

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BORDER TRADE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING

Dewitt C. Greer
State Transportation Building
Ric Williamson Hearing Room
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Wednesday,
February 1, 2023

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Jane Nelson, Presiding Officer
Rafael M. Aldrete
Alvaro "Al" Arreola
Jon Barela
Luis Alfredo Bazán
Eduardo Calvo
Eduardo A. Campirano
Andrew Canon
Warren Erdman
John Esparza
Raquel Espinosa
Juan Antonio Flores
Dante Galeazzi
Cynthia Gaza-Reyes
Jake Giesbrecht
Maria-Elena Giner
Iliana Holguin
Lisa Loftus-Otway
Marga Lopez
Stan Meador
Juan Olaguibel
Jesus Reyna
Mayor Rolando Salinas
Gerardo "Gerry" Schwebel
Pete Sepulveda, Jr.
Daniel Silva
Tommy Taylor
Roberto Tinajero
Mayor Victor Trevino
Sam Vale
Cameron Walker

ON THE RECORD REPORTING
(512) 450-0342

Also Present:

Marty Boyd
Sergio Carlos Guajardo Castellanos
Joanne Cisneros (FMCSA)
Lorena Echeverria de Misi
Luis M. Diaz
Carlos Ealy
Juan Carlos Espinosa
Juan J. Flores
Claudia Lagos Galindo
Eva Garcia
Anabell Flores Garza
Cynthia Garza
Aaron Gibson
Tyler Graham
Eduardo Hagert
Susan Harper
Cory Henrickson
Jesse J. Hereford
Felix Herrera
Nishant Kukadia
Mildred Litchfield
Pablo Marentes
Terry Martinez
Caroline Mays
Tyson Moeller
Alvin New
Dora Robles
Alex Rodriguez
Melany Rodriguez
Melba Schaus
Blanca Serrano
Wesley Starnes
Trent Thomas
Adriana Torcat
Paul Truban
Juan Carlos Villa
Casey Wells

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P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 SECY. NELSON: Good morning, everyone. Buenos
3 días. I miss my gavel.

4 I would like to call the first Border Trade
5 Advisory Committee Meeting of 2023 to order. I am
6 Secretary of State Jane Nelson, and I have the honor to
7 have been appointed by Governor Abbott to serve as chair
8 of this distinguished committee. I must say it feels good
9 to be back in the chairman's seat today. I do miss having
10 a gavel to bang us to order.

11 Although I'm no stranger to serving as
12 committee chair, I am particularly excited to work with
13 you all today. I am so sorry that we have ice here and it
14 prevented some of you from being with us in person, but I
15 want to welcome those of you who joined us virtually today
16 as well, and I promise we will have better weather for our
17 next meeting.

18 There is no topic more important to the future
19 of our Texas economy and the North American economy than
20 making sure we have efficient trade and quality
21 infrastructure along the Texas-Mexico Border. And in
22 recognizing the importance of our North American trade
23 partners, I want to recognize a few special guests we have
24 with us today, including Mexico's Consul General in
25 Austin, Pablo Marentes. Thank you, Consul Marentes for

1 joining us today, joining us virtually.

2 CONSUL GENERAL MARENTES: Okay. I'm looking at
3 you right now. I need some joy. It's nice to see you.

4 SECY. NELSON: Thank you. And we will meet in
5 person at our next meeting.

6 CONSUL GENERAL MARENTES: Right, we are hoping
7 so. Thank you so very much for inviting us to this first
8 one.

9 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

10 Canada's Consul General in Dallas, Susan
11 Harper, thank you so much for joining us today, as well.

12 CONSUL GENERAL HARPER: Thank you very much for
13 the invitation, and thank you for accommodating the
14 weather. We're used to this kind of weather a little bit
15 in Canada, but it's certainly very difficult for us to get
16 from Dallas to Austin today. But this is an important
17 meeting, and I appreciate you accommodating me joining
18 virtually today. Thank you.

19 SECY. NELSON: I'm not even sure if Canada has
20 ice like this. I would have sent a pair of ice skates up
21 there, had I had known it was going to be like this. But
22 it is wonderful to see you virtually.

23 I also would like to give special recognition
24 to Marco Gonzalez, Secretary of Regional Development for
25 the State of Nuevo León, who has joined us in person here

1 today. Thank you, Secretary Gonzalez, for making the
2 trip.

3 SECY. GONZALEZ: Happy to be here with you.

4 SECY. NELSON: Dr. Gonzalez, as I learned
5 today.

6 And Secretary Cantu from the State of
7 Tamaulipas, who has joined us virtually as well. Can you
8 hear us, Secretary?

9 MR. CASTELLANOS: Hi, Secretary, it's Sergio.
10 Our Secretary Cantu is almost joining the meeting. He's
11 just waiting.

12 SECY. NELSON: Okay.

13 MR. CASTELLANOS: Thank you very much.

14 SECY. NELSON: Well, perhaps we should move on
15 then. We certainly want to thank all of you for your
16 partnership with the State of Texas. It is a recognition
17 of the shared economic destiny that we have. And I
18 realize that we have more reasons to be optimistic about
19 that destiny than ever before.

20 Before we do our roll call, I will start by
21 giving a few key officials with us today the opportunity
22 to provide some brief remarks to the committee. I would
23 ask that you limit your remarks to a minute or so, so that
24 we can stay on schedule.

25 First, Marc Williams, Executive Director for

1 the Texas Department of Transportation, better known as
2 TxDOT. Marc, would you like to give brief remarks to us?
3 And we can connect him virtually also.

4 Is Marc -- are you with us virtually?

5 (No response.)

6 SECY. NELSON: Marc isn't with us, so we'll
7 move on.

8 Next Texas Transportation Commissioner Alvin
9 New. Commissioner New, are you with us?

10 COMMISSIONER NEW: I am with you.

11 SECY. NELSON: Hello, Commissioner.

12 COMMISSIONER NEW: Good morning. My purpose is
13 just to listen in and take this to the Commission. And
14 I've attended quite a few of these, and this and the
15 Freight Committee are the two that I really try to take
16 care of through being involved and listening all the time.
17 So that's my purpose.

18 SECY. NELSON: Great. Well, Commissioner, I
19 have to tell you that in all my years in Austin I have
20 never been in this beautiful building, and so I'm
21 delighted. And I am very, very excited to be
22 participating in this committee. It is a real treat for
23 me to chair this, and I am looking forward to the work of
24 this committee.

25 So thank you for joining us today and listening

1 in, and we hope if you have anything to add you'll jump
2 right in. Thank you.

3 Next I'd like to recognize our Canadian Consul
4 General Susan Harper. Consul Harper, anything to add?

5 CONSUL GENERAL HARPER: Thank you very much.

6 Again, from my point of view, I'm quite honored
7 to be joining you, even if this time it's virtually,
8 because from our perspective as Canadians, border issues
9 are fundamentally important to our economy, to our
10 security. And from my perspective, it's very important
11 for me as a representative of Canada in Texas to really
12 better understand the southern border and understand how
13 security, economy work together to permit the --
14 facilitate the goals of the governments on both sides of
15 the border and to deal with the very pressing issues that
16 are present here, but also globally.

17 And from my point of view, again, it's quite an
18 honor for a Canadian to be understanding and learning
19 about this border, but also be applying and hopefully
20 bringing some insights based on what we deal with at our
21 border. Thank you.

22 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

23 Now I'd like to recognize Mexico's Consul
24 General in Austin, Pablo Marentes. Consul Marentes.

25 CONSUL GENERAL MARENTES: Thank you so very

1 much for inviting me. I'm all ears to hear what the plans
2 are. And I have been participating in these meetings for
3 two years now.

4 I'm very happy to know the new members of this
5 committee or gathering, and I'm all ears to have a better
6 understanding of how near we are in our plans to be a very
7 consistent group of states that will be gathering always
8 to have better relations, better trade, and better
9 understanding. Thank you.

10 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

11 And finally, I'd like to give our partners from
12 our Mexico border states to say a few words. First from
13 Nuevo León, Secretary Gonzalez.

14 SECY. GONZALEZ: Very happy to be here with our
15 friends from TxDOT, especially your first meeting as
16 Secretary of State. You can count on Nuevo León to always
17 be present at these meetings from now on.

18 We see Texas as our strategic ally, partner and
19 our brother. We're going to be working shoulder-to-
20 shoulder with you guys because we are the most industrial
21 state in Mexico. We're the Texas of Mexico, so what
22 better way to connect Nuevo León with Texas.

23 Thankful for the invitation.

24 SECY. NELSON: Muchas gracias. Thank you.

25 And last but not least, we have from the State

1 of Tamaulipas, Secretary Cantu.

2 MS. FLORES: Hello. Good morning, everyone.
3 This is Anabell Flores, Undersecretary of Investment
4 Promotion. Our secretary will be joining soon, but we are
5 very happy to be here.

6 Thank you for the invitation, and it's very
7 important for us to be here since we are also allies of
8 our neighbor state of Texas. There's a lot of
9 opportunities to develop so we're very happy here to keep
10 exploring.

11 Thank you very much.

12 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

13 Now I'd like to recognize Caroline Mays to
14 conduct our roll call for this meeting. I worried that we
15 might not have a quorum, but I think we might.

16 MS. MAYS: Good morning, BTAC members, those
17 that are joining us here in Austin at the Greer Building
18 and those of you joining us online.

19 So what I'll do first is I'll just do a
20 straight roll call, and then I will start from those that
21 are in the room to take, you know, 60 seconds or so to
22 just fully introduce yourself. Tell the Secretary how
23 long you've been on BTAC, what are the key issues all of
24 you have been working on, and one thing that you would
25 like her to know. Because she's new to this, so we want

1 her to hear from all of you.

2 So I will start with those in the room, and I
3 have Andrew Canon.

4 MR. CANON: Here.

5 MS. MAYS: I have Jake Giesbrecht is here, and
6 Calvo.

7 Pete?

8 MR. SEPULVEDA: Present.

9 MS. MAYS: And Iliana.

10 And I want to make sure because we have some
11 folks that are not members. Daniel, who are you
12 representing?

13 (Inaudible response.)

14 MS. MAYS: Okay. And then we have Danny.

15 And then we have Luis.

16 MR. BAZÁN: Good morning, present.

17 MS. MAYS: And now I want to recognize our
18 district folks at the table.

19 MALE VOICE: Good morning. [inaudible], Pharr
20 District.

21 MS. MAYS: Okay.

22 (Inaudible response.)

23 MR. GONZALEZ: I'm [inaudible] Gonzalez, Laredo
24 District.

25 (Inaudible response.)

1 MS. MAYS: And then also I want to go online
2 now. We will start with those that I see. I see Gerry.

3 MR. SCHWEBEL: Good morning, everyone. Good
4 morning, Madam Secretary. I'm Gerry Schwebel from Laredo,
5 Texas.

6 I've been on the BTAC formally since 2012. Our
7 company, IBC Bank, has been a member of BTAC since day
8 one. And I represent my area, where I've been very much
9 involved in working with TxDOT in a number of capacities
10 and a number of other committees, including Lieutenant
11 Governor Patrick's Transportation Committee, as well.
12 That's why I was meeting with you in some of the advisory
13 committee meetings.

14 So I look forward to working with you and your
15 leadership. It's been a tradition, every new Secretary of
16 State that joins the BTAC that I jump in and formally
17 extend the invitation for you to visit the number one most
18 important port on the Texas-Mexico Border which is Port
19 Laredo. So I hope you can join us soon.

20 SECY. NELSON: Wonderful.

21 (General talking, laughter.)

22 MS. MAYS: Gerry, everyone is laughing. I
23 think you virtually --

24 MR. SCHWEBEL: I'm just worried that Sam Vale
25 is going to beat me to the punch, so that's why I've got

1 to jump in.

2 MS. MAYS: Sam is not in yet, but thank you,
3 Gerry.

4 And then we'll go to Rafael.

5 MR. ALDRETE: Rafael Aldrete, here.

6 MS. MAYS: Okay. Let me see. Dante, are you
7 on?

8 MR. GALEAZZI: I am. Good morning, Secretary.
9 Good morning, everybody. My name is Dante Galeazzi. I'm
10 the president of the Texas International Produce
11 Association.

12 We're representatives of the fresh produce
13 industry both grown in Texas and that produce that crosses
14 or enters Texas as its first point for distribution
15 through North America, really. Pleasure to be here.

16 We're based in South Texas. We're here, I've
17 been part of this committee since 2017. My predecessor
18 was part of this committee going back to 2012. This is
19 absolutely critical for us.

20 As you know, fresh produce moves on 18-wheelers
21 throughout the state. We have more than 1.3 million
22 pounds that enter the State of Texas from Mexico every
23 year for fresh produce, absolutely critical. You add
24 about another million pounds of fresh produce grown from
25 Texas also moving on these roadways. So it is vital that

1 we're part of these conversations and that's why we're
2 here.

3 Thank you, everybody.

4 MS. MAYS: Thank you.

5 I see Cameron Walker.

6 MR. WALKER: Yes, good morning. Good morning,
7 Madam Secretary, Caroline. Good morning, everybody else.

8 I am Cameron Walker. I'm executive director
9 with the Permian Basin Metropolitan Planning Organization.
10 As you know, we generate more than 40 percent of raw
11 materials in the form of oil and natural gas. We're
12 also -- not exactly in the MPO area, but certainly in this
13 region we are leading the country with renewable energy as
14 well with solar and wind energy.

15 So this region has a lot of freight through it,
16 has a lot of growth in both communities, Midland and
17 Odessa and the surrounding region, and we are the hub of
18 the national oil and gas industry right here.

19 Thank you and look forward to today's meeting.
20 I have been on the BTAC board for three years.

21 MS. MAYS: Thank you, Cameron.

22 And we'll go to Cynthia.

23 MS. GARZA-REYES: Hello. Good morning. How
24 are you all today? Madam Secretary, we welcome you and
25 we're excited about this.

1 My name is Cynthia Garza-Reyes. I am the
2 director of external relations for the City of Pharr. I
3 oversee all the federal and state priorities for the city.

4 I would say at least 90 percent of my time is
5 spent on our Pharr International Bridge, so I work hand-
6 in-hand with my colleague, Luis Bazán, who is there
7 representing our bridge. And like Gerry said, I also am
8 going to extend an open invitation to our Pharr
9 International Bridge. So the next time you are in South
10 Texas, we'd love to have you.

11 And thank you again, Secretary.

12 MS. MAYS: Thank you, Cynthia.

13 And we'll go to Jon Barela in El Paso. Jon,
14 are you on? Jon, you're muted.

15 Jon Barela in El Paso, going once, going twice.

16 (No response.)

17 MS. MAYS: Okay. I want to see -- am I missing
18 any BTAC members online?

19 MR. MEADOR: Caroline, this is Stan Meador. I'm
20 present.

21 MS. MAYS: Okay. Great. Go ahead and
22 introduce yourself, Stan.

23 MR. MEADOR: Good morning, Madam Secretary.
24 This is Stan Meador. I work for Texas Pacifico.

25 I'm based in San Angelo, couldn't quite make it

1 in slipping and sliding to Austin today, but glad to be
2 joining virtually. You'll probably recognize our name in
3 correlation with the South Orient Railroad and our main
4 focus, which has been the case for some time, is getting
5 that international bridge in Presidio unlocked and open
6 and providing another rail freightway over the southern
7 border with Mexico.

8 So we continue to work in that effort, and
9 Caroline and all the staff at TxDOT are very much engaged
10 in that process as well. And I look forward to working
11 with you on this committee. Thank you very much.

12 MS. MAYS: Okay. We will go to Rafael. I
13 think I missed you.

14 MR. ALDRETE: Thank you, Caroline. Sorry, I
15 thought we were doing just the roll call.

16 I'm Rafael Aldrete with the Texas A&M
17 Transportation Institute. I'm based out of El Paso, and
18 I've been a member of BTAC for about 14-15 years, I think,
19 and I'm looking forward to working with Madam Secretary
20 and everybody else. Thank you.

21 MS. MAYS: Did I miss anybody? Jon Barela from
22 El Paso, I'm going to give you another chance. Can you
23 hear us?

24 Any other BTAC members online?

25 (No response.)

1 MS. MAYS: Okay. If not, we will get back to
2 the room.

3 Sam Vale just walked in, and you had a battle
4 of the bands with Gerry Schwebel. He spoke before you.
5 We just wanted to let you know.

6 MR. VALE: He's in Laredo. Right?

7 (General talking and laughter.)

8 MS. MAYS: But Sam, you can go ahead and
9 introduce yourself. We're going to go back to the room.
10 Just tell the Secretary how long you've been with BTAC,
11 what are some of the things that you would like her to
12 know about your work with the committee and your own work.

13 MR. VALE: Actually, Madam Secretary, I was in
14 the first [inaudible]. Gerry Schwebel would remember
15 this. Gerry was one of the -- we were all arguing that we
16 were not paying attention to the ports of entry and we had
17 great difficulties being able to sell the need to provide
18 more efficiency.

19 Nobody saw that it benefitted anybody but
20 people coming in and out, so then we started arguing for
21 something. And we started -- we had an old organization
22 called the Mexico-Texas Bridge Owners Association. So we
23 did have a group that would meet, but it was just a very
24 informal group. Our highlight was to go to Mexico City,
25 enjoy a nice restaurant and spend some money.

1 When it began to grow, it became very
2 important -- I see Pete Sepulveda over there. He's been
3 in that location -- I met you in Eagle Pass and went to
4 Rio Grande City, and then we went all over the border. So
5 these are guys that have been all up and down the border.

6 So it really began, and we have worked in other
7 private organizations, like the Border Trade Alliance. We
8 even have specialized groups now, the South Texas Assets
9 Consortium where we bid on national pilot projects. And
10 Texas, of course, won four out of five because they were
11 mostly on the border. Only Miami got into it other than
12 Texas, because there's a national consortium.

13 So we've been through a lot. I can say that
14 probably I know since Caroline came on, probably right
15 around that time -- when did you come on originally,
16 Caroline?

