

I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting Summary (DRAFT)

WebEx October 14, 2021, | 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

I-27 Advisory Committee Members

Advisory Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Judge Terri Beth Carter	Sherman County	Present
Judge Steve Floyd Designee: Commissioner Rick Bacon	Tom Green County	Present
Mayor Brenda Gunter	City of San Angelo	Present
Judge Terry Johnson	Midland County	Present
Mayor Bruno Lozano	City of Del Rio	Not Present
Mayor Ginger Nelson	City of Amarillo	Present
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Present
Judge Curtis Parrish	Lubbock County	Present
Mayor Patrick Payton	City of Midland	Present
Mayor Dan Pope	City of Lubbock	Present
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Present
Judge Johnny “Rowdy” Rhoades	Moore County	Present
Mayor Pete Saenz	City of Laredo	Present
Judge Nancy Tanner	Potter County	Present
Mayor Shannon Thomason	City of Big Spring	Present
Judge Kathryn Wiseman	Howard County	Not Present
Guy Andrews	City of San Angelo	Present
Tracee Bentley	Permian Strategic Partnership	Present
Kevin Carter	Amarillo Economic Development Corporation	Present
Oriana Fernandez	City of Del Rio	Present
Gerry Schwebel	IBC Bank	Present
Dee Vaughan	Texas Corn Producers	Present

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays	Sondra Johnson
David Alegria	Curtis Jones
Francisco Almanza	David Jones
Glenn Allbritton	Cary Karnstadt
Roger Beall	Steve Linhart
Kit Black	Terry Martinez
Loretta Brown	Robert Ornelas
Jessica Butler	Sherry Pifer
Emily Clisby	Gabe Ramirez
Chris Cowen	Jennifer Ramirez
Sean Cudnoski	Roberto Rodriguez, III
Gabriel De Ochoa	David Salazar
Lorena Echeverria de Misi	Randee Shields
John DeWitt	Aisa Showery
Kylan Francis	John R. Speed
Lauren Garduno	Trent Thomas
Humberto "Tito" Gonzales, Jr.	Paul Truban
Michael Haithcock	Austin Valentine
Bill Hale	Steve Warren
Brandye Hendrickson	Giacomo Yaquinto
Krista Jeacopello	
Blair Johnson	

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Alvin New Texas Transportation Commissioner

Elected Officials

Charles Perry Texas State Senate District 28

Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver
Jon Hetzel	Garver
Tracy Michel	Garver
Sean Wray	Garver

Other Attendees

George Antuna	City of Eagle Pass
Andrew Avis	Midland County
Caleb Cobb	Senator John Cornyn
Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough, LLP
John Medina	City of Big Spring
Stephen Nava	Kimley Horn
David Pore	Hance Scarborough, LLP
Mackenzie Poston	Representative Brooks Landgraf, District 81
Debra Richmond	Permian Strategic Partnership
Joe Riedel	Senator John Cornyn
Joe Shalkowski	Atkins
Jonathan Sierra-Ortega	Texas Senate Transportation Committee
Lalo Uribe	Webb County

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Freight, Trade, and Connectivity, opened the meeting by welcoming the Committee to the first I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting. She explained the meeting would include electing the Chair and Vice-Chair, a Ports-to-Plains feasibility study summary, update on federal legislation, as well an update on current projects that TxDOT districts are working on with the Ports-to-Plains Corridor.

Ms. Mays introduced Jessica Buter, TxDOT Transportation Planning and Programming Director.

Ms. Butler welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their participation. She said TxDOT was looking forward to a full agenda and to working with them.

Next, Mayor Dan Pope thanked everyone for joining the meeting. He said it was good to be back together. He said the work is continuing, progress is being made, and he looks forward to getting the I-27 Advisory Committee on the road. Mayor Pope reminded the members that the work was a generational effort, and Texas needs another north-south interstate that connects Mexico to Canada. He said the committee was doing the right work, and they must stay the course, and that he looks forward to spending the morning with the committee.

Lorena Echeverria de Misi, TxDOT Corridor Planning Branch Manager, took roll call.

Ms. Mays turned the presentation to Trent Thomas, TxDOT State Legislative Affairs Director.

