

## I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

TxDOT Stassney Headquarters, Austin/Teams | November 9, 2023 | 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Advisory Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Judge Terri Beth Carter	Sherman County	Present
Judge Lane Carter Proxy: Rick Bacon, Commissioner Pct. 3	Tom Green County	Proxy Present
Mayor Brenda Gunter	City of San Angelo	Present
Judge Terry Johnson Proxy: Andrew Avis, Public Works Director	Midland County	Not Present
Mayor Al Arreola Sr. Proxy: Michael Garcia, Assistant City Manager	City of Del Rio	Not Present
Mayor Cole Stanley	City of Amarillo	Present
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Not Present
Judge Curtis Parrish	Lubbock County	Present
Mayor Lori Blong	City of Midland	Present
Mayor Tray Payne Proxy: Steve Massengale	City of Lubbock	Proxy Present
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Not Present
Judge Johnny “Rowdy” Rhoades	Moore County	Not Present
Mayor Victor Trevino Proxy: Vanessa Perez, Mayor Pro Tem.	City of Laredo	Proxy Present
Judge Nancy Tanner	Potter County	Not Present
Mayor Robert Moore	City of Big Spring	Not Present
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Not 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	Not Present
Jorge Ramon	City of Del Rio Economic Development	Present
Gerry Schwebel	IBC Bank	Present
Dee Vaughan	Texas Corn Producers	Present

## Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Lorena Echeverria de Misi  
Robin Ayers  
Loretta Brown  
Andrew Cannon  
Marvina Cephas  
Emily Clisby  
Kylan Francis  
Claudia J. Lagos Galindo  
Epi Gonzalez  
Michael Haithcock  
Gabriel Ramirez  
Blair Johnson  
Curtis Jones  
Cary Karnstadt  
Mildred Litchfield

Terry Martinez  
Caroline Mays  
Alex Meade  
Meera Nguyen  
Robert Ornelas  
Madeleine Pelton  
Roberto Rodriguez III  
Wesley Starnes  
Trent Thomas  
Sergio Vasquez  
Luis Villarreal  
Steve Warren  
Casey Wells

## Consultant Team

Susan Chavez	Garver
Keegan Doan	Garver
Jon Hetzel	Garver
Leigh Mercer	Garver
Tracy Michel	Garver
Shelby Shockley	Garver
Sean Wray	Garver
Rachel Lunceford	HG Consults
Kari Sutton	PCI

## Other Attendees

Lauren Garduno	Ports-to-Plains Alliance	José Ortiz	City of Midland
Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Shiloh Stanley	City of Amarillo
Cheri Huddleston	Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Victoria Vara	City of Sonora
Joe Kiely	Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Juan Carlos Espinosa	Texas A&M TTI
Lindsey Adams	City of Midland	Don Rodman	I-14 Coalition
Carl Craigo	City of Midland	Dan Seedah	Jacobs
Tommy Gonzalez	City of Midland	Ruben Garibay	Puerto Verde
Jack Ladd	City of Midland		

## **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Committee Chair Brenda Gunter, Mayor of San Angelo, opened the meeting by welcoming the Committee to the I-27 Advisory Committee Meeting. Mayor Gunter emphasized the importance of the I-27 project and assured the committee that the project is not going stale or slowing down. She explained all the miles along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor will not be developed at the same time or the same rate, so the purpose of the meeting will be to update the committee on these projects.

Lorena Echeverria de Misi, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)-Transportation Planning and Programming (TPP) Corridor Planning Branch Manager, welcomed new TxDOT hire Andrew Cannon, TxDOT-TPP Freight Trade and Connectivity Section Director. Mr. Cannon introduced himself, indicating his experience with TxDOT-TPP and as executive director of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). He explained his enthusiasm for the project and its importance for border connectivity and freight.