17 MS. MAYS: I came to TxDOT in 2012, but I took
18 over BTAC in 2013-2014 when Judge Cascos sat on the
19 Freight Advisory Committee. When he became secretary of
20 state, he was like, I want BTAC to be like the Freight
21 Advisory Committee, so I think it might have been 2013,
22 2014, I took over BTAC.

23 MR. SAM VALE: So that is when it started to
24 develop more effectively in terms of a function of TxDOT.
25 I think that you've heard some people that have political

1 backgrounds. I think it's really unique for us to
2 understand that in this group what we do is plan but we
3 don't fund.

4 And that's where somebody with your background
5 is extremely valuable, because you know the lay of the
6 land over there in that building across the street. My
7 father served 22 years in the House a long time ago.

8 SECY. NELSON: Really.

9 MR. VALE: So we all have a great love and
10 affection for what we do. And really we're just about
11 taking care of ourselves and we don't really worry too
12 much about the long and the short of the rest of the
13 country.

14 But that's not what's happening now because now
15 we've got Ken [phonetic] that is on the board and we
16 really need to be in touch with him. Our good friend here
17 to your right, he's looking like a movie star.

18 SECY. NELSON: My good friend, too.

19 (General talking and laughter.)

20 MR. VALE: He's trying to get a part, but right
21 now he's Secretary of Agriculture for Nuevo León. Now,
22 that's another major important part of Mexico and then you
23 can leap from there, but all the power in Mexico
24 essentially comes from Mexico City, comes in different
25 ways. If the governor gets along with the president, it

1 really works good; if the governor doesn't get along with
2 the president, it's a little dicey, not too different than
3 what we do.

4 But from Mexico, this group learns the systems
5 of Mexico, the border, the State of Texas and Canadian
6 activity, so that's why some of us have been here quite a
7 long time.

8 SECY. NELSON: Your experience and others who
9 have been here for a while is really beneficial. And I
10 am, I have to tell you, so excited about participating
11 with this group.

12 MR. VALE: The border I can tell you is the
13 biggest economic development engine for the State of
14 Texas.

15 SECY. NELSON: For sure, for sure.

16 MR. VALE: And Pete Sepulveda over there, he's
17 got more money going to different cities, he's been
18 mayors, he's been county judges. What else have you been,
19 councilman?

20 And now he's the RMA person, very, very
21 knowledgeable individual. And even though he came from
22 Rio Grande City area.

23 (General laughter.)

24 SECY. NELSON: Well, and I'll editorialize a
25 little bit, and I'm just stepping into this role so I'm

1 not quite sure what is acceptable or not acceptable, but
2 I'm chair and so I'll just do what I want.

3 But I will editorialize and say that in my
4 previous role as chair of Finance and as a senator over
5 there, I think one of the reasons that Texas was able to
6 do things well is that we put a lot of emphasis on not
7 just transportation but keeping our veins and arteries
8 open so that goods were able to transport within our state
9 easily.

10 And looking at -- just stepping into this role
11 and looking at not just Texas but our neighbors to the
12 north and south and keeping those veins and arteries open
13 so that we can make sure that all of our goods get
14 transported easily to the north and south. If that
15 philosophy can serve us well, I think that's the mission
16 of what we're doing here today and with this group.

17 MR. VALE: When I was I college I worked for
18 Crawford Martin, Secretary of State's office. I can tell
19 you that [inaudible] at that time. But on Friday, you had
20 to get out of Dodge because we wanted to go somewhere. We
21 don't know where we'd [inaudible] --

22 SECY. NELSON: I know. We'll find out. Well,
23 I'm going to really enjoy this group.

24 Well, let's continue or we'll be here through
25 the next ice storm.

1 MS. MAYS: And please speak up because we don't
2 have microphones. This is the only thing that goes online
3 and our hearing room, so speak up.

4 SECY. NELSON: Project to those guys on the
5 back row there. Can y'all hear us back there?

6 MR. ROBERT VALE: Robert Vale with Starr
7 Camargo Bridge. This is my second time at this meeting so
8 learning a lot. Hope to continue with this group. I
9 think there's a lot of great ideas.

10 I was talking to them at dinner last night. In
11 the future, there's a lot of projects that can be co-
12 developed in trade with Mexico and the United States, and
13 it's exciting to hear some of the ideas. [inaudible] some
14 of the ones that haven't been published --

15 MR. VALE: He spent 20 years in Houston, Texas
16 with the Maersk Line, the second largest container
17 shipping company in the world. So he knows a lot about
18 logistics.

19 MR. ROBERT VALE: What you said was correct in
20 that developing these arteries, there are several of them.
21 I think we only concentrate on a few so we have to develop
22 the others --

23 MR. CANON: Secretary, Andrew Canon, executive
24 director of the RGV MPO. We work on the transportation
25 planning for Cameron, Hidalgo, and portions of Starr

1 County. Unlike my colleague from Laredo, I'm not going to
2 sell the importance of our bridges. It's like asking you
3 to pick your favorite child.

4 (General laughter.)

5 MR. CANON: I will say we do offer more road
6 transportation to South Texas than anywhere else.
7 [inaudible] they will come from Brownsville, being
8 launched. So a lot of dynamic growth, a lot of dynamic
9 opportunities, and I've served on this committee since
10 2013 when Caroline came onboard, and we look forward to
11 the relationship.

12 And I do want to second that we would love to
13 entertain you in South Texas, go to our bridges, our ports
14 of entry, and just have a good time down in the Rio Grande
15 Valley.

16 SECY. NELSON: You didn't use the phrase "good
17 time" when you were selling that other one. Good time
18 sells me. Okay.

19 MS. BAZÁN: Luis Bazán, I'm director of the
20 Pharr International Bridge. I've been at the bridge since
21 2013 December, so this is the my ninth year this past
22 December. Started as economic development manager, moved
23 up to director in 2013.

24 Prior to that I was with the Pharr Chamber of
25 Commerce for five years. Previous to that, I was with

1 Andrew Canon at Hidalgo County MPO as transportation
2 planner, doing government [inaudible] Chamber of Commerce
3 doing business development and government affairs since
4 2001.

5 So I'm happy to be here. I've been on this
6 committee since 2014, I believe. My proxy is also, as you
7 saw, Cynthia Garza with legislative affairs for the City
8 of Pharr. And we work collectively, and as she said,
9 about 90 percent or more of the time is spent on bridge
10 matters.

11 Right now one of the things that we're going to
12 be probably talking about is the connectivity. We talked
13 about, you know, we talked about the arteries and the
14 connectivity ports of entry. I'm happy to report,
15 obviously, that the City of Pharr is on the way to
16 actually securing more funding for also projects already
17 under construction, not just inside the port but beyond
18 that.

19 Also working collectively with the City of
20 Reynosa, the State of Tamaulipas, to ensure that those six
21 corridors are properly kept and maintained in order to
22 traverse all the crossings through our bridge. Dante
23 mentioned the produce. In Pharr we cross approximately
24 200,000 truckloads of product per year, making us the
25 number one produce port of entry in the United States.

1 So we're happy to report that and here we'll be
2 talking about some of the projects that we have, including
3 a new bridge expansion that we're hoping to break ground
4 [inaudible] by the end of this year, if not early 2024.

5 MS. MAYS: Danny.

6 DANNY: I'm Danny, [inaudible].

7 SECY NELSON: Thank you.

8 DANNY: [inaudible]

9 MS. MAYS: Danny, you've got to speak up. We
10 don't have --

11 (Audio from meeting room cuts out.)

12 FEMALE VOICE: -- recently we've seen a lot of
13 tremendous movement as far as infrastructure being done.
14 That's going to allow a lot more activity to go
15 [inaudible]. So I am very excited about that. And of
16 course, we'd love to extend an invitation to visit the
17 port of entry, once all the infrastructure phases are
18 completed [inaudible].

19 So there's a lot of really exciting
20 opportunities coming to the [inaudible] Bridge. I'm very
21 happy to be here today.

22 MR. SEPULVEDA: Thank you, Secretary.
23 Congratulations on your first committee. Just a word of
24 advice, Sam already introduced me, but don't believe
25 everything he says.

1 (General laughter.)

2 MR. SEPULVEDA: I have a dual role in Cameron
3 County. I am the executive director of the Cameron
4 County RMA, also the county administrator for Cameron
5 County.

6 So the county owns and operates three
7 international bridges between the U.S. and Mexico. While
8 traffic is not back to the pre-COVID numbers, but since
9 the traffic restrictions were lifted, you know, we've seen
10 an increase in that traffic and hopefully in the next
11 couple of years we can go above pre-COVID numbers.

12 We have completed one donation program project
13 with CBP and GSA at their bridge. We have another one,
14 another expansion of the CBP primary lanes. We're going
15 from four primary lanes to eight. And we're also going to
16 be letting a project at the [inaudible] Bridge probably
17 March of this year.

18 So when SpaceX made a decision to locate in
19 Cameron County, we added a sixth mode of transportation.
20 So today we have highway, we have rail, we have airport,
21 we have seaports, we have pipelines that go from the U.S.
22 into Mexico, and we have space. We're also working with
23 CBP and GSA on the revitalization of the Gateway Port of
24 Entry.

25 GSA is going to spend about \$180 million to

1 bring it back to meet the current standards. No
2 improvements have been made since the Eisenhower era to
3 the Gateway Port of Entry.

4 We work very closely with Pete Alvarez and his
5 staff in developing projects in and around Cameron County,
6 and at times we go beyond Cameron County. We understand
7 the importance of bringing an interstate corridor to
8 Cameron County.

9 The whole area of Cameron County is the largest
10 metropolitan area in the United States without a single
11 interstate. So we're working with TxDOT and the team.
12 And on US 77 now we're down to about three sections that
13 need to get funded, so hopefully here in the next 2024 UTP
14 we can get those sections funded. The RMA has a \$1.2
15 billion fiscal project that we hope to get constructed in
16 the next 10 to 12 years.

17 One very exciting thing that happened about 15
18 months ago is the RMA rolled out its own toll tag called
19 the Fuego Tag. In the next six months we're going to be
20 interoperable with the all the international bridges in
21 Cameron County and all the coastal parks at South Padre
22 Island. And so we're working with other international
23 bridges in the Rio Grande Valley because the idea would be
24 to get our tags interoperable with all the international
25 bridges.

1 We have plans of interoperability with the
2 entire state, other toll authorities in the state and
3 beyond the State of Texas. And we also have plans to
4 coordinate with Mexico to make our tag interoperable with
5 Mexico.

6 For example, at South Padre Island, at least
7 half of the property owners at South Padre Island are
8 Mexican Nationals that come from Monterrey or wherever.
9 And so if we make our toll tag interoperable with the toll
10 roads going from Reynosa to Monterrey, then interoperable
11 going in northbound at any international bridge, it would
12 be ideal for the whole Rio Grande Valley and the whole
13 South Texas area.

14 So we've got very aggressive plans over the
15 next couple of years, and we, too, invite you to go to
16 Cameron County. And if you've never gotten a tour of
17 SpaceX, it's worth it. They've got about 2,000 employees
18 right now.

19 There's a lot of activity going on at the Port
20 of Brownsville right now. As a matter of fact, we're
21 working with the Port of Brownsville in developing a
22 master plan because in the next five-six years we're going
23 to have to provide access, we're going to have to move
24 about 6- or 7,000 employees in and out of the Port of
25 Brownsville. And so that is going to be a big challenge,

1 but we'll coordinate that with Pete and his staff and
2 TxDOT.

3 So lots of great things happening at the border
4 and you'll find out Brownsville to El Paso many, many
5 great projects.

6 I also serve on the Texas Transportation
7 Institute Advisory Council, so anything that we can help
8 and coordinate, we'd be glad to.

9 SECY. NELSON: Interesting. Who is your state
10 senator?

11 MR. SEPULVEDA: Morgan LaMantia.

12 SECY. NELSON: Okay. Brand new. I met her.
13 She's good.

14 MR. SEPULVEDA: She's going to be very good.

15 SECY. NELSON: You know, I served on a pretty
16 new -- well, two sessions old now, but a Ports committee
17 of the State Senate that went down there and toured, very
18 interesting. We went down to the Panama Canal and toured
19 ports down there. This committee should interact with
20 them.

21 MR. SEPULVEDA: [inaudible]

22 SECY. NELSON: It would benefit this committee
23 to interact a lot with them, because a lot of their
24 decisions --

25 MR. SEPULVEDA: Absolutely. And that's why

1 bringing an interstate corridor to the Rio Grande Valley
2 is important because then we would have port-to-port
3 connectivity from the Port of Brownsville to the Port of
4 Corpus or Houston and other ports along the coast.

5 SECY. NELSON: The lieutenant governor created
6 that committee. I was on it twice. I was on it when it
7 was created and then another session, so it was two
8 sessions old.

9 But the legislature did not know much at all
10 about ports until that committee was created. And I tell
11 you all that because the legislature needs to know about
12 ports. Right? They need to know.

13 And it would benefit not just the Texas
14 legislature but it would benefit our neighbors to know --
15 for the legislature to know more about ports.

16 Okay. Thank you for your information.

17 Go ahead.

18 MR. CALVO: Madam Secretary, again welcome. My
19 name is Eduardo Calvo, the executive director of the El
20 Paso MPO.

21 You're going to hear a lot about the border but
22 it's also important to understand that how the Texas-
23 Mexico Border is not a monolith, right. There's a lot of
24 [inaudible]. In our case, as an MPO we are one of the two
25 bi-state MPOs, so we cover a little bit of southern New

1 Mexico as well, which is very relevant here because of the
2 Santa Teresa Port of Entry which is physically in the
3 State of New Mexico, but it's within our metropolitan
4 area.

5 And that bridge -- not a bridge, it's a land
6 crossing. That crossing is a very important element of
7 our system of crossings that goes from Santa Teresa to the
8 west and going through the crossings in the metropolitan
9 area of El Paso that extends to the Guadalupe on the
10 eastern part of the county. So that's interesting, so
11 you're going to hear a lot about that.

12 Another very important feature for us is that
13 we have Ciudad Juarez across the border from us. So
14 that's about 2 million people, so when you combine El Paso
15 and Ciudad Juarez, we're close to 3 million people. You
16 know, we're pretty far away from civilization, right, but
17 there's a lot of activity going on.

18 And that also makes the crossing patterns very
19 different. Unlike Laredo, for example, that most of the
20 traffic is generated south, Monterrey, Mexico City, and
21 points south, but most of the stuff that we cross in our
22 crossings is generated in Juarez, so the model of our
23 maquilas is a little different. We have the big maquilas
24 where you have, you know, 500-1,000 employees who ship
25 that are producing stuff with some with some high

1 [inaudible] and so on.

2 So our model is crossing back and forth, back
3 and forth. It's not so much trips that are originating
4 from the southern part. It's just different. Right?

5 But the focus of our crossings, given that a
6 lot of our companies that are involved in our region are
7 using just-in-time as a [inaudible]. It's not just the
8 crossing time, but the reliability of a crossing is
9 tremendously important for our region.

10 So again, you're going to hear a lot about the
11 differences between the region. There's a little
12 competition about that of how it also relates to the need
13 for funding. You're going to hear me whine a lot about
14 it's not just about I-35.

15 I-10 is tremendously important to us. It's a
16 very important east-west corridor, not just for us locally
17 but for the State of Texas [inaudible]. It's the only
18 all-weather year-round commercial corridor in the country.

19 So again, I look forward to working with you
20 and discussing.

21 SECY. NELSON: Well, thank you.

22 (Audio in the meeting room cuts out.)

23 MR. BARELA: Sorry to interrupt but we can't
24 hear what's happening. Those of us online, we can't hear
25 what's happening from the room.

1 MS. MAYS: Sorry. Somebody muted me. Okay, we
2 got it.

3 SECY. NELSON: We have Presidio.

4 MR. GIESBRECHT: (inaudible). I understand
5 that. So anyway, we do mostly agricultural products. We
6 have a lot of crops out of Mexico. We do a lot of hay.
7 We're more the agricultural side of the state coming
8 through Presidio and vice versa, trading out of the State
9 of Texas.

10 We have a lot of challenges. One of our
11 challenges is being solo up there, that's why TxDOT is so
12 important to us. [inaudible]. That's why the [inaudible]
13 been so helpful.

14 The I-67 corridor study which we've done, and
15 which we're working on to organize an expansion of the
16 bridge, and we can't get the U.S. side to finish it. The
17 Mexican side has been finished for almost a year now and
18 the U.S. side is 80 percent finished from the bridge and
19 we just need to get the last piece of it finished
20 [inaudible]. We don't want it to be a bridge to nowhere.

21 But we have some challenges. We're a small
22 city. We have like 7,000 people in Presidio [inaudible].

23 So thank you very much.

24 MS. MAYS: Okay. We got everybody in the room,
25 Secretary. We have a few more folks online that were not

1 here in the beginning.

2 Tyson Mueller with UP, you're on the line. Go
3 ahead and introduce yourself and say a few words.

4 MR. MOELLER: Good morning, everybody. Tyson
5 Moeller, general director for Union Pacific, and we
6 operate in all of the border connections there. So happy
7 to be here. Twenty-seven years with UP.

8 MS. MAYS: Thank you, Tyson.

9 And I see Maria Giner, representing the
10 International Boundary and Water Commission.

11 MS. GINER: Good morning, Secretary. I'm so
12 sorry I was unable to be there. I'm here in Austin
13 actually with no power. So you can't see my camera, as
14 you see it's pretty dark.

15 SECY. NELSON: Oh, no.

16 MS. GINER: Yes. And so I didn't want to
17 venture the drive down there, but I was so looking forward
18 to meeting you. I'm just here to learn and to listen how
19 the federal government, through the International Boundary
20 and Water Commission, can support our communities. Thank
21 you.

22 MR. VALE: Madam Secretary, the International
23 Boundary and Water Commission is the most important piece
24 in constructing anything over the Rio Grande. Their
25 challenge is to make sure the border is secure, and that

1 means not move, and so all construction has to go through
2 them for approval. So I think she undersold the
3 importance of that entity.

