

I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

IBC Bank, Laredo/WebEx April 20, 2022 | 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	Tom Green County	Present
Mayor Brenda Gunter	City of San Angelo	Present
Judge Terry Johnson Proxy: Andrew Avis, Public Works Director	Midland County	Proxy Present
Mayor Bruno Lozano	City of Del Rio	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 Proxy: Morris Williams, Deputy City Manager	City of Midland	Proxy Present
Mayor Dan Pope	City of Lubbock	Present
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Present
Judge Johnny “Rowdy” Rhoades	Moore County	Not Present
Mayor Pete Saenz	City of Laredo	Present
Judge Nancy Tanner	Potter County	Not Present
Mayor Shannon Thomason	City of Big Spring	Present
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Present
Judge Kathryn Wiseman	Howard County	Present
Guy Andrews	City of San Angelo	Present
Tracee Bentley Proxy: Debra Richmond	Permian Strategic Partnership	Proxy Present
Kevin Carter	Amarillo Economic Development Corporation	Present
Jorge Ramon	City of Del Rio	Present
Gerry Schwebel	IBC Bank	Present
Dee Vaughan	Texas Corn Producers	Present

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays	Cary Karnstadt
Francisco Almanza	Raul Leal
Glenn Allbritton	Terry Martinez
Robyn Ayers	Robert Ornelas
Roger Beall	Sherry Pifer
Kit Black	Gabe Ramirez
Loretta Brown	Jennifer Ramirez
Jessica Butler	Maribel Rangel
Chris Cowen	Roberto Rodriguez, III
Lorena Echeverria de Misi	Vanessa Rosales-Herrera
John DeWitt	David Salazar
Kylan Francis	Wesley Starnes
Lauren Garduno	Trent Thomas
Humberto "Tito" Gonzales, Jr.	Paul Truban
Tyler Graham	Austin Valentine
Eduardo Hagert	Jose Vargas
Krista Jeacopello	Steve Warren
Blair Johnson	Giacomo Yaquinto
Sondra Johnson	
Curtis Jones	

Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver
Jon Hetzel	Garver
Tracy Michel	Garver
Sean Wray	Garver
Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Lena Camarillo	PCI
Kari Sutton	PCI
John Tiemann	PCI

Other Attendees

Kristi Aday	City of Plainview
George Antuna	City of Eagle Pass
Homero Balderes	City of Eagle Pass
Coby Beckner	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Virginia Belew	Permian Basin Regional Planning Commission
Kody Bessent	Plains Cotton
Jose Ceballos	Fasken Oil & Gas
Miriam Castillo	City of Laredo Economic Development
Teclo Garcia	City of Laredo
Bobby G Gonzales	Quantum Engineering Consultants
Beverly Haggand	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance

Jason Hinojosa	Frontier Group Investments
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough, LLP
Timoteo "Tim" Juarez Jr	Stanley Consultants
Joe Kiely	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Cal Klewin	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Brian Klinksiek	Howard County
Tyler Kraus	Kraus Development
Gene Lindgren	LEDC
Danny Magee	City of Eagle Pass
Katheryn Massey	City of Amarillo
John Medina	City of Big Spring
Francisco Montemayor	GEMCO
Glaforo Montemayor	GEMCO
Melisa Montemayor	HNTB
Robert Morris	LLUSCBA
John Osborne	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Milton Pax	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Henry Sauvignet	IBC Bank
Joe Shalkowski	Atkins
Jeffrey Snyder	Texas Tech University
David Vance	ARCADIS

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Freight, Trade, and Connectivity opened the meeting by welcoming the Committee to the I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting. She thanked everyone who could make the tour of the Port-of-Entry the day before. She hoped everyone found it educational and informative. Ms. Mays thanked Mayor Saenz, Judge Tijerina and the rest of the Laredo staff for hosting the meeting and tour in Laredo. She also thanked the Customs and Border Protection Agency and Officer Flores for providing the tour.