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Planning and Modal Programs, thanked the committee members, emphasizing the importance and benefits of participation and representation in the I-27 process and acknowledging the progress the committee has made on the project since HB 1079, from feasibility to implementation. Caroline provided a brief review of a meeting for a Texas-Coahuila infrastructure meeting. TxDOT presented to business leaders (automotive manufacturers, other manufacturers) operating in Coahuila, primarily Saltillo, as well as the governor elect and mayors from Coahuila. There was discussion of Mexico wanting to improve the corridors that connect to Ports-to-Plains. Caroline explained that all of this to say is we have allies in Mexico that support Ports-to-Plains implementation.

Ms. Mays continued her remarks by emphasizing to the committee to not stop telling the story of how this interstate would support energy sector development, agricultural development, national security, border trade, and more within Texas and globally. She explained the impact on economic development may not be recognized enough, and that this needs to be an added message moving forward. She thanked the committee, reiterating to continue to work with TxDOT and its associated districts, and to engage the community on potential benefits.

## **Roll Call/Safety Minute**

Cary Karnstadt, Project Manager, TxDOT-TPP Division took roll call and provided a safety minute.

Lorena Echeverria de Misi reviewed the meeting agenda. Ms. Echeverria de Misi re-emphasized Mayor Gunter's point on the purpose of the meeting being to highlight and discuss the progress and momentum that has been underway.

## **Ports-to-Plains System in Texas – Interstate Implementation Plan**

Mr. Karnstadt, provided an overview of the Interstate Implementation Plan, highlighting the following key points: 1) the purpose of the implementation strategy and plan is to identify improvements in the short-term (2025-2028), mid-term (2029-2034), and long-term (2035+) time frames, based on anticipated project letting schedules, 2) the plan will identify corridor segments for NEPA clearance, 3) the plan will describe how each corridor segment corresponds to recommendations from the Ports-to-Plains Corridor Interstate Feasibility Study. Mr. Karnstadt presented the corridor segments and reviewed the corresponding corridor segment tabloids.

John Osborne with the Lubbock Economic Development Alliance remarked that it would be helpful to receive materials, such as presentation slides, prior to the Advisory Committee Meetings. Mayor Gunter requested to TxDOT that the committee members receive all meeting materials prior to meetings in the future. TxDOT said they would be sure to send them in advance for future meetings.

Mayor Gunter asked about the segmentation of the project, recalling previous segmentation of the corridor during the feasibility study stages (segments 1-3). Ms. Mays clarified TxDOT is no longer operating under the legislation of HB 1079, those segments were associated with the segment committees. This implementation effort is looking at the corridor as a whole and how TxDOT goes about implementing it to an interstate to get the interstate shield; Ms. Mays said that the segments shown for this implementation plan are control sections. Ms. Echeverria de Misi talked further about the control sections and understands that the information needs to be delivered to the committee for review. The table explaining IUs is simply to connect the nomenclature from the feasibility study to how we are now looking at the corridor.

Mayor Gunter and Mayor Blong requested maps of the segments shown in the presentation.

Mayor Gunter welcomed Commissioner Alejandro “Alex” G. Meade III who was filling in for Commissioner Alvin New. He welcomed everyone to the campus and took a moment to commend the Advisory Committee for their work to advance economic development through Ports-to-Plains. He emphasized that Ports-to-Plains makes the state that much more competitive.

Mr. Karnstadt continued his presentation, highlighting the key elements of Ports-to-Plains planning and future workshops/involvement throughout the whole corridor.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi presented on TxDOT’s Statewide and Rural Connectivity Task Force, a new development that has been underway since September and championed by Commissioner Alvin New that is focused on rural connectivity and safety. Ms. Echeverria de Misi presented the purpose and goals of the task force, which are centered around identifying and prioritizing key projects that would upgrade corridors to 4-lane divided facilities, promote safety, and support economic prosperity. Leveraging this task force into Ports-to-Plains allows for the initial phasing of what could be a future interstate, which is consistent with the I-27 effort and goals.