4 SECY. NELSON: I hope you heard that.

5 MS. GINER: I did hear that. And in fact, I'm
6 ready and waiting for the floor plan so I can sign 250
7 pages worth of plans to demonstrate that the two
8 governments are in agreement with that project.

9 So no, definitely, we are very involved in the
10 process, not only in the ports of entry but in the
11 delivery of water to our South Texans, as well as all
12 along the Rio Grande. So yes, we are advocating for more
13 funding.

14 I will share with the group that this year our
15 budget did really well. We did a really strong year of
16 advocating. We are still severely underfunded, but we got
17 like a 20 percent increase in our operations budget which
18 was very exciting for us. So we'll be able to hire more
19 staff and hopefully be able to improve our service to our
20 communities.

21 MS. MAYS: Thank you very much.

22 And we have Daniel Silva.

23 MR. SILVA: Good morning, Madam Secretary.

24 Daniel Silva with RGV Partnership here representing the
25 four-county South Texas region of Willacy, Starr, Cameron

1 and Hidalgo.

2 It's a pleasure to work with you, I'm here to
3 learn as well. I've been on the job for seven months and
4 excited to work with such a great group of people.

5 Thank you.

6 MS. MAYS: Thank you.

7 Want to go back to Jon Barela, El Paso. You've
8 been on mute; we have not had a chance to hear from you.

9 MR. BARELA: Good morning. Thank you,
10 Caroline, appreciate it.

11 Madam Secretary, good to meet you virtually,
12 hope to see you soon in person.

13 SECY. NELSON: Yes.

14 MR. BARELA: I'll be brief. Borderplex
15 Alliance -- I'm CEO of the Borderplex Alliance.

16 To my knowledge, we're the only privately
17 funded organization that represents three states and two
18 countries. I won't repeat what my colleague, Eduardo
19 Calvo, just mentioned, other than to say that define the
20 Borderplex region as Dona Anna County, New Mexico, Ciudad
21 Juarez, and El Paso County. Glad that there's much
22 activity here.

23 We are the fifth largest manufacturing hub in
24 North America and our organization has been actively
25 promoting our region as the location of choice for

1 reshoring and nearshoring opportunities, especially, of
2 course, in manufacturing. And all of that is coming to
3 fruition. We've been incredibly active with mega projects
4 and other large industrial projects in our region.

5 I'll conclude by saying that it looks like --
6 we're compiling data in our organization -- it looks like
7 we will probably become the fourth largest manufacturing
8 hub in North America. We're only 13,000 jobs short of the
9 New York Metro area, Tri-State area. So the momentum or
10 growth will continue and we look forward to a good year
11 ahead and certainly a good several years ahead.

12 Look forward to working with you, again, Madam
13 Secretary, and hope to see you soon.

14 MS. MAYS: Okay. Did I miss any BTAC members
15 online? Did we miss anybody?

16 (No response.)

17 MS. MAYS: Okay. Secretary, I think that
18 concludes the roll call and then also remarks from
19 committee members, and I'm happy to announce that we do
20 have a quorum, so we're in good shape.

21 And I heard from Marc who will stop by. He's
22 in another meeting, he'll stop by in a little bit.

23 Before we go to the adoption of the minutes, I
24 want to introduce my team. I have some of the staff here
25 that I would like you to meet.

1 SECY. NELSON: Perfect.

2 MS. MAYS: We'll start with Juan.

3 MR. FLORES: Juan Flores. Madam Secretary,
4 pleasure to meet you. Working across the country, this is
5 one of the more aggressive programs in the country for
6 planning and able to do and developing a plan of attack.

7 We have the freight international trade
8 connectivity. I like to think we're the darling of
9 TxDOT, so we have the corridors, we have the border
10 corridor that Claudia is doing, we have cyclists, and also
11 to the freight planning that we just finished, and staff
12 right now with this. So one of the most aggressive
13 programs, we're leading in all modes, strategy, and look
14 forward to working with you.

15 SECY. NELSON: Yes.

16 MS. MAYS: Next, Claudia.

17 MS. LAGOS: Hello, Madam Secretary. Claudia
18 Lagos, I'm part of Caroline's team. I'm in charge of the
19 International Framework Planning Branch.

20 This is one of the most important tasks that we
21 have internally to develop and to follow everything
22 related to BTAC in coordination with all the members and
23 through the Mexican states. We work very closely with the
24 four states and with the federal level in Mexico. And we
25 always want to align the projects that we have on the U.S.

1 side to join the projects and have the same benefit on
2 both sides of the border.

3 MS. MAYS: And then we have Lorena. Lorena,
4 want to introduce yourself real quick?

5 MS. deMISI: I'm on Caroline's team. I'm a
6 multimodal planner for the Planning and Modal Programs
7 group, working on helping Caroline in very specific plans
8 for maritime, aviation, rail, public transportation, and
9 transportation planning and programming. I've been with
10 TxDOT about 18 years.

11 MS. MAYS: So that's the folks in the room, but
12 I want to let you know online we have a multitude of TxDOT
13 people, include state and legislative affairs, our federal
14 affairs folks, and a bunch of other TxDOT folks.

15 You met the border district engineers. All
16 three border district engineers are here, you've got El
17 Paso, you've got Laredo, you've got Pharr. So this
18 committee is well supported by TxDOT, here in Austin but
19 also in the border regions.

20 And then we also have consultants, you'll hear
21 from them later, that support the work of this committee,
22 supported in the past but also moving forward. So just
23 want to let you know, you heard Commissioner New is here,
24 Commissioner Laura Ryan used to be here but she stepped
25 down from Commission. But you have a lot of support from

1 Commission in terms of the work of this committee from
2 TxDOT.

3 So just wanted to let you know that you're in
4 good hands and if you have any questions, we worked very
5 well with your team and predecessors, so we just want to
6 welcome you on behalf of TxDOT. This is your first
7 meeting, but many more to come. And as you've seen the
8 committee members are very committed. All of them online
9 would have been here if it wasn't for the weather, so I
10 just wanted to let you know, but you still have a good
11 crowd here.

12 So welcome you for your first meeting.

13 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

14 MS. MAYS: And we'll go to the next agenda
15 item. We have a quorum, the next agenda item --

16 MR. NEW: Caroline, it's Alvin.

17 One thing I just want to make sure and say that
18 for Secretary Nelson to choose to do this role is a
19 tribute to Texas. Because when you do Senate Finance
20 chair, you've taken on a big role for a long time, and
21 taking time off and going to do things personally would
22 have been certainly in line.

23 So I'm an admirer of the fact that you have a
24 big heart for service, and I think most of us that get
25 involved do. But yours is an amazing story and I'm really

1 happy that you've chosen to take on this role, and look
2 forward to working with you in the sense of listening and
3 trying to take these things that we do on this committee
4 to the Commission.

5 So just want to make sure and welcome you from
6 that perspective. It sure is good to see people that work
7 hard to take care of Texans.

8 SECY. NELSON: You're so kind. Thank you,
9 thank you, that's very kind.

10 Well, let me just, if I might, say to those who
11 connected virtually, I'm sorry you couldn't join us, but I
12 really look forward to meeting you all in person. And to
13 everybody in the room, thank you for making it here. I'm
14 very grateful, and I'm really looking forward to this.

15 Yes, I had decided that 30 years in the Texas
16 Senate was enough for that role. But I hadn't bought my
17 rocking chair yet and I enjoy public service, and this
18 role is just tailor made for me.

19 I'm really going to enjoy this particular
20 group. I love the mission of this group, the partnership
21 that I'm seeing, and the people that I'm meeting here
22 today, both virtually and the people who are here. I can
23 just tell that you all bring such a wealth of experience
24 and knowledge, and we can work together and do great
25 things, great things.

1 I do bring a background of legislative
2 experience that you all are very familiar with. What some
3 of you might not know is that my husband and I owned a
4 business, a manufacturing business that did worldwide. We
5 were the largest manufacturing company of bushings, which
6 is a small airplane part that went in -- every airplane
7 you fly in probably had -- if it's commercial, we probably
8 had about 2,000 parts in that airplane. But we did
9 business in Canada, we did business in Mexico, we did
10 business everywhere in the world.

11 So I'm very familiar with the business aspect
12 of things, which did, by the way, serve me very well as
13 Finance chairman in the Texas Senate. I know business
14 operations. Boy, did that help me in my Finance role.

15 It helped me in my Senate undertakings, and
16 it's going to help me in this job. It's really going to
17 help. And I understand some things that I think you're
18 going to be dealing -- not you, we are going to be dealing
19 with in a lot of our discussions.

20 From a senator perspective, I was telling my
21 staff -- I should introduce my staff -- anyway, from a
22 senator perspective, when they were telling me about this
23 organization when we very first started, I put on my old
24 senator hat and I said, you know, I remember getting a
25 phone call as senator from a constituent who was really

1 mad because they owned a lot of trucking -- they owned a
2 trucking company but had a lot of trucking businesses.

3 They brought in goods from Mexico, and it was
4 when we were having some problems and they had vegetables
5 sitting on a whole lot of trucks in Mexico and they were
6 bringing them up to -- I represented the Metroplex Senate
7 district. And he had a lot of goods sitting down there on
8 trucks, and he called me up -- now, this is when I was a
9 senator -- and he called me up and he was mad as a wet
10 hen. That's a term we use.

11 He was mad and he called me up and he was
12 screaming. Well, when you're a senator and you represent
13 a constituency, well, this guy was angry and he wanted to
14 know what I was going to do about it as his senator.
15 Well, when you're a senator you have to do certain things,
16 and of course, I made phone calls, what am I going to do.

17 Well, now I have a different hat on and I look
18 at things differently. Well, it's important that we keep
19 those lines open, you know, and that's our job here.
20 Right? So are y'all listening to me, can you hear me over
21 there?

22 (General laughter.)

23 SECY. NELSON: Okay. So those kinds of
24 discussions are going to be important to senators sitting
25 over there in that building and we have to make them

1 understand why what we're doing is important.

2 And Canada, I did business manufacturing
3 airplane parts and did a lot of business up in Ontario.
4 And I know how important it was looking in that direction
5 too, how important it was that I could get my parts going
6 up there.

7 Anyway, I don't want to personalize it, but you
8 always want to personalize things. My good friend, John
9 Whitmire, who is the longest serving state senator sitting
10 over at the Capitol, always said -- his phrase that he
11 uses more than anything else is: always put a face on it.

12 And I think it's important that, no matter what
13 we do, we always put a face on it and make it real.
14 Because if you personalize it and make it real, it helps
15 people understand things. So we need to put a face on it.

16 So I talk too much.

17 So we know we have a quorum. A quorum is
18 present, and I am going to assume that everybody has read
19 the minutes from the last meeting. I know you all stayed
20 up late last night reading those minutes, and so I am
21 going to move the adoption of the minutes from the October
22 18, 2022, Border Trade Advisory Committee Meeting that was
23 held in El Paso. And I am going to ask Dr. Gonzalez if
24 you would like to move the adoption of those minutes.

25 Dr. Gonzalez moves the adoption of the minutes.

1 Would anyone like to second the adoption of those minutes?

2 (No audible response.)

3 SECY. NELSON: We have a second. Is everyone
4 in favor of the adoption of the minutes? All those in
5 favor, aye.

6 (A chorus of ayes.)

7 SECY. NELSON: Is anyone opposed -- I need my
8 gavel -- is anyone opposed?

9 (No response.)

10 SECY. NELSON: None. The minutes from the
11 Committee's October 18 meeting are adopted.

12 Now I'd like to turn it over to Eduardo Hagert
13 from TxDOT to provide a recap of the October 18 meeting.

14 MS. MAYS: Secretary, let me just pause.

15 Representative Morales, did you just join us?
16 Maybe not. I just wanted to make sure we recognized
17 Representative Morales.

18 Eduardo, go on. Go ahead.

19 MR. HAGERT: Good morning. Can you hear me
20 clearly?

21 SECY. NELSON: Yes.

22 MR. HAGERT: Okay, good.

23 Good morning, everyone. I'm Eduardo Hagert
24 with the Texas Department of Transportation. I want to
25 thank you all for joining us today. Let me give you a

1 brief recap of our last BTAC meeting on October 18, 2022.

2 The last BTAC meeting had six tasks. First, we
3 provided a status update on the implementation status of
4 the Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan.
5 Second, we provided a status update on the I-10 and I-20
6 corridor studies. Third, we discussed the Senate Bill
7 1308 final draft report.

8 Next, we provided a brief update of the Texas
9 Freight Mobility Plan, followed by presentations on the El
10 Paso Regional Border related technology projects.
11 Finally, the Committee was briefed on autonomous truck
12 deployment and operation efforts in Texas.

13 As a summary of the last BTAC meeting, Claudia
14 Lagos, with TxDOT, provided updates on the implementation
15 of the Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan.
16 Claudia discussed the status of BTMP projects in the El
17 Paso, Laredo and Pharr districts. She briefed members on
18 the expansion of the border wait time measurement system.

19 She also described the work plan for the
20 binational cross-border oversize/overweight needs
21 assessment study. She outlined the Mexican driver
22 training program which seeks to reduce commercial vehicle
23 safety citations and fines for Mexican trucks that cross
24 the border in Texas. In addition, she summarized the
25 Texas-Mexico Task Force, a forum intended to enhance

1 bilateral communication, coordination and cooperation
2 between Texas and Mexico on cross-border trade
3 transportation issues.

4 Members offered comments and questions
5 regarding the Texas-Mexico Task Force.

6 Following an insightful discussion, Lorena
7 Echeverria and Cary Karnstadt, with TxDOT, provided
8 updates on the I-10 and I-20 corridor studies. On one
9 hand, Lorena highlighted the corridors' impact on the
10 state's economy; on the other, Cary described the purpose
11 and scope of the I-10 study and he indicated the I-10
12 study is currently in milestone number three of five, in
13 which initial improvement strategies have been identified
14 based on analysis and stakeholder participation.

15 Cary also gave an overview of the I-20 study
16 and the public input received through the study. Finally,
17 Cary identified common steps for both studies and he noted
18 that the studies were expected to be completed by the
19 spring of 2023.

20 Members chimed in and commented on the
21 importance of the I-10 and I-20 corridor studies to the
22 State of Texas and the national economy.

23 Further, Francisco Almanza with TxDOT and a
24 consultant, Mike Williamson, briefed BTAC members on the
25 final draft report for the Senate Bill 1308 study.

1 Francisco reminded members that the Senate Bill 1308 study
2 focuses on the impact of automated driving systems, ADS,
3 and connected driving systems, CDS, on statewide safety,
4 workforce and congestion at the Texas-Mexico Border.

5 Mike Williamson outlined the Senate Bill 1308
6 study's timeline and stakeholder engagement. He
7 identified the general themes of the comments received in
8 the study. He then presented an overview of the Senate
9 Bill 1308 study report, including the potential benefits
10 of using ADS/CDS to alleviate motor vehicle congestion at
11 ports of entry, the potential impacts on ADS/CDS on
12 driving and public safety, the potential impacts of
13 ADS/CDS on the transportation industry workforce, the
14 Texas economy and future considerations. Mr. Williamson
15 noted that the final report would be submitted to the
16 Governor and the Legislature later this year, which was
17 submitted on January 1st.

18 BTAC members provided comments and questions
19 regarding the Senate Bill 1308 study report, focusing on
20 how the technology will be applied at border crossings.

21 After that, we heard from TxDOT's corridor team
22 to learn more about the Texas Freight Mobility Plan. Juan
23 Flores, with TxDOT, provided statistics regarding the
24 movement of goods and the economic impact of freight
25 transportation in the logistics sector. He identified

1 notable external trends impacting freight flows in Texas.

2 His presentation also highlighted multiple
3 freight transportation demands in Texas, a summary of
4 freight transportation assets in Texas, and the state's
5 goods mobility needs. He also gave an overview of
6 projects and needs identified in the freight plan, and he
7 identified next steps in the preparation and submission of
8 the plan.

9 Caroline Mays offered additional input
10 regarding the plan and urged BTAC members to provide
11 comments regarding the plan through its development. BTAC
12 members asked questions regarding the presentation and
13 suggested areas of consideration for the plan.

14 Further, we heard from Tomas Trevino, TxDOT's
15 El Paso District Engineer, who provided an update on
16 technology projects in El Paso, including a wrong-way
17 driver project, the end of queue system, a port of entry
18 project at the Bridge of the Americas, and installation of
19 full color dynamic message signs.

20 David Coronado, director for El Paso's
21 International Bridge System, briefed members regarding El
22 Paso's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. He
23 presented stats for vehicle and pedestrian border
24 crossings and discussed the status of several El Paso
25 projects.

1 Eduardo Calvo, El Paso's MPO director,
2 described his organization's development of a new travel
3 demand model. El Paso County representatives, Michael
4 Hernandez and Sal Alonzo, outlined multiple projects in
5 the county area.

6 Our final presentations dealt with autonomous
7 truck deployment and operations in Texas. Representatives
8 of autonomous vehicle companies Kodiak Robotics and Aurora
9 gave presentations on their current operations and
10 technology advancements.

11 This concludes the recap. And with that, I
12 will turn it to Caroline.

13 MS. MAYS: Eduardo, thank you. We're
14 conferring on something here -- thank you.

15 SECY. NELSON: Thank you for that.

16 Okay. This is just my first meeting. I'm
17 going to recall the adoption of those minutes that we just
18 adopted, if there's no objection. Is there any objection?
19 No.

20 My good friend, Dr. Gonzalez, moved the
21 adoption of the minutes, because I suggested that, but
22 because you're not a member, you can't do that. I'm going
23 to recall that and I'm going to ask my good friend, Sam,
24 instead to move the adoption of the minutes. Is there any
25 objection to that?

1 No, of course not. And is there a second to
2 that motion.

3 (Inaudible response.)

