

**Ports-to-Plains Segment #3 Committee  
Meeting #4 Summary  
May 11, 2020, 8:00 a.m.  
WebEx\***

*\*Note: WebEx was required due to COVID-19 shelter in place orders*

**Attendees**

Segment Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Mayor Luis Sifuentes	City of Eagle Pass	Present via WebEx
Sid Cauthorn	Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Not Present
Miguel Conchas	Laredo Chamber of Commerce	Present via WebEx
Anna De La Garza	Eagle Pass International Bridge System	Not Present
Liliana Flores	Del Rio Port of Entry	Present via WebEx
Nick Gallegos	Middle Rio Grande Development Council	Present via WebEx
Melissa Huddleston	Laredo Motor Carriers Association	Not Present
Blanca Larson	Del Rio Chamber of Commerce	Not Present
Morris Libson	Eagle Pass Business and Economic Development Council	Not Present
Yvette Limon	Laredo International Bridge System	Present via WebEx
Mayor Bruno Lozano	City of Del Rio	Present via WebEx
Sandra Martinez	Eagle Pass Chamber of Commerce	Not Present
Leo Martinez	Del Rio Economic Development Corporation	Designee Oriana Fernandez Present via WebEx
Margie Montez	Del Rio International Bridge	Present via WebEx
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Not Present
Judge Francisco G. Ponce	Dimmit County	Not Present
Mayor Pete Saenz	City of Laredo	Not Present
Judge David R. Saucedo	Maverick County	Not Present
Mayor Wayne Seiple	City of Carrizo Springs	Not Present
Judge James Tullis Shahan	Kinney County	Present via WebEx
Kirby Snideman	Laredo Urban Transportation Study (Metropolitan Planning Organization)	Not Present
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Present via WebEx

Segment Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Raul S. Villareal	Laredo Licensed U.S. Customs Brokers Association, Inc.	Not Present
Advisory Committee Leadership		
Mayor Dan Pope, Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Chairman	City of Lubbock	Present via WebEx
Judge Stephen Smith, Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Vice Chairman	Sutton County	Not Present

### Elected Officials

Shannon Harmon      State Senator Perry's Office  
 Marshal Hoak         State Senator Flores' Office

### Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays	Steve Linhart
Commissioner Alvin New	Terry Martinez
Loretta Brown	Sherry Pifer
Blake Calvert	Jose Emilio Ramos
Emily Clisby	David Salazar
Gabriel De Ochoa	Jarred Shaffer
Ray Green	Peter Smith
Bill Hale	Akila Thamizharasan
Cory Henrickson	Trent Thomas

### Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver	Sophie Cohen	WSP
Susan Chavez	Garver	Michael Penic	WSP
Tracy Michel	Garver	Lena Camarillo	PCI
Sean Wray	Garver	Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Joe Bryan	WSP	Robert Ryan	Blanton & Associates

### Other Attendees

George Antuna	City of Eagle Pass
Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough
Joe Kiely	Port-to-Plains Alliance
Lalo Uribe	Webb County
Matt Wojnowski	City of Del Rio

### Welcome

The Chair of Segment Committee #3 and City of Del Rio Mayor Bruno Lozano, called the meeting to order and took roll call.

Bill Hale, TxDOT Chief Engineer, welcomed everyone to the meeting and said he appreciated the efforts everyone had been putting into the process.

Peter Smith, TxDOT Transportation Planning and Program Director, thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the meeting. He said there has been a lot of progress and everyone's input was still needed. He thanked members for their participation.

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Freight, Trade, and Connectivity thanked the Committee Members for participating. She said there was still lots of work to be done and encouraged members to participate and engage.

Mayor Lozano thanked everyone for participating and their continued efforts, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the project was important to help achieve an economic future that included trade with Mexico to keep Texas alive. There is an opportunity to fine tune efforts for the project and they would be discussed today.

Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Chair and City of Lubbock Mayor Dan Pope welcomed Segment Committee Members and provided a recap of past activities. He told members in the first week of April, they reviewed Chapters 3 and 4, looked at cost estimates, areas suitable for interstate designation, preliminary committee recommendations, funding, and today the group would see the economic analysis. The sub-committees formed by the Segment Committees after the last meeting met the week of April 6<sup>th</sup> and continued to meet for a two-week time period. By April 17<sup>th</sup>, Mayor Lozano submitted his Segment Committee's recommendations. Based on that, there was a survey sent by TxDOT to Segment Committee members to prioritize their recommendations. In addition to the sub-committee meeting, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs have had three separate phone conversations to discuss details about the data shown today. The TxDOT Districts have been working closely with us as well. He reminded the committee the finish line is close, and there are approximately seven weeks to go. There is another round of meetings in June, and lots of work is going on. Mayor Pope said he was thankful for the TxDOT team and he is excited about the numbers that will be presented today.