Next, she provided an overview of the Texas Trunk System and its criteria. The Texas Trunk System is a network of rural divided highways that complement the IHS and connect major cities, major ports, and community centers. She outlined how Ports-to-Plains fits in the statewide and rural connectivity goals of the Trunk System.

Mayor Gunter asked about relief routes and how Unified Transportation Program (UTP) 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 is looking 25 years out, so it is part of continued progression that the districts have been working on and it is part of the trunk development.

Mr. Osborne asked if there was a way to add certain corridors to the Trunk System that are left out – roadway between San Angelo and Sonora, and between San Angelo and Odessa/Lamesa. Ms.

Echeverria de Misi clarified that those are on the Trunk System, however they have not been identified as “Key Corridors” yet, which is a designation specific to a TxDOT program.

Lauren Garduno with the Ports-to-Plains Alliance said this is important to share with folks in Midland. He thinks SH 158 is a Phase I Trunk System corridor and it should be shown to highlight the importance of building out in Midland/Odessa, although it was not picked up as a key corridor. SH 349 is a trunk system corridor; it just was not picked up as a Phase I. We need to sell things like National Highway System, Future Interstate, Phase I Trunk System.

Mayor Blong, City of Midland, said that right of way (ROW) acquisition opportunities will be lost along SH 158 and SH 349 if we do not start showing these. Mayor Gunter recommended using MPO and UTP moneys to accomplish this effort.

Gerry Schwebel with IBC Bank went back to San Angelo a few years ago with putting maps on the tables and they were asked to draw critical corridors. He asked what happened to those maps. Caroline explained that the exercise was done as part of the feasibility study.

Mr. Canon brought up the comment to work with your MPO across the state. Thoroughfare plans should be updated. He emphasized working with MPOs and Districts for functional corridors and work with the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Federal Highways issue is important where you move forward with projects, but the functional classification is very important and long.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi continued the presentation to discuss total UTP construction funding for key corridors. This effort would include upgrading Key Corridors to 4-lane divided, setting them up for future interstate cross-section. \$4B does not necessarily go towards meeting interstate standard, but it does upgrade them to 4-lane divided. Mr. Osborne acknowledged that this contributes to a significant chunk of our corridors.

## **International Trade Presentation**

Claudia Lagos Galindo, TxDOT International Trade and Border Planning Branch Manager, presented on International Trade. Her presentation focused on a new perspective regarding multimodal importance to include rail, people, and bicycles.

Ms. Galindo emphasized the importance of the corridor is inside and outside the United State. Its location is highly strategic. I-27 will help alleviate other interstate traffic. I-27 is the interest of the world and near shoring, border cities on both sides, and supply chains.

Mr. Schwebel wanted to share the value of agriculture and energy within the corridor. He explained that when we talk about logistic clusters, we need to understand agriculture and energy. He mentioned that dairy is important from Del Rio and up and down the border. He asked how we diversify and have different sectors add value to the area. He asked how we bring people from multiple areas along the Advisory Committee to understand the corridor up and down.

Mayor Gunter said we always talk about food, fuel, and fiber. She said we need to look back at the numbers for these things and products that make up the value.

Mr. Schwebel said that as public officials you are important and expressed that the public sector needs to work with the private sector so the message can be delivered in unison.

Mr. Garduno said the fuel, food, and fiber discussion and referencing population slides from the BTAC presentation that morning, when telling our story, it is important to express the anticipated population growth and tie it into the agricultural growth, in Texas in particularly but also to the north. Population will grow tremendously between now and 2050. The way you message this will be important.

Mr. Garduno also mentioned the Third Coast discussion from the Freight Advisory Committee. He thinks I-27 should include the trade and economic development about the third coast and how it moves up north. He suggests widening the yellow zone of the third coast area into Wyoming and Montana.