4 SECY. NELSON: Okay, we've got a second. Now,
5 is there any objection to the adoption of the minutes?
6 No.

7 Hearing none, then the minutes are adopted.
8 See how easy that was.

9 (General talking and laughter.)

10 SECY. NELSON: You have a point of order? I
11 guess I'll recognize you on the point of order. See how
12 easy I am.

13 MR. VALE: We did extend membership to the four
14 Mexican states that are on the Texas border. It's my
15 understanding that he represents one of those states. So
16 it's not just because he's not the secretary of whatever
17 else, he's the secretary of agriculture, so I think that
18 it's very valid.

19 MS. MAYS: No, we're good, Sam. The
20 technicality is that BTAC members are appointed by the
21 Commission. If they're not appointed, they're not on this
22 list, so the statute --

23 SECY. NELSON: Since he wasn't on the list, he
24 couldn't make the motion. It gets so complicated so
25 quickly.

1 MR. VALE: That's not what we did when we went
2 through the master planning -- you remember, Caroline,
3 what we did was to be able to unify the communications,
4 and if you say I'm a stepchild --

5 MS. MAYS: Well, Sam, it's just the
6 technicality of this. We're just following this because
7 BTAC is a statutorily created committee. That's the
8 challenge.

9 SECY. NELSON: And Sam, I would never call you
10 a stepchild. Therefore, you're not recognized on your
11 point of order and we're moving on. See how easy that
12 was.

13 (General laughter.)

14 SECY. NELSON: But that's a good point. But
15 just to keep things rolling, I'm going to just keep it
16 clean, and I would never offend my good friend.

17 So we're moving on. Now we're going to go on
18 to the next agenda item is to recognize Claudia Lagos from
19 TxDOT to provide us with an update on the implementation
20 of Texas Border Trade Master Plan.

21 Claudia. She's virtual.

22 MS. MAYS: No, she's right here.

23 Would those of you online please mute your
24 microphones, please, so we don't have background noises.

25 MS. LAGOS: My purpose is to present what we've

1 started working on the implementation part of the Border
2 Master Plan. And as you may know, we finished the new
3 Border Master Plan and it was adopted in 2021. So we
4 start doing our next steps, our next studies, getting into
5 consideration the projects and the recommendations that we
6 have on the Border Master Plan, and we would like to
7 present today the two studies that we are going to
8 conduct. One is going to be looking into the first and
9 last mile connectivity in each port of entry, then we are
10 going to move to the connectivity between ports to ports,
11 and then we are going to move to the connectivity to
12 region to region.

13 So I would like to pass the microphone to some
14 of our consultant team that they are going to help us
15 presenting what we have as the plan for the study. She is
16 the one who is going to present the first part.

17 MS. BARRIOS: Good morning, everyone. Buenos
18 días a todos. My name is Nair Barrios. I'm a
19 transportation planner with Jacobs Engineering. I am
20 consultant support for the BTAC in this first section of
21 the study.

22 Thank you for being with us, Secretary of
23 State. We are very happy that you braved the cold and the
24 ice and everything. And thank you to everybody that is
25 online. We appreciate you still connecting even though

1 there's some weird weather going on.

2 So I'm usually soft-spoken, so if you guys
3 don't hear me, please do let me know right away.

4 I'm here to present to you basically what the
5 framework is for what we're calling the border crossing
6 connectivity study. In this case, if we can go to the
7 next slide, I was going to bore you a little bit with a
8 bit of background, because you all know this very well and
9 basically inside and out. But for the benefit of the
10 Secretary, we just want to do a little bit of a recap of
11 where we're standing right now.

12 First of all, as you know, there was the
13 adoption of the Texas-Mexico Border Master Plan in 2021,
14 and what the plan was outlining was basically the
15 importance of the border in the Texas economy. Like Sam
16 said, the transportation network is one of the biggest
17 drivers of economic health and prosperity for the state,
18 and like you said, it is our main objective to keep those
19 veins of freight open. So the objective of the BTMP was
20 basically figuring out the ways that we could improve some
21 of those transportation links and what the needs of those
22 would be going forward.

23 So if we go to the next slide, you will see the
24 BTMP did an amazing plan outlining what is the economic
25 importance of the border, and as an extension of that, of

1 the connectivity of the border. And one of the main
2 things that we learned is that the impressive amount of
3 trade that goes through the Texas-Mexico Border actually
4 doesn't just stay in Texas. Right? And it's one of the
5 main connections for other states in the nation, like
6 California, Michigan, and also a lot of the trade that
7 goes into Texas.

8 If we look at updated numbers for 2021, there's
9 a total of \$418 billion in trade that goes through the
10 Texas-Mexico Border, with destiny to other states in the
11 nation, because, as you know, more than 50 percent of our
12 entire border with Texas actually is the Texas-Mexico
13 Border. It's also very interesting to know that our trade
14 with Mexico keeps growing throughout the years.

15 And it's very important to know that we
16 actually trade more with Mexico than Mexico does with
17 China. So it's really an important driver of economic
18 development, but also leadership of trade, and keeping
19 those connections healthy and moving forward would really
20 be one of the things that keeps us in the forefront of
21 trade, like all of our fellows in the border very well
22 know.

23 So if we go to the next slide, you'll see these
24 are just some of the key needs identified by the Border
25 Master Plan. Like we said, it's a very comprehensive

1 document but we wanted to highlight those that talk
2 specifically about the border crossings, because that is
3 sort of the focus of this bridge study that we're going
4 through. And one of the ones that it points to
5 specifically is if you ask anybody that's been on the
6 border, lived in the border, went through the border, the
7 border crossings and the delay at the border crossings is
8 the first thing at the forefront of anybody.

9 The other thing is safety. The border
10 crossings are actually pretty multimodal. There's a lot
11 of population that lives on both sides of the border, so
12 keeping pedestrians, transit, and all other modes flowing
13 safely and connecting safely for all of our users is
14 paramount.

15 And the other thing is we want to look at the
16 health of these border crossings, but it's also very, very
17 important to be able to connect them to the network
18 properly, because, as you know, you're only as strong as
19 your weakest link.

20 Specifically, one of the cross-cutting themes
21 that the Border Master Plan identified when it came to
22 border crossings is that the network needs to be more
23 resilient. And for that we need to have a more redundant
24 network, meaning if there's a disruption event at any of
25 the border crossings, the network has to be able to

1 rebalance itself to basically try to reduce the delay that
2 that would have on the border crossing as much as
3 possible.

4 And finally, with the forecast of traffic and
5 current trends in trade, if we do nothing for the border
6 crossings, the delays would only get bigger. And if there
7 are such numbers like you're saying, Secretary, we can
8 look at a productivity loss of \$4.4 billion in 2050, which
9 is numbers that nobody wants to hear.

10 So this study is actually building on the
11 Border Master Plan. And if we go to the next slide we'll
12 see, looking at the connectivity of the border crossings
13 was identified as a high impact initiative on the Border
14 Master Plan. And most importantly, it's flowing directly
15 into what we call the increase in travel time, which is
16 basically how much time it takes you to get from point A
17 to point B.

18 Most importantly, that delay on the border
19 crossings has also gone into modal shifts when it comes to
20 some of these south of the border. So you have seen
21 increases in the number of pedestrians crossing the
22 bridges or the number of people using their bicycle as a
23 way to cross the bridges, on top of the increase in
24 traffic on any of the border crossings.

25 So if we go to the next slide, this is sort of

1 our bridge and middle step between the implementation plan
2 of the Border Master Plan and the original Border Master
3 Plan, and this is what we're doing in the middle to kind
4 of keep the momentum. We're calling this the connectivity
5 study and the connectivity study has two fronts we'll use
6 as a bridge in between the two efforts. My colleague,
7 Paula, will talk to you about the implementation plan in a
8 little bit, which is the bridge that goes in between those
9 two.

10 First of all, we'll be doing what is called a
11 first and last mile connectivity study, and what that is
12 supposed to do is we'll identify gaps between all of the
13 transportation modes and networks that we have in the
14 immediate vicinity of your border crossings. That doesn't
15 necessarily mean that it's the very last mile and the very
16 first mile, it just means that it's the link that connects
17 your border crossing to the biggest capacity highway
18 network link that we have, or the closest major
19 destination, which, as you know, in places like Laredo
20 could be an industrial park where your freight is moved
21 from one vehicle to another vehicle. So it's not
22 necessarily a mile, but it serves your closest connection.

23 On the other side, we also have the border
24 crossing connectivity study, and what this one is trying
25 to do is figure out how well a border crossing connects to

1 the border crossings around it. And this is trying to
2 figure out the redundancy in your network so we can have a
3 better idea how to redistribute our traffic whenever
4 there's a disruption in between your border crossings.

5 So those are sort of the two branches of the
6 connection study that will be happening in between those
7 two. And for those two efforts, we're doing a level of
8 stakeholder engagement that we'll be talking to you just
9 in a little bit.

10 So if we go to our next slide, just to give you
11 some details on what that first and last mile connectivity
12 study is, what we're trying to figure out, like I said, is
13 how that border crossing connects to all of the networks.
14 And our main objective in this is figuring out what are
15 your key links from that border crossing to whatever in
16 the network you're moving.

17 We're also identifying bottlenecks. We're
18 identifying network gaps, and that is everything from a
19 difference in capacity, a difference in lane from your
20 border crossing to your major capacity highway link, to
21 maybe a gap in your sidewalk for all those new pedestrians
22 that are using your border crossings, or a gap from your
23 border crossing to your first major transit connection.

24 We're also looking at safety hotspots. There's
25 a lot of people moving around a border crossing, and

1 whatever we can do as operational improvement to reduce
2 that, it's what we call low-hanging fruit. They're
3 usually improvements that can be done fast and it's just
4 about digging in today and figuring out what is causing
5 those safety issues.

6 And then last, but not least, we're looking at
7 those bike, pedestrian and transit network kind of gaps.
8 This is something that we're obviously going to do with a
9 lot of help and coordination with the MPOs and the cities.
10 But like we said, it's one of those things that could make
11 a big impact when it comes to the functioning of your
12 border crossings.

13 And then what we will bring out to you at the
14 end of this is potential recommendations to do
15 improvements, both operational and infrastructure, around
16 those border crossings. We'll figure out what we can do
17 specifically for your bike and ped networks connecting to
18 transit networks, and we'll figure out metrics to figure
19 out how much improvement is being done once those
20 improvements are being put in place. Because, you know,
21 you have to figure out how much you're moving the needle.
22 Right?

23 So if you go to the next slide, I'm just giving
24 you a very high overview of the border crossings. And I
25 know I'm bringing water to the well because you all know

1 this so very well, but within the three regions what we're
2 going to do is that review of the highway networks
3 connecting to the border crossing. So anything that is
4 available from your interstate, your state highway, your
5 national highway that goes through your border crossings
6 is what we're focusing on.

7 But if we go to the next slide, you'll also see
8 that we're also looking at the rail crossing connections
9 that are very important for the border as well. And we'll
10 be looking at your international dams and our ferry
11 crossings, which are not a lot, but it's still a
12 connection that we could leverage.

13 And we'll also be figuring out the connections
14 to the seaports. We're not specifically close to the
15 seaports in all of the border but we do have important
16 ports when it comes to the Valley region, both for deep
17 draft and shallow draft, so we'll be figuring out what are
18 those connections that could having hurdles going from
19 your border crossing to your port.

20 If you look on the next slide -- let me know if
21 I'm going fast; since I don't have a counter, I'm trying
22 not to go over time -- border connectivity study, we'll be
23 doing it sort of in three branches. Right? We cannot
24 compare apples to oranges.

25 So the first thing is we will be considering

1 the connections for what we call personal ownership
2 vehicles, or POVs, which is your regular passenger car.
3 For that we will define what is the distance between your
4 border crossing and your highest capacity link, which is
5 your highway, and also, what are the most traveled routes
6 that people take once you leave the border crossing.

7 And we define some things, you know, the crash
8 characteristics around that border crossing, we create a
9 profile about what is your average traffic at peak hour,
10 which is the worst time of day for traffic. And we also
11 identify what is the capacity that the network has coming
12 out of it and what could be potential capacity, meaning
13 more lanes or any other improvement that we can do to make
14 that capacity bigger. So that's on the highway side.

15 We also looked at what we call transit and
16 active transportation, which is your bikes, your
17 pedestrians, your transit. And for that we will be
18 basically mapping out the transit connections in that sort
19 of immediate vicinity of the border crossing, and making
20 sure that your pedestrian and your bicycle and your
21 transit networks are well connected so people are not
22 having trouble if they're not in a personal ownership
23 vehicle when they go through the border crossing.

24 As many of you know, for crossings where
25 there's just a pedestrian crossing, a lot of people

1 actually cross by foot and then get on an Uber, on a bike,
2 on a taxi, on a bus. So it's very important to get those
3 connections kind of nailed down and as smooth as possible.

4 And then, obviously, we're here for trade, so
5 there's a whole section of this analysis that will
6 basically concentrate on commercial motor vehicles and
7 rail. And for that we'll also identify those connections
8 that go from your border crossing to your high capacity
9 network, but we'll identify the connections that go from
10 the border crossing to those major freight attractors,
11 meaning an industrial site, a railyard, anything that
12 actually has sort of that first step when freight comes
13 in.

14 So those would be sort of our three fronts when
15 it comes to the first and last miles.

16 Now, if we move forward, I'm going to tell you
17 the other side of the coin, the border crossing to border
18 crossing analysis. And like I said, the main thing that
19 we want to do here is how that network works in between
20 themselves, in between border crossing to border crossing,
21 instead of just looking at how we connect that border
22 crossing to the network. And this is kind of one of the
23 bases of resiliency and for that we will do a little bit
24 of the same identification that we did for the previous
25 ones.

1 We will look for bottlenecks on where your
2 network would get snagged. We would look at what are the
3 gaps on a high capacity network, meaning if I'm trying to
4 get to an interstate, is there a gap there that I could
5 improve to actually make that connection easier. We'd
6 look at your safety hotspots. There's nothing to disrupt
7 your network worse than a crash.

8 And then we'll also look at FM roads that could
9 be built up to provide redundancy or provide alternative
10 routes in case of emergency. Like our fellows down in
11 Presidio mentioned, sometimes there's border crossings or
12 sections of the border that feel a little bit like a lone
13 ranger because their connections to the network are not as
14 abundant as other parts. It's figuring out how to
15 basically broaden those options for you in case that
16 something happens on 67 and then you don't have the
17 opportunity to get freight on as much as you could, or
18 maybe just personal ownership vehicles.

19 And the last thing, which I mentioned when we
20 went through the ports, is figuring out that we have
21 proper connections to the Texas coastal ports, because
22 those are also a main part of our transportation network.

23 How are we going to be doing this or what is
24 part of the analysis? We'll be doing what is called a
25 planning level rerouting scenario, and that is basically

1 figuring out if you cannot get on 67, where do you go. So
2 you have that in mind once a disruption event happens and
3 you can start putting in place instructions so you're kind
4 of not just trying to figure it out on the day of the ice
5 storm, to say something.

6 Also, what are the benefit-cost analysis of
7 your hourly and your daily at a border crossing. As you
8 know, that is the main thing that we do when there is a
9 delay at a border crossing, it's how much money are we
10 taking away from our economy.

11 And our final deliverable for this would be
12 operational improvements when it comes to all these border
13 crossings.

14 But for all of this we want to keep you
15 engaged, and that's where the stakeholder engagement
16 process comes from, so we will be doing this based on
17 border regions. This BTAC had Binational Regional
18 Steering Committees, which means basically smaller groups
19 within the regions that talk to their counterparts in
20 Mexico and make recommendations based on that. So they
21 have the El Paso Region, the Laredo Region, and the Rio
22 Grande Valley Region. And for that we have identified
23 sort of community pairs when it comes to those communities
24 so we can go in and basically structure a stakeholder
25 approach even more.

1 And we'll do it from three things, we'll do it
2 focused on that binational discussion by reactivating
3 those regional committees that a lot of the people here
4 sit on. And we'll also go to our Customs and Border
5 Protection and their counterpart, Aduanas, in Mexico,
6 because we have to know what their protocols are when a
7 disruption comes along and how to better communicate those
8 to the extent that we can and how to better match them on
9 both sides of the border.

10 And lastly, I will be supporting you in this
11 ongoing effort of educating Texans about the importance of
12 the border and why it's so basically paramount to keep it
13 flying, to keep it moving, and how much of our economy
14 actually comes from it.

15 So that's kind of a very fast way of saying all
16 of that.

17 On the next slide you can see what is our
18 schedule. This is sort of a very rapid-fire effort that
19 we're going to be going on. And some of this has already
20 happened on the background, you know, on the data
21 collection, what we call modal mapping which is basically
22 figuring out what all these types of transportation are
23 within the border region, and our network analysis, which
24 is the base to figure out if you have to reroute where
25 would you go and what those main connections are.

1 Now, you can see some of our other activities
2 as we go on through the summer when we're planning to
3 close this effort out, and then you can also see some of
4 the border crossing stakeholder engagement tasks. In the
5 coming days we'll be coming to you to get you on in that
6 stakeholder engagement and take a little bit more of your
7 time to make sure that we're doing our due diligence.

8 And if we go to the next one, you'll see sort
9 of a little bit more detailed explanation of what those
10 current activities are. And one of the main ones is
11 leveraging all of the big data sources that TxDOT has been
12 acquiring over the last years to make sure that we have
13 those destinations for personal and commercial vehicles
14 and pedestrians and really settled in the place that they
15 should go. It's a great forum for us to be able to know
16 sort of outside of empirical data how the state keeps
17 moving along.

18 We'll also be going through the projections
19 from the Border Master Plan to 2050 to update anything
20 that needs to be updated because a lot of that was based
21 on 2019 data, and then a pandemic happened -- who would
22 have known? And finally, exploring what those bottlenecks
23 are in those last mile connections.

24 So if you go to the next slide you'll see
25 basically what is coming up in terms of analysis for the

1 next couple of months. There's a lot of detail there
2 which I'm happy to share with you. And then in the next
3 slide you'll see what is happening in terms of
4 stakeholders.