### **Economic Analysis**

Joe Bryan with the consultant team provided the Committee with the economic analysis. He started with the background and objectives, including the HB 1079 requirements. He explained the economic model that was used to determine travel time changes, market access, and new development.

Based on the travel time analysis, an interstate would likely save 89 minutes in travel time along the entire corridor. Within Segment #3, an interstate would likely save 39 minutes in travel time from end-to-end. With additional savings in travel buffer time (the time drivers add to their journey to ensure a punctual arrival), a travel cost savings of approximately \$1.1 billion in Segment #3 is anticipated.

Based on the safety analysis, an interstate is anticipated to improve safety and reduce crash rates. These safety improvements are equivalent to approximately \$457 million in savings per year.

With the interstate option, trucks will be able to access major international gateways more quickly, commuters save time, and allow for better job opportunities. Warehouse and distribution sector development is driven by access to interstate highways. The interstate would enhance access to markets for businesses.

Mr. Bryan said the interstate would attract new business, particularly within the food and agriculture, energy and extraction, and warehousing and distribution industries. Return on investment was studied as impacts and improvements will extend beyond the 2050 horizon year. A net return on investment of approximately \$17.8 billion or 76% return is expected statewide. He also explained the benefit cost ratio would be 2.8 with a net present value of approximately \$49.4 billion.

In Segment #3, there would be projected economic gains of nearly 7,800 jobs and approximately \$900 million in annual Gross Domestic Product. Mr. Bryan ended the presentation by saying that across the state and country, Americans have learned what supply chains are and how important they are due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Food production and transportation is critical, and this project is talking about ways to protect it and help it grow. Within sourcing and distribution sectors, it is likely trade will be domestic and continental, meaning Mexico. The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement could not have come at a better time. They are looking for opportunity.

Mayor Pope commented he liked the numbers and that slide 43 (Summary of Segment #3 analysis) does a good job of capturing this. He suggested adding the net value to the slide to capture the impact on smaller communities and how they would benefit from truck stops, restaurants, and other travel-related service developments.

Mayor Lozano commented it is hard to quantify federal benefits as you get closer to Laredo, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass. There is an economic impact of job creation for the federal government as they improve or add US Border Patrol stations. He noted how much impact there would be if the Port of Del Rio was enhanced when trade with Mexico opened up.

Ms. Mays commented places like Phoenix and Las Vegas were in similar situations prior to an interstate system, they did not experience major growth until the interstate was built.

Commissioner New said one thing he did not hear but could have impact is the size of the population along the corridor and the economic data that the population contributes. It gives a perspective of how many people there are and how it impacts the state's economy. There are a small number of people, but a larger than normal economic impact. There's impact of trade at the border, agriculture in the north and the Permian Basin in the center.

For more narrative, what gets talked about on I-35 is 66 percent of people live in the Dallas/San Antonio/Houston triangle. Here in the border region, there's 6-10-percent of the population and are contributing 15 percent to the economy. That could be part of the narrative.

Miguel Conchas, Laredo Chamber of Commerce, commented the numbers are very impressive. When he travels to Washington D.C., he typically hears the negative (drugs, etc.) about the border region. and the positives of this need to be shown, especially how useful trade is during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Mays said the supply chain and role of transportation during the COVID-19 pandemic is not just getting products to consumers, but also getting medical supplies. Like Joe mentioned, manufacturing can scale up quickly. She noted this is an opportunity to educate what this corridor offers and how efficient it is for the flow of the supply chain.

Liliana Flores, Del Rio Port of Entry, commented she is on a committee in Acuna where they are trying to bring in more trade and are finalizing their cargo shipments going west. By the end of the year, they will determine how many there are and will encourage them to come through Del Rio.

Mayor Luis Sifuentes of Eagle Pass said the numbers are attractive and asked how these get to the state legislature.

Mayor Pope responded it becomes our challenge as this report gets delivered, the report makes the case for a long-term investment.

Mayor Lozano added as part of the Segment Committee meetings, the Committee has been highlighting what makes each segment unique. We have changed the way we present ourselves as commercial trade for North America. This region is important for trade and we are trying to show that to our senators. Other states are looking at Texas as an investment as well.

