

# I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

UT Thompson Conference Center, Austin/Zoom April 13, 2023 | 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

## I-27 Advisory Committee Members

Advisory Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Judge Terri Beth Carter	Sherman County	Not Present
Judge Lane Carter	Tom Green County	Not Present
Mayor Brenda Gunter	City of San Angelo	Present
Judge Terry Johnson Proxy: Andrew Avis, Public Works Director	Midland County	Present
Mayor Al Arreola Sr. Proxy: Michael Garcia, Assistant City Manager	City of Del Rio	Proxy Present
Mayor Ginger Nelson	City of Amarillo	Not Present
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Present
Judge Curtis Parrish	Lubbock County	Present
Mayor Lori Blong	City of Midland	Present
Mayor Tray Payne	City of Lubbock	Not Present
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Not Present
Judge Johnny “Rowdy” Rhoades	Moore County	Not Present
Mayor Victor Trevino	City of Laredo	Present
Judge Nancy Tanner	Potter County	Not Present
Mayor Robert Moore	City of Big Spring	Not Present
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Present
Judge Randy Johnson Proxy: Brian Klinksiek	Howard County	Proxy Present
John Osborne	Lubbock Economic Development Alliance	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
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### **Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)**

Lorena Echeverria de Misi	Steve Linhart
Kit Black	Caroline Mays
Chris Cowen	Alvin New
John DeWitt	Robert Ornelas
Kale Driemeier	Roberto Rodriguez, III
Yvette Flores	Vanessa Royales-Herrera
Claudia J. Lagos Galindo	Wesley Starnes
Epi Gonzalez	Trent Thomas
Humberto "Tito" Gonzalez, Jr.	Ariana Torcat
Elisa Greenberg	Paul Truban
Eduardo Hagert	Austin Valentine
Michael Haithcock	Sergio Vasquez
Blair Johnson	Luis Villarreal
Sondra Johnson	Steve Warren
Curtis Jones	Chad Windham
Cary Karnstadt	

### **Consultant Team**

Wendy Travis	Garver
Jon Hetzel	Garver
Tracy Michel	Garver
Sean Wray	Garver
Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Colin McGahey	PCI
Kari Sutton	PCI
Lauren Taylor	WSP

### **Other Attendees**

Annalisa Bailey	Amarillo Economic Development Corporation
Vicky Carrasco	Kleinman Consultants
Lauren Garduno	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Shadi Hakimi	STV/CP&Y
Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough, LLP
Joe Kiely	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Sachin Kunagalli	American Structurepoint
Michael Looney	San Angelo Chamber
John Medina	City of Big Spring
Kent Moore	American Structurepoint
Hal Talton	Office of Representative Price

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

Brenda Gunter, Mayor of San Angelo, and Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the Committee to the I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting. She told the Committee the reception received in Washington two weeks ago was completely different versus the reception in 2019. The change was due to the designation they had achieved. She said it was another big step forward and she looks forward to continuing the conversation today. Mayor Gunter discussed the importance of funding for planning and engineering. Now that the corridor is designated, the Committee needs to work with their communities and MPOs to start planning. She asked the Committee to share their thoughts, to participate, and thanked them for being at the meeting.

Humberto “Tito” Gonzales, Division Director, TxDOT Transportation Planning Program was introduced. He told the Committee he had been in his role for five months. He knows how important the Ports-to-Plains Corridor is, as he was born and raised in Laredo. He said the Ports-to-Plains Corridor is vital to international trade as it connects the three gateways of Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Del Rio. Industries that would economically benefit from the interstate include international trade, energy, and agriculture. Upgrading the corridor would also improve freight movement. He told the Committee the Texas Transportation Commission held a special meeting in January to discuss Statewide and Rural Connectivity and focused on an important initiative of the department to upgrade the Texas Trunk System to four-lane divided highways. Ninety percent of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor is on the Texas Trunk System. Mr. Gonzales provided an overview of the agenda for the meeting and said he appreciated the Committee’s commitment to the corridor and was glad to be a resource along with other colleagues from TxDOT at today’s meeting.

