Texas Department of Transportation

Texas-Mexico Border Region Connectivity Plan

Appendix A

Stakeholder Engagement

Texas-Mexico Border Region Connectivity Plan

Region-to-Region Meeting Summaries

Texas Department of Transportation

Contents

February 8, 2024, El Paso District Meeting 1

February 13, 2024, Pharr District Meeting 5

February 16, 2024, Laredo District Meeting 14

May 13, 2024, Combined District Meeting 20

May 16, 2024, McAllen Stakeholder Workshop 23

May 21, 2024 Laredo Stakeholder Workshop 30

May 28, 2024, El Paso Stakeholder Workshop 40

May 29, 2024, Presidio Stakeholder Workshop 48

June 12, 2024, Del Rio Stakeholder Workshop 58

July 30, 2024, Agency/Industry 1:1 Meetings 69

September 23, 2024, Laredo District Meeting 82

September 24, 2024, Pharr District Meeting 88

September 26, 2024, El Paso District Meeting 94

October 3, 2024, McAllen Stakeholder Workshop 100

October 15, 2024, Laredo Stakeholder Workshop 110

October 16, 2024, Eagle Pass Stakeholder Workshop 122

October 22, 2024, El Paso Stakeholder Workshop 133

October 23, 2024, Presidio Stakeholder Workshop 146

Stakeholder Engagement Results 154

February 8, 2024, El Paso District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting 1: El Paso District

Date and Time: Thursday, February 8, 2024 at 11am (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Noemi Herrera Rojas	HNTB
Tomas Treviño	TxDOT ELP	Eva Esquivel	HNTB
Marty Boyd	TxDOT ELP	Kim Johnson	ICF
Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB	Ryan Robert	ICF
Will Smithson	HNTB	Gilysa Garcia	ICF
Travis Norton	HNTB	Efrain Esparza	Omega
Alisha Catalano	HNTB		

Agenda

Border Region Connectivity Study
TxDOT El Paso District Meeting

Dates: February 8, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM MTN/11:00 AM CST **Location:** MS Teams

Purpose: To introduce the sudy and solicit input on the study goals, approach and network.

Agenda

1) **Welcome & Introductions, TxDOT TPP**
2) **Background & Study Approach, HNTB**
3) **Draft Study Goals, HNTB**
4) **Border Regional Connectivity Network Input, HNTB**
5) **Next Steps, HNTB**
6) **Closing Remarks, TxDOT TPP**

Purpose and Summary

The meeting initiated with Marvina Cephas leading BTMP team introductions, followed by Kelvin Kroeker introducing the consultant team. Tomas Treviño, District Engineer, then introduced himself and Marty Boyd, the Director of Advanced Transportation Planning for the El Paso District.

The focus of the meeting centered around the Border Region Connectivity Study, which is anticipated to span a duration of 12 to 15 months. The study aims to address connectivity challenges and redundancy for disruptive events between regions, with discussions also planned with the Laredo and Pharr Districts.

The team presented draft goals and outlined the study's approach, emphasizing collaboration between stakeholders and districts. Goals cover aspects such as mobility and reliability, economic competitiveness, safety and security, connectivity, cross-border resiliency, sustainable funding, customer service, asset preservation, stewardship and sustainability, equity, and technology.

Network input was discussed, with a detailed examination of metrics for identifying connectivity, including data tracking paths across the network and proximity to various hubs and facilities.

Key points raised included the importance of safety within and between regions, resiliency efforts on both sides of the border, and the need for coordination with Mexico on infrastructure improvements.

Mapping tools were demonstrated, facilitating comments and scenario planning, including potential traffic shifts and future infrastructure projects.

Future engagements with districts and stakeholders were outlined, including updates on the Binational Regional Steering Committee and the Border Transportation Advisory Committee.

Closing remarks highlighted the interconnected nature of corridor studies and the importance of incorporating recommendations from various sources, such as other TPP studies and corridor plans from neighboring states like New Mexico. Operational improvements and upcoming initiatives, such as the CTR's e-commerce freight patterns study, were also mentioned as relevant considerations for the study's scope.

Discussion

Marty Boyd – Assuming that you are taking into account Mexico data, do you have enough data on the trips from Mexico? Are you looking into the origin/destination data in Mexico?

Travis Norton – We are looking at border region connectivity from the crossings and in the border region. Trucks cross the border and drop payloads, and another truck then takes it on to other markets. We are looking at the broader picture of connecting the regions and not just the crossings.

Marty Boyd – Are you taking into account trips moving northward into New Mexico? We have loads gong east on I-10 and some going north into New Mexico. Looking at the demands heading to large cities in Texas are you considering the trips heading north into New Mexico and trips coming from the west?

Will Smithson - Yes, we are considering them.

Marty Boyd – US 62/ US 180 is in need of improvements.

Tomas Treviño – Please go back to goals. You talk about safety within border regions and just showed a slide that the secondary roadway network that is not connected to the primary network. It is imperative to improve those roads to a Super 2 or a two-lane divided roadway. Examples: US 62/US 180 (possibly to a 4-lane divided), US 54, US 90, and US 67. Not sure the need to just improve travel safety in and between regions. The between part is what got me, and it should just be safety, period. This applies to the regions and far beyond the regions.

Marty Boyd – Resiliency on both sides of the border is important. We can do everything on our side and what are we doing with Mexico. What/How influential can we be on the network in Mexico? It

appears that some things are getting worse on the other side. Due to inefficiencies on the Mexico side and I would like us to see what can be address in this study.

Kelvin Kroeker – Region steering committees will be happening again and it would be good to talk with them during those meetings and the Mexican local, state, and federal levels. We have Humberto Treviño and Efrain Esparza on our team who are assisting with communication and coordination with Mexico.

Marty Boyd – The Mexico ports are controlled by the Federal side, and if anything goes wrong, they have to wait for Mexico City instead of the states.

Will Smithson – We want to identify the same thing on the Mexico side, and it will be more qualitative due to data not being available. We can say that these facilities need to be improved.

Marty Boyd – Can we go to the map? Modeling on the existing and future networks, are you also using the MPO model future projects like Border Highway East?

Will Smithson – Yes, and we are asking you to check to make sure these facilities are included.

Marty Boyd – The map is only showing Texas, and I know that New Mexico is working on alternate routes and Mexico as well. Will you be doing some scenario planning in case they take traffic off BOTA? There is a dialog about commercial traffic being contained within the center of the city. What will it do to the network if they eliminate commercial vehicles on BOTA, and what will it do to the network? We have supporting infrastructure on our side, and Mexico does not. Mexico would have to add infrastructure to get to Tornillo to cross. Also, Santa Teresa would have to add infrastructure-wise at that location due to this potential future issue.

Marty Boyd – Our district has corridor studies that should be considered. Those studies provide short-medium-long term recommendations. Studies include Borderland Expressway, Border Highway East, Outer Loop -- all add proposed future network information from MPO plan.

Tomas Treviño – Is the team coordinating with Santa Teresa on their proposed roadway?

Kelvin Kroeker – BTMP 1 in 2021 established that discussion on the Santa Teresa crossing, and CBP uses it for through trips. It is an oversize overweight port. It is part of the system, and we can make sure it is available for comment.

Marty Boyd – I have a meeting with the planners on Monday, and they will fill the interactive map up with comments.

Will Smithson– I am available to help with the map, if needed.

Next Steps

Kelvin Kroeker – We will be coming back to the Districts multiple times and will be having the BNRSC meetings about three months out, including representation from industry and government and private sectors.

Kelvin Kroeker – Regarding a BTAC update, we will not be doing a presentation, but in the future we will, and there will also be public meetings. Using the MPO model is within the team's scope, and Axel Herrmann of C&M will be helping with the analysis. BTMP 1 had a list of needs (about 80 pages worth), some work has been done, but not a lot, so how can this study help?

Closing Remarks

Marty Boyd – All corridor studies affect our border region, and you should look at our corridor studies for recommendations. We completed the US 67 study. Check other TPP studies like Truck Parking, Statewide I-10… include all of those and include New Mexico's. They just finished their plan. They have an alternative entry that ties into Sunland Park, and they are working on a Presidential Permit that is not even a mile from Paisano and I-10. This will bring in more connections to them. We are also working on Border Highway East and the Multi Modal Ports studies.

Will Smithson – We are leaning on you to give us that ground truthing on what is included in the network.

Tomas Treviño – The Odessa district has done a good bit of work on US 67 to the El Paso District boundary. Currently, the El Paso District does not have it in our plan. Another thing we are trying to add to our plan is to add frontage roads along I-10 down from Tornillo to Fabens. First at Tornillo, if they close commercial truck traffic through BOTA. If the trucks move along this corridor, they will bring infrastructure with them.

Marty Boyd – We will add this to the map. [Referencing HNTB's on-line mapping tool.]

Tomas Treviño – There is a lot of need for operational improvements along I-10 and 375, like direct connectors and fully functional interchanges instead of the diamond interchanges we have. They do not operate well at high volumes. Examples are I—10 at Eastlake and Horizon.

Marty Boyd – The CTR just developed a tool for how e-commerce has altered freight patterns, and El Paso is going to be a test area for their Amazon activity, and hopefully we will get it in the summer, and the team can help run it.

Action items

- Project team will send over the Draft Goals to the District
- District will review the Draft Study Goals
- District will review the online mapping tool and add comments
- Project team will obtain the studies mentioned above

February 13, 2024, Pharr District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting 1: Pharr District

Date and Time: Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at 9 am (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT TPP	Will Smithson	HNTB
Rex Costly	TxDOT Pharr	Travis Norton	HNTB
Dora Robles	TxDOT Pharr	Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Norma Garza	TxDOT Pharr	Eva Esquivel	HNTB
Pedro Alvarez	TxDOT Pharr	Ryan Robert	ICF
Paula Dowell	HNTB	Gilysa Garcia	ICF

Agenda

Border Region Connectivity Study
TxDOT Pharr District Meeting

Dates: February 13, 2024

Time: 8:00 AM MTN/9:00 AM CST **Location:** MS Teams

Purpose: To introduce the sudy and solicit input on the study goals, approach and network.

Agenda

1) **Welcome & Introductions, TxDOT TPP**
2) **Background & Study Approach, HNTB**
3) **Draft Study Goals, HNTB**
4) **Border Regional Connectivity Network Input, HNTB**
5) **Next Steps, HNTB**
6) **Closing Remarks, TxDOT TPP**

Purpose and Summary

The meeting initiated with Marvina Cephas leading BTMP team introductions, followed by Kelvin Kroeker introducing the consultant team. The TxDOT District team then introduced themselves, including Pedro Alvarez, District Engineer, Rex Costly, Deputy District Engineer, Norma Garza, District Director of TP&D, and Dora Robles, District Advanced Project Development Director.

The meeting's focus was the Border Region Connectivity Study, which is expected to last 12 to 15 months. The study aims to address connectivity challenges and redundancy for disruptive events between regions, with discussions also planned with the Laredo and El Paso Districts.

The team presented draft goals and outlined the study's approach, emphasizing collaboration between stakeholders and districts. Goals cover aspects such as mobility and reliability, economic competitiveness, safety and security, connectivity, cross-border resiliency, sustainable funding, customer service, asset preservation, stewardship and sustainability, equity, and technology.

Comments included considering connectivity with mobility and reliability and consolidating asset preservation with sustainability goals,

Network input was discussed, with a detailed examination of metrics for identifying connectivity, including data tracking paths across the network and proximity to various hubs and facilities.

Key points raised included the importance of safety within and between regions, resiliency efforts on both sides of the border, the need for connectivity from coastal ports to other ports and bridges on land, connectivity between the three border regions, and the need for coordination with Mexico on infrastructure improvements.

An interactive map was developed with a network of on-system roadways. Quantitative analysis was used to identify the initial network of facilities identified to be important for border connectivity. The interactive mapping tool was demonstrated, facilitating comments and scenario planning, including potential traffic shifts and future infrastructure projects.

Additional facilities were discussed to identify potential gaps in the initial mapping analysis. These included South Port Connectors at Port of Brownsville, FM 106, FM 1015, FM 396, FM 2061, FM 755, SP 115, FM 649, 365 Tollway, FM 2061 (Jackson Road), FM 649, FM 650, FM 755, FM 1017, SL 195, and FM 681. Additionally, currently known plans of construction at various ports in the district on both US and Mexico sides were discussed.

Future engagements with districts and stakeholders were outlined, including updates on the Binational Regional Steering Committee and the Border Transportation Advisory Committee.

Closing remarks highlighted the interconnected nature of corridor studies and the importance of incorporating recommendations from various sources, such as other TPP studies and corridor plans from neighboring states like New Mexico. Operational improvements and upcoming initiatives, such as the Center for Transportation Research's e-commerce freight patterns study, were also mentioned as relevant considerations for the study's scope.

Discussion

Draft Study Goals

Pedro Alvarez – I think mobility and connectivity go hand in hand. Reliability may be considered with economic competitiveness. You hit that right on the head - I saw a post the other day saying that Texas is the eighth largest economy, and the governor wants us to get to number five, and we're going to get there, no doubt about it, with the way things are going. Along the border, safety and security are a number one priority especially with international traffic getting in and out. It is really important. So, I would just suggest considering adding connectivity to that first mobility and reliability item.