Members were asked two Mentimeter questions:

**Mentimeter Question #1: What future trends may impact the economic profile of this corridor in the future?**

There were 14 responses. The number of responses is in parenthesis. They are summarized as: *growth, increase in trade, population growth (3), supply chain channel changes from international to continental (2), individuals and families moving from high cost living on the US West Coast to Texas, increased globalization of goods, growth in warehousing, recession to various markets due to COVID-19, near shoring of manufacturing, possible decrease in immigration, Congressional approval of infrastructure funding, and diversification of trade corridors and Ports of Entry.*

**Mentimeter Question #2: How does increased connectivity of the interstate factor into any changes?**

There were 17 responses. The number of responses is in parenthesis. They are summarized as: *economic development (3), jobs, increased international trade, population growth (2), improve efficiency and reliability for trucks (2), safer roads and impacts (2), growth in population and economy, attract manufacturing, tourism increase, enhances mobility and alleviates traffic off of I-35, warehouse development, truck trade, increased connection to seaports on the US West Coast and Asian markets, and connects west Texas communities.*

## **Revised Cost Estimates**

Rachel Lunceford, a member of the consultant team, reminded the Committee that although cost estimates were provided at the last Segment Committee meeting, they were updated based on having frontage roads in some rural locations. The revised estimate for Segment #3 is \$6.699 billion and assumes 160 miles out of 210 miles will have frontage roads. The entire corridor estimated cost for frontage roads in 533 miles out of 718 miles is \$23.516 billion.

Mayor Lozano commented the numbers have the Committee's approval.

## **Prioritization of Recommendations**

Ms. Mays reviewed the Segment #3 Committee's recommendations that were presented at the April meeting. Committee Members were asked to prioritize these recommendations via a survey prior to today's meeting. She then reviewed the results of the survey.

Mayor Lozano suggested asking the TxDOT Districts to review the projects and recommend how they think the projects might best be implemented and the phases that might occur during the short, mid, and long-term. There are environmental studies, right-of-way acquisition, and funding that must occur. He noted some of the State Loop projects are done, but there are other studies that have not even begun, so they would need to be in a study phase. He said spreading the projects out gives a more realistic approach.

Oriana Fernandez, Del Rio Economic Development Corporation, commented if upgrades cannot be made in the short-term, the border patrol crossings need to be prioritized for less delay and wait time.

David Salazar, TxDOT Laredo District Engineer, noted the northern portion of US 277 near Del Rio was identified in the short-term, but this is a complete route and the immediate needs should be identified first to allow for phasing and realistic timeframes. He said it appears US 277 seems to be a priority, but it may be best to expand to interstate on US 83 as it would happen sooner than US 277 due to terrain.

Commissioner New said the Segment and Advisory Committees need to make this a 25-year project, not a 10-year project. Environmental and right-of-way will be about a three-year process. He encouraged the Committee to follow the comments received from the District.

Mayor Pope suggested it might be best to meet with the sub-committee to get some feedback.

Mayor Lozano agreed, noting the sub-committee would meet on Thursday as well as get the District's input.

After discussion of the priorities, two Mentimeter questions were asked.

Mentimeter Question #3: Do you agree with the Committee’s short-term priority rankings? Are there any you would consider moving to mid-term or long-term priorities?

No responses.

Mentimeter Question #4: Do you agree with the Committee’s mid-term priority rankings? Are there any you would consider moving to short-term or long-term priorities?

No responses.

### Review and Discussion of Report Chapters 5, 6, and Executive Summary

Ms. Mays asked for any comments on draft Chapters 5 (Public Involvement and Stakeholder Engagement), Chapter 6 (Segment Committee Recommendations and Implementation), and the Executive Summary outline.

### Comments on Chapters 5, 6, and the Executive Summary Outline from Segment #3 Meeting

Comment	Commenter
<b>Chapter 5 Comments</b>	
None	-
<b>Chapter 6 Comments</b>	
Include benefits to the rest of Texas	Mayor Lozano
Check mileage numbers in Table 6.1	David Salazar
Under safety and mobility, number should be 41%, not 28%	David Salazar
<b>Executive Summary Outline</b>	
None	-

### Next Steps

The draft report will be sent to the Committee for review on Tuesday, May 19<sup>th</sup>. Comments are due Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup>.

The draft final report will be sent to the Committee for review by Wednesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, with a final Segment Committee Meeting on Tuesday, June 9<sup>th</sup> via WebEx for a final page-turn.

Mayor Pope said he appreciated everyone’s work and was looking forward to getting together a final time on June 9<sup>th</sup>.

Mayor Lozano said he looked forward to meeting with the sub-committee and thanked everyone for participating.

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

### Action Items:

- Mayor Lozano and Judge Tijerina will talk to the sub-committee and Laredo District about priorities
- TxDOT will send the draft report on May 19, 2020

- Committee members will send all written comments to TxDOT by May 26, 2020
- TxDOT will send the revised final draft report by Wednesday, June 3, 2020
- The next Segment Committee Meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 9, 2020