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Planning and Modal Program welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for being in Austin. She told the Committee their efforts were not in vain and said to stay the course. She said Commissioner New’s efforts, the department efforts, and commitment from the Districts are all working towards advancing the corridor. She told the Committee she appreciated their efforts.

Alvin New, Texas Transportation Commissioner, let the Committee know he was there to listen. He said he looked forward to learning and listening and would speak up if needed.

Cary Karnstadt, Project Manager, TxDOT Transportation Planning and Programming Division, took roll call and provided a safety minute.

## Communication Toolkit for Committee Outreach

Lorena Echeverria de Misi, TxDOT Corridor Branch Planning Manager, provided an update on the Communication Toolkit. She explained that four fact sheets have already been reviewed and the three fact sheets to review at today’s meeting are on international trade, economic impact, and freight movement. She provided a summary of each fact sheet and asked for feedback from the Committee. She reminded the Committee the fact sheets are high level, provide key takeaways, and identify high level benefits of the facility.

John Osborne, Lubbock Economic Development Alliance, asked if the opening paragraph on each fact sheet should be tailored to the data as they are all the same.

Mayor Gunter noted it was the numbers driving the need.

Discussion about the fact sheets included a potential overview fact sheet and mention of food, fuel, and fiber.

Ms. Mays said the key is to be consistent. Thinking about the target audience, it needs to educate about the corridor. When presenting, discussing food, fuel, and fiber is great, but for written context it needs to stick to data and be consistent.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi suggested reviewing the targeted audience list again at the next meeting, as it may help direct the feedback.

Lauren Garduno, Ports-to-Plains Alliance, suggested categorizing the targeted audience list to get a better understanding of how the fact sheets will be distributed. The facts need to jump out. It's the correct approach to resonate with audiences.

Michael Haithcock, Director of Transportation Planning and Development, Abilene District, noted that the fact sheets are helpful for their District in building the case for receiving funds towards schematic and environmental projects.

Mayor Gunter thanked everyone for their feedback.

## **Legislative Update**

Trent Thomas, TxDOT Director of Government Affairs, provided a legislative update. He told the Committee the corridor is getting a lot of attention. There have been a lot of phone calls regarding Ports-to-Plains. He explained there were federal bills filed in both the U.S. House and Senate to designate the corridor as I-27 with segments in Midland/Odessa and Dumas to Oklahoma to be called I-227 and I-327, respectively.

From a budget standpoint, the Texas Senate has voted on House Bill 1 which includes an Article XI Rider that is \$1.1 billion, but there will not be action until the end of May as the legislative session adjourns. Federally, there is potentially \$12 million on different projects at this time that include feasibility, preliminary design, and environmental studies.

Mr. Thomas said there are a lot of grant opportunities under the IAJR and encouraged members to reach out to TxDOT for letters of support.

Judge Curtis Parrish, Lubbock County and Vice-Chair, asked if it would be beneficial for the Committee to talk up the Article 11 rider, or if would be best to just leave it be.

Mr. Thomas said it's important to be active, but not aggressive. It's important to make a point and be involved.

Commissioner New also said it's important to be assertive, but humble.

## **Ports-to-Plains System in Texas Implementation Strategy and Plan and Statewide Connectivity Initiative**

Mr. Karnstadt provided an overview of the Ports-to-Plains Implementation Strategy and Plan. He reviewed the purpose, key considerations, stakeholder engagement process, and timeline.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi reviewed the Statewide Connectivity Initiative and provided information on the Texas Trunk System, key corridors, and existing and candidates for upgrade within the trunk system.

Mr. Osborne asked if the prioritization of projects would evaluate the list created for the Feasibility Study.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi confirmed the implementation plan will build off the study. In the Feasibility Study, the prioritization included operational improvements, but the plan will focus on interstate upgrades. She said there is also a multi-modal component that will evaluate how rail, transit, and emerging technologies will be incorporated.

Mr. Osborne noted the Districts were involved in the Feasibility Study and he wanted to make sure those lists of upgrades were not discarded.

Mayor Gunter asked how funding ties into the plan.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi said the plan is not fiscally constrained, and the work is outside of the UTP. It's looking 25 years out, so it is part of continued progression that the Districts have been working on and it's part of the trunk development.