Dora Robles (in chat) – I think asset preservation and sustainability go hand in hand. Perhaps that's an opportunity for consolidating some of these goals.

Rex Costly – If I may add, I appreciated you all going back and referring to the study that was done in 2021 and the Border Master Plan. It is very important to remind the audience of what the objectives are because you may have new audience members, you may have seasoned audience members, so reminding them of the prior work, what we've done, and where we're going is very important. Regarding the border region, I get it, we are on a border, and we have metrics of how far north from the border is considered part of the border region. I understand what a border region is but perhaps expand on that for the audience members.

Paula Dowell – I think you make a very good point here. We too have been concerned because this is the implementation phase, and people associate implementation with action. It is very important to partner with you all in the districts because, at this level, implementation happens. Our goal is not to rehash the needs that have already been identified but to expand upon those needs and identify what is unmet. Many projects and efforts are underway, and we want to look to the future and bring in the next generation of solutions. If you at the district, say, identify an unmet need, we want to know what you, at the district, need out of this effort to start and get the solution development into the pipeline. That's where our focus on implementation is going to be.

Claudia Lagos Galindo – I just want to emphasize what we are trying to do in terms of the Border Master Plan, we are advancing recommendations, and this story is part of advancing recommendations. This is probably a little different from some other efforts or studies, but we at TPP don't implement. We need to be careful and emphasize this, because we are not implementing something, rather we are advancing and bringing to the table recommendations and ideas. Also, it is important to recognize how we can connect the three regions, and when we say three regions, we are referencing the three border districts.

Border Region Connectivity Network Input

Paula Dowell – Let's step back at this map and provide an overview of the facilities that are on the preliminary network within this region and get some feedback on that. We are asking: Are there facilities that we have there that you're wondering why are they there? Or are there facilities that are important to border connectivity that you don't see? Or are there things you would expect to see on the network that we haven't included? Perhaps because we didn't have a way to score those using quantitative measures. This is really that stakeholder driving input which is going to be important for us to finalize what this network looks like.

Will Smithson – Yes, remember y'all, I mentioned this was based on a quantitative system, so we all know, especially in the border region, that there are other roads that are critically used. That's what this preliminary map is, it includes obvious interstates, future interstates, and functional class one, two, and three on the roadways in between the network.

Pedro Alvarez – So, my question here is, are we looking at projects that are already built or are we also identifying new projects that are in developmental stages?

Will Smithson – So this is all existing and some planned. We want to know if there are roads in your long-range plans that don't exist but are planned to be. We'd like to get some information on that. But, as Paula mentioned, there are routes that we just can't do this sort of desktop analysis on.

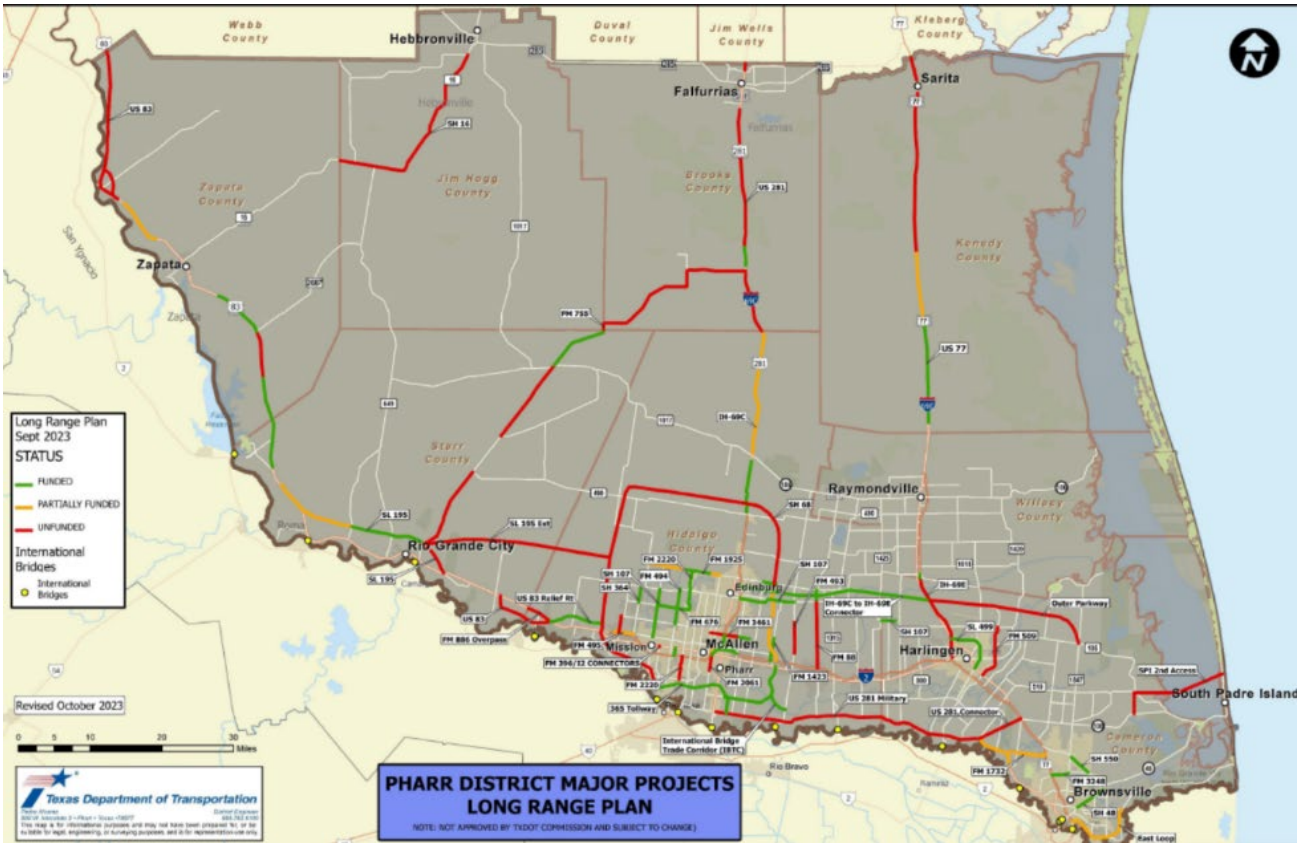
Paula Dowell – I'm going to mention that later, we will be coming back to the topic of what projects are either ongoing or planned to be ongoing. We are at the very early stages of this analysis, and we are trying to make sure that we have the right network defined to do our more detailed analysis. So, we are asking, is this the right network? Are there any roadway facilities that should be on here that are important to that border region connectivity that currently are not showing going up? And then at the same point, are there some facilities on here that are showing up that maybe the local community would prefer that cross-border traffic not be used and so we may want to look for alternative routes for those types of facilities?

Pedro Alvarez – I just opened up the link, so I can zoom in here.

- One thing of note, in the port of Brownsville, the South Port Connector connects the Port of Brownsville to SH-4. We need to look at adding the South Port Connector to this map. I would also encourage you to use this Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) resource (in chat). It has a list of all the projects that they have, and it is important for you all to identify which projects have been completed and would help supplement your analysis moving forward. I also wanted to make sure we consider all transportation pathways, land, air, sea, and rail. The Port of Brownsville is obviously a water port, but many other routes of transport are used to get material in and out of there as well. My staff is already starting to add more input there.

- Let me see here, make sure that FM 509 is here. Okay, yes, it is included and it's a really important route connecting Los Indios towards the Harlingen San Benito area, a bit northwest of which is Port of Harlingen. The Port has expanded its operations, so consider not only FM 509 but also FM 106. That also connects to the Port of entry - we need to include FM 106, in the same way FM 509 is.

Figure 1. TxDOT Major Projects within Pharr District



Dora Robles (in chat) – https://ccrma.org/projects/

Paula Dowell -- I think another important note too is while you know we'll be doing the more detailed analysis on the US side of the border; we would like to have your insight in terms of you know what's going on at the Mexican side. That is also important and impacts the safety and the efficiency of the border crossings on the US side. We will be engaging stakeholders on the Mexican side, but I know that you guys do that regularly. So, anything that you would like to add to the map with regards to the Mexican side of the border would certainly be appreciated as well.

Kelvin Kroeker – If anybody has anything else on the map, we can capture that here, or again in ongoing communication after today.

Pedro Alvarez – I was typing in some of the roadways that connect to the Ports of Entry [FM 1015, FM 396, FM 2061, FM 755, SP 115, FM 649].

- FM 1015 connects to the Progresso International Crossing to Anzalduas Port of Entry. We have a project ongoing with the city of McAllen and they're making improvements to the port of entry there.

- FM 396 is an already existing location, and we've already identified an interchange at FM 396 and I-2 as an example of a future project. It's currently a functioning facility, and once the Anzalduas Port of Entry project is completed, the trucking industry will be able to utilize that roadway too.

- Now we have a project working with Hidalgo County RMA, Dora put a link in the chat, [*From Dora Robles in chat*: HCRMA GIS map Link], that's the other RMA in our area which is currently constructing the 365 tollway which will interconnect five ports of entry in the long term, and currently connects three - Anzalduas Port of Entry, Pharr International Bridge, and the Hidalgo Bridge. The idea is there even though it is not yet completed. It will be completed in September 2025, and I want to put that on the radar.

- Then FM 2061, Jackson Road, from Pharr through McAllen. That's the borderline to the international bridge. We need to identify that because it's the primary route to get to the interstate from the Pharr International Bridge at this time. That is Jackson Road.

Travis Norton – One thing I wanted to note as well- if you all could also consider those routes that go outside of the district, which connect the Pharr District to Laredo District, but then also inland. Look at those routes as well to see if we captured the right routes for long-distance connectivity between this region and others. There are obvious routes like future I-69 and US 83. So we want to get your insight into if we got the right routes or if we missed anything there.

Pedro Alvarez – I just added FM 649 in Starr County which goes through the South. And FM 755 that goes from Rio Grande City towards US 281. Those are two routes that are not being utilized at this time as much as possible because we're still in the process of adding capacity, rehab, adding shoulders, and things of that nature. FM 755, for example, we're looking to add super-two's to provide connectivity from Starr County to Northern Hidalgo and Brooks Counties. What you're showing right there, FM 1017, that "trucker's alley" if you will, US 281 and US 83 are having so much congestion in Starr County, that folks are traveling to and from the Valley through Laredo utilizing this route, FM 1017. The highlighted ones that you have already included are good, and if we add these two which I have mentioned, we will capture more roads that influence the western connectivity of our district to Laredo.

Dora Robles (in chat) – Port of Harlingen link to their facilities. This should give you a good idea as to what roadways are impacted. https://portofharlingen.com/port-facilities/

Rex Costley (in chat) – FM 755 in Starr County

Rex Costley (in chat) – FM 650 in Starr County will be a new OS/OW route.

Dora Robles (in chat) – I just added a comment regarding "Port Connector Rd" to the ship Channel on the GIS link. The Map should add SL 195 projects currently identified in the Ports-to-Plains Corridor.

Figure 2. Port Connector Road, referenced by Dora Robles

Travis Norton – I did want to mention, feel free to zoom out and add comments outside of your district, to Corpus Christi, or even Laredo. Please don't feel like you need to stop at your district boundary.

Kelvin Kroeker – Really good, so that's the tool, up and running, and we have a ton of good input already.

Next Steps

Pedro Alvarez – Not sure if this is the appropriate time, but one of the things that I'm hearing from folks on the border is a tug-of-war between the City of McAllen, Mission, and Pharr when it comes to the development on the Mexican side of the house. Claudia may be more in tune with this, but one of the things we are hearing is that there have been a lot of improvements to Reynosa for the Reynosa crossing with the City of Pharr and Reynosa. But I'm hearing that there may be some issues developing on the Mexican side at Anzalduas on the western part of the City of Reynosa. I'm not sure if they're going to need a presidential permit. I'm not sure if they're going to need other improvements on the Mexican side. I'm hearing it from both sides -- that there may be something brewing on the Mexican side as far as what the federal government of Mexico, the state government of Tamaulipas, and the local government of Reynosa are looking to do on the Mexican side of the house as it pertains to connections to the Anzalduas bridge and also to the far to the Pharr bridge. But I thought I'd share that with you all.

Claudia Lagos Galindo – One question for you, do you mean in terms of the facilities at those bridges or the connectivity to get to those bridges on the Mexican side?

Pedro Alvarez – The connectivity. As far as the bridges themselves, they're moving forward with them. But it's the connectivity to get to them. For example, from the road that goes from Monterrey to Reynosa, and then north towards Anzalduas.

Claudia Lagos Galindo – That part is Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes (SCT), and actually, I had a meeting yesterday with the team, the lawyers or consultants, who are helping Marnos, the company that has the concession on the Mexican side for Anzalduas, and they are moving on. I'm going to look closely at them to see what the status is on the Mexican side in terms of their connectivity. Both, for both bridges in Mexico.

Pedro Alvarez – And Claudia, I'm not as familiar with the Los Indios Port of Entry or if there are any improvements on the Mexican side of Los Indios. I know there have been some challenges on the Mexican side, but if you're going to be reaching out to them, maybe ask that question as well.

Claudia Lagos Galindo – Yes, the Los Indios concession is completely managed by the state of Tamaulipas, and the connectivity is managed by the federal government. I will ask.

Kelvin Kroeker – So overall to the Pharr district, are there other things that we must capture or that we must address for this connectivity study to be successful? To be able to advance priorities from the Border Master Plan to your district? We welcome open discussion around the overall approach here.