5 We will be reaching out to you for the help and
6 we will be reaching out for those community workshops, and
7 we're certain that you will be super helpful. People like
8 Mr. Eduardo Calvo are always at the forefront and always
9 lending his expertise and his knowledge, because, like he
10 said, the border is actually incredibly diverse from one
11 side of the state to the other.

12 And I think I won't take any more of your time.
13 but I will definitely answer your questions.

14 MS. MAYS: Yes. Identify yourself again
15 because it's being transcribed, name, and then speak up
16 because we don't have microphones in the room.

17 MR. CANON: Andrew Canon, Rio Grande Valley
18 MPO.

19 If we're going to look at connectivity in part
20 of this study, it's unspoken in here, but shouldn't we
21 look at resiliency of the network as well?

22 MS. BARRIOS: Yes. That's an excellent
23 question. When we talk about redundancy of the network,
24 that is sort of what we meant. Maybe I wasn't clear
25 enough, I apologize. We're going to be figuring out what

1 your major connections are and how they're working out,
2 and then what is your backup network, which is sort of the
3 first step when it comes to resiliency.

4 And then part of that initiation protocol with
5 stakeholder engagement, with Border Protection, and with
6 Aduanas is figuring out sort of the coordination and
7 operational side of resiliency. If you have to shut down
8 a border crossing, what is the next step?

9 MS. MAYS: This is the first step. This is
10 part of a broader analysis. Paula Dowell will talk a
11 little bit more about kind of the expansive nature of the
12 work efforts.

13 Luis.

14 MR. BAZÁN: One question. Luis Bazán, Pharr
15 International Bridge.

16 So you mentioned the operation gaps, or as we
17 also like to call it, just connecting with our partners.
18 For example, now the Aduanas are being run by the
19 military. Even though we build relationships with them
20 and they change every eight to nine months, you know, what
21 is the plan moving forward?

22 Because as Secretary was talking about earlier,
23 find that business mind. We have the issues to some
24 degree with CBP on the federal side in the U.S. I think
25 the bigger issue stands with Mexico and having that

1 relationship or having that operation gap being a little
2 closer to understanding what the business side of things
3 are.

4 I think with regards to the technology, with
5 regards to the personnel, with regards to all these
6 projects at all the bridges were putting in place, but the
7 personnel and the policies implemented by these personnel,
8 in particular -- again, the military running an operation
9 of that nature, what are we going to be doing there and
10 what is the timeline to get to that one?

11 MS. MAYS: And I'll take that, Luis. Certainly
12 part of this is going to look at that, but what you're
13 talking about, that's a broader effort that normally we
14 have dealt with on the BBXG. And as you know, BBXG hasn't
15 really met for a while. That's where those discussions
16 normally happen because now we're talking about U.S. State
17 Department, U.S. DOT, you know, SCT, SRE, SAT on the
18 Mexican side.

19 So that dialogue hasn't happened in a while,
20 but we're cognizant and we're aware of that. And then on
21 our end we normally do it through JWC, but what we'll try
22 to do, working with the Secretary -- previously Secretary
23 Scott and Ruth Hughes -- was really having the
24 relationship with the border states, Mexican border
25 states, but then also really having a close relationship

1 with our partners at the federal level. So we'll try to
2 do that as Texas, and I think with Secretary Nelson now,
3 we've really started those grassroots relationships with
4 not just the Mexican states but also at the federal
5 government.

6 So we recognize those challenges, those
7 relationship challenges, and certainly that's something
8 we're going to be focusing on with the Secretary. She's
9 already made inroads with starting to have those dialogues
10 moving forward.

11 Let's get the folks in the room, then we'll
12 come back online quickly.

13 Danny.

14 DANNY: [inaudible] for TxDOT.

15 I just have to go with this committee. Will we
16 have an opportunity to look at a draft before it's
17 finalized? The community has a vested interest in making
18 sure that the information is accurate and complete.

19 It's happened to us before that sometimes they
20 just [inaudible] to comment on that. Workshops and
21 stuff --

22 MS. MAYS: Danny, you were probably not here as
23 part of the Border Master Plan. These committee members
24 will tell you they built the Border Master Plan. And also
25 what was critical and going to be critical in this is

1 coordinating with our Mexican counterparts.

2 Nair talked about the Binational Regional
3 Steering Committee. That was what we created under the
4 Border Master Plan. Each of the three border regions had
5 their Binational Steering Committee, and we held those
6 meetings in the border regions.

7 We actually went and held meetings in Mexico.
8 We went to Reynosa, we went to Nuevo, we went to Juarez.
9 We held meetings there to really bring the Mexican
10 counterparts on.

11 So yeah, the same strategy we're going to use
12 moving forward to make sure that the border regions are
13 engaged in this because when we talk about last mile --
14 you're in Eagle Pass. We know the issues there. The
15 bridge is right there within the city, how do you connect
16 that to where the trucks and the people need to go.

17 So, no, this is going to be a really grassroots
18 effort to work with the regions and the bridge owners and
19 the bridges and the communities to understand what those
20 issues and challenges are. This is not -- we facilitate.
21 BTAC is the organization behind what the product will look
22 like in the end.

23 We're not cooking this up here. It's really
24 you all will be providing us the input. And that's why
25 we're coming to you in the front-end, and not in the tail-

1 end when this sausage is already made.

2 So I can assure you that, yeah, you're going to
3 be involved. And they'll come to you at the local level.

4 MS. LAGOS: That's why we were mentioning that
5 we are going to be visiting the regions, because we need
6 to work really closely with the stakeholders region by
7 region.

8 MS. MAYS: Any comments in the room before we
9 go online?

10 MR. CALVO: This is Eduardo Calvo with the El
11 Paso MPO.

12 A couple of questions or comments. First of
13 all, when we look at connectivity, you know, we also need
14 to look at how that is impacted on the Mexican side.
15 Because one thing is there are crossings on the U.S. side
16 but also on the Mexican side. So are we going to look at
17 that?

18 MS. MAYS: Yes. This is going to be
19 binational, like we did with the Border Master Plan. It's
20 going to be binational.

21 That's why you see somebody like Secretary
22 Marco here really looking at both sides. Because the
23 border -- if it fails on the Mexican side, it's going to
24 fail on our side. When we talk about border delays,
25 that's what -- it spills into Mexico, three miles, four

1 miles into Mexico, so understanding that.

2 I'll give people a great example. Luis has had
3 issues whereby his bridge was shut down so now on the
4 Mexican side how do they get to the next bridge? On the
5 U.S. side, how do we get to the next bridge? So it's on
6 both sides.

7 MR. CALVO: And then the second thing, I mean,
8 just a comment. Historically the focus has been on delays
9 going northbound. You know, we're seeing more and more
10 now a lot of delays southbound, right.

11 So CBP doing inspections on southbound traffic
12 before they get to go into Mexico ports. So that's
13 becoming a real issue. We're seeing more and more of a
14 backup of cars and trucks backing into, in our case of El
15 Paso -- into the main lanes of I-10 which creates a big
16 problem in our city.

17 It's not just the delay, but a lot of
18 accidents, and the same on the sidewalks and so on. So
19 that's something that we also need to work on, whether
20 it's CBP, whether it's Mexican Aduanas, or both. That's a
21 big issue.

22 And then finally, when we look at our system of
23 crossings [inaudible] talking about the cities, you know,
24 unfortunately, politics are involved as well. That's very
25 unfortunate. Decisions are made in Washington, D.C. or in

1 Mexico City or in Austin or in Chihuahua, or in our case
2 [inaudible].

3 That has an impact on us. So it's not just at
4 the federal level, but it's also at the state. And I
5 think part of the work of this committee is to make sure
6 that it is understood that some of the political decisions
7 that are made have a tremendous impact on the economy.
8 Like in delaying the movement of trucks and people in both
9 directions.

10 MS. MAYS: Thank you.

11 Okay. So we'll move online. Gerry, we'll
12 start with you and then we'll go to Dante.

13 MR. SCHWEBEL: Thank you very much.

14 One of the things that I want to remind our
15 colleagues, and I think for information to Secretary
16 Nelson, is the fact that this plan by virtue of Texas
17 having more ports of entry than any other state, it is a
18 plan that the federal governments of Mexico and the United
19 States are looking as the basic framework of the deeds of
20 North American trade.

21 And for some of us, many of us in this
22 committee are also involved at other levels, at the
23 federal level. I will tell you that in the high level
24 economic dialogue meetings from last November to the most
25 recent North American Leaders Summit, at the table in

1 discussion, some of us that are present there are using
2 this BTMP, this master plan in the discussions of the
3 infrastructure needs to allow us to strengthen the USMCA.

4 So we all need to be reminded that whatever
5 we're planning at the local level, we have a national
6 significance in the North American region. And the role
7 that we play goes beyond even local, even beyond Texas.
8 We are being looked at by three governments, quite
9 frankly, as to what we're doing in Texas to strengthen our
10 infrastructure to facilitate that flow of commerce and
11 people.

12 So we've got to stay focused on that. If not,
13 then it does become, as Eduardo says, political and then
14 we go back to the old thing about the squeaky wheel gets
15 the grease.

16 I think the governor, you know, in his vision
17 was correct in creating this border infrastructure plan
18 that allowed input from both sides, Mexico and Texas, to
19 have the adequate planning. And if we start deviating
20 from the plan and look at other new projects for politics,
21 then we're going to fall into the trap of not meeting the
22 needs. And I hope we can have more discussion about that
23 at the end of some of the things that we're hearing at the
24 federal level of politics that's coming in that goes
25 against the spirit of the BTMP.

1 MS. MAYS: Thank you, Gerry.

2 We will go to Dante.

3 MR. GALEAZZI: So good morning again.

4 Before I jump in with my question, Miss
5 Caroline, I know there's a couple of people still in the
6 waiting room, specifically RGV Partnership. I know that
7 they got kicked off and they're looking to jump back in.

8 But anyway, again, I just want to commend y'all
9 on the study. It is fantastic. I love it.

10 One of the things I want to bring up, though,
11 is as you're looking at the resiliency, especially that
12 final mile and connectivity between bridges, we saw the
13 exposure to regulatory loopholes in April of 2022, where
14 I'll just say poorly written TxDOT regulations allowed for
15 abuse of an inspection program at the border. And it
16 impacted my industry by \$340 million of losses, but more
17 importantly, it impacted the Texas economy to the tune of
18 somewhere between \$15- to \$18 million in losses.

19 And so I would encourage this resiliency study,
20 the analysis, to look at how we can provide those types of
21 suggestions to TxDOT to fix those regulatory loopholes.
22 So that way, regardless of politics, regardless of what's
23 happening, regardless of year-to-year changes or issues,
24 we look at structuring trade law -- or we look at
25 structuring our laws in Texas to support the

1 infrastructure, to support trade, to support all the work
2 and effort that this group and many others are doing to
3 bring trade and economic viability to our state.

4 And I can certainly dive into that, but I think
5 everybody on this call knows exactly what I'm talking
6 about. So thank you.

7 MS. MAYS: Thank you, Dante, but I want to go
8 on record that TxDOT is not a regulatory agency, so we are
9 more just on the infrastructure side. The regulatory
10 agency is another agency. DPS and other agencies that do
11 that.

12 So we don't get involved, other than on the
13 infrastructure side. So I just wanted to make sure we
14 clear that up. Okay?

15 MR. NEW: Caroline, this is Alvin. And that's
16 the point I would make, too, just very quickly.

17 Dante, the only thing we regulate are
18 billboards. Okay? So we don't write regulations. We're
19 an infrastructure entity.

20 So it would be another Texas agency or
21 legislative statutorily driven regulation. So that will
22 be something that still affects this committee, still
23 needs to be dealt with, but we'll have to do the work to
24 figure out what exactly that is and whether we have any
25 levers to help with that through this committee and TxDOT.

1 The other thing I just briefly wanted to talk
2 about, Caroline, is at some point it would be good to talk
3 about the corridor from the Valley and so forth because it
4 definitely affects what Gerry was talking about, and it's
5 something that we'll be trying to tackle over the next two
6 decades or so. Okay?

7 MS. MAYS: Thank you very much, Commissioner
8 New, for that input. Yes, we will talk about US 83 in the
9 next segment where we're talking about connectivity
10 between border regions, which kind of overlays to
11 connectivity between border crossings. So thank you for
12 bringing that up.

13 We will go to Maria online.

14 MS. GINER: Yes, good morning. I just wanted
15 to make a couple of comments with regard to this.

16 First of all, I think it's a great study. It
17 will be very important as far as being able to hopefully
18 determine where priorities are. But I do want to
19 highlight a couple of issues that I'm seeing with regard
20 to the ports of entry, and those are the ports in rural
21 communities, right.

22 I know we've worked with TxDOT specifically on
23 Port Hancock. Some of these rural ports are in a very
24 dilapidated state. Fort Hancock is owned by the Federal
25 Government, by the IBWC, but again, it probably needs to

1 be replaced, and I'm sure there's other rural ports of
2 this nature.

3 So the communities want to preserve these
4 ports. Are they worth preserving? I don't know.

5 Do they have a function? It would be nice if
6 we could define a function for them if in fact they do
7 have value for connectivity. So that's one of the things
8 I wanted to comment, so to make sure that as you do your
9 stakeholder outreach, you include those rural communities
10 that have these smaller more rural ports.

11 The other thing that I just wanted to offer
12 that I would love to have you present this study at our
13 citizens forum. We do three a year across the entire
14 border region. Obviously I think we've got three
15 community citizens forums along Texas. That could be a
16 way to also further identify how to engage those
17 communities that may not be so connected the squeaky
18 wheel, as Gerald called it.

19 So those are just two observations I wanted to
20 make, but thank you for the opportunity.

21 MS. MAYS: Thank you very much. We will
22 definitely take you up on that. You know, our goal is
23 always to expand and make sure we're inclusive, reach as
24 many people as possible so we can get input from them so
25 we develop plans and programs and certainly projects that

1 really address the needs of the local communities
2 throughout the state but in the border regions. So thank
3 you for that.

4 Anybody else online or in the room that would
5 like to make a comment, questions about this agenda topic
6 before we move to the next one? Next one is also fairly
7 related, so just want to make sure that we give them
8 enough time to present that and then we can have
9 additional dialogue later.

10 Secretary, with that, we have Marc here, our
11 executive director.

12 MS. BARRIOS: Thank you for your time,
13 everybody.

14 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

15 Director, let me tell you, first of all, thank
16 you for allowing us to have the meeting here in this --
17 would you believe this is my first time ever in this
18 building?

19 MR. WILLIAMS: I would not.

20 SECY. NELSON: I'm embarrassed to tell you.
21 And what a beautiful building, it is truly beautiful.

22 MR. WILLIAMS: It is.

23 SECY. NELSON: I knew Ric Williamson when he
24 was a state rep, and what a tribute to him to be meeting
25 in the Ric Williamson Room.

1 Thank you for hosting us. We are honored to be
2 here.

3 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

4 SECY. NELSON: And I'm honored to be having my
5 first meeting here.

6 MR. WILLIAMS: We're thrilled to have you,
7 Secretary.

8 SECY. NELSON: I'd be happy to turn the mic
9 over, whatever this is.

10 MR. WILLIAMS: Whatever this is. Thank you for
11 your resiliency here today. You know, we had a whole
12 resiliency discussion, and now just the resiliency of
13 getting through this meeting.

14 SECY. NELSON: We got a quorum.

15 MR. WILLIAMS: This, as you may have quickly
16 gathered, is a resilient group, dedicated group.

17 SECY. NELSON: Oh, my gosh.

18 MR. WILLIAMS: We're trying to get them a
19 little bit more passionate about the topic of border
20 trade. These individuals live it and breathe it every
21 day. And what you all bring to this committee is
22 invaluable, and you all over the years have made us better
23 at what we do and understanding the needs of the Texas-
24 Mexico Border and the trade that flows through it and its
25 economic importance to the State of Texas. And it has a

1 significant impact in the actions that we take as an
2 agency and the decisions that we make and the priorities
3 that we set.

4 It's like ice accumulating on trees, you don't
5 realize it all of a sudden till something happens. But
6 our Commission -- you've got Commissioner New on today.
7 They certainly appreciate what the border means. Even
8 this recently as this past month identifying -- with Tito
9 and our Transportation Planning and Programming
10 Division -- the U.S. 83 corridor as one of our next
11 priority focus corridors for our growing transportation
12 investments, again, recognizing the significance that
13 border trade plays in improving those transportation
14 facilities.

15 So it's really an invaluable group to us and
16 something that we really get a lot of very important
17 constructive input that we use to drive decision-making
18 here at the Department. So thank you for being part of
19 it. This is great.

20 SECY. NELSON: I'm excited.

21 And you weren't here earlier when I made
22 mention of this, so I'm going to say it again. I harped
23 for years about the reason -- and I'm going to brag on
24 you -- one of the reasons that we've had the tremendous
25 economic success in Texas has been our focus on -- and

1 you've heard me use the term over and over again -- keeping
2 our veins and arteries open. I use that a lot.

3 But it's true that we've had the economic
4 success in Texas that we have had partly because we have
5 focused on keeping those veins and arteries open and
6 allowing for the flow that we have. And we are going to
7 focus in this group here today on keeping those
8 international veins and arteries open, like we have in
9 Texas. And they're going to hear me harp on that over and
10 over again. But they get it, this group gets it, and I
11 love that, because it's going to help us all be
12 successful.

13 And TxDOT really has done a good job at that,
14 and we've all benefitted, clearly, clearly benefitted.
15 And just in listening to the conversations today, it's
16 exciting. I love, love the energy that I've picked up.

17 MR. WILLIAMS: When we met and visited we told
18 you that this was an engaged and energetic group, but as
19 the group can see, the Secretary is up for the challenge.

20 MR. VALE: We've got a list already.

21 SECY. NELSON: My gosh. We're going to have
22 fun doing this too.

23 Thank you for hosting us.

24 MR. WILLIAMS: Our pleasure.

25 SECY. NELSON: What's the propeller out in

1 front?