Mr. Osborne asked if the Committee should just focus on getting the corridor to interstate instead of smaller project.

Commissioner New said the corridor is designated as a future interstate, but in order to be built, every incremental step will help. Two-lane to Super 2 or 4-lane is one step closer to interstate. He said I-69 was designated in the 1990s and only 310 miles of 3,000 miles is interstate today. He told the Committee, don't let perfect be the enemy of good. This is an opportunity to extend existing I-27, work on 2-lane to 4-lane upgrades, and purchase right of way. This is a long process, and it must be done incrementally.

Mr. Garduno noted as a plan is put in place, it doesn't prevent the Districts from identifying planning starting with the low-hanging fruit. Even though recommendations may be in the mid-to long-term, planning can start happening in the short-term. He also noted future I-27 is on the future EV corridor, which could be included in the plan.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi agreed. The planning purpose is to upgrade to an interstate facility that is committed to the UTP. Implementation starts now, and the I-69 corridor will be used as a template.

Commissioner New noted Mr. Garduno knows the process. Don't be disappointed if it does not look like an interstate immediately. It's incremental. He wants the Committee to not get disappointed if it is not built to interstate immediately.

## **International Trade Presentation**

Claudia Lagos Galindo, TxDOT International Trade Branch Manager provided a presentation on International Trade. She discussed the importance of the Texas/Mexico border and trade potential and Texas trade with the world. She reviewed international trade corridors impacts on Ports-to-Plains and included data on population, employment, and gross domestic product. Ms. Galindo reviewed the top commodities for Texas/Mexico trade for important exports and provided data on the value of trade transported by truck.

Mayor Gunter thanked Ms. Galindo for the important information.

Gerry Schwebel, Executive Vice President, IBC Bank, told the Committee he had just returned from Washington and had the opportunity to share valuable information about the ports and I-27 with the Transportation Research Board. They need to know what is going on and what the future looks like. There needs to be a strong plan for corridor communities and look at logistics centers and clusters to connect northern Mexico to these communities.

## **District Updates**

The TxDOT Amarillo, Abilene, Lubbock, San Angelo, Odessa, and Laredo Districts all provided an update on projects that are currently underway or planned along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor.

Kit Black, Amarillo District Director of Transportation, Planning and Development, provided information pertaining to improvements along existing I-27, SL 335, and US 87. He discussed the future expansion of SL 335 as well as future improvements to existing I-27.

Michael Haithcock, Abilene District Director of Transportation, Planning and Development, discussed future improvement to US 87, including the purchase of right-of-way for future I-27. He also noted the plan for US 87 around Big Spring was being pursued for future I-27. He said support from Big Spring and Howard County has been tremendous.

Steve Warren, Lubbock District Engineer provided updates on a current interchange on US 87 as well as future projects to install cable median barrier. He said future improvements at US 87 included freeway operational improvements.

Chris Cowen, San Angelo District Engineer, provided updates on an overpass at SH 158 as well as construction of Super 2 on US 277 south of Sonora. He provided the status of the US 87 expansion and operational improvements, San Angelo Relief Route, and Sonora Relief Route. He also discussed the San Angelo Relief Route Corridor Study Implementation Plan that was

conducted early this year. Mr. Cowen noted the City of San Angelo, City of Sonora, Tom Green County, and San Angelo MPO have all been very supportive of these projects.

Robert Ornelas, Odessa District Director of Transportation, Planning and Development, provided updates about current projects along I-20 and future projects along SH 349 which include upgrades to freeway.

Epi Gonzalez, Laredo District Engineer, discussed the widening projects currently happening on US 277 and I-35. Future projects include reconstruction of existing roadway to freeway standards on US 277 and US 83.

## **Adjourn**

Mayor Gunter recommended the fall meeting to be held in November in Lubbock. She thanked Commissioner New for participating and said he brought a lot of wisdom.

Commissioner New said he appreciated everyone's efforts and told the Committee to keep at it one bite at a time. He was happy to listen.

Mayor Gunter thanked everyone for a fantastic meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:08 p.m.