Pedro Alvarez – I think the overall approach is moving in the right direction.

- One of the things that I hear regularly from our stakeholders is "You know we have a Border Master Plan, and we have projects that that we're looking to do. The question is when are they going to be delivered?" And so, identifying projects in the Border Master Plan is one thing as Claudia alluded to at the very beginning, but then is the implementation stage. I think that folks are getting a little bit anxious like "Hey, we participate in studies, we have round table meetings, we have open discussions, we bring up concerns. When are these projects going to be done?" That's one of the challenges that we're facing here with the local stakeholders. So, I think that this approach here is important. We've identified projects, and what are we going to do now to deliver them? I think that's going to be key. And you're potentially going to hear this from stakeholders.

- Another thing I want to point out. Some of the local communities are looking to expand their trade zones. Keith Patrick, of the City of McAllen, informed that they have purchased approximately 1,500 acres around Morefield Air Force Base, which will be a hub. They are looking to bring, in the long term, rail. And they're looking to have 1,500 acres available for industry like a trade zone. And how does that influence? FM 681, already highlighted on your map, will have direct connectivity there. As I was looking at the map, I also wanted to point out that FM 490 may be playing a bigger part in the near future.

- FM 490 from the McCook area towards I-69 C. That's important due to the expanding industrial park in McAllen. We have some industrial parks near 5-10 miles of the border.

- Edinburg is looking to expand its facilities on north I-69 C and FM 290. With SH 68 coming, they're looking to find a way to attract companies to go to North Edinburg utilizing its industrial zone.

- Weslaco is expanding its industrial zone along FM 1015 north of the interstate which I've added. Weslaco is trying to have more industrial influence in the region.

Rex Costley – I'm going to add to what you've said on what the stakeholders want to hear what projects are let, and what are in construction. We've talked about studies. If we celebrate our successes from 2021 till now, what projects that are in construction, and what are let, it kind of builds a segue of what we're trying to do in this next study. I think as you mentioned, they're getting impatient at times. They can tell us, "We already told you what to do, go do it, go build it." They want to see projects, turned dirt, getting the roadways built.

Will Smithson – One of the things in our box, where it says assess current and future needs, is to have an inventory of every project that is currently in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), what's going to be let, and what's in the Unified Transportation Program (UTP) to provide a status and update of. We don't want to overanalyze projects that are already let or have budget or funding. And to show people what is being done and what is currently going to be done.

Pedro Alvarez – And so just kind of circling back obviously the purpose my understanding of this of this study is the connectivity right between the three border districts far to Laredo and El Paso. And so, I think that that's important to identify any additional needs. I think that adding roadways like FM 649 and FM 755 to the study would help us there. In terms of as far as projects in the queue, I mean we look at our 2024 UTP that's been approved. We have several projects already along these major corridors, but we also have other projects on other connectivity and mobility roadways where we're trying to expand. The whole purpose of this study is to ensure we have connectivity between the three regions. We talk about this connectivity between regions, but what about interconnectivity? Typically, in the Valley, we talk about moving goods North to South, but we need to consider east and west, the water ports, Harlingen and Brownsville, to Ports in Pharr, for example.

Kelvin Kroeker – And I just wanted to put that out there and some of those things are controlled by CBP, is that correct? HazMat crossing designations and oversize overweight crossing designations, auto-used car import-export, CBP operates it as a system and designates where those activities take place.

Pedro Alvarez – That is exactly right, they do influence that. USDOT and TxDOT work with the RMAs as well, and I think that that's important because identifying overweight, oversize corridors is part of the process here.

Will Smithson – Yes, Rex mentioned in the chat, that FM 650 in Starr County will be a new OS/OW route.

Pedro Alvarez – So FM 650, the City of Roma has a third-party park on 650, west of US 83, and their long-term goal is to add another port of entry just north of the existing bridge there Roma and Miguel Aleman that will provide overweight oversize opportunity to cross in into the US, then go to this industrial park, then from that point do the third party logistics we will breaking down loads and things of that nature. So, FM 650 is another one that has gotten a lot of a lot of attention here recently by Representative Ryan Guillen and Congressman Henry Cuellar and others. Thank you, Rex, for reminding us.

Closing remarks

Rex Costley – I wanted to mention, on the slide before the interactive map, what does yellow and red mean? What are the numbers referring to?

Will Smithson – This is a scoring metric on the data points I referred to, proximity to freight generators, passenger generators, and the amount of border traffic on the road. Red means that it is above the median, so most critically or heavily used. They are anticipated to have higher forecasted employment and population. The yellow is just a second tier to that.

Paula Dowell – Yes, we can go through the previous slide and talk through this a bit more. So, this is the quantitative analysis. How we're trying to designate the network is data-driven but stakeholder-informed. This is the data-driven part of this. This is the sampling of the types of data that we were able to pull in. And then we use this data to score the system network. The next map, which you were referring to, shows us the results of all of that quantitative scoring. Yellow means that those facilities scored below the median score, and red scored above the median score. Our initial network includes both those in the red and any links necessary to connect those in the red.
Rex Costley – Thank you, I appreciate that.

Action items

- Project team will send over the Draft Study Goals to the District
- District will review the Draft Study Goals
- District will review the online mapping tool and add comments.

February 16, 2024, Laredo District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting 1: Laredo District

Date and Time: Friday, February 16, 2024 at 1 pm (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Travis Norton	HNTB
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT TPP	Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Epigmenio "Epi" Gonzalez	TxDOT Laredo	Noemi Herrera Rojas	HNTB
Roberto Rodriguez	TxDOT Laredo	Kim Johnson	ICF
Paula Dowell	HNTB	Ryan Robert	ICF
Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB	Gilysa Garcia	ICF
William "Will" Smithson	HNTB		

Agenda

Region to Region Connectivity Study
TxDOT Laredo District Meeting

Dates: February 16, 2024

Time: 1:00 PM CST **Location:** MS Teams

Purpose: To introduce the sudy and solicit input on the study goals, approach and network.

Agenda

1) **Welcome & Introductions, TxDOT TPP**
2) **Background & Study Approach, HNTB**
3) **Draft Study Goals, HNTB**
4) **Region to Region Connectivity Network Input, HNTB**
5) **Next Steps, HNTB**
6) **Closing Remarks, TxDOT TPP**

Purpose and Summary

The meeting initiated with Marvina Cephas leading BTMP team introductions, followed by Kelvin Kroeker introducing the consultant team. The TxDOT District team then introduced themselves, including Epigmenio “Epi” Gonzalez, District Engineer, and Roberto Rodriguez, District Director of Transportation Planning and Development.

The focus of the meeting centered around the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study, which is anticipated to span a duration of 12 to 15 months. The study aims to address connectivity challenges and redundancy for disruptive events between regions, with discussions also planned with the Pharr and El Paso Districts.

The team presented draft goals and outlined the study’s approach, emphasizing collaboration between stakeholders and districts. Goals cover aspects such as mobility and reliability, economic competitiveness, safety and security, connectivity, cross-border resiliency, sustainable funding, customer service, asset preservation, stewardship and sustainability, equity, and technology. Network input was discussed, with a detailed examination of metrics for identifying connectivity, including data tracking paths across the network and proximity to various hubs and facilities.

Key points raised included the importance of safety within and between regions, resiliency efforts on both sides of the border, and the need for coordination with Mexico on infrastructure improvements.

An interactive map was developed with a network of on-system roadways. Quantitative analysis was used to identify the initial network of facilities identified to be important for border connectivity. The interactive mapping tool was demonstrated, facilitating comments and scenario planning, including potential traffic shifts and future infrastructure projects.

Future engagements with districts and stakeholders were outlined, including updates on the Binational Regional Steering Committee and the Border Transportation Advisory Committee.

Closing remarks highlighted the use of the interactive mapping tool to provide comments and directions to include important off-system roadways into the network and future opportunities for other stakeholders, including Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to provide feedback.

Discussion

Epi Gonzalez – I think this is perfect timing with everything else that we're focusing on. I know we’re also part of this, with connectivity for us here in the border districts. Here in the border district, with I-27, and our needs on US-90, US-57. So, this is a good time for us to be looking at this. The commission and administration are focusing on how to improve this and are providing us the resources to do that right. So, you’re not going to hear anything but good things from as far as what we want to get out of this.

Paula Dowell – Super, we certainly look forward to working with you in partnership on this.

Draft Study Goals

Epi Gonzalez – I think these are pretty overarching goals. I don’t have any particular concerns. However, I guess, as we get a little bit more in-depth, what exactly do you all mean by reliability? And obviously, economic competitiveness can look very different to different people, depending on who the stakeholders are. We certainly understand the safety and security aspects. I don’t have any issues with these study goals as I see them.

Travis Norton – That’s a great point, and in our next section, when we talk about the border region connectivity network, that’s our first attempt to put these goals to use. We’ll be identifying what parts of the network we’re going to be focusing on for that study, and then we’ll follow up with a needs assessment. So, you’ll see a clear connection of these goals through our needs assessment and further recommendations.

Connectivity, Cross-Border Resiliency, and Sustainable Funding

Epi Gonzalez – So the one that hits home quite a bit is cross-border resiliency. We are all aware of the events that were going on in Eagle Pass, with the migrants crossing. That created some issues for that particular crossing. But we also have a lot of other issues. I'm not sure how we could particularly address these because just in these past few weeks we've been feeling the repercussions of this. In the Mexican customs, the Aduanas are having many issues with their computer system. I've been told that they keep crashing, and this causes a lot of disruption for us. We literally have had trucks lined up on I-69 leading up to several miles worth of trucks lined up just north of the World Trade Bridge, and even on I-35. I don't know how we could address that, I guess, work with our counterparts in Mexico. But this is something that has impacted us quite a bit here in the recent past. As far as sustainable funding, I guess we never have enough funding, right? So having a dedicated funding source, or at least a more stable funding source, would be good. That's all I have to say about that one.

Travis Norton – Yes, understood. I think we can help with this study and how it builds with the Border Trade Master Plan (BTMP) with similar recommendations and other ongoing studies addressing all those topics, for sure.

Epi Gonzalez – When it comes to sustainable funding, one of the things that we keep hearing is that a lot of our funding formulas are based on population. For Laredo, we have about 300,000 people in the city, so population-wise, it's not huge, doesn't ring a lot of bells, or reach that critical level. But those formulas don't take into account all the commerce that is going on across our region. So somehow, that needs to be captured. I'm sure you guys have heard it - that funding that gets assigned to our border district doesn't just benefit our border districts, it benefits the state and the country as a whole. Because it improves commerce between Mexico, and the US, and especially with everything that's going on with the nearshoring, that's going to become even more vital.

Travis Norton – Certainly, I think this study is one part of a lot of efforts, but especially with the regional border connectivity network and the needs assessment, elevating the visibility into those needs through the study is going to be a big benefit of what we're doing here. So, I appreciate that feedback.

Customer Service, Asset Preservation, Stewardship and Sustainability

Epi Gonzalez –These are very important objectives and goals.

Equity and Technology

Epi Gonzalez – I can definitely see the technology aspect of this. The City of Eagle Pass is working on Puerto Verde, a project that is going to be multi-modal, and is going to use a lot of technology to facility and more goods a lot more quickly through the ports of entry. So, I can't forget about technology.

Roberto Rodriguez – Now on equity, I'm not sure if this falls under equity, but something that has been brought up to us by some of the trucking companies and customs brokers is the Border Safety Inspection Facilities (BSIFs) that we have. Actually, Kelvin, we worked on those, the Columbia Bridge. Due to the right-of-way restrictions, we could never build one at the World Trade Bridge. So, a lot of people still feel that "Hey, it's not fair that the trucks that go through Columbia get inspected even three more or four more times than a regular vehicle or a regular truck because they use that other bridge." So, of course, they have their own ideas about the things happening before with trade about allowing the Mexican trucks to go all the way into the interior of the US to deliver merchandise, but that never happened and that was actually the intention of the BSIFs. So, I guess that's something open for discussion, but I'm not sure if that falls within equity or something else we can look at.

Travis Norton – That's a great point because we need to look into the needs of the communities and the people that use these facilities and these corridors and make sure that they're being well served by the system. So that's a great point on the technology side too - making sure that we're not just looking to build more highway capacity and that we're using technology to make the system more efficient and improve coordination between various agencies.

Paula Dowell – Well I think the other thing on technology, too, is that we hear it both in the context of public safety and security which is associated with region-to-region border flows.

Kelvin Kroeker – Thank you for the input.

Connectivity Network Input

Epi Gonzalez – We were having a conversation earlier with Lauren from Ports to Plains, and I don't know if in your layers you have Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) checkpoints.

Alisha Catalano – Yes, we have.

Kelvin Kroeker – I know we have ports, but do you know if we have inland CBP checkpoints? You know the ones that are up to 100 miles in?

Alisha Catalano – Oh, no.

Kelvin Kroeker – That may be something that we're missing.

Alisha Catalano – We only have ones in the border crossing area. But yes that's a good point. I'm going to add it.

Epi Gonzalez – Because as we're looking at improvements on I-27, we're going to be coming across these checkpoints, so I thought you maybe had it here.

Kelvin Kroeker – That's a good point, Epi. It does affect interstate travel here in our border districts from El Paso and we know very well that those CBP checkpoints on the interstates are a factor.

Alisha Catalano – Yes, I will update it and when I update it, the link keeps working so the next time you open it, they will just appear.

Epi Gonzalez – So what other information is in the different layers that you all have for this map?

Alisha Catalano – For this map, we have only the infrastructure and future projects. But for this one, it was added by different districts. For example, for now, we only have this loop for El Paso, but we're still working on getting the rest of the different projects. We have future interstates also because those sometimes affect what is going to be going on. And then we have commercial airports, deep draft ports, non-commercial and commercial border crossings, and rail border crossings. We have the roadways for Mexico and the United States, the districts, and the networks. So, we kept it simple in what we added for what may be useful for reference, but if you have something to add we can get your input on it.

Paula Dowell – The purpose of this map was to get your input on it. We did use a GIS-based approach for designing the system. So, we do have data layers that showed how the whole network scored with regards to those different buckets of criteria that Will went over earlier. So, if you wanted to look at the truck percentage or the volume or the value of commodities flowing, we do have those data layers and we could certainly look at all of that in here and eventually, we'll do so. The first purpose of this was to get you to look at the network. But I can understand why you might want to go back to some of those scoring criteria and have a better understanding of why certain facilities scored high or low.

Epi Gonzalez – Correct, so in those goals or objectives that we saw earlier, safety is one of our top priorities, so we always look at, especially in these long-range projects, we definitely want to prioritize segments. And some of that prioritization will be based on things like safety, economic development, and those kinds of things.

Paula Dowell – Yes, absolutely. And Epi, the other thing is we haven't started doing is our crash analysis yet but that's our next step. We're starting to gather all of that data and everything so that we can start to analyze this network for safety, mobility, asset preservation, and resilience. So, we'll be looking at a lot of different conditions and performance metrics. So we'll be developing those data layers, too. So we'll be able to not only look at the activity that is happening and the amount and type of traffic that the corridors are carrying, but we'll also be able to look at the conditions and performance across the whole network. And then, that's how we're going to identify where the needs are. You know, where it is performing well and where it is not.

Epi Gonzalez – Absolutely, thank you.

Alisha Catalano – I wanted to also add - if you click on any of the roadway systems, one of the layers has the people and goods and market access roads if that's something that sometimes is useful for reference. So, we do have that there. Also, we have them if it's rural or urban. Some of the clips or segments might have 0 scores because they were added to ensure the connectivity of the score. So, if you find little bits of segments that may not have that data, it is for that reason. But if you click it, you can find the overall score from the analysis.

Will Smithson – And that was what I had explained, that if we had pieces or parts of a corridor, we just selected the whole corridor. So, we'll have segments that did not score well, but we do want to have a continuous corridor. And as Paula said, this is the first cut at the unit of analysis. We'll now go do all those performance metrics and identify how this network is performing.

Epi Gonzalez – That makes sense, I can certainly understand that part.

Will Smithson – Again, this is interactive, so you can take your time zoom in, zoom out, and add comments on specific corridors or a piece of corridor. Maybe you have some reason as to why it should be added, or if it should be deleted, or extended. Before we do all the analysis that Paula was talking about, we want to make sure that we have a complete network and that everybody agrees upon that region-to-region network.

Epi Gonzalez – So just a comment here, let's say, if you go to Eagle Pass, for example. You can zoom out a bit, perfect. You see that loop around it, right? Here, we have the last segment of the loop that's going to go from 57 to 277, right, to close it. It's going to go from Hopedale or Colonia, somewhere at Elm Creek, yes that area - that's where it's going to connect. How do we go about adding that piece there?

Alisha Catalano – I would recommend what other districts have done is that they add a comment here saying something like a future project connecting this segment of road to this other segment of road, or if you have any specific name of the project or anything. That way, we can look up, or we can go to that person and ask for more detailed information to go by.

Epi Gonzalez – On some of these, we're already far along on the design. Is that something we can provide you with a kmz file to add it?

Will Smithson – Yes, definitely. We would love that. Any type of geographic file that you have would make Alisha's job a lot easier to figure out the endpoints of the project and its horizontal alignment. The comment could be "supply shapefile" or "supply kmz."

Roberto Rodriguez – Yeah, we can do that. We have that already.

Will Smithson – That would be tedious to digitize what you're trying to comment on, so this is absolutely something we're open to.

Epi Gonzalez – I know we've been kind of focusing on some of those strategic corridors, but this is really open to any project within our district that provides or helps with region-to-region connectivity.

Will Smithson – Exactly.

Paula Dowell – Correct.

Will Smithson – That's why we're here to talk to y'all because y'all know that stuff.

Paula Dowell – Another thing to remember is that our analysis only included an on-system network because we couldn't get all the data for the off-system network. But if you know that there's an off-system facility that is key to region-to-region connectivity then that's where we need you to tell us to add it in.

Kelvin Kroeker – Sometimes there's a critical street like Killum Industrial, that is not on the network but becomes essential to circulation and operations, so feel free to point those things out. Cuatro Vientos is the one I think I was thinking of, Roberto.

Epi Gonzalez – Yeah, even the Hachar Reuthinger and those types of roadways.

Will Smithson – And this isn't password protected or anything.

Alisha Catalan– Yes, you don't need any GIS credentials. Feel free to share it.

Epi Gonzalez – Okay, good.

Paula Dowell – And you can see what kind of comments the other districts are adding as well.

Closing Remarks

Epi Gonzalez – I just have a quick question - for now, do we keep this internal to TxDOT? I know we're going to have outreach that will occur. But can we get MPO's perspective on these kinds of things?

Paula Dowell – Yes, the MPOs are going to be part of our Binational Steering Committees and those are going to be a combination of the public and private sectors. And we expect 50 - 70 people at those. That's going to be our broader stakeholder effort. But the intention of this is to really give the districts the first opportunity to provide us feedback. We can certainly share with you the list of the Binational Steering Committees and who we're inviting to those meetings, and you can let us know if there's anyone you think is missing and we can add them to those lists.

Claudia Lagos Galindo - Thank you Epi and Roberto for all your comments. This is just the beginning of the analysis you will be hearing from us, and we will be inviting you to any of the efforts to continue the conversation and analysis for your region. Please feel free to contact us with any comments, feedback, or suggestions that you would like to share with us in terms of comments or anything that you think will be helpful in terms of the study.

Action items

- Project team will send over the Draft Study Goals to the District.
- District will review the Draft Study Goals.
- District will review the online mapping tool and add comments.
- Project team will add inland CBP checkpoints.

May 13, 2024, Combined District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study Kickoff Districts Meeting 2: El Paso, Laredo and Pharr

Date and Time: Monday, May 13, 2024, at 11 am (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT TPP	William "Will" Smithson	HNTB
Roberto Rodriguez	TxDOT Laredo	Eva Esquivel	HNTB
Marty Boyd	TxDOT El Paso	Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs
Edgar Perez	TxDOT Pharr	Dan Seedah	Jacobs
Paula Dowell	HNTB		

Purpose and Summary

The meeting initiated with Marvina Cephas leading BTMP team introductions, followed by Kelvin Kroeker introducing the consultant team. Each District then introduced their participants.

Claudia thanked the Districts and explained TxDOT's vision for the stakeholder engagement which is designed to be interactive. She described the three ongoing studies: First/Last Mile at Ports, then Port-to-Port, and then Region-to-Region. Claudia reemphasized the desire for stakeholder input.

HNTB presented an overview of the meeting format which will include some background information, the goals, the new findings based on the analytical study, and the preliminary results. Network input was discussed, with a detailed examination of metrics for identifying connectivity, including data tracking paths across the network and proximity to various hubs and facilities. HNTB described areas/topics where the speaker will pause and emphasize the need for input.

Figure 3. HNTB's Presentation on May 13, 2024 Meeting

The Jacobs team also shared overviews of their content which included updates on First and Last Mile Connectivity and Port-to-Port Connectivity Analysis.

Figure 4. Jacobs' Presentation on May 13, 2024 Meeting

Figure 5. Jacobs' Presentation on May 13, 2024 Meeting

HNTB presented the agendas for the five cities including timings, locations, and the added presentation of the US 90 Corridor Study for Del Rio and the Truck Parking Study for Presidio meetings.

Discussion

The Districts expressed support for the planned upcoming workshops. There were no questions.

May 16, 2024, McAllen Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Meeting 1 McAllen, TX

Date and Time: May 16, 2024, at 9:30 am (CT)

Location: McAllen Convention Center, 700 Convention Center Blvd, McAllen, TX 78501

Attendees: See Sign In Sheets

Agenda

McAllen Binational Steering Committee
May 16, 2024
Time: 9:30 AM CST
Location: McAllen Convention Center - 700 Convention Center Blvd, McAllen, TX 78501

Agenda

9:30 AM to 9:40 AM	Overview and Purpose	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT
9:40 AM to 9:45 AM	Opening Remarks	Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT
9:45 AM to 9:55 AM	Introductions	Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT
9:55 AM to 10:55 AM	First/Last Mile Connectivity	Jacobs
10:55 AM to 11:15 AM	Connectivity between Border Crossings and Maritime Ports	Jacobs
11:15 AM to 12:15 PM	Region to Region Connectivity a. Study background, Approach and Goals b. Border Region Context and Socio-economic Profile c. Border Region Connectivity Network Demand d. Network Existing Conditions Profile e. Next Steps, Questions and Closing Remarks	HNTB
12:15 PM to 12:30 PM	Closing Remarks	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas began the meeting with a welcome and asked each attendee to introduce themselves.

Andrew Canon presented a safety minute focused on motorcycle safety. Claudia Lagos Galindo summarized discussions, first and last mile, port-to-port, and region-to-region participation. She emphasized that the goal of this meeting is to get feedback from users of these systems, to determine what we have considered and captured adequately, what additional investigations may be needed, and where solutions are required. This input will be used in the studies.

Presentations

First/Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi gave a presentation on the First and Last Mile Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study reviewed multimodal (e.g., highway, rail, airport, seaport, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) infrastructure connectivity to the Texas-Mexico border crossings to identify needs and potential improvements. Chris Cowen discussed data sources for traffic volumes, levels of service, bottlenecks, speed, and crash statistics. Rob Faubion facilitated the discussion.

Feedback on Data Sources

- Edgar Zamorano suggested looking at data from the Mexican National Customs Agency (ANAM), which has conductivity and productivity data between the US and Mexico.

Highway Connectivity Challenges

- Edgar Zamorano shared that approximately 25 percent of trucks crossing between Mexico and the US do not have parking. He explained that thousands of trucks circulate because of lack of parking, making traffic slower and forming long lines
- Edgar Zamorano shared that connecting regions along the border is difficult because the region Zapata is not designated as a commercial area. Truck traffic headed towards Laredo needs to avoid this region.
- An attendee added that Zapata's economy is historically focused on tourism, not industrial trade. He shared that designating the area as a commercial zone under the Department of Commerce may be challenging as the community may not be favorable to changing their economic focus from tourism to trade.
- Claudia Lagos Galindo noted that this was an important finding, as it doesn't only affect connectivity locally but across the border region.
- Aldo Fernandez shared that a lack of personnel to staff the crossings leads to bottlenecks- the issues are not solely infrastructure-based. Jolanda Prozzi noted that this feedback was received in initial stakeholder feedback efforts.
- Maria Nuria Ruiz shared that the traffic at the Los Indios Bridge has increased since January 2024, and has become increasingly difficult since mid-March. She attributed this issue to the longer and more exhaustive inspections done for cars and trucks. She also noted that for cars, there is only traffic lane for inspection. The high car volume also delays truck inspection. Trucks are limited from moving out of the lines to other streets because of their requirement to remain on heavy truck routes. Due to permitting, trucks cannot be on many streets, especially near the university. These traffic lines can become about four hours long.
- Edgar Zamorano added that the current infrastructure is not meeting traffic demands. He shared that most people use the Anzalduas bridge, and traffic can be so high, that it can take 30 minutes to move only 300-400 feet. He shared that the road from Anzalduas to Laredo is one-way with minimal mobility.

- Aldo Fernandez agreed with Maria Nuria Ruiz and Edgar Zomarono. He stated that there is more growth in population to the west of McAllen, and aside from a lack of personnel leading to bottlenecks, the bridge has a single lane for both truck and car traffic. This leads to a bottleneck. He also added that issues of parking also exist on the Mexican side of the border.

- Gricelda Elizondo added that she was concerned that efforts to improve infrastructure and address highway challenges were only being done in the US. She added that without similar efforts in Mexico, the efforts to improve traffic flow would not be fruitful. She also added that there are three international bridges in Reynosa, and that cargo only crosses at Hidalgo. She added that the fact that the bridge itself is narrow also leads to a bottle neck. She explained that a barricade is still in place on the bridge for security issues, but this barricade leads to less traffic flow.

- Gricelda Elizondo also added that the infrastructure is inadequate to help people crossing by foot across the border. Many children cross by foot to go to school, and the elderly are also users of the bridge. The heat affects the health of children and the elderly especially, and better infrastructure is needed to protect pedestrian users.

Transit / Pedestrian / Bicycle Connectivity Challenges

- Gricelda Elizondo suggested that a special bicycle lane would help traffic flow. Currently, there is bike parking in Hidalgo, but no special lane. On the Mexican side, cyclists cross with pedestrians.

    - Several attendees agreed that park and ride could be helpful in pedestrian crossings.

    - Miguel Cardenas expressed concern about the safety of streets in Brownsville due to the high number of fuel tank trucks. He explained that tanker trucks hold dangerous materials and stay parked on the sides of roadways in residential areas. These trucks are also put out of service in precarious places due to conditions like rain. He emphasized that the rules in permits hinder truck traffic.

    - Ghery Valladeres added that many of the fuel-carrying trucks have to adhere to one-way traffic due to their permits and aren't able to move back away from homes.

    - Edgar Zamorano added that traffic lights are not synchronized along the bridges. Although police officers assist in improving traffic control, the current unsynchronized traffic control is not effective.

    - Hector Garza added that from the Anzalduas Bridge to the US, there is a lack of signage directing traffic to the McAllen Airport, to Laredo, and to other ports.

Connectivity between Border Crossings and Maritime Ports

Jolanda Prozzi presented the Port-to-Port Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study focused on identifying levels of redundancy of connections among border crossings, potential needs, and potential/proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address challenges.

Matt Garcia suggested that when discussing petroleum-based commodities, pipeline transport be considered as well, as transporting these products via pipelines can reduce road traffic.

Edgar Zamorano added that metal is a commodity moving through ports, steel for automotive industries, and aluminum sheets for wind turbines. These travel from Louisiana, and Houston, connected through Alameda and Brownsville. The metals are exported from Jalisco to Europe and Brazil. He suggested that freight train is not a major transporter of these metals within Mexico due to insufficient infrastructure.

Ghery Valladeres observed that steel sheets are transported through freight from the Port of Brownsville. These sheets are transported to mills in Monterrey. Freight is not used as frequently for metal rolls.

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Paula Dowell and Will Smithson presented the region-to-region connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. The focus of the presented study was to enhance multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to make travel safer and more efficient.

Border region socio-economic trends:

- Hector Garza asked initially where agriculture was in the top industry map
- Paula Dowell explained that in this initial map, the oil and gas industry is so large that it visually overwhelms other industries, but details of other industries are explained later in the presentation when discussing industry values and traffic volumes.
- Matt Garcia emphasized that oil and gas is a dominant industry in Mexico as well. He estimated a robust growth in energy as an industry in Mexico over the next 10-12 years.

Next Steps and Closing Remarks

- Aldo Fernandez added through his involvement in the development of the Port of Matamoros, he recognizes a lack of energy infrastructure as a growing issue. He suggested including both electrical and water infrastructure in the study as these two resources limit growth in the region.
- Paula Dowell added that although the study is focused on transportation infrastructure, combined information technology infrastructure and energy infrastructure play vital roles in growth and development.
- An attendee asked whether the study was considering an HOV lane between McAllen and Brownsville
- Paula Dowell answered that an HOV lane is something that they can include in their modeling exercise.
- Edgar Zamorano explained that for each bridge there is a separate toll tag. He asked whether this could be consolidated in some way.
- Paula Dowell noted that this is important to consider because not all bottlenecks or challenges are infrastructure-related, rather policy or regulatory-related.

- Eric Davilla explained that this issue is being addressed with the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority. A regional toll tag called the Fuego tag, is in play. In mid- to late- June these tags will be interoperable with the Harris County Toll road Authority and interoperable with several other toll authorities in the central United States. Eventually, they hope to partner with Cameron County Bridges, and eventually, they will offer this with other partners in the region.

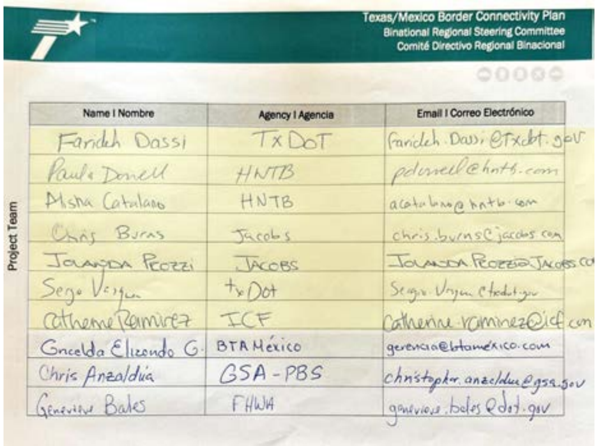
- An attendee asked whether the numbers shared on the estimating future demand consider nearshoring.

- Claudia Lagos Galindo explained that those numbers are from the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. The pandemic likely affected the conditions and these calculations so these data will be updated at the end of 2024 or early 2025.

- This attendee added that his estimates show that demands will be higher than the demands shown in the presentation.

- Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo closed the meeting by thanking attendees for their feedback, emphasizing that their first-hand user experience is invaluable.

Sign In Sheets



Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Binational Regional Steering Committee
Comité Directivo Regional Binacional

Project Team

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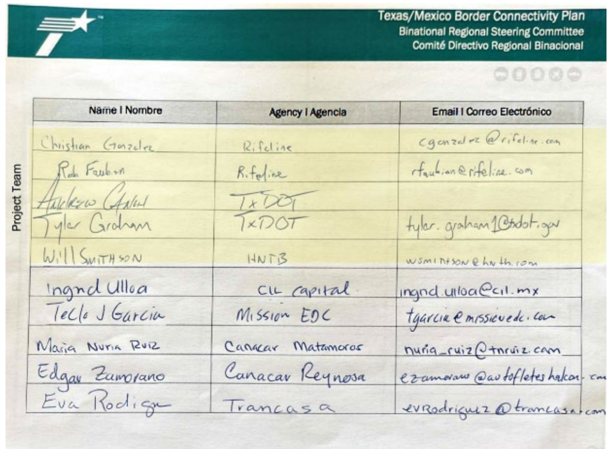

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
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Comité Directivo Regional Binacional

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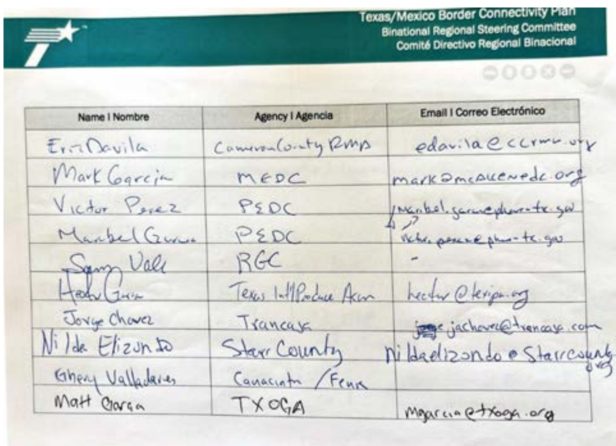

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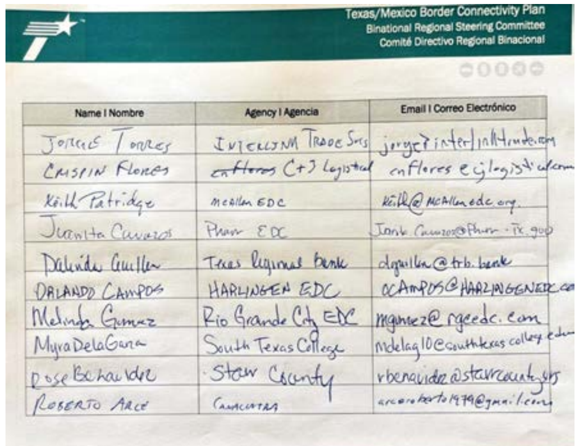

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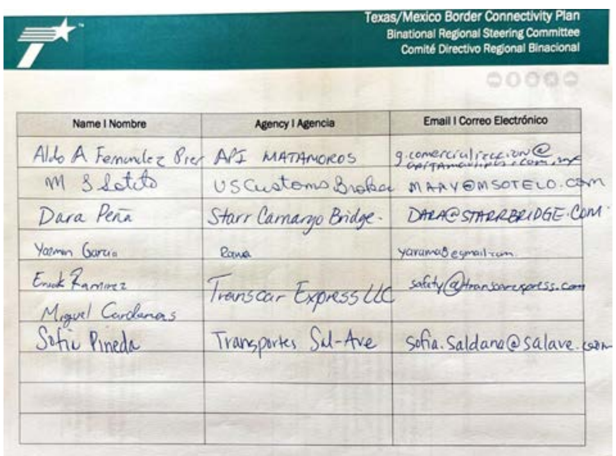

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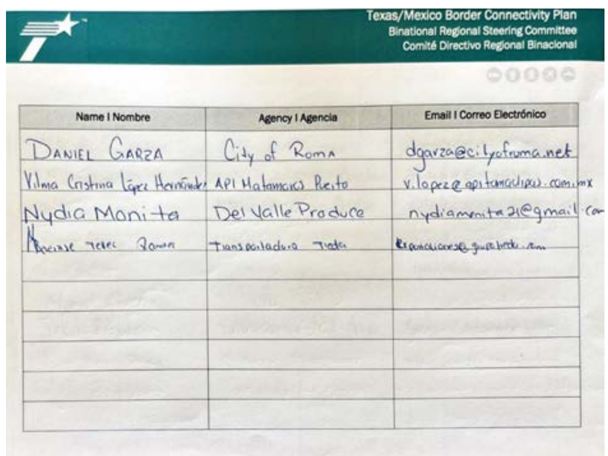

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Photographs

May 21, 2024 Laredo Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 1 Laredo, TX

Date and Time: May 21, 2024, at 9:30 am (CT)

Location: Embassy Suites by Hilton Laredo, 110 Calle del Norte, Laredo, TX 78041

Attendees: See sign in sheets

Agenda

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Workshop
May 21, 2024

Agenda

9:30 AM to 9:45 AM	Welcome Remarks and Safety Minute	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT
9:45 AM to 10:00 AM	Opening Remarks	Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT
10:00 AM to 11:00 AM	First/Last Mile Connectivity	Jacobs
11:00 AM to 11:20 AM	Port to Port Connectivity	Jacobs
11:20 AM to 12:20 PM	Region to Region Connectivity	HNTB
12:20 PM to 12:30 PM	Closing Remarks	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting.

Claudia Lagos Galindo, International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, summarized studies presented including, first and last mile, port-to-port, and region-to- region. Lagos Galindo emphasized that the focus of this meeting is to gather input from users of these systems to ascertain if topics have been comprehensively captured, identify further research, and pinpoint areas where solutions are needed. This input will be used in the studies.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in B Attendance.

Presentations

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study reviewed multimodal (e.g., highway, rail, airport, seaport, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) infrastructure connectivity to the Texas-Mexico border crossings to identify needs and potential improvements. Chris Cowen, with Jacobs, discussed data sources for traffic volumes, levels of service, bottlenecks, speed, and crash statistics. Carissa Abrego, with Rifeline, facilitated the discussion.

Feedback on data sources

- Carlos Mendoza Mendez, with INDEX Nuevo Laredo, suggested including data from private cargo industry GPS systems. Mendoza Mendez clarified that there is no single location where cargo industries can centralize this data and proposed sharing data from his company with those interested.
- Claudia Lagos Galindo suggested that the project team have future correspondence with Mendoza Mendez to obtain this data.
- Paula Dowell, with HNTB, said that obtaining telematics data from willing companies would enhance the study. This data includes origin and destination information, safety features, and additional information. This data can also be anonymized to safeguard the privacy of private companies.
- Jerry Maldonado, with the Laredo Motor Carrier Association (LMCA), explained that his group represents several trucking companies in Laredo. He offered to share GPS data from drivers leading Laredo and explained that several companies represented in the LCMA transport goods across the border to Nuevo Laredo and into central Mexico.
- Paula Dowell explained that this data is valuable in quantifying the monetary effects of bottlenecks and slowdowns.

- Jerry Maldonado stated that FM 1472 is congested, as all drivers crossing through the World Trade Bridge or the Colombia Bridge travel on this road. He suggested that the GPS data could reveal the bottlenecks.

- Rolando Ortiz, with Killam Development, suggested that the study obtain data from the City of Laredo bridge system, the City of Laredo Economic Development Corporation, and the Webb County and Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

- Jolanda Prozzi confirmed that data from these groups is being utilized in their study.

- Jason Hinojosa, with South Texas Skies, asked whether data from prior studies, such as truck parking studies and other local engagement efforts, are being used in the current First and Last Mile Connectivity study.

- Jolanda Prozzi confirmed that results and data from prior studies are being used in the First and Last Mile Connectivity study.

Highway Connectivity Challenges

- Gene Lindgren, with Laredo Economic Development Corporation, stated that mile marker 13 on I-35 has severe stop-and-go traffic.

- Jolanda Prozzi requested this be marked on the map handouts presented at the meeting for the project team.

- An attendee shared that there is very little access to I-35 on Mines Rd traveling toward Columbia Bridge. The last access to I-35 is Killam Industrial Blvd. He explained that when entering Laredo, traffic has periodically been backed up 3- 4 miles, due to the lack of sufficient access roads leading to. Wait times have been 1-2 hours, especially after 5 PM.

- David Earl, with Talise, asked whether the study focuses on current conditions or is considering future developments. Earl explained that several developments are occurring along the I-35 corridor which will change the traffic demand patterns. These developments include Gateway, Talise, and others. He suggested the study review the Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) reports completed by developers to estimate projected traffic in the next 10-15 years.

- Jolanda Prozzi answered that this information would be useful and asked that these TIAs be shared.

- David Earl offered to share these documents and requested that project leads provide their contact information or reach out to his company, Talise. He encouraged other developers to share as well.

- Fransisco Marquez, with GEMCO, noted that the average annual daily traffic on US-59 is increasing. Marquez explained that US-59 is the main route between Houston and Laredo, and accidents slow traffic. He suggested having a connection between US-59 and SH-359 to improve connectivity between Houston and Laredo.

Safety and Crash Hotpots

- Claudia Lagos Galindo asked that attendees from Mexico share the status of new or existing road conditions.

- Israel Morales, with Caterpillar, explained the MEX 2 highway has not been built, although plans began over 10 years ago. MEX 2 would provide a key connection to the World Trade Bridge. Political funding issues affect the success of building MEX 2.

- Frank Marquez added that a road is being built in Nuevo Laredo connecting MEX 2 to MEX 85 from Radial to Periférico Sur Poniente.

- Melissa Cigarroa, with the City of Laredo, shared that they have observed extensive traffic due to the processing systems on the bridges going down. This has led to a backup of 18-wheelers around the City of Laredo from the World Trade Bridge to US-59. These 18-wheelers are mixed with local traffic affecting mobility and safety.
    - Carlos Garza, with Codefront managing the Colombia International Bridge, shared the following:
    - There is congestion near an abandoned checkpoint along the toll road at Kilometer 100 in Nuevo Laredo. Trucks continue to use the single-lane checkpoint, not realizing it's not in service, leading to a traffic bottleneck.
    - Ongoing construction at the bridge is causing traffic delays. The construction will expand the bridge from 3-lanes to 5-lanes. Current traffic levels are less than those of the World Trade Bridge.
    - Gloria Columbia Road, a toll road connecting to SH-255 in Nuevo Laredo towards Columbia, is under construction and anticipated to open in June. It is estimated that traffic will increase by 30 percent following the construction of the toll. SH-255 is currently only 2-lanes. Garza suggested increasing the capacity of SH-255 to accommodate future demands.
- An attendee shared that the federal government is investing in expanding the border checkpoint along I-35. He suggested TxDOT coordinate with the federal government to make this checkpoint more efficient.

Transit / Pedestrian / Bicycle Connectivity Challenges

- Jason Hinojosa shared that active transportation is disconnected. He explained that there is an effort to encourage pedestrians and cyclists to travel through creek ways as most pedestrians and cyclists currently share the road with car and truck traffic. Hinojosa explained that Laredo is limited in local funding and asked that TxDOT collaborate on efforts to improve pedestrian transit and connect off-street to local transit.
- Juan Mendive, with the Laredo-Webb County MPO, shared that the active transport plan identified that many cyclists utilize buses to get to the Mines Rd area. These are passengers who travel into the States from Nuevo Laredo to work in warehouses. Mines Rd lacks bike infrastructure and is highly trafficked by freight.
    - Jerry Moldonado suggested that Mines Rd is not safe for cyclists. With the weather over 100 degrees, and with the high freight traffic, he suggested including bicycle lanes would be a liability, especially for trucking companies.
    - Juan Mendive shared that Mines Rd is not only for the trucking industry. He stated that these efforts to isolate pedestrians and cyclists remove infrastructure for the people of Laredo, highlighting the importance of maintaining infrastructure for people.

Freight Rail Connectivity Challenges

- David Earl asked whether at-grade rail in downtown Laredo is still actively being used in warehouses in the city, or whether they are passing through. If trains are passing through, he asked whether it would be possible to eliminate at- grade crossings to make the city safer for pedestrians.
- Jolanda Prozzi responded that the red-colored rail line on the map is still active and is causing issues in mobility in Downtown.

- Henry Sauvigney, with IBC Bank, shared that his company office is located in downtown Laredo. Sauvigney explained that regulations require trains to continuously blow their horns at intersections, leading to several minutes of loud blasts when trains travel through downtown. He also shared that trains park in the downtown area for 15-20 minutes reducing mobility. He expressed concern that potential solutions such as developing underpasses for the rail would not be feasible when considering current regulatory requirements.

- Jose Reyes, with Original Food Co., shared that the downtown infrastructure was originally built for pedestrians and not cars; however, several cars drive and park in the area. This reduces pedestrian safety. Reyes suggested the development of public transport downtown to reduce car congestion and encourage pedestrian use.

- Jason Hinojosa added that the local government has spent funds on freight studies to determine issues with freight in the downtown area. Railway development continues and is projected to double. Hinojosa added that this is an environmental justice issue with a high volume of noise pollution. He hopes to highlight and voice the needs of the people of Laredo and emphasize the need to reduce at-grade railroad crossings downtown.

Connectivity between Border Crossings and Maritime Ports

- Jolanda Prozzi presented the Port-to-Port Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study focused on identifying levels of redundancy of connections among border crossings, potential needs, and potential/proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address challenges.

Feedback received

- Victor Salazar, with Trayecto, added that a short segment of the road could connect Mines Rd to El Indios near Eagle Pass. Eagle Pass has higher-weight rail transport, and this connection could improve resiliency by increasing connectivity. He added that there is resiliency in connecting the roadway northwest of Laredo in Mexico but not in Texas.

- Iliana Alvaro Garcia, with Garalh International, suggested that the riverside region is a development that can become a center point for trade and transportation. The region is a new and growing infrastructure for industrial parks and warehouses that meet the needs for perishable goods. It has connections to ports in Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros. Joint inspections allow for inspections to occur in record time. The region is well connected to important roads such as MEX 54 and US-83.

- An attendee suggested having a connection west of Mines Rd, and west of the Columbia Bridge. This connection would create a relief in traffic.

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Paula Dowell and Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to-Region Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. The focus of the presented study was to enhance multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to make travel safer and more efficient.

Study Goals

- Jerry Moldonado said that the customers of the trucking company decide which bridge the drivers should take. Usually, the customers prefer the World Trade Bridge. This prevents drivers from using the Columbia Bridge. Moldonado proposed that the trucking company should have the option to choose the bridge, depending on the traffic situation. Trucking companies are limited by the federal government in Mexico and some permit procedures from making such choices. However, Moldonado believes that allowing this flexibility would ease traffic congestion.

- Claudia Lagos Galindo appreciated Moldonado's suggestion and view of trucking companies, brokers, and businesses as partners. She explained that the political decisions in Mexico influence transportation regulation.

- Paula Dowell added that this feedback shows that several bottlenecks and transportation issues are regulatory, institutional, and operational rather than infrastructure related. She suggests that quantifying the economic cost of these regulatory bottlenecks would be persuasive.

- An attendee contributed to Moldonado's idea to give motor carriers the option to choose between the bridges, saying that there are other factors besides infrastructure and demand that affect traffic. He said that political turmoil, union actions, and security issues could impact traffic at bridges, so it would be useful for motor carriers to have the option of which bridge to use.

- Victor Salazar added that enhancing the movement of traffic at the bridges could have an impact on safety in the cities where trucks operate near pedestrians and cars.

- Graciela Briones, with the Laredo and Webb County Area MPO, explained that the MPO is bound by funding. The MPO has spent funds on studies to improve connectivity, however, funding is allocated based on population size. Laredo is the number one port in the country, but the funding does not consider the unique challenges of the area. This limitation hinders the region's planning, impacting not only local mobility but also operations at the state and national levels.

Border Region Socio-Economic Trends

- Gregorio Gomez, with Jaguar, stated that the City of Saltillo and the City of Monterey influence the economy in this region. Due to nearshoring, these areas are growing quickly. He suggested including the City of Saltillo in the study area.

- Carlos Mendoza Mendez explained that much of the data on growth in Mexico is experiential rather than quantitative. He explained that his company, INDEX, is sponsored by the World Back hoping to ascertain growth of companies in Mexico. INDEX represents over 1,200 companies in Mexico. The World Bank is supplying the same survey to other companies they represent.

    - Claudia Lagos Galindo asked to be included in this effort, and Mendoza Mendez said he could be in touch.

- Iliana Alvaro Garcia stated that the Roma–Ciudad Miguel Alemán International Bridge is currently crossing an average of 250 trucks daily. With growth and industrial investment in the region, she anticipates growth in crossings at this bridge.

- Francisco Marquez stated that currently there is confusion amongst investors regarding nearshoring. Marquez explained that there are three types of investment in Mexico: reinvestments of foreign companies already in Mexico, foreign companies coming to Mexico, and Mexican companies investing within the country. The media announces companies not yet in the country leading to confusion amongst investors.

Reasons Why Drivers Take Longer Routes Rather Than Shorter Routes

- Jerry Moldonado explained that drivers travel longer routes for security and compliance reasons. His trucking group is part of the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (CTPAT) program which restricts drivers from going through certain regions considered unsafe. This prevents drivers from going through Encinal, Texas, and other border cities.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo asked why these routes are considered dangerous.
    - Jerry Moldonado answered that issues with drugs and human trafficking largely make these regions unsafe. Drivers may encounter people trying to convince them to carry drugs or people. His group restricts cards from being charged for fueling in the unsafe region, to disincentivize travel here. If these shorter routes were made safer, trucking companies would use them, and routes would be more cost-efficient.
- An attendee added that another reason people take longer routes rather than shorter ones is that some of the shorter routes don't have adequate infrastructure or services. For example, the routes may only have one-lane traffic each way, making it more dangerous, or the route may be limited to one- lane traffic in each direction, creating a dangerous route. Alternatively, the route may have a shortage of gas stations or rest stops, making it less comfortable for drivers.

The Border Region Network's Existing Conditions

- An attendee thanked the hosts of the workshop. He stated that planning is a friend of investing and improvising is an enemy of investing. He emphasized that Laredo is vital to the economy and appreciated the data available to improve future planning.

Closing Remarks

- Roberto Rodriguez, with the Texas Department of Transportation Laredo District, shared updates on planned investments and improvements. The updates include but are not limited to improvements to FM-1427 (Mines Rd), Uniroyal Interchange, I-35, and US-59. Rodriguez shared that SH-84 connecting FM-1472 to I-35 West Frontage Road is anticipated to let in the next 2-3 months to reduce congestion near FM-3338. Rodriguez also shared that improvements to the intersection of I-35 with US-83 are funded and scheduled for 2027. Regarding the Laredo Outer Loop project, schematics are being developed for the Texas 20 Loop south to US-83, along with progress on other connections.

- Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo closed the meeting by thanking attendees for their feedback and conversation. They emphasized that first-hand user experience is invaluable for confirming data and identifying gaps. They added that attendees are welcome to contact the project team for one-on-one meetings.

Sign In Sheets

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Laredo Binational Workshop – May 21, 2024
Taller Binacional en Laredo – 21 de mayo de 2024

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Texas Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 21, 2024
Laredo, Texas
Page 11

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
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Taller Binacional en Laredo – 21 de mayo de 2024

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Texas Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 21, 2024
Laredo, Texas
Page 12

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Laredo Binational Workshop – May 21, 2024
Taller Binacional en Laredo – 21 de mayo de 2024

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Texas Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 21, 2024
Laredo, Texas
Page 13

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Laredo Binational Workshop – May 21, 2024
Taller Binacional en Laredo – 21 de mayo de 2024

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Texas Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 21, 2024
Laredo, Texas
Page 14

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Laredo Binational Workshop – May 21, 2024
Taller Binacional en Laredo – 21 de mayo de 2024

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Texas Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 21, 2024
Laredo, Texas
Page 15

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Laredo Binational Workshop – May 21, 2024
Taller Binacional en Laredo – 21 de mayo de 2024

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Texas Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 21, 2024
Laredo, Texas
Page 16

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Photographs

May 28, 2024, El Paso Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 1 El Paso, TX

Date and Time: May 28, 2024, at 1:00 pm (MT)

Location: El Paso Convention Center, One Civic Center Plaza, El Paso. TX 79901

Attendees: See sign in sheets

Agenda

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Workshop
El Paso, Texas
May 28, 2024

Agenda

1:00 PM to 1:15 PM	Welcome Remarks and Safety Minute	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT
1:15 PM to 1:30 PM	Opening Remarks	Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT
1:30 PM to 2:30 PM	First/Last Mile Connectivity	Jacobs
2:30 PM to 2:50 PM	Port to Port Connectivity	Jacobs
2:50 PM to 3:50 PM	Region to Region Connectivity	HNTB
3:50 PM to 4:00 PM	Closing Remarks	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting.

Claudia Lagos Galindo, International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, summarized studies presented including, First and Last mile, Port-to-Port, and Region- to-Region. Lagos Galindo emphasized that the focus of this meeting is to gather input from users of these systems to ascertain if topics have been comprehensively captured, identify further research, and pinpoint areas where solutions are needed. This input will be used in the studies.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in the B Attendance.

Presentations

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study reviewed multimodal (e.g., highway, rail, airport, seaport, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) infrastructure connectivity to the Texas-Mexico border crossings to identify needs and potential improvements. Dan Seedah, with Jacobs, discussed data sources for traffic volumes, levels of service, bottlenecks, speed, and crash statistics. Sarah Hay, with Rifeline, facilitated the discussion.

Highway Connectivity Challenges:

- An attendee shared that there is pedestrian traffic in both directions at the El Paso Stanton Port of Entry. This was not captured in the presented map.
- Jean-Francois Roy, with BRP, shared that he's observed bottlenecks in traffic move spatially throughout the day. He was curious whether the study could capture this.
- Marty Boyd, with TxDOT El Paso District, asked whether any data collected showed effects on traffic from the new Simulacra toll highway in Tornillo.
- Jolanda Prozzi shared that the study will investigate whether this can be visualized on the map.
- Mariana Barraza, with the County of El Paso, shared that her group is meeting with the company that finished construction on the toll road on Thursday, May 30, 2024. Following this meeting, she can share information with the study to add to inform the study.

Highway Connectivity Investments and Improvements:

- An attendee shared that the New Mexico Department of Transportation is planning to develop a connector through Sunland Park.
- Javier Acosta, with LJA, mentioned that there are four travel lanes on the US side of the Ysleta-Zaragoza bridge going to Mexico, while there is only one lane on the Mexico side. This leads to congestion.

- Jean-Francois Roy asked whether the study had updates regarding about efforts to improve technology and transportation in El Paso, with efforts similar to what has been done in the Port of Houston.
    - Kelvin Kroeker, with HNTB, clarified that this effort is known as the Green Corridor initiative, and offered to share information about this effort with Jolanda Prozzi.

Transit / Pedestrian / Bicycle Connectivity Challenges

- Jose Bocanegra, with the TxDOT El Paso District, mentioned that there is a lack of sidewalks in Fort Hancock. He explained that many children cross the border for school, but they do not have safe pathways.
    - Eduardo Calvo, with the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), mentioned that the presented transit map does not feature the E-Fast Pass service or the South Central Regional Transit District. The South Central Regional Transit District operates out of New Mexico but has stops in El Paso as well. It's important to note that, despite being on a smaller scale, this transit service should be included in the study.
    - Javier Acosta emphasized the importance of addressing the immigration and migrant situation. He mentioned that approximately one thousand people commute between Juarez and El Paso, leading to traffic bottlenecks.
        - Mariana Barraza, with the County of El Paso, clarified that bridges are not closed when migrants cross. She also mentioned that the Paso Del Norte bridge is the only bridge in El Paso where migrants are accepted by appointment with the US Customs and Border Patrol.
- Claudia Garcia, with Sun Metro, shared the following regarding the Sun Metro transit:
    - The Sun Metro is collaborating with the Texas Department of Transportation to add two new bus stops along with crosswalks in the City.
    - Although buses do have stops in downtown, it becomes challenging for them to reach their terminus during peak hours.
    - There is no bus stop on the south side of the Texas 375 Loop at the Ysleta- Zaragoza bridge, as there is no safe area for the bus to stop. However, the City is exploring the possibility of adding bus stops at both ends of the bridge.
- The city has secured funding through the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program to conduct a study on the traffic on Stanton Street, which has experienced a significant increase due to the I-10 Connect, particularly during peak times
- Claudia Escudero, with the Mexican Consulate, mentioned that streets in Santa Teresa, Mexico are being blocked by oversized load trucks.
- Juan Acereto, with the City of Juarez, emphasized the need to acknowledge the issues with migrants and bridge management to find solutions. He mentioned that the Mexican government is facing funding challenges and expressed hope for a positive relationship between the US Customs and Border Patrol and Mexico. Emphasizing the importance of collaboration, he noted the absence of shared technologies at the bridges and called for resilience and local cooperation, regardless of changing political climates.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo agreed with Acereto's sentiments.

- Eduardo Calvo emphasized the importance of Acereto's statement. He suggested that at a local level, El Paso and Juarez should acknowledge and address problems and seek solutions. He stressed that relying on the federal government is not feasible, as it is challenging to influence federal politics at the local level. He emphasized the need for collaboration between the two countries to find solutions.

- Eduardo Ramos, with Logistica Soft, expressed gratitude to TxDOT for hosting the meeting. He emphasized the importance of creating a political environment that fosters collaboration. He also highlighted the significance of Juarez in the global economy and suggested that the study include a comprehensive map that shows the origin and destination of products traveling from Asia, through Mexico, through Houston to Europe, and beyond.

    - Claudia Lagos Galindo mentioned that Ramos's aim to illustrate the roles of Texas and Mexico in the global supply chain aligns with the upcoming update to the Border Transportation Master Plan.

    - Javier Acosta stated that including this economic perspective is crucial. He revealed that Juarez exported goods worth 5 million dollars.

Connectivity between Border Crossings and Maritime Ports

- Jolanda Prozzi and Dan Seedah presented the Port-to-Port Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study focused on identifying levels of redundancy of connections among border crossings, potential needs, and potential/proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address challenges.

- Eduardo Calvo asked what tools were used by the study to determine wait times at border crossings.

    - Dan Seedah explained that the analysis used a travel demand model in combination with travel time.

- Eduardo Calvo emphasized the importance of understanding how significant decisions or events can impact the resilience of trade and travel. For instance, if a bridge were to close to trucks, a weather event occurred, or a political decision was made, it would be crucial to understand the potential impact on trade.

- A participant mentioned that infrastructure must be able to withstand political decisions. In the past fall, bridges were slowed down due to the transportation of migrants. As a result, companies decided to spend 3 million dollars to airfreight their cargo to Laredo instead of using the slow-moving bridges. He also mentioned that the regulatory requirement for K-9 inspections for goods transported across the border has caused delays in transportation in Juarez. He stressed the importance of having sufficient personnel at the bridges.

- Claudia Garcia suggested the project leads contact the Texas Transportation Institute for more data on pedestrian travel across bridges.

- Gerardo Fierro, with the El Paso MPO, mentioned that additional personnel from the Agencia Nacional de Aduanas de México are required at the Ysleta-Zaragoza bridge. He also suggested that the existing infrastructure should be enhanced to facilitate customs administration. Furthermore, he proposed conducting a joint study involving Aduanas and the US Customs and Border Patrol to measure crossing times.

- Eduardo Ramos asked that economic growth and benefits to business be discussed. Often, decisions are made based on historical patterns rather than what may be most logistically efficient.

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Paula Dowell and Will Smithson from HNTB presented a study on Region-to-Region Connectivity, which was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to make travel safer and more efficient.

Study Goals:

- Eduardo Ramos suggested adding logistics as a study goal.
- Gerardo Fierro asked whether municipalities such as Chihuahua and San Pedro were included in the study, as they were not marked on the presented map.
    - Paula Dowell explained that the study included regions beyond the border area, such as Chihuahua and San Pedro in Mexico, and Austin and San Antonio in Texas. However, the map emphasizes the main areas from which most of the data were collected, encompassing regions with nearshoring and growth.

Border Region Socio-Economic Trends:

- An attendee shared that in Chihuahua, an area equivalent in size to 55 football fields has been developed for industrial use. However, employment in the region has declined in 2023 and through the beginning of 2024. Mexico has increased labor costs, affecting the growth of businesses in the nation. Several companies are relocating to Mexico, including Foxconn and their affiliated companies. The growth potential in Chihuahua is steady and exemplified by the growing infrastructure. One obstacle in Chihuahua is satisfying electricity demands as current electrical facilities do not meet demands.

Reasons Why Drivers Take Longer Routes Rather Than Shorter Routes:

- An attendee suggested that longer routes are taken because shorter routes have traffic lights, which slow down truck travel.
- Gerardo Fierro suggested that shorter routes may have narrower roadways which are less safe for truck traffic.
- Paula Dowell pointed out that in addition to road conditions such as width and speed, access to facilities could also influence route choices.
- Gerardo Fierro added that logistics companies often pay transporters based on the shortest route, but hired trucking companies sometimes still take the longer routes. Fierro acknowledged that amenities affect route choice.

The Border Region Network's Existing Conditions:

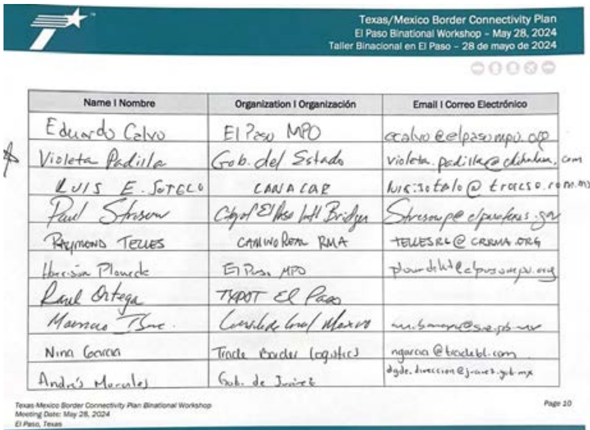
- Eduardo Calvo explained that in El Paso, east-west traffic moves through I-10. He asked the study to clarify whether they were seeking alternative east- west roadways.
- Will Smithson pointed out that El Paso is unique because of its proximity to the interstate. He noted that other border areas do not have quick access to east-west routes.
- Eduardo Calvo expressed curiosity about the volume of traffic from El Paso to Laredo, and the reasons behind it.
- Harrison Plourde, from the El Paso MPO, mentioned that trucking companies opt for longer routes away from the border to reach facilities. He also noted that private sector amenities are crucial for truckers and doesn't foresee the same level of development in amenities along US-90 as on I-10 or I-35. According to him, this is because US-90 lacks the traffic and population to support private sector growth. He raised the question of whether public investment in remote areas would be valuable without subsequent private investment.
    - Will Smithson explained that the study wants to measure the cost of trucks traveling longer distances in order to determine the value of investing in private sector amenities and other infrastructure for shorter routes.

- Gerardo Fierro asked the TxDOT El Paso District whether plans are underway to improve the two-lane roadway to Presidio.
    - Marty Boyd answered that as part of the US-67 study, there are plans to improve the roadway in areas where there is high traffic volume and widening is necessary. Currently, the focus is on enhancing safety and adding more passing lanes. However, the long-term goal is to expand US-67, particularly near Presidio.
- Javier Garza, with FWS Logistics, asked whether the study is only considering trade and transportation at the regional level, or whether the study will consider global supply chains. is considering trade and transportation regionally or globally. He mentioned that gathering data from logistics groups could enhance growth within Texas, but also noted that Mexico is a significant market for finished products. Garza recently attended a meeting in Manzanillo, a crucial seaport in Mexico, where the focus was on improving technologies for efficient global export to Europe, Asia, and Canada.
    - Paula Dowell and Will Smithson emphasized that the project team is thinking globally, and although the focus of the current meeting is on regional transportation, the team recognizes that these efforts are considering the global economy.
    - Javier Garza emphasized that global trade and transportation information should not be limited to logistics companies but should also involve government entities. Governments have access to data regarding the types of goods coming into and leaving ports, as well as their destinations and origins. Garza recommended including assessments for Asia, Europe, and Canada.

Closing Remarks

Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

Sign In Sheets



Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
El Paso Binational Workshop – May 28, 2024
Taller Binacional en El Paso – 28 de mayo de 2024

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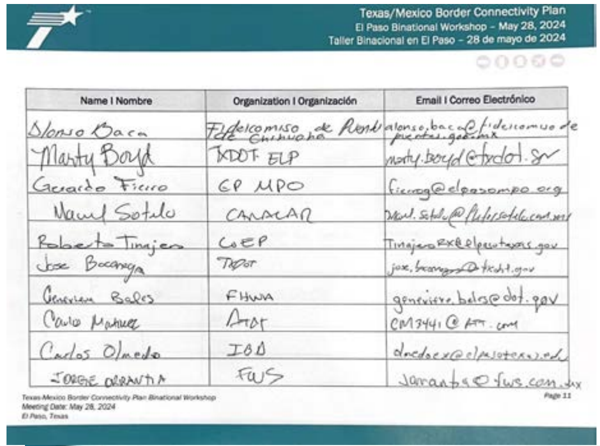
Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 28, 2024
El Paso, Texas
Page 10



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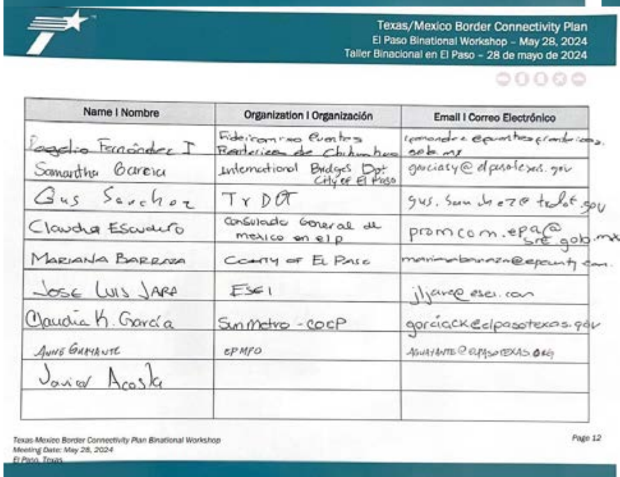
Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 28, 2024
El Paso, Texas
Page 11



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El Paso Binational Workshop – May 28, 2024
Taller Binacional en El Paso – 28 de mayo de 2024

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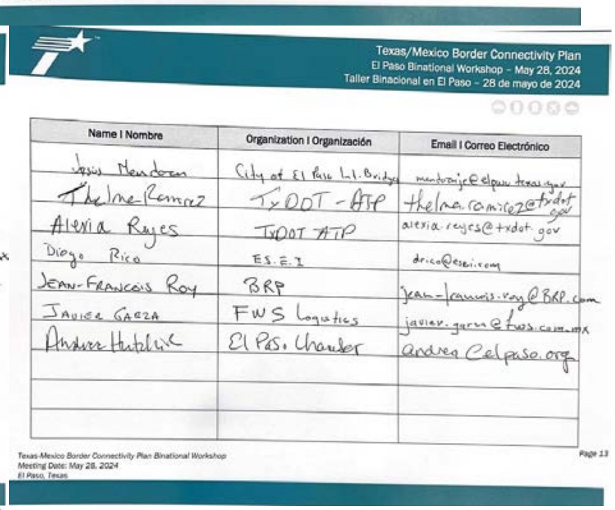
Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 28, 2024
El Paso, Texas
Page 12



Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
El Paso Binational Workshop – May 28, 2024
Taller Binacional en El Paso – 28 de mayo de 2024

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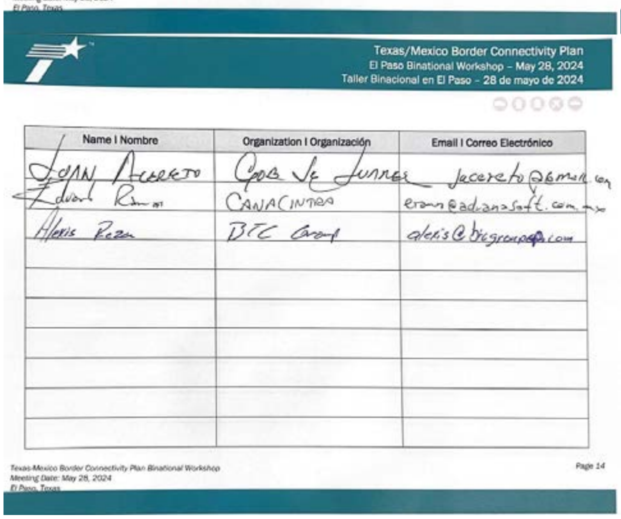
Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 28, 2024
El Paso, Texas
Page 13



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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 28, 2024
El Paso, Texas
Page 14

Photographs

May 29, 2024, Presidio Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 1 Presidio, TX

Date and Time: May 29, 2024, at 9:30 am (CT)

Location: Presidio Activity Center, 1200 E O'Reilly St., Presidio, TX 79845

Attendees: See sign in sheets

Agenda

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Workshop
Presidio, Texas
May 29, 2024

Agenda

9:30 AM to 9:45 AM	Welcome Remarks and Safety Minute	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT
9:45 AM to 10:00 AM	Opening Remarks	Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT
10:00 AM to 11:00 AM	First/Last Mile Connectivity	Jacobs
11:00 AM to 11:20 PM	Port to Port Connectivity	Jacobs
11:20 AM to 12:20 PM	Region to Region Connectivity	HNTB
12:20 PM to 12:40 PM	Box Lunch Distribution	
12:40 PM to 1:40 PM	Truck Parking Study	HNTB
1:40 PM to 1:45 PM	Closing Remarks	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting.

Andrew Canon, Director of International Trade, Freight, and Corridor Planning with TxDOT, presented the safety minutes, which focused on truck driver safety. Claudia Lagos Galindo, International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, introduced studies presented, including First and Last Mile, Port-to-Port, Region-to- Region, and Truck Parking. Lagos Galindo emphasized that the focus of this meeting is to gather input from users of these systems to ascertain if topics have been comprehensively captured, identify further research, and pinpoint areas where solutions are needed. This input will be used in the studies.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in B. Attendance.

Presentations

First/Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study reviewed multimodal (e.g., highway, rail, airport, seaport, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) infrastructure connectivity to the Texas-Mexico border crossings to identify needs and potential improvements. Dan Seedah, with Jacobs, discussed data sources for traffic volumes, levels of service, bottlenecks, speed, and crash statistics.

Feedback on Data Sources

- Don Deitch, with the TxDOT Alpine area office, offered to share data on crash hotspots with the study including data that is not in the Crash Records Information System (CRIS).
- John Fergeson, Mayor of Presidio, shared that roads from Ojinaga to Presidio are insufficient and poor in quality and capacity. Fergeson suggested contacting officials in Ojinaga to obtain crash hotspot data.
- Gamaliel Bustillos, with the Mexican Consulate, suggested the team should obtain data from the Centinela toll booth. Bustillos agreed with John Fergeson, stating that the Mexican Consulate has connections with several government offices in Mexico and would be willing to share information to help the study.
- Hildeliza Saenz, the Director of Economic and Tourism Development of Ojinaga, discussed a highway project that would link Chihuahua, Ojinaga, and Camargo. The current condition of this federal highway is poor, and it experiences heavy traffic. However, progress on this project has been slow. Other projects in Chihuahua are also focused on improving transportation connectivity from the border to the central part of the state.
- Jose Portillo, Presidio County Judge, shared that companies in the Permian Basin utilize a chemical called Baryte for oil and gas drilling. Múzquiz produces Baryte and could be a good partner in the international trade of this product.

Highway Connectivity Challenges

- Isidoro Montoya, from the private sector, inquired about the certified dimensions for oversized and overweight vehicles and asked if US-67 is certified for carrying such vehicles.
- Jolanda Prozzi explained that in Presidio, oversize or overweight vehicles can drive on US-67 with appropriate permits for moving indivisible loads. However, the road itself is not designated as a heavy-weight corridor.
- Isidoro Montoya mentioned that trucking companies are unable to transport oversized vehicles larger than 14 feet tall or wide due to infrastructure limitations. There are areas where the roads are too narrow or have frequent traffic stops, such as in Fort Davis. Trucking companies may choose to avoid these routes due to the risk of accidents with smaller vehicles. Montoya emphasized the potential for growth at the Ojinaga-Presidio port, which could create jobs and reduce unemployment in the region. Montoya also mentioned losing contracts with companies due to poor road conditions in Mexico and preferring to travel through Santa Teresa instead of Ojinaga- Presidio.
- Stan Meador, with Texas-Pacifico, shared that future freight rail could help bypass some issues related to oversized and overweight transportation.
    - Don Deitch explained that trucking companies need to obtain a permit for transporting oversized loads. They then receive a route to reach their destination. Deitch shared the following regarding transporting oversized loads in the region: Currently, heavy loads can reach Marfa, but there are clearance issues for truckers traveling east and west on US-90 from Marfa.
    - A corridor study for US-90 is underway to address these low clearance areas, but it will likely take at least 5-10 years before any solutions are implemented.
    - The current route for heavy-sized loads is from Marfa north on SH-17 to Fort Davis, and from there, trucks can either travel east or continue north on SH-17 to I-10 to go west.
- Isela Nunez, with Pipa, mentioned that Presidio has been involved in US-67 studies and freight studies. The findings from these studies could help in addressing the current transportation needs of companies. Nunez also mentioned that the Mexican Consul has played a supportive role in expanding the staff at the Ojinaga-Presidio port.
- John Fergeson pointed out that there is no exit booth for truckers on US-67. An exit booth is a place at the US border where truckers submit documents to the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) when they are heading toward Mexico. Because there is no exit booth, drivers have to stop on the shoulder to hand over their paperwork, posing a safety issue. Fergeson was unsure whether the responsibility for constructing an exit booth falls under TxDOT's jurisdiction or CBP's.
    - Guadalupe Catano, with the CBP, shared that he was uncertain about which jurisdiction would be responsible for the construction of an exit booth. He mentioned that CBP needs investment in infrastructure and personnel to expand. Currently, there are four lanes that the CBP can operate, but due to a lack of personnel, not all lanes remain open.
    - Clay Slack, with RCS Inc., and owner of the port of entry, shared that an exit booth would be in TxDOT's right of way. His group would be willing to collaborate with TxDOT to facilitate the construction of an exit booth.
    - John Fergeson said that Presidio and Ojinaga became a route for transmigrantes a few years ago. Transmigrantes are people who buy used goods, like cars, in the US and sell them in Latin America. Transmigrantes drive slowly and often tow vehicles. They stop on the shoulder near the bridge to prepare their materials, but this is unsafe. Fergeson suggested increasing parking spaces near the border and turning lanes throughout the US-67 corridor for transmigrantes.

Safety and Crash Hotpots

Don Deitch explained that the region has accidents that don't involve police. Some of these accidents are recorded by TxDOT Alpine but are not updated in the CRIS. Deitch offered to share these records.

Antonio Sanchez, from Transportes y Multiservicios Victoria, mentioned that he served as the Mayor of Ojinaga 24 years ago. He had a vision of connecting Ojinaga-Presidio with Dallas and Long Beach, California. Sanchez expressed that Ojinaga has seen significant growth in recent years but emphasized the need for better planning and infrastructure, particularly in improving water quality and waste management services. He shared that the Presidio-Ojinaga port is crucial for cattle transportation. The federal highway in Mexico near Ojinaga is currently a rural Class C highway, and there are proposals to upgrade it to Class B to accommodate heavier vehicles, but this is challenging under the federal government. Sanchez offered to share a plan to enhance the future vision of Ojinaga. Finally, Sanchez mentioned that transmigrantes are discouraged from crossing at Ojinaga-Presidio due to stricter inspections compared to other ports.

Transit / Pedestrian / Bicycle Connectivity Challenges

- John Fergeson stated that Presidio has a transit bus service with two departures and two arrivals. There is also an international bus service, from Chihuahua to Dallas to Houston.
- Guadalupe Catano shared that there is an increase in bus traffic through the Ojinaga-Presidio bridge. Approximately 10-15 buses cross each week, and most buses cross on Wednesdays and Thursdays. These buses carry approximately 40 passengers.

Freight Rail Connectivity Challenges

- Stan Meador shared that since 2018, there have been ongoing upgrades to the rail infrastructure between Chihuahua and Alpine. These upgrades include the reconstruction of a bridge on the Mexican side in 2018 and on the U.S. side in 2019. Further infrastructure enhancements were completed in 2020 and 2021. However, the rail has not been operational yet, as a customs and border inspection facility is still needed. Over $40 million has been invested in the rail line in the region from 2018 to 2021, without any financial return. Regarding the status of the customs and border inspection facility, Meador shared:
    - The contract between TxDOT and the contractor that will build the customs and border facility was approved on March 28 and has been executed.
- The contractor has worked with TxDOT and the business is family-run. Meador feels confident in them.
- The contractor has started to order specialized materials that have longer lead time, such as cameras, but physical construction on the grounds has yet to begin.
- The contract allows for 340 workdays, or 1.5 calendar years for the contractor to complete the work; however, there is hope the customs and border facility will be completed sooner.
- Jolanda Prozzi asked whether more investment is needed in the rail line, or whether the current infrastructure is adequate.

- Stan Meador answered that the infrastructure is sufficient, and any future investments will be deferred until the rail line is operational. However, Meador anticipates that once the bridge opens begins to attract traffic, the rail may experience capacity limitations. Meador is collaborating with partners at CBP to discuss staffing. Texas-Pacifico is currently forecasting that 12,000 railcars will run on the line in the first six months, and this number will double in the following year. To accommodate this increased capacity, an additional $50-55 million investment would be required for the South Orient line in the US.
- Jose Portillo asked whether Meador has had conversations with CBP to identify a low-risk rail partner that could be pre-inspected in Mexico, which would enable the rail line traffic to commence.
- Stan Meador answered that this discussion has taken place, but pointed out that pre-inspection doesn't cover all risks. He also mentioned that in the future, nonintrusive inspection methods such as x-rays will be implemented and tested, which will facilitate smoother inspections.
    - Vicky Carrasco asked if the study is to include San Angelo and other cities along the US-67 corridor in freight discussions.

Connectivity between Border Crossings and Maritime Ports

Jolanda Prozzi presented the Port-to-Port Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study focused on identifying levels of redundancy of connections among border crossings, potential needs, and potential/proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address challenges.

- Jose Portillo shared that Topolobampo is a historically underused seaport city with existing rail.
- Jose Portillo shared that when United Auto Workers threatened to strike, ports in El Paso and Eagle Pass were affected, and Presidio saw an increase in truck traffic.
- Pablo Rodriguez, with the City of Presidio, mentioned that in 2008, a flood in Ojinaga-Presidio prevented teachers living in Ojinaga from reaching Presidio. These teachers had to take a 13-hour route through El Paso to get to Presidio.
- Isidoro Montoya added to Rodriguez's point, mentioning that the 2008 flood happened due to the swelling of Rio Concho and Rio Bravo. This floodplain makes Chihuahua and Presidio vulnerable, underscoring the importance of having alternative routes.
- Jose Portillo shared that the levee was reconstructed following the flood, but no flood study has been conducted since then. Portillo has been working with the International Water Boundary Council and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to conduct a flood study in the next 60 to 90 days.
- Ramon Carrasco, with Kleinman Consultants, further explained Portillo's point, stating that the drainage study will include a 100-year and 500-year flood.
- Stan Meador mentioned that there may have been a flood study done since the levee was reconstructed, as the reconstruction led to a mandatory increase in the height of the rail bridge.
- Ramon Carrasco clarified that a study was conducted following the 2008 flood, which led to the construction of the levee and likely the need to increase the height of the rail bridge. The new study being conducted by the International Water Boundary Council and FEMA will update the designation of flood zones in the region.

- Jose Portillo added that an updated flood map would also benefit the growth of businesses. Currently, homes and businesses face difficulty in obtaining