Mayor Cole Stanley, City of Amarillo, said he learned that 80% of the population in Texas resides east of I-35. He said you are talking about taking materials from the border up and continue to use I-35 which takes fuel, wear and tear on roads, and time delay, and he is wondering what TxDOT is doing to advertise an alternate route.

Ruben Garibay, Executive Chairman of Puerto Verde, talked about his work spearheading Mazatlán offshore permit and Eagle Pass rail and land. As a transportation executive, he brought up that the software used to design routes, the same message comes back that Mexico does not produce national network information. The only thing they have is GPS data. Everything continues to go through I-35 because that is the data that the software folks have. They had a meeting with the company to see what Trimble needs – Coahuila 57 – to get cargo. There are nearshore opportunities if Mexico DOT can collaborate with us on steering traffic toward 57/Ports-to-Plains.

Ms. Mays responded, according to Dr. Potter, 87% of Texans live east of I-35 but some towns are losing population. The Interstate facility attracts economic development. To Lauren's point of the Third Coast, this came out of Texas Freight Mobility Plan. The Third Coast is important. When you look at energy sector, information is coming from the Ports. The freight is moving in a zig zag across Texas, and it must be studied and approved. Much is happening in Mexico, coming from Mazatlán, and coming into Ports-to-Plains. This corridor is a key focus area for TxDOT and will continue to be important and develop to partner with you and move the corridor forward.

## **2024 Unified Transportation Program Funding Overview**

Ms. Echeverria de Misi presented on an overview of the 2024 UTP, including what it is, the project development process, total investment dollars, and how it relates to Ports-to-Plains.

Mr. Osborne asked about the quantitative difference in funding for Ports-to-Plains between the 2023 and 2024 UTPs. He says he would like to understand how much it increased given the amount of surplus in 2024 for the state and how the legislature was directing funding. Ms. Echeverria de Misi said TxDOT would be able to supply this information.

Mr. Osborne and Mayor Blong requested maps of where the listed UTP projects are located up and down the corridor, that it would be helpful when presenting to constituents. Lorena said TxDOT would be able to provide this graphic as a follow-up. Mayor Gunter expressed agreement.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi continued the presentation, showing the Advisory Committee where 2024 UTP project-specific information can be found. Mr. Osborne expressed that he would like to know the

breakdown on how funding dollars for specific 2024 UTP projects on Ports-to-Plains were determined.

### **I-14 System in Texas – Interstate Implementation Plan**

Ms. Echeverria de Misi presented on the future I-14 system in Texas by touching on its interstate implementation plan, which follows similar goals and structures as the Ports-to-Plains future interstate. Both facilities will have implementation plans completed in the same timeframe.

Mr. Garduno provided some context on how the I-14 system fits in with Ports-to-Plains explaining that if I-14 is built, it would change the game on how future I-27 is used as a strategic economic corridor. In his explanation, he cited specifically the east-west movement of cattle from warmer states through Texas to feedlots. Right now, cattle are moving on other highways, but the I-14 corridor building out would mean more cattle could be moving along Ports-to-Plains segments in the future.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi continued to present, explaining the general approach in planning the I-14 system, population trends along I-14, safety, traffic, and timeline.

### **Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan Update**

Casey Wells, TxDOT TPP Systems Planning Section Director, presented on updates to the Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan and how it relates to Ports-to-Plains. This plan must be updated every four years. His presentation highlighted a recap of the Joint Executive Steering Committee, the project timeline, the *Connecting Texas 2050* draft goals, planning emphasis areas and implications, draft needs, and next steps.

Mr. Wells requested any feedback on the *Connecting Texas 2050* draft long-range goals. Mayor Gunter said the only issue would be with what are the specific projects under each goal, which is not something that needs to be discussed at this meeting.

### **Communication Toolkit Outreach**

Ms. Echeverria de Misi began by explaining that the nature of this section is for open discussion. She highlighted the four fact sheets provided by TxDOT to the committee that were in the handout materials and in the online calendar appointment. Seven have been previously reviewed, four are being reviewed for this meeting, and two are planned for the future. Lorena asked for comments but realizes more time may be needed. She asked for high level feedback.