Overview of S.B. 1474

Trent Thomas provided an overview of S.B. 1474 which was passed during the 87th Texas legislative session.

The I-27 Advisory Committee is established to provide TxDOT with information on concerns and interests along the Ports-to-Plains (P2P) Corridor and to advise on transportation improvements impacting the P2P Corridor.

The I-27 Committee is comprised of 10 county members that are the county judge, elected county official, or administrator of the county road department designated by the county judge. Counties include Dallam, Howard, Lubbock, Midland, Moore, Potter, Sherman, Tom Green, Val Verde, and Webb. Seven mayors, or a city manager designated by the mayor are represented from the following cities: Amarillo, Big Spring, Del Rio, Laredo, Lubbock, Midland, and San Angelo.

Mr. Thomas explained the mayors met in September to elect the six I-27 advisory committee members that include three economic development professionals (one for each segment of the P2P corridor), one member who is a representative of the agriculture industry, one member who is a representative of the international trade industry, and one member who is a representative of the energy industry.

Economic development members nominated to the Advisory Committee include Kevin Carter, President/CEO of the Amarillo Economic Development Corporation; Guy Andrews, Director of Economic Development, City of San Angelo; and Oriana Fernandez, Economic Development Director, City of Del Rio.

Gerry Schwebel, Executive Vice President of IBC Bank, was nominated as the international trade representative; Tracee Bentley, President and CEO of the Permian Strategic Partnership, was

nominated as the energy industry representative, and Dee Vaughan, Board Member of the Texas Corn Producers, was nominated as the agriculture industry representative.

Mr. Thomas noted that the committee will elect a chair and vice-chair and meet at least twice each state fiscal year.

Nominate and Elect Chair and Vice-Chair

Texas State Senator Charles Perry was able to join the meeting and spoke about the Ports-to-Plains efforts. He said the work was important and timely, as conversations at the federal level are occurring. Senator Perry said he was looking forward to the outcome and was still working on securing funding. He said Mr. Thomas had been a huge help and has been a great resource. He read the Ports-to-Plains Feasibility report and said the corridor was justifiable. The interstate will only work if everyone is on board.

Mayor Pope thanked Senator Perry for his words and introduced Commissioner Alvin New, Texas Transportation Commission.

Commissioner New said he is happy the committee has been put together and he looks forward to watching and will listen and learn.

Mayor Pope started the discussion by asking for nominations for the I-27 Advisory Committee Chair.

Mayor Pete Saenz suggested Mayor Pope continue to lead the committee as he did for the Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee. Mayor Saenz said Mayor Pope was a great leader for the last group and should continue his efforts and made the motion to nominate Mayor Pope as Chair of the I-27 Advisory Committee.

Ginger Nelson, Mayor of Amarillo seconded the nomination. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mayor Pope said he was honored and humbled, and ready to lead.

Shannon Thomason, Mayor of Big Spring, made a motion to nominate Mayor Gunter as Vice-Chair of the I-27 Advisory Committee.

Rick Bacon, Tom Green County Commissioner seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Key Goals of the Committee

Ms. Mays told the committee to keep in mind the purpose of the advisory committee as they develop goals and achievements for the committee. To facilitate with the development of goals, the Mentimeter tool was used to track responses. Only advisory committee members were allowed to participate in the Mentimeter.

Mentimeter Question 1: What are the key goals of the committee?

Most responses described I-27 designation, securing funding, communicating the importance of the corridor to stakeholders, and advocating for funding.

Judge Parrish said he liked the idea of communication. He said the group needed to stay as one voice to continue the great work from last year with the goal of funding. He said this is a generational project and the best time to get started is today. He liked the idea of moving forward and getting funding to provide transportation to Texas and the United States.

Mayor Pope commented Judge Parrish brought forward several goals. He also noted that he liked the term advocate.

Judge Parrish said West Texas was in a unique position. Although behind, we have a good, strong voice, and when we speak together, the project will move forward amazingly.

Mayor Gunter said a goal could be to advocate and communicate the importance of the corridor.

Mayor Gunter suggested another goal as seeking funding opportunities.