2 MR. WILLIAMS: It was from one of our ferries
3 that was decommissioned, and someone had the idea to take
4 it off the ferry and put it here.

5 SECY. NELSON: You know I'm a history buff, so
6 one day when I have some extra time, I'm going to just
7 walk around and look. What a magnificent building. Thank
8 you.

9 And what a great group of people we've
10 assembled here, just awesome. Thank you for everything
11 I'm going to be asking you to do with us, because we're
12 going to be engaging full steam ahead, full steam ahead.

13 MR. WILLIAMS: We're up for it. Thank you,
14 Secretary.

15 SECY. NELSON: You bet.

16 Well, we've got a full house here.

17 MR. WILLIAMS: We do. This is a dedicated
18 group.

19 SECY. NELSON: I can tell.

20 MS. MAYS: In the midst of the storm, they're
21 here.

22 SECY. NELSON: Hey, no problem.

23 MS. MAYS: Secretary, let's move on to the next
24 agenda item.

25 SECY. NELSON: Okay. Where are we on here?

1 Paula Dowell is next up. Yes. There she is. I was
2 hunting for you.

3 MS. DOWELL: Good morning, everyone. Am I
4 going to be good from here?

5 SECY. NELSON: You're good, sure.

6 MS. MAYS: Gerry, can you guys hear Paula? I
7 think we're good.

8 MS. DOWELL: All right. Well, first of all,
9 thank you very much. It is an honor to be here. I have
10 been working with the Texas Freight Advisory Committee for
11 over the past decade on really looking at the freight and
12 the trade, and so obviously the border was a big part of
13 that. There's lots of familiar faces around the table and
14 on the TV, and I look forward to working with all of you
15 in the months ahead.

16 So what we're going to be doing is while our
17 colleagues at Jacobs are going to be doing this really
18 quick start task to look at that first and last mile,
19 we're going to be pivoting off of that and coordinating
20 with them, but at the same time, building a much larger
21 effort to really make sure that we look at not only the
22 first and last mile but the connectivity between the
23 border crossings within a region. So that intraregional
24 connectivity, but also the interregional, the connectivity
25 across the regions, both from east-west, but we also can't

1 forget that critical north-south connectivity.

2 So how does an overall global network work
3 together on this binational level? So with that, the next
4 slide. The north connectivity needs -- I know that some
5 of these were introduced, but within our effort we're
6 really looking at this from a broad perspective, looking
7 at the congestion like we talked about in the border
8 delay, but not only the delay getting across the border
9 but the delay getting to the border as well.

10 We want to look at systems operations, and
11 we've talked a lot about that. We can't only look on the
12 Texas side of it but we have to be able to look at the
13 Mexican side of it as well. And we need to be looking at
14 our neighbors to the west and looking at those border
15 crossings and see if there are any lessons learned in
16 using that as well.

17 Safety and security are going to be an
18 essential part of this and everything. Because not only
19 do they impact the overall reliability of the border
20 crossing and everything, but that's of utmost importance
21 to the communities around the border crossings themselves,
22 but to the state and to the nation as a whole.

23 The asset management and design, a lot of these
24 bridges were designed many, many decades ago. Are they
25 really equipped for the traffic and the equipment that's

1 being used today, but also what's coming down the pike in
2 the future? We all know we're on the verge of some real
3 revolutionary changes in technology here within the
4 transportation industry and we want to make sure that
5 those bridges and our border crossings are really equipped
6 to handle that and to adapt to that.

7 Multimodal connectivity. We've talked a lot
8 about this. This is about the movement of both people and
9 goods, and so we want to look at the multiple modes that
10 are used at all of these crossings and between these
11 crossings as well.

12 The binational collaboration. This isn't just
13 an infrastructure issue. We know it. We get that, but we
14 want to make sure that we're looking at that binational
15 collaboration and a lot of the institutional and
16 regulatory type bottlenecks and so forth, but also the
17 opportunities that we have there.

18 The community impacts and benefits. We have
19 already seen slides and we all -- I'm speaking to the
20 choir here -- know how important these border crossings
21 are, not only to the communities and the state but to all
22 of North America. And really, they have a role in the
23 world of trade and everything, but a lot of times it's the
24 communities right there at the crossings that might be
25 bearing the brunt of some of the potential negative

1 impacts. But we also want to make sure that they're able
2 to capitalize on a lot of the positive impacts and
3 benefits that come from being a border community.

4 We want to look at the resiliency and
5 [inaudible] security. Again, security means lots of
6 different things in the context of the border, so we'll be
7 looking at that from lots of different dimensions.

8 As part of the Texas Delivers 2050 Plan, which
9 was just adopted last week, which is the state's freight
10 plan, we did some resiliency case studies and looked at
11 some of that border. So that gives us a really good basis
12 to build upon to understand what happens when you have a
13 closure, whether it's the whole bridge, whether it's one
14 mode across the bridge. We've heard some issues with some
15 of the pipeline disruptions, the cross-border pipelines,
16 what does that mean? So really understanding from a
17 multimodal perspective as far as resiliency goes, but also
18 just from a whole regional and border context on that.

19 And then also, sustainable funding. I mean,
20 that's going to be just among everything, with getting,
21 you know, a lot of the infrastructure going on. So really
22 work to identifying what are some of the opportunities out
23 there? What is needed?

24 How do we ensure that there's some sustainable
25 funding, and [inaudible] agreements on the priorities from

1 both sides of the border and everything, because a lot of
2 times that's what really drives the funding is the
3 [inaudible].

4 So if I could just take a moment here to ask
5 this group -- that's a long list. If we can go back one
6 slide, please -- that's a big list of very broad
7 categories of some of the border connectivity needs.

8 Is there anything that you're surprised you're
9 not seeing up there, something else that we need to make
10 sure that we should have [inaudible] opportunities, like
11 border connectivity?

12 (No response.)

13 MS. DOWELL: Anyone online?

14 (No response.)

15 MS. DOWELL: Well, this isn't going to be your
16 only opportunity. I just wanted to make sure right out of
17 the gate we were able to get some confirmation here.

18 MR. SEPULVEDA: Paula, you know, one of the
19 things that I hear on a regular basis is border wait times
20 is one of the big challenges. Where would that fall in
21 terms of the various categories here?

22 MS. DOWELL: I think we'll probably look at
23 that under congestion. And we don't really have the word
24 "reliability" up here, but that certainly needs to be up
25 here and then about resiliency too.

1 If we have something that really impacts
2 those -- some of the border wait times you can predict
3 what they're going to be, right? And then sometimes you
4 have unpredictable events. So really understanding the
5 extent of those border delays, what is predictable, what's
6 not predictable, and do they have different solutions for
7 addressing them.

8 But certainly we'll be getting into that under
9 the congestion, but there could be some other categories
10 where we'll look at that as well. Great point.

11 MS. MAYS: Yeah, Paula. I can add, Pete, those
12 studies that Nair talked about and what Paula is talking
13 about, this focus is not on the border crossing, not on
14 the border delays, it's on the connectivity.

15 Once you get out of the federal compound on
16 either side, east-west, north, this is what it is. We did
17 a lot of work on the actual delays at the border crossings
18 themselves. This is not going to look at that
19 specifically, but it will look at the implications of
20 those delays. And once it gets out, what does that look
21 like once it gets out of the federal compound?

22 MR. SEPULVEDA: As far as technologies -- I
23 mean, obviously, if you get out of the GSA facility, what
24 have you. But then some of us have border safety, there's
25 a possibility that it's another level.

1 MS. MAYS: Exactly. As soon as it leaves the
2 federal compound, that's what this is looking at and then
3 the rest of it. And then there's layers.

4 There's that first and last mile and then
5 there's kind of a broader one, and then this is looking at
6 kind of a much broader picture. We've layered it up so
7 we'll be able to zero in on those.

8 Yeah, the BCF facilities, those are right as
9 soon as you leave the federal compound, looking at what it
10 creates there, but then the first-last mile where they're
11 going to all the warehousing, the trucks that are dropping
12 off, then you also have the longer distance ones that are
13 coming to pick up. So all of this understanding because
14 they're different layers, different issues and challenges.
15 So yeah, we're going to be dicing and slicing this a lot.

16 MR. VALE: As long as you know that when you're
17 in business you've got to make all the connections because
18 when it breaks down and one part of it is not working, the
19 whole thing goes.

20 MS. MAYS: Exactly, exactly. Danny?

21 DANNY: I agree. [inaudible]

22 MS. DOWELL: That's going to be -- the
23 binational collaboration and everything and really making
24 sure that we understand that not all of this is
25 infrastructure. Some of it is personnel, some of it is

1 policy, regulatory and everything. And so we've kind of
2 grouped it under there, but certainly that's part of what
3 we have.

4 MS. MAYS: And, Danny, you guys know that the
5 checkpoints are on the corridors, so that's where CBP and
6 border patrol, all of them will be part of the discussion.
7 I know Epi [phonetic] knows that very well. We have a
8 huge one on I-35 that creates a lot of operational issues
9 with the backup, especially with the trucks.

10 So all of those are going to be part of all of
11 this analysis. Because like Sam mentioned, it's not just
12 one, you've got several elements within it that we have to
13 look at.

14 Because the checkpoint is how many miles far
15 away from the border, Epi?

16 FEMALE SPEAKER: Thirty.

17 MS. MAYS: Yeah, 30 miles away from the border
18 but it's still part of the border, the security and the
19 safety and inspections. So that also impacts everything.

20 MR. BAZÁN: [inaudible]

21 MS. MAYS: Yeah, and again, that's a whole long
22 discussion on operation issues at the border, Luis, and
23 others that actually own the bridges that give CBP money
24 and the donation assistance to put officers there. That's
25 a whole discussion.

1 But I think what we're trying to focus on this
2 segment is outside of the federal compound, shut or open,
3 how does it impact the entire network, but those
4 discussions are ongoing. We have a lot of people here
5 that spent a lot of time on staffing, hours of operations,
6 et cetera, that are a little bit beyond what we're
7 discussing here. But the bridge owners are very, very
8 involved in those discussions on a daily basis, because it
9 impacts, you know, trade.

10 If you shut down a bridge, especially if the
11 trucks cross there, it's not very easy for them to pivot
12 to another bridge. So it has a lot of implications for
13 the business community, but also people.

14 MS. DOWELL: -- there is a very deliberate
15 effort here to focus on what we know we can immediately
16 influence to address some of these things.

17 Next slide, please. So we have the first and
18 last mile connectivity, which is going to be that real
19 quick start they do, start a lot of the data validation
20 and a lot of those immediate kind of needs. And hopefully
21 we'll have some quick start solutions too, so relatively
22 cost-effective, easy to implement solutions that are
23 coming out of that as well.

24 The effort that we're going to be really
25 focused upon is building upon that first and last mile

1 connectivity and looking at the interregional, which is
2 that between the three border regions that we look at. So
3 we want to look at the connectivity between those border
4 regions, but also how are we supposed to tie that into the
5 north-south which is the direction we know a lot of the
6 traffic is in, and looking at it in a more holistic
7 network approach.

8 We also, as part of this, will be looking at
9 the updated statewide forecast. We know that coming out
10 of the freight plan we have updated commodity growth rates
11 as well as forecasts coming out of that.

12 It's also going to be looking at the multimodal
13 supply chain connectivity. There was a really deep dive
14 look at the supply chain as far as Texas Delivers 2050.
15 And it did include the border crossings impact, but the
16 part that we're really expand on in this effort is
17 understanding more on the Mexican side and where those
18 bottlenecks and everything are happening there so that we
19 can help to supplement and not duplicate efforts that have
20 already been done, but really expand upon them.

21 We want to make sure that we look at the
22 multimodal people connectivity too, that was mentioned
23 before: the bike, the ped, the transit, all of those
24 personal ownership vehicles. And so that will be all part
25 of it as well.

1 And then we've talked about the resiliency of
2 the statewide border network. So we look at it at a
3 bridge-by-bridge level, but we're really going to be
4 interested in understanding how it works as a network and
5 everything, so that when something happens you don't
6 completely shut down our economy as a result of it.

7 And then again, safety and security. On the
8 interregional which is looking at really opportunities for
9 some of that, whether it be modal [inaudible] or safety
10 that's at the border crossing. We know there's
11 [inaudible] on both sides of the border, so we have to
12 start taking a look at that linkage between the crossings,
13 the transportation network and land usage, how that
14 influences the border crossing choice, and the ability to
15 substitute one crossing for the other.

16 And then part of this will also be looking at
17 the regional resiliency. But this is where we're going to
18 really start drilling down on those community impacts and
19 benefits and starting to understand that, so that as we
20 start to come with whether they're programs or policies or
21 technology and operational choices, that we're taking into
22 account that there are going to be applicable and
23 sustainable solutions over the long haul as well.

24 And we do want to make sure that we're looking
25 at not only infrastructure bottlenecks and checkpoints,

1 but where might we be able to use some of this emerging
2 technology, data integration, a lot of the advances that
3 we have so that we're prepared to make sure that we are
4 doing the most efficient, economical, cost-effective and
5 sustainable types of solutions.

6 At the core of this, we're really going to be
7 working with our districts and our MPOs. Because we want
8 to make sure that this advances the implantation of the
9 Border Master Plan and it's not just an update of the
10 information and the challenges that we found out there.
11 So really understanding from the districts and the MPOs
12 what information, what data do you need from us to be able
13 to start a project or a solution development.

14 And so -- next slide. As a result of that,
15 we're going to be really focused on identifying unmet
16 needs in that. And what that's going to mean is we're
17 going to start with collecting a lot of the data,
18 validating that data, reviewing materials. We already
19 have a long list of things that were reviewed for the
20 Border Transportation Master Plan. We're going to look at
21 what's been done since then to make sure we're
22 incorporating everything that we had in there.

23 We're also going to identify the network.
24 We're taking a page out of the book of identifying and
25 designating the freight transportation network, continuing

1 to make sure we're identifying the part of the modal
2 network that is most important for connectivity for all
3 communities [inaudible]. That will give us the network
4 from which we're going to do our more detailed analysis
5 and then really develop and understand what the gaps and
6 the needs are there.

7 So we'll develop that border connectivity
8 network. From that, then we're going to do a lot of
9 stakeholder input, along with a lot of technical analysis
10 to identify where we have needs. Are those high, medium,
11 low priority needs?

12 And then [inaudible] beginning the programming
13 process into what scale are those projects going to be
14 addressing those needs. So we'll be looking at where are
15 there gaps between the needs, and the projects will be
16 better planned. And as we identify needs where there's
17 currently no project being planned to address it or the
18 fact that it may not be addressing the specific need
19 that's been identified, then we need to work to get input
20 from both sides of the border to see what do we need to
21 do, take this information to start at that project
22 development phase, so we can really start to figure out
23 how can we address this need. So that will be a really
24 important outcome from this.

25 And so from that, then we'll start to develop

1 our report and our documentation. But a key part of that
2 is going to be a framework to really help the local
3 communities and the districts move from planning into
4 programming and implementation.

5 So the stakeholder outreach is going to be a
6 very important part of this. This group is going to be
7 vital. So there will be times when we come to you to vet
8 information, to get input and to help us make some key
9 decisions along the way.

10 We will also have binational industry and
11 agency stakeholder groups. This might come in the form of
12 interviews. It might be focus groups. It could be
13 workshops.

14 But we want to make sure that we take care of
15 the MPOs, the Customs and Border Patrol, GFA, the bridge
16 operators, elected officials on both sides of the border,
17 the Mexican federal, state and local officials, shippers,
18 carriers, business associations, community associations,
19 those that actually depend upon and use the border, really
20 hear from them as well.

21 As we talked about before, we'll be working
22 through the Binational Steering Committees. They'll be a
23 very important conduit for this. We'll also have those
24 district coordination meetings at key points along the
25 effort, and then we're stoked to have two rounds of public

1 meetings too so that we can make sure that we reach out
2 and really engage the communities in this.

3 And then in terms of our schedule for this,
4 this is a longer schedule. So we're looking at a 14-month
5 schedule to get to our draft findings and our draft
6 report, and we'll have a couple of months to really make
7 sure that we really vet that with all of the stakeholders
8 before finalizing it here.

9 But you'll see here where we have our regional
10 steering committee meetings kind of phased out at key
11 points when we're identifying the network, when we're
12 identifying the current needs, we're projecting what the
13 future needs, and then we're starting to develop some of
14 the recommendations and strategies. We want all of this
15 to be really well vetted and for everyone to have an
16 opportunity to engage in that conversation.

17 The first 90 days we're going to initiate our
18 material review. We'll have our data collection, we're
19 going to develop our outreach plan and initiate
20 stakeholder outreach. This means our district
21 coordination and stakeholder interviews and forums and
22 planning those will be first on the list.

23 We'll have some draft goals and objectives for
24 this effort that will build upon the BTMP goals and
25 objectives and that will be our first kind of round of

1 input and everything that we want everyone to understand
2 what is the framework, what must we get out of this
3 effort. And then we're going to start with developing the
4 framework for identifying and designating that border
5 connectivity network.

6 So once again, questions or any discussion
7 points you might have? I look forward to working with all
8 of you.

9 MALE SPEAKER: Madam Secretary, I have a
10 comment.

11 SECY. NELSON: Yes, sir, you are recognized.

12 MALE VOICE: Thank you. So I wanted to just
13 ask, I guess, so we saw two timelines, right, one from
14 Jacobs and one from HNTB. So can you just kind of clarify
15 for the group how these two timelines are going to work in
16 conjunction, because we're kind of working on two things
17 and then patching it together. So for clarity, I think
18 that would be good to discuss.

19 MS. DOWELL: As far as Jacobs, it's really is a
20 big start, kind of first 90 days: gathering a lot of
21 data, focusing on that first and last mile connections and
22 kind of jump-starting the process and everything. And
23 then we're going to be mobilizing, coordinating with them
24 on the outreach plan, what are they going to be doing and
25 how does that fold in.