Mr. Osborne expressed satisfaction with how everything looked and that it is an improvement from past meetings.

Mr. Garduno said that some of the front sides are specific but, on the back, it is one big map. He suggested adding some focus on energy hubs, wind hubs, agriculture hubs, etc. for each fact sheet's back side map.

Ms. Echeverria de Misi said at the last meeting, some questions were asked about how to use these fact sheets. A list of targeted audiences was provided as a tool. This is also on txdot.gov and in the packet. Ms. Echeverria de Misi said that TxDOT is here to support the committee and is open to other committee requests.

Mayor Gunter asked Mr. Garduno to talk about the I-27 Advisory Committee and why it is important and why it was created. Mr. Garduno explained that the study was legislatively directed, as was the committee. There is an appropriate role for the Committee, and it is to provide feedback and inform TxDOT. As we move forward, TxDOT must build the interstate. TxDOT is trying to get feedback from the Advisory Committee at the appropriate time to build. Feedback must be given at the right time to coordinate with the UTP. He discussed the cycle of getting recommendations early enough for the districts to review and approve in time to be selected. If a project is designated as long-term, then what does the committee need to do to help move a project into mid-term that can make the STIP.

Mayor Gunter mentioned that the UTP is a key conversation for end-game development of the corridor. Mr. Osborne expressed that having knowledge on the UTP is key to getting funding directed toward districts.

Judge Curtis Parrish, Lubbock County and Vice Chair, commented that he worked on the bill with Senator Perry. He read what the Advisory Committee charge is. He said the Committee is responsible for advising and guiding TxDOT on implementation and priorities of the future I-27. He said that the Advisory Committee needs to be presenting to TxDOT. Judge Parrish said the structure of these meetings could be flipped.

Mr. Garduno said that the state is lucky to have the UTP. The Committee can help us figure out UTP as well as other discretionary funding opportunities outside of TxDOT's allocation for Ports-to-Plains.

Mayor Blong said that she understands that the message should be consistent with the UTP and that MPOs communicate, but discussion does not need to be limited to the UTP. We also need to discuss the projects that did not make the list.

Mr. Schwebel said that the Judge's words were spot on. In Laredo, Senator Cruz visited and presidential permits for multiple bridges have not been approved. Senator Cruz said he was entering legislation that would help streamline and benefit international trade. Mr. Schwebel said that the Advisory Committee is stronger together and by learning more about the entire corridor we can carry more weight.

Mayor Pro Tempore Vanessa Perez, City of Laredo, said that she sits on the MPO. She said that they had a situation where a project did not make the UTP. They had to communicate why this project was important. She invited the members to come to Laredo and see the logistics and the demand from the nearshoring trends. The communities along the corridor are important, but these need to understand Laredo and how it can affect your community. She made a point to learn from each other and plan for the future and to fight for money.

Mayor Gunter shared that 2 years ago the committee visited Laredo and saw the logistics. She also shared that Segment 3 in Laredo was always a priority and that the Committee agrees with Ms. Perez and understands the importance of Laredo.

Mayor Stanley said he agrees with the Judge. He asked that he has a place on the agenda to discuss projects with the district engineer in his community and bring projects to discuss. Then they can help



one another to get projects built along the corridor. He specifically asked if he could speak at the next meeting. Mayor Gunter expressed agreement.

Mildred Litchfield, former TxDOT Deputy Division Director, said that she has been listening to the meeting. She said that you can work with Districts and that the process never ends. There is a new call for 2025 projects. Districts work closely with the UTP team and work to understand priorities. The call for Cat. 2, 4, 12 are going on now and hope to have scores by January. Now is the time to get voices heard.

Mayor Gunter thanked the Committee for attending the meeting and for their input. She adjourned the meeting.

### **Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 4:09 p.m.