Next, City of Lubbock Mayor and Advisory Committee Chair Dan Pope thanked everyone for joining the meeting. He said he received rave reviews about the border tour and said you cannot understand the U.S. economy without seeing how the port works. He continued that there is lots to be excited about, and the Committee was in a much better spot than they were the last time they met since the corridor has received federal interstate designation. He thanked Mayor Saenz, Judge Tijerina, and Gerry Schwebel for being supporters of I-27 and hosting the meeting. He turned the meeting over to City of San Angelo Mayor and Advisory Committee Vice-Chair Brenda Gunter.

Mayor Gunter described the long journey I-27 has been. The designation would not have occurred without the work everyone put in. She said there are two factors to consider: 1. It takes a village, 2. A picture is worth a thousand words. There is no better way to see the issue than to tour the border. You do not understand until you see it. She thanked everyone for their hard work and told them to keep it going.

Gerry Schwebel, Vice President of IBC Bank said he was excited for the meeting. He welcomed everyone in attendance. He said his company has been involved with trade for four decades and with key ports in Texas as well as logistics. He stated he was glad for everyone to be in Laredo.

City of Laredo Mayor Pete Saenz said he was delighted to have everyone in Laredo. He thanked everyone for attending and thanked Mr. Schwebel for hosting the meeting. He said for those that took the tour, now they understand the meaning of the word port. It really gives the project life to see the process. The port is Laredo's contribution to the I-27 Corridor. Trade ends and begins at the port, and it enhances the goals and objectives, as well as those of agriculture and energy. He thanked everyone for joining in Laredo.

Webb County Judge Tano Tijerina welcomed everyone to Webb County. He thanked Gerry as a partner and Mayor Pope and Mayor Gunter for leading the way. He described the Port as the perfect place geographically with the U.S. as the body, Texas as the heart, and Laredo as the aorta to the heart. He said it was important to open that heart as a lifeline. He said he was honored to have everyone there.

Lauren Garduno, interim TxDOT District Engineer for Odessa welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted his career started in 1988 and they did not know where the Ports-to-Plains Corridor would go. Originally, it skipped Laredo all together. It has come a long way from those initial plans and future engineers at TxDOT will make their careers out of this project.

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

Humberto "Tito" Gonzales, TxDOT Deputy District Engineer for Laredo District, provided a safety minute.

Update on Infrastructure Bill and Federal Designation

Robyn Ayers, TxDOT Director of Federal Affairs provided an update on the infrastructure bill and federal designation.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) covers Fiscal Years 2022-2026 and provided \$550 billion in new spending. Ms. Ayers discussed the anticipated highway apportionments to Texas as well as formula funding for significant new programs. She also discussed federal grants, benefit cost analysis and the IIJA next steps.

She also discussed the recent designation of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor as a High Priority Corridor as future interstate in Section 421 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act.

John Osborne, Ports-to-Plains Alliance, asked if rural projects could be evaluated on a cost benefit analysis as part of a larger project, such as along I-27.

Ms. Ayers said unfortunately not. You can only figure in the benefit for the project you are applying for in the grant.

Mr. Osborne asked as it relates to I-27 designation is that something that needs to be resolved quickly?

Ms. Ayers said that it is just a matter of time. The FY 2022 Omnibus bill did not actually designate the corridor as I-27. The actual interstate number will need to be approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

Mayor Pope asked about member designated projects that used to be called earmarks. Are those currently separate from the IIJR?

Ms. Ayers said yes, those will be included in all future appropriations bills. There was a call for them in the fiscal year 2023 transportation appropriations bill. Those were all additional funding resources that were not out of formula funds.

Mayor Pope noted that the IIJR bill is an amazing opportunity for everyone. The details are still being made but cities, counties, and MPOs will have a much larger role in seeking grants and partnerships. Electric vehicle infrastructure is available in both statewide grants and individual local opportunities. We need to be involved in that process as the year goes along. He thanked Ms. Ayers for her clarification about the I-27 designation.

Goals and Objectives

Mayor Pope reminded the Committee the goals and objectives go back to the first meeting.

