Blanton & Associates, Inc. Attn: IBTC, 5 Lakeway Centre Court, Suite 200 Austin, TX 78734. You can also leave a verbal testimony by calling (956) 278-0687.

Comments must be received or postmarked by Friday, April 1, 2022, to be included in the Public Hearing summary report. Responses to verbal and written comments received during the comment period will be included in the Public Hearing Summary report that will be posted on the project webpage.

**Slide 24:**

Lastly, don't hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Please feel free to contact me Eric Davila, P.E., PMP, CCM, HCRMA Chief Development Engineer, at (956) 402-4762 or [eric.davila@hcrma.net](mailto:eric.davila@hcrma.net), with any questions or comments.

Thank you for participating in this public hearing. Please do not forget to submit comments by Friday, April 1, 2022. This concludes our hearing presentation.