1 And so we are going to be working together as a
2 team, so it's not going to be we're going off in two
3 different timelines. We will come to you, both of us,
4 with what we need from everyone. So we will make sure
5 that we are having coordination meetings with the TxDOT
6 staff and everything all along the way.

7 So we're acting as one.

8 MS. BARRIOS: In respect to Jacobs, we expect
9 to be finished by June. And then Paula and her team are
10 picking up from there and to the next 14 months, I
11 believe. So it's just that there's not a gap in effort
12 right there between the original Border Master Plan and
13 their recommendations, keeping the momentum and taking
14 advantage of the plan.

15 MS. MAYS: Okay. We have Gerry online.

16 Gerry, go ahead.

17 MR. SCHWEBEL: Thank you.

18 Paula, in the interest of time and making sure
19 we don't reinvent the wheel, have you all considered --
20 and I know in slide 24 you made a list of the
21 organizations or the sectors. But when you're talking
22 about -- are we talking about also working with like Texas
23 Association of Business or Dante's group, the agriculture
24 sector -- the major sectors of the Texas economy, going to
25 them.

1 They have already done some work on some of
2 this. We could take some of that data and incorporate it
3 into this, rather than relying on us or the BNRSC to be
4 the only ones going out and providing input.

5 I don't want to put words in your mouth, Dante,
6 but I know that you all have dedicated a lot of time and
7 energy into what impacts the movement of agricultural
8 products through the State of Texas. I'm sure the energy
9 sector has it, manufacturing sectors -- I think Jon Barela
10 of El Paso alluded to the role that they play -- but OEMs,
11 major OEMs that we have in Texas, whether it's Toyota or
12 GM and now Tesla, or the high tech sectors. These are all
13 key sectors that may have data that we could add value to
14 this particular initiative.

15 MS. DOWELL: Yes, Gerry, I could not agree with
16 you more. And you kind of sit in kind of that joint
17 appointment on the BTAC and with TxDOT. We know that we
18 convened the supply chain working group as we were doing
19 the supply chain analysis as part of the freight plan, and
20 we had some of those OEMs and everything on that and we
21 talked with them.

22 So we're picking that up right where we dropped
23 it off, just doing a little deeper dive on the cross-
24 border piece of that. It was a good analysis but we need
25 to enrich our understanding, particularly deeper down into

1 those roads in Mexico.

2 And I know Tommy brought this up. We were
3 having an I-10 corridor meeting down in El Paso and
4 talking about we focus a lot on the bordering Mexican
5 states, but some of the -- we need to understand what's
6 happening before it gets to that state as well in many
7 cases. And so certainly we will continue to reach out and
8 get as many of the industry and specific sectors involved
9 as we can within these discussions, and we want to build
10 upon all the different efforts that TxDOT is doing.

11 We know also there's a lot of potential for
12 stakeholder fatigue out there because you guys have been
13 very kind and generous with your time. And so we do want
14 to make sure that we're not coming back and asking the
15 same questions that we asked six or eight or nine months
16 ago. And so we'll certainly -- I think that's the beauty
17 of the team that you have.

18 You have people that have been connected on
19 several of these efforts and everything. And so we'll
20 work very hard to make sure that we maximize and optimize
21 our stakeholder and industry outreach.

22 SECY. NELSON: I have a question. What is your
23 plan to interact with your friends across the street at
24 the Capitol Building?

25 MS. MAYS: That's generally our role. Paula

1 and the consultant team normally provide us with
2 information and then we interact with the folks across the
3 street. We have our state legislative affairs team that
4 normally guides us in how we do interact with across the
5 street.

6 So we can certainly follow up with you,
7 Secretary, to see what's the best way, whether we can
8 support you with information or whether we, TxDOT, go and
9 interact across the street.

10 SECY. NELSON: Okay. Well, in your materials
11 here you say stakeholder outreach, Mexican federal, state
12 and local officials -- well, on top of that you say
13 elected officials. So you have no game plan to reach out
14 to elected officials at all levels?

15 MS. DOWELL: We work with TxDOT specifically on
16 deciding what that plan is, and as we need to look at our
17 first 90 days, developing that outreach plan, it's
18 something we will do in coordination with them. And
19 really, in terms of engaging and interacting with elected
20 officials, we leave that --

21 SECY. NELSON: Is that at all levels, federal,
22 state, local?

23 MS. DOWELL: Yes.

24 MS. MAYS: Can you identify yourself for the
25 court reporter?

1 MR. VALE: We do need to be a little more
2 sophisticated because we've had -- individually we've gone
3 to committees of the House and the Senate and provided
4 information, and the surprise to many of us is the lack of
5 knowledge on those committees. So if they're on the
6 committees that are germane and they don't know things
7 that they should, I think educational benefits and that's
8 where I think you could be extremely valuable in helping
9 design how to provide information that is useful to the
10 legislators that need to make those decisions. And it's
11 very difficult, because it cannot be characterized as
12 lobbying but providing information.

13 SECY. NELSON: Providing information is not
14 lobbying. It's educating.

15 MR. VALE: -- that's a skill [inaudible]
16 assist.

17 SECY. NELSON: And then at the local level, is
18 there outreach with county commissioners? We have a
19 county commissioner here.

20 Do we work with our county commissioners? This
21 is my first meeting so I'm learning.

22 MS. MAYS: Yes, we do.

23 SECY. NELSON: So we provide information to
24 county commissioners.

25 MR. VALE: [inaudible] the legislature, which

1 has such short sessions designed by many smart people --

2 SECY. NELSON: Oh, we should talk about that.

3 And remember, too, that just because they're
4 not meeting in session, there should be education going
5 on.

6 MR. VALE: Correct.

7 SECY. NELSON: In fact, I would argue that the
8 best time to educate them is when they're home. Yeah, you
9 need a game plan. You really need a game plan.

10 MR. VALE: [inaudible] those smaller
11 communities which have many more areas and miles than what
12 we're talking about. And they have people in all the
13 communities to be able to realize, okay, this is going to
14 be good for me because I might get a store --

15 SECY. NELSON: When I'm sitting at home in the
16 Dallas-Fort Worth area representing a district and I get a
17 call from a constituent who owns a lot of trucking
18 companies, saying you need to do something because I've
19 got a bunch of trucks sitting down there and they're
20 loaded with -- fill in the blank, tomatoes -- and he's
21 screaming at me, I need to understand what's happening.

22 MR. VALE: It's very important. I can tell you
23 that's the most difficult method to communicate to all the
24 people that have the ability to influence the results
25 favorably.

1 SECY. NELSON: They don't understand. They
2 don't understand. Yeah, okay. Well, we should have a
3 talk about that.

4 MS. MAYS: Yes, we have a lot to talk about
5 there.

6 Gerry, do you still have comments? You have
7 your hand up.

8 MR. SCHWEBEL: Yes. I just wanted to add,
9 Madam Secretary, that it's a constant ongoing education.
10 We present the BTMP two years ago with every city council
11 member, every county commissioners court. We reached out
12 the legislators in our particular districts to keep them
13 informed when we were working on the BTMP.

14 That's part of our -- we as stakeholders were
15 participating in the meetings, but we're also having to
16 share with our local, county and state reps what was going
17 on. And then we'll continue to do that, because in two
18 years we've got a new crop of city council members, county
19 commissioners, state legislators and senators.

20 So this is an ongoing job that all of us play
21 that role of outreach and educating them. And that's just
22 part of the whole nature of what we're doing as a
23 committee, because these are evolving documents and
24 there's going to be tweaking and changes and there will be
25 new thinking at all levels as well. And then we've got to

1 make sure we stay focused on the basic framework of the
2 BTMP.

3 MS. MAYS: Yeah. Thank you, Gerry.

4 SECY. NELSON: I'm sorry. Are we finished?

5 MS. MAYS: Yes.

6 SECY. NELSON: I'm sorry. Were we finished?

7 Any other questions from the -- yes.

8 MR. CALVO: [Inaudible].

9 SECY. NELSON: A bit louder.

10 MR. CALVO: This is Eduardo Calvo.

11 I think when it comes to the messaging and
12 establishing the goals and objectives of this study,
13 especially with private entities, every time when we get
14 together with them tell them, We're going to get -- we're
15 going to come up with stuff, many of them just roll their
16 eyes and say, Well, I'm not on the study. I mean, again,
17 just go out and fix it; you know, fix the wait times.

18 The messaging I think is very important, so why
19 don't you try to achieve at least [inaudible].

20 MS. MAYS: Yeah. We definitely understand
21 that, and I think the message that we're building is you
22 all as BTAC developed the Border Master Plan, identified
23 what the key issues and needs are. This is the next step
24 to dig deep into that and so we can develop extra
25 strategy.

1 We were here at 10,000 feet; we're now bringing
2 it to 5,000 so we can figure out. And then once we get
3 this done, we hand it over to the district engineers here
4 on the roadways, they're developing projects, they're
5 working on that right now.

6 Commissioner New mentioned US 83, Ports to
7 Plains Corridor now is on TxDOT's radar. That corridor
8 from Pharr all the way to I-10 serves 22 out of 28 border
9 crossings in Texas. So that's where we're trying to take
10 it to the next level, to be able to look at these
11 corridors that serve the border communities. That's an
12 east-west connectivity connecting two border regions but
13 connecting 22 border crossings.

14 So that's where we're trying to go in this kind
15 of multi-pronged approach, so we want the stakeholders to
16 stay engaged. Danny mentioned clearly, when you look at
17 the local level, what are the issues there?

18 This is what we're trying to do now to go to
19 each of these communities. El Paso, let's work with you
20 and figure out what do we do to address the backup of
21 southbound traffic into I-10 that, you know, Tomas would
22 have to figure out what does the district do, what does
23 TxDOT do.

24 So that's really where we're trying to go.
25 We're not just trying to do studies aimlessly for the sake

1 of doing studies. We're trying to go to the next level
2 that we help the districts and you all at the MPO level to
3 identify actual tangible projects to address the needs
4 that have been identified.

5 So, Pete, quickly. I know we need to take a
6 five-minute stretch, and then we'll come back.

7 MR. SEPULVEDA: Just to follow up on Eduardo's
8 comment. Stakeholder fatigue, we hear from some of these
9 folks it's like how many meetings are you going to have,
10 how much level of engagement?

11 But to me, one very important element is what
12 are those stakeholders doing as far as their own
13 logistics, because many a time they'll come to TxDOT and
14 say: TxDOT, relieve congestion, improve safety, more
15 roadways, expanded facilities.

16 And then we start thinking, well, what are you
17 doing at your business? Are you looking at -- instead of
18 switching out all the trucks at 10:00 a.m. every morning,
19 could you distribute those throughout the day perhaps?
20 What are you doing to work with the local government as
21 far as providing alternative corridors?

22 So my point being stakeholder engagement is
23 key, but stakeholder participation and being part of the
24 solution is even more important.

25 MS. MAYS: Well said.

1 SECY. NELSON: Put that on a T-shirt.

2 MS. MAYS: Yeah, well said. Yeah, exactly.
3 Got to be at the table.

4 So with that, Secretary, do you want to give us
5 a five-minute recess?

6 SECY. NELSON: Let me -- I always like to do
7 just a little wrap-up on just the summary that I heard in
8 all the previous discussions here, some key points that I
9 want to put on a T-shirt also.

10 We are going to keep this group's focus on
11 people and businesses; we're going to focus on issues;
12 we're going to keep politics out of things. I would like
13 to thank and commend, however, the study. I think there
14 are some really good things in there. I want to commend
15 you on that.

16 We are going to take a five-minute break, and
17 then we're going to regroup for a final set of
18 presentations from our Mexican partners, and I really look
19 forward to that.

20 So five minutes, and I do mean five minutes.

21 MS. MAYS: We'll be back right in five minutes,
22 so see you back at 11:16 on the dot. Thank you.

23 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

24 SECY. NELSON: We are back to do our business,
25 and the chair would like to recognize Secretary Marco

1 Gonzalez, Dr. Gonzalez from Nuevo León, to provide us an
2 update on his state's transportation and infrastructure
3 projects.

4 Secretary Gonzalez, mi amigo.

5 SECY. GONZALEZ: Mi amiga. Thank you, Madam
6 Secretary, for being part of your first formal event on
7 this important committee.

8 Before I start, I want to present myself. My
9 name is Marco Gonzalez. I'm the secretary of Regional
10 Development and Agriculture and also port director of
11 Colombia. I see over the current investments that are
12 going outside of the metropolitan area of Monterrey,
13 industrial, agricultural, and I'm also overseeing the
14 highway master plan that I'm going to present to you guys
15 on the border crossing.

16 It is very important for you guys to know that
17 Colombia is a mixture of different conditions, of
18 different advantages that each port has. We have the
19 concession of the bridge for 30 years. We just got it
20 from the Federal Government. We own the land on the
21 Mexican side; it's like an industrial park with its own
22 international crossing.

23 I'm very glad that everyone promotes their own
24 port, telling what advantages it has, each of their own
25 ports, and I want to present how the Nuevo León port has

1 the advantage of being and becoming the fastest one and
2 the most secured port with Texas.

3 The advantage we have is we only eight miles'
4 border with Texas, less than .7 percent of the border
5 Texas has with Mexico. Some people might think we don't
6 appear on the map, but trust me, those 8.7 miles, we're
7 going to make them the most productive and the most
8 efficient.

9 We have Ciudad Juarez maquiladoras, free trade
10 zones, any kind of assembly plant on the Mexican side, but
11 we also are very interested in having all the goods that
12 do not have to stop to Laredo, that are going more upward,
13 to use Colombia.

14 I'm also going to show you how important we are
15 when we measure the international crossings. As Mexicans
16 we measure them of how tax collection is generated for the
17 Federal Government. You will see in the video we're
18 number three in income generating, and we're going to
19 become number two this year, surpassing Ciudad Juarez.

20 We form part with the Port of Laredo; for me,
21 Laredo is my second home. Laredo has the advantage that's
22 it's the only city that has two borders, one with Nuevo
23 Laredo, which is the most aduana in Mexico, and the other
24 one with the most important state, industrial state of
25 Mexico, which is Nuevo León, so Laredo, Texas has the

1 advantage of the whole situation and is our entry to
2 Texas.

3 You're going to see, Madam Secretary, also the
4 veins and arteries of how we see the commerce going into
5 Texas and how Nuevo León can make it more fast and we can
6 make it more efficient.

7 I want to send you greetings from Governor
8 Samuel Garcia. This project that I'm going to present to
9 you is top three of his agenda. I'm going to be present
10 in these meetings, not virtually, for the next four years
11 and a half; I'm going to be present here lobbying whatever
12 needs to be taken care of to make this border crossing
13 more attractive.

14 I'm also very glad that I met yesterday Sam
15 Vale and his son. I'm a great admirer of his story. I
16 want to go see him since I was federal congressman ten
17 years ago. I knew of his story, but I did not have the
18 privilege of meeting him, and I'm looking forward to learn
19 a lot from him on how we can make this crossing. I
20 already learned yesterday that we have Port Mansfield on
21 the radar, that we need to connect Nuevo León with Rio
22 Grande.

23 And I also, before I start, want to emphasize
24 the importance of Nuevo León in the Mexican economy.
25 Nuevo León is number one in foreign direct investment.

1 Right now 20 percent of all the foreign direct investment
2 going into Mexico is going to Nuevo León.

3 Why? Because they like us, we have the best
4 human capital, we have the best schools, we have the best
5 infrastructure. We're one of the most secure states in
6 Mexico. We also are first place in job creation. We have
7 more than 4,200 foreign companies based in Mexico. We
8 have also 52 -- of the foreign direct investments, 52 are
9 new investments and 48 are expansions.

10 I'm going to present a video that's going to
11 show you how we see our border crossing needs to be fixed
12 and it's currently being fixed, but also we have to do the
13 highways that were needed to be done 30 years ago.

14 Like Governor Garcia says, the only way to get
15 things done is to do it yourself, so this is the way the
16 State of Nuevo León is doing it. We're not looking for
17 federal help; we're not looking for charity from no one.
18 We're financing by the state, and this is how it's going
19 to get done, and it's already been under construction.

20 Lastly, for the comment Mr. Bazán said about
21 Aduanas: In the case of Nuevo León, trust me, we are the
22 first lobby with Aduanas. I'm also personally doing the
23 lobbying that needs to be done with the Aduanas in Mexico
24 City.

25 All the industry in Monterrey or Nuevo León

1 comes to me and tells me all the legal difficulties
2 they're having, and I'm the one that has to go and lobby
3 and try to fix things. I know in Mexico things can be a
4 little bit different, but we have to adapt, because if we
5 don't adapt, we're not going to advance.

6 So in this political system, like Sam Vale told
7 me yesterday, if the governor doesn't get along with the
8 president, it's not good news for the state. Thankfully,
9 Nuevo León Governor Garcia gets very along with the
10 president, so he hopes that brings very good prospects
11 that it's going to be a good relationship.

12 And lastly, we are looking forward for your
13 visit to Nuevo León, and also Governor Abbott's. When the
14 borders were closed, we met Governor Abbott and TxDOT in
15 Colombia, and we were able to negotiate really fast; we
16 were the first state to negotiate in less than 48 hours,
17 open our bridges. And we're very hopeful that Texas and
18 Nuevo León can become more strong and more vital.

19 So now we'll see the video, please.

20 (Whereupon, the video was shown.)

21 SECY. GONZALEZ: This is the video; I hope you
22 like it. And I also have three main issues that need to
23 be discussed very fast about Nuevo León.

24 If we don't prepare ourselves for what we're
25 preparing on our site, making the Colombia Port from three

1 to five lanes, we're expanding everything because we are
2 foreseeing that a lot of commerce and a lot of trucking
3 are going to go through Colombia.