Ms. Mays provided a recap of the last meeting pertaining to the goals and objectives. The group participated in a Mentimeter exercise at the last meeting to discuss goals and objectives. Fact sheets were developed, and the discussion today is to make sure each goal and objective was captured appropriately. She walked the Committee through each goal and asked for their input.

Goal 1: Communicate the need to upgrade the Ports-to-Plains Corridor to an interstate facility for the safe and efficient movement of goods and people, job creation, economic development, and border security.

Mr. Schwebel said this is this is exactly what we need to focus on. Security does not just start at the border. It transmits a whole network. It is important we understand that whatever we focus on, it is not it is not just one sector, but the entire segment of the corridor. When we look at the programs, and I think it has been very relevant in the last week, importance to our state and to our governor, the importance of security, that whatever steps we take are ongoing steps that the corridor maintains a security focus as well as a flow, a quick flow of trade. We do not want trade to slow down because there's concern or question about security. He said he would put that on the table for future reference as we think about where we go forward, we also keep that in the back of our mind that the corridor is only going to be effective if the trade and the mobility of people and other vehicles is swift and not disrupted.

Mayor Pope asked if security should be added to the goal. "The safe, *secure*, and efficient movement of goods and people..."

City of Del Rio Mayor Lozano said he wanted to reiterate what Mr. Schwebel said. He experienced an actual stop in movement, and it is imperative we illustrate the importance of access to interstate systems. It is a reality there will be immigration issues in the foreseeable future. He noted he's seeing in real time along the border the lack of future foresight for the commercial trade needs and if we're not emphasizing the needs for secure border crossings and secure movement of commercial traffic, we're going to impact not just our local economies between McAllen through El Paso we're also going to be impacting the state economy and the federal economy that the national economy as different governors respond to different needs. Mayor Lozano strongly encouraged mayors and judges, especially border mayors and judges, to emphasize the needs for the movement of secure traffic and efficient movement and to provide the state a plan of action with investments on how to quickly turn the knob to relocate the movement of traffic through border crossings and if interstate 27 comes to fruition, I think that's a great opportunity for the state to take the lead on.

Mayor Saenz said diplomacy should be seen more so on the Mexican side as well. There is a vested interest that Mexico cooperates as much as they can, and he said he thinks they can do more. Hopefully we don't politicize bridges and trade. There must be a better way of attaining border security other than just closing the bridges or limiting the bridges. That impacts the economy everywhere. We need to step up and bring the Mexican counterparts in a more diplomatic yet urgent approach toward border security. We need their help to obtain these security points. It starts with Mexico and even further south.

Mr. Schwebel noted the need for a secure border as it impacts the private sector. If there is disruption to the border, it impacts energy and agriculture as well.

Mayor Gunter said she thinks the other issue is efficient movement of goods. We know if you are on I-35 and there is a major accident, efficient is not standing still for eight hours waiting for the traffic to be cleared. She noted we must make sure we emphasize what does efficient mean. We must find an alternative efficient way to move goods. And I-27 is the answer to that efficient movement.

Mayor Lozano replied the word efficient needs to be in there somewhere.

Ms. Mays suggested adding safe and secure and efficient movement.

Mayor Gunter also thought a key word is alternate. We have not provided an alternate transportation route. Alternative must be a key word. We need the interstate for the safe, secure, efficient, and alternative movement of goods and people. She also said border security is very important and it's not just about guns and ammunition, it's about food, fuel, and fiber.

Mr. Osborne said the paragraph implies everything to the corridor, but it also impacts the entire nation. We need to state how impactful it is from a communication standpoint; the corridor impacts the entire state and nation.

Debra Richmond, Permian Strategic Partnership, stated that oil production in the Permian Basin is over 50% of the U.S. resources, noting it provides security to the U.S. and allies around the world.

Mayor Pope noted the Committee had discussed the first two goals. Goal three was the designation of I-27, so he suggested replacing that with a timeline of implementation strategy.

It was also suggested that a national security fact sheet be developed.

A discussion of TxDOT funding categories for Goal 4 determined there are different ways to leverage the monies for projects as well as marketing to other entities.