Mayor Pope said designation was very important as well.

Mayor Gunter suggested three goals as: designation, advocate and communicate, and funding.

Mr. Schwebel commented that everyone was on the right track and should be seeking innovative solutions to connect people and commerce. Along with that, leveraging all funding sources including federal, state, and local. Connectivity is key. The quicker resources can be leveraged, the faster the project will reach it's ultimate objective.

Terry Beth Carter, Sherman County Judge, commented that this committee can fall back on all the data and information that was collected last year for the feasibility study. The data shows the corridor is needed.

Mayor Gunter said a lot of the discussion falls under communicate and advocate. National security as part of the communication has several line items that are important to moving the project forward. As current delay of goods shows, we don't have alternatives for imports. If this corridor was an alternative, it would make a huge difference.

Mayor Pope suggested advocating for the purpose, and that discussing all of Texas, the country and connection to Mexico.

Mayor Pope suggested TxDOT, and their consultants, take the input the committee members provided and draft a few goals and send them in written format to the committee for further word smithing. Ms. Mays said TxDOT will write some goals based on what the committee provided at this meeting and send them to the committee for review. She suggested about four goals. The committee members agreed four goals seemed appropriate.

Mayor Pope asked for any further comments before letting TxDOT come up with language for the goals.

Mayor Gunter said the four goals should be designate, advocate, communicate, and funding.

Mentimeter Question 2: What does the committee hope to achieve?

Similar to the first question, responses comprised of I-27 designation, funding, and communicating the importance of the corridor.

Commissioner New suggested the committee think about what they want to achieve including designation and funding, but start thinking about strategic segments, biting off small chunks at a time. He said that the committee will want to come together in a way forward that everyone will agree on. A little piece at a time, a strategic and amicable process for all involved. The real way forward is to fund pieces.

Mayor Pope thanked Commissioner New for his comments and suggested the possibility of an implementation plan. Possibly an achievement or outcome for the committee to develop an implementation plan.

Commissioner New said he would leave that up to the committee, but he reminded the committee to think about what it is they want to achieve, and about different parts being built as it moves forward.

Mayor Gunter said his comments were right on, and there is a need to prioritize development of the route to get the best bang for our buck. It will need strategic objectives that include small projects that add up to the larger corridor.

Mr. Schwebel commented that the committee has identified the standard benefits of the selling that's going to need to happen. To secure funding, we need to be telling success stories from the key sectors that sometimes don't show national significance. We need to zero in on what we can get from those sectors including agriculture, energy, and trade.

Mayor Pope said an implementation plan with short-, mid-, and long-term goals would be a logical way to break it up.

Commissioner Bacon commented that setting up priorities as the initial part of the study, part of the committee's job is to help promote those priorities as we receive more input. As part of the committee, we'll have data for the whole corridor.

Mr. Schwebel commented that one piece missing was safety and security. Also, challenges to economic development including job creation.

Mayor Gunter said that as part of communication, certain buzz words need to be used including safety, drive time, fatalities, and economics. The same words we pulled together last year in the feasibility study.

Mayor Pope thought the committee had enough on achievement for TxDOT to develop some language and send back to the committee for review.

Ports-to-Plains Corridor Interstate Feasibility Study Summary

Ms. Mays provided an overview of the Ports-to-Plains Feasibility Study. She started by reviewing the study milestones that were completed last year. Next, importance of the corridor and the committee's project recommendations were discussed. Ms. Mays reviewed the total cost, findings, and final recommendations.

Ports-to-Plains Corridor Project Updates

District engineers from the six TxDOT districts representing the I-27 Corridor provided an update in each of their districts that included projects in the 2021 Unified Transportation Program (UTP) and unfunded or partially funded projects. The following districts were represented:

Laredo – David Salazar
San Angelo – Chris Cowen
Odessa – John Speed
Lubbock – Steve Warren
Abilene – Glenn Allbritton
Amarillo – Blair Johnson

After the updates, Mayor Pope said that it was mentioned that a few projects were being built, but not to interstate standards. He asked TxDOT to remind the committee of that standard. Should that be something to consider as an advisory committee?