4 So I have three slides. One is just to mention
5 that we're going to -- we're also working on a railroad
6 project. Right now we're currently not lobbying to have
7 an international crossing; that's not the topic right now.
8 But we're going to have a multimodal railway station in
9 Colombia, because we need to have the connection with
10 Colombia and Camarón. Camarón is a town, it's a little
11 town 52 kilometers away from Colombia, which it junctions
12 with a railway to Nuevo Laredo, so we need to have -- also
13 to offer more services, we need to have that train
14 station.

15 We have the right of way already and right now
16 we're working on the expansion of the highway and also the
17 possibility of installing in two years the railway that
18 needs to be to Colombia to make this more attractive.

19 We also have the Option A and Option B.
20 Obviously, we have been talking to Kansas City. At first
21 they were nervous, because they thought we were interested
22 in having an international crossing. We're not interested
23 in having right now an international crossing. Currently
24 that would occur in 30 years time, but right now we need
25 to have the train arriving in Colombia, and we're working

1 on that.

2 The next one, please.

3 You can see we will have a multimodal terminal
4 on the left-hand side of the port, and on the right-hand
5 side in the future, 15, 20, 25 years, we can start
6 thinking about an international railway crossing, or
7 before that, but that time lapse.

8 This is one of the major headaches that I have
9 that my customers or my industrial business partners from
10 Nuevo León are worried, Mines Road. I know there's a lot
11 of efforts being done. I talked to the mayor last week.

12 We also need to do a study of the
13 synchronization of the stop lights. Something has to be
14 done really fast. I know there's a project to do -- on
15 the left-hand side there's a project to alleviate the
16 traffic congestion. I know that the City of Laredo has
17 that in the agenda, but I also want to share with you guys
18 my concern that if we don't act rapidly on this issue,
19 we're going to have more chaos in the Laredo area.

20 I know we don't have credibility, because no
21 one believed us for the last 30 years that we were going
22 to do things, but right now we're doing it, and right now
23 everyone is just like a spectator, looking at us in a
24 weird strange way, because they're sometimes amazed that
25 we're doing it. but sometimes they don't believe it, so I

1 take them personally to see it with their own eyes. So
2 it's happening. We're investing everything so we can have
3 better access to Texas.

4 The next, please. This is the loop that the
5 City of Laredo has, supposedly it's going to start by the
6 end of this year, maybe. TxDOT friends can tell me if
7 that's true or not, I don't know, but hopefully it needs
8 to be done.

9 The next one, please. 255, this is also a
10 concern for us. As it was 20 years ago or 15 years ago,
11 10 years ago, when the toll fee was eliminated from the
12 255 because there was a commitment from Texas and Nuevo
13 León to take that toll charge away so Nuevo León could
14 also start their counterpart -- well, guess what happened?
15 Nothing happened.

16 So that's why I tell you we have no credibility
17 the last government, but we are changing that. Right now
18 we're one step ahead, and we're worried that the 255
19 condition is not going to be appropriate for what is
20 coming next year.

21 So we need to make it more prepared, not only
22 the basic maintenance that it needs but also start
23 thinking of a little expansion -- it doesn't cost that
24 much -- and hope Texas will invest a little bit in that;
25 we're investing a lot to make this possible, and I'm sure

1 Texas will do its own part. Now we're asking the favor,
2 strangely enough, after 30 years.

3 (General laughter.)

4 MS. MAYS: When you finish on your side, then
5 we will look at improving 255, Marco.

6 SECY. GONZALEZ: Right, but we're going to
7 finish this year, December 2024.

8 So that's my presentation, and I want to thank
9 you for your time.

10 SECY. NELSON: Good job. Wonderful
11 presentation. Thank you.

12 MS. MAYS: Any questions for Marco?

13 SECY. NELSON: All right. Any questions,
14 comments?

15 (No response.)

16 SECY. NELSON: Thank you so much for your
17 presentation.

18 SECY. GONZALEZ: Thank you.

19 SECY. NELSON: Next the chair would
20 recognize -- well, is -- do we --

21 MS. MAYS: We don't have any others from
22 Mexico.

23 SECY. GONZALEZ: We're going to become the
24 spoiled child, not the stepchild.

25 (General talking and laughter.)

1 SPEAKER: Caroline, I think Tamaulipas was on.
2 MS. MAYS: Okay. Is it Anabel?
3 SPEAKER: Yes.
4 MR. SCHWEBEL: That's Secretary Cantu, who is
5 on there, where it says Anabel, that's Secretary Cantu.
6 SECY. NELSON: From Tamaulipas?
7 MS. FLORES: Yes.
8 MS. MAYS: Yes.
9 SECY. NELSON: Well, we're delighted. Okay.
10 Go right ahead.
11 MS. FLORES: Hello. Good morning, friends of
12 TxDOT. Director Marc Williams, thank you for the
13 invitation.
14 It is a great pleasure to greet Jane Nelson,
15 Secretary of State and chair of the Border Trade Advisory
16 Committee; Honorable Susan Harper, Consulate General of
17 Canada in Dallas; Alvin New, Caroline May, all committee
18 members, fellow secretaries of economic development of
19 Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Nuevo León.
20 It is always a pleasure to me sharing the
21 common goal for the best of our nation. Please receive
22 our warm greeting from our Governor of Tamaulipas, Dr.
23 Americo y Gabriel Anaya, who asked me to share with you
24 his interest to strengthen the ties of friendship and
25 cooperation that you have.

1 For Tamaulipas they have this strategic partner
2 with whom we are united by our shared vision of
3 integration and prosperity in the new stage of current
4 trade of North America.

5 Our state has 18 international commercial
6 crossings, nine commercial, of which seven of them are
7 vehicles, and we are the only state with two railways
8 crossing, which makes us a landing bridge in trade between
9 Mexico and the United States within the framework of the
10 USMCA, due to a privileged geographical position and the
11 competitiveness of the logistic platform.

12 Tamaulipas brings first the road and the rail
13 trade to United States, thanks to the leadership of the
14 custom officers of Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros.
15 These are facts and specific data that allow us to prove
16 out that we are one of the regions with the most
17 competitive economic future in the world.

18 And it is under this vision that the new
19 Tamaulipas government, headed by Dr. Americo y Gabriel
20 Anaya, in coordination with the federal government of the
21 President of Mexico, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, carry
22 out the most ambitious agenda of infrastructure
23 modernization in terms of current trade.

24 With strategic projects, such as the
25 installation in Nuevo Laredo of the National Custom

1 Agency, ANAM, and the modernization of the international
2 bridges of the Nuevo Laredo 3 and Reynosa-Pharr,
3 initiatives that aim to facilitate trade, reduce waiting
4 times and expedite the exchange productivity.

5 And that is combined with the efforts of Texas
6 and the other states on our border to strengthen
7 connectivity and communication in the region with the most
8 intense binational trade in the world.

9 Friends of TxDOT, fellow colleagues from
10 Chihuahua, Coahuila and Nuevo León, in Tamaulipas we are
11 ready to continue building together a region of
12 opportunities with initiatives in favor of the economic
13 integration of our countries trade with mutual respect and
14 collaboration.

15 We would like to invite you, Madam Secretary
16 and Governor Abbott, to visit us soon. We will very
17 welcome.

18 Thank you very much.

19 SECY. NELSON: Thank you very much.

20 Are there any questions or comments?

21 (No response.)

22 MS. FLORES: We have a video, but I think it's
23 a little problem here. I want to share our video, Madam
24 Secretary.

25 SECY. NELSON: We'd love that.

1 MS. MAYS: You can do share and then see if you
2 can play it.

3 SECY. NELSON: We'll turn it over to you to
4 handle the technology part of things.

5 MS. FLORES: Thank you.

6 (Discussion of technical issues.)

7 (The video was shown.)

8 MS. FLORES: Well, thank you very much, and we
9 are ready to keep working together.

10 SECY. NELSON: Thank you very much. Good
11 video. Thank you.

12 Any questions, members, comments on that?

13 (No response.)

14 MS. MAYS: And we welcome you to visit Texas as
15 well, TxDOT. This is Caroline Mays, looking forward to
16 working with you all. We had a great relationship with
17 the previous administration. We want to continue that, so
18 again, our doors are open as well, and the partnership and
19 the friendship.

20 MS. FLORES: Of course. I think the next
21 meeting is April 18. Right?

22 MS. MAYS: Yes.

23 MS. FLORES: Okay. See you then.

24 MS. MAYS: Yes, absolutely.

25 SECY. NELSON: Thank you.

1 Now I want to open up the floor for discussion.
2 Any comments or questions or feedback or thoughts about
3 future topics for our next meeting?

4 Yes, sir.

5 MR. CALVO: Thinking about specific ideas, a
6 lot of the people who are your shippers in the industry in
7 Monterrey, how do they make the choice of where to go,
8 right, whether it's Laredo, whether it could be Pharr or
9 the Valley?

10 When I went to school in Monterrey, it was real
11 easy for us to go to either to Laredo or to McAllen and go
12 shopping or something, but when it comes to industry, what
13 are some of the factors in making -- for industry to make
14 those choices?

15 SECY. GONZALEZ: That is an excellent question.
16 Usually the customer doesn't ask from which port it's
17 going to cross. What a customer wants is his product to
18 be at the final destination in a specific time.

19 So what we found out is mostly custom brokers
20 don't mention to the customer that there are different
21 options where you can cross your product. We made this
22 challenge and we made it with Lego. Lego was using
23 another port of entry to the U.S., and we talked to them
24 and we made a challenge to time its crossing times to its
25 final destination.

1 So amazingly, we made the test from the station
2 in Fort Worth and Colombia 1 by four hours, and that's why
3 we're promoting all the Mexican companies to try us, to
4 make that comparison, because a custom broker is never
5 going to mention to them usually there's other options.
6 Why? Because they have other interests that maybe they
7 don't want to promote another port because they're from
8 another state.

9 So what we're doing personally, and Governor
10 Garcia is doing, is going company by company and telling
11 them, Try Colombia. If we don't win the bet, we pay the
12 freight. We have won only 27 bets, because everyone knows
13 that we're the fastest crossing border.

14 Also, we are in talks with the Federal
15 Government and we're very glad that ANAM comes to Nuevo
16 Laredo, because that's going to strengthen all the area.
17 But basically, to your answer, the state is doing the
18 promotion company by company. We're doing the marketing
19 and we're telling the companies to try us.

20 Next year we will give a fiscal incentive to
21 all the companies that use Colombia which have their tax
22 address in Nuevo León. They're going to get their 3
23 percent incentive of labor tax, so as you cross more to
24 Colombia, the less state tax you're going to use.

25 So that's going to be a strategy we're going to

1 implement next year, and that's where I'm personally
2 promoting Colombia, and everyone, even my wife, tells me
3 that I'm obsessed with Colombia. I have six children;
4 Colombia is my seventh child, and I'm doing this
5 personally because I really believe -- I'm also a
6 businessman.

7 From a businessman's point of view, I want my
8 product to go fast and secure. I don't want my product to
9 be in a port that might have security incidents that is
10 going to affect my crossing. So that's why we're
11 promoting Colombia.

12 And it's an excellent question. If the state
13 did not get involved in this promotion, Colombia would not
14 be on the map, and this is the first time we're doing
15 this. And remember, Colombia is owned by the state; it's
16 not owned by the Federal Government, so Colombia is ours
17 and that's why we're promoting it. We're the Sam Vale of
18 Colombia.

19 (General laughter.)

20 SECY. NELSON: All right. So next we're going
21 to hear from Consul General Harper. Are you with us?

22 CONSUL GENERAL HARPER: I am.

23 SECY. NELSON: Sorry you're not with us in
24 person, but we are ready to hear your wisdom.

25 CONSUL GENERAL HARPER: I hate to disappoint on

1 two counts then. But I just wanted to thank you again for
2 the opportunity to be on this committee, because I found
3 these studies were very interesting, and I'm hoping that
4 we can get copies of the handouts, because much of the
5 specifics are new, but many of the elements that you're
6 looking at are quite familiar to me.

7 And I again extend the offer that if there's
8 anything that you see that we could provide some
9 information on for the Northern U.S. Border that might be
10 useful, I'd be very glad to do this, because I'm learning
11 a lot, but I would also like to have the opportunity to
12 share from our side.

13 So thank you again.

14 SECY. NELSON: Okay. Any questions or comments
15 of Consul Harper?

16 MR. GIESBRECHT: I have a question. This is
17 Jake from Presidio.

18 SECY. NELSON: Jake from Presidio has got a
19 question for you.

20 MR. GIESBRECHT: I have a lot of experience in
21 the bridges and the [inaudible] areas. The efficiency
22 that you have in trade between the United States and
23 Canada is next to none, so if you could share some of that
24 information for us of how you do things over there,
25 especially at Lynden. I've always been amazed, there's

1 about 20 stop lights there in Lynden, and there's never a
2 traffic jam, and you've got 12,000 trucks going through.
3 How does that work?

4 MS. MAYS: Consul General, did you hear the
5 question or comment?

6 CONSUL GENERAL HARPER: I did hear that there's
7 some interest on efficiency. I'm thrilled that you see
8 all the positive side. I certainly remember discussions
9 over the last 15 years.

10 I've always been a trade person at my core, and
11 we have always recognized the importance of not having
12 trucks waiting in a line, because that costs terrible
13 amounts of money.

14 And so I'm glad to hear that you see those
15 efficiencies, and let me go to my colleagues, some of whom
16 who have greater specific expertise on the border, and see
17 if there's something that I can get on that.

18 It would help to have more specific perhaps, to
19 you Claudia, that we could get more information on exactly
20 what would be of interest, and I'd be glad to see what I
21 could bring back.

22 Thank you.

23 MS. MAYS: Yeah, no. That would be great,
24 Consul General, in April and we can definitely include
25 that on the agenda and have someone that can talk about

1 the experiences on the northern border.

2 I know it's not just Ambassador Bridge, but
3 there's other bridges that, you know, we can maybe learn
4 from the efficiency there, processes. You heard the
5 discussion today, so anything that is unique that we can
6 learn from the northern border will be very, very helpful.

7 Thank you.

8 SECY. NELSON: Gerry.

9 MR. SCHWEBEL: Thank you very much, Secretary.

10 I just have a couple of future topics that I'd
11 like to put on the table for discussion for us to
12 consider.

13 Following up on Dante's earlier remarks, the
14 challenge that we have on the border is perhaps one of
15 communication, of seeking greater dialogue with other
16 state agencies.

17 I know that TxDOT is responsible for all of our
18 roads and our connectivity issues, but what we faced last
19 year, with the help of Secretary Scott, you know, of
20 having to address the issue where DPS was the state agency
21 was also -- and our governor took some action.

22 That we have greater dialogue with members of
23 this committee prior to looking at any supply chain
24 disrupter or interruptions, I would like to see us have
25 perhaps a plan of greater communication with that. And I

1 just put that on the table for possible discussion for the
2 future.

3 And the second point that I'd like also for
4 discussion is that we have other federal programs out
5 there for infrastructure funding, as well as private
6 sector initiatives projects, but the on the federal side
7 there's funding provided under the Bipartisan
8 Infrastructure Law or under the IIAA, you know, all of
9 these federal infrastructure programs that I think we need
10 to really look at a lot closer.

11 Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, for
12 example, we had Congresswoman Escobar seek out \$600
13 million for El Paso and \$130 million for Brownsville for
14 their ports of entry, yet some of that discussion was
15 not -- you know, very little, maybe some consideration but
16 not much consideration to our BTMP.

17 So when we look at those federal projects where
18 I know the politics come into play that we also need to
19 harmonize them and make sure they're within our BTMP and
20 we don't contradict each other in establishing our
21 priorities in the state, which is what we've been working
22 on for the last two years.

23 So if that's something we could review for the
24 next time, so I'd like to put those on the table for
25 future discussion. Thank you very much.

1 SECY. NELSON: Great recommendations.

2 Anybody else have any additional thoughts,
3 recommendations?

4 (No response.)

5 SECY. NELSON: Anybody online?

6 (No response.)

7 SECY. NELSON: Okay. Well, so tentatively, the
8 next meeting will take place on April 20, and we'd very
9 much like to convene the next meeting in the border
10 region.

11 Because we had our last meeting in El Paso, the
12 chair recommends this committee hold its next meeting in
13 the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, or other major port of
14 entry on the Texas-Mexico Border.

15 There's been a little lobbying done already.
16 I'm not going to say which of my children I love the most,
17 but we will make that announcement.

18 I want to thank you all again, and I would like
19 to give a really big thanks to TxDOT. Claudia, I know how
20 much work you put into this. I am just amazed at how many
21 people physically made it in, and I am very grateful for
22 whatever magic took place. Thank you, thank you, thank
23 you.

24 And please, please, I know the roads still are
25 a little treacherous, please be safe getting home. And I

1 just thank you, everybody, for all your hard work.

2 And I have to tell you personally what an honor
3 it is for me to chair this, and I think we're going to
4 have a great time together, and we're going to do great
5 things. I see huge opportunities for our partners to the
6 north and the to the south, and all of us working
7 together, we're going to do great things.

8 Tamaulipas, do you have a question or comment?
9 Go right ahead.

10 MS. FLORES: We will be more than happy to host
11 you in Nuevo Laredo for the next meeting.

12 SECY. NELSON: Wonderful. We're going to have
13 many future meetings, and I'm really excited about making
14 several trips. Austin is a wonderful place, but we're
15 going to come down to the border. We're going to do
16 several of our trips down where the action is -- not that
17 there's not action in Austin, you understand that.

18 So I'm going to entertain a motion to adjourn
19 this meeting from a member.

20 (Motion and second made.)

21 SECY. NELSON: Yes. Is there a second? Is
22 there any objection?

23 (No response.)

24 SECY. NELSON: Hearing none, this meeting is
25 adjourned.

1 (Whereupon, at 12:04 p.m., the meeting was
2 adjourned.)

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MEETING OF: TxDOT Border Trade Advisory Committee

LOCATION: Austin, Texas

DATE: February 1, 2023

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 136, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Nancy H. King before the Texas Department of Transportation.

DATE: February 10, 2023

/s/ Nancy H. King
(Transcriber)

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