Committee Communication Toolkit

The Committee reviewed the agriculture, energy, and international trade handouts developed as part of the Committee communication toolkit.

Mr. Schwebel said the trade handout was perfect for them to spread throughout Texas and Washington. He noted it is important to educate people about the entire corridor, including the agriculture and energy.

Mayor Pope suggested the last sentence in the first paragraph should state the corridor connects west and south Texas from Mexico to the strategic gateways of Laredo, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass to Canada.

Mayor Lozano liked the map but would like to see one with Texas in the middle and showing more of Mexico and Canada.

Ms. Richmond noted PSP has updated numbers that can be used in the energy fact sheet that will be significantly larger. She also noted the number of jobs it will create.

Mr. Osborne said we also need to note how the population in Texas is expected to double, allowing for the creation of so many jobs.

A jobs fact sheet was suggested for the project.

David Salazar, TxDOT District Engineer for Laredo, said the fact sheets are great, but a video would really show the issues best.

City of Amarillo Mayor Ginger Nelson said it would be great to show the challenges of not having an interstate, such as a wind blade or cattle truck trying to maneuver a corner.

Howard County Judge Kathryn Wiseman said people do not realize the Permian Basin's economic impact and the fact that product needs to move.

Dee Vaughan, Texas Corn Producers, said that food security is national security. Farmers produce in Texas and times have shown that during civil unrest and revolts in counties that export wheat they are an important part of the food economy.

Mr. Garduno noted you still must move food and get it from rural places to population centers, which is why I-27 is needed in a rural area.

Mr. Vaughan said it is important to realize that Texas is an agricultural powerhouse. So much is produced, but you must get the product to the marketplace where it is needed. Dairy production is also increasing numbers. Transportation and the relationship between U.S. and Mexico are crucial to making sure we have certain products including fruits and vegetables year-round. It is in our interest, and it is a national security issue. We want Mexico to be well fed and we want their produce coming to the U.S. We need to emphasize how efficient the system needs to be to be able to do this.

Trade Industry Presentations

Customs Brokers and Border Operations, Robert Morris Jr., Vice President, CCS Daniel B. Hastings, Inc.

Mr. Morris provided a presentation about the importance of the Texas-Mexico border and discussed the southbound and northbound border process as a customs broker.

Bridge Laredo 4/5: A Vital Link for the Supply Chain in North America, Glafiro Montemayor, CEO of GEMCO

Mr. Montemayor provided a presentation that included the main corridors in Mexico, the U.S., and Texas. He reviewed Texas main exporting commodities and the importance of I-27. He also covered USMCA's supply chain. Mr. Montemayor discussed the new international bridge in Laredo that would represent the first binational loop. He discussed the logistics and border management of the bridge.

Cotton Trade Perspective, Kody Bessent, CEO, Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.

Mr. Bessent provided the cotton trade perspective of the corridor. He discussed domestic and international export of farm products and the U.S. and Texas cotton production. He discussed how cotton is transported, top ten exports, and movement of cotton through the U.S.

Update on Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan Implementation and Freight Planning Efforts

TxDOT staff Giacomo Yaquinto, Sherry Pifer, Paul Truban, and Cary Karnstadt provided brief updates on the following:

- Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan 2021 Implementation Priorities
- Senate Bill 1308 Study Update
- US 83 Regional Corridor Study
- US 57 Corridor Interstate Feasibility Study
- I-10 Texas Corridor Study
- 2050 Freight Mobility Plan

Mayor Pope thanked the speakers for their presentations. He noted that twice a year does not seem like enough, so maybe quarterly meetings at a minimum should be held with every other being in-person and the others being held virtually. He thanked the Laredo hosts for the hotel, bank, and tour. He then thanked TxDOT and Caroline.

Mayor Gunter thanked everyone for their time commitment and support, every ounce is valuable.

Ms. Mays thanked Henry Sauvignet for the support and partnership at IBC Bank. She thanked the Committee Members for attending, the TxDOT leadership, and the consultant team.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.