Ms. Mays said that a lot of the projects currently in construction are projects that had been developed over years. Since the corridor wasn't designated at that time, or now, they don't have the framework to develop the projects to interstate standards. Another issue is right-of-way (ROW) because an interstate-level facility requires a much larger footprint. The cost is also a factor. Mr. Salazar agreed that ROW was an issue for their district. The process depends on funding, ROW, and environmental.

Mr. Speed said there are some situations where they have safety issues, so the solution isn't always to upgrade to an interstate, but it may be compatible with future interstate.

Mr. Johnson said identifying what is needed as an interstate standard is the first step, and then move forward.

Mr. Warren said they are also restricted with ROW acquisition. From an environmental and public involvement standpoint, it must be justifiable to acquire a large amount of ROW.

Update on Proposed Federal Legislation

Cheri Huddleston with Hance Scarborough introduced David Pore, partner at Hance Scarborough.

Mr. Pore said it was an honor to provide the committee with an update. His role, as well as his firm's role is to get this bill signed by the President as soon as possible. The strategy was to keep an open mind and expedite the bill. Bills were introduced in the 116th 5-year reauthorization DOT programs, and that bill passed the house with language included that placed future interstate designation with

written support and congressional delegation. With a lot of work, that happened in Texas and New Mexico. Mr. Pore noted that Joe Kiely with Ports-to-Plains Alliance, was responsible for much of that effort. Unfortunately, the support has not been as strong in Oklahoma and Colorado to be included for federal designation this year. There is strong congressional and bi-partisan support in Texas and New Mexico. Representative Cuellar and Representative Arrington have provided strong support as well as Senator Cornyn and Senator Cruz. When the HR 3684 infrastructure bill was amended, I-27 was not included. However, with a bi-partisan amendment, there was support to include it. Partisanship issues broke out, and the amendment did not get a vote.

Right now, it's moved into the next option, which is appropriation process, which is somewhat unusual, but there is momentum developed and it has been passed by the house twice, cleared and vetted. Progress is being made in the transportation Housing and Urban Development (HUD) bill.

If this route is not successful, a stand-alone bill will be the next step. That would cover the designation of I-27 in Texas and New Mexico. Washington is grid-locked right now, but this is not a partisan issue, and Mr. Pore felt confident for its future passing.

Mr. Schwebel noted that if help with a common message in Oklahoma is needed, he knows some key players to help spread the message.

Mr. Pore said he would love to take advantage of any contacts and will coordinate through Joe to get in touch with Mr. Schwebel.

Planning for Future Advisory Committee Meetings and Open Discussion

Ms. Mays told the committee that per the bill, they must meet at least one more time prior to August 31.

Mayor Nelson asked for Mr. Pore's input on the federal timeframe to help determine when the committee should meet next.

Mr. Pore said that if the latest effort is not successful, ideal timing for outreach is late January to early February.

Mayor Pope suggested a virtual meeting in January to touch base about where things were from a federal standpoint, and then have an in-person meeting in April.

The Committee decided the April meeting should be in Laredo, with a tour of the port of entry before or after the meeting.

Ms. Mays said TxDOT would get started on some agenda items for that meeting. She said she wanted to make it clear that TxDOT could support the committee based on SB 1474, but that TxDOT was legally prohibited from participating in any lobbying efforts by the committee,

Next, she reviewed the action items that included:

- TxDOT to take results of Mentimeter and feedback from the committee and develop language for goals and achievements.

- TxDOT will begin looking at dates for April committee meeting and port of entry tour in Laredo.

Brandye Hendrickson, TxDOT Deputy Executive Director, thanked everyone for attending the meeting. She said she appreciated all the great work, and it was great to listen to all the feedback from the committee. She thanked the committee for their participation and all the work that is being done.

Mayor Pope thanked everyone for their time and told the committee there was homework. The I-27 game can't be won without continuing to tell the story. The committee needs to be sharing the work done in the feasibility study with the community. He told the committee that if they need information for a presentation or need someone to present to stakeholders, help can be provided for that. This is about advocacy, communication, and support. We need this interstate. It's critical to Texas and the rest of the country.

The meeting adjourned at 11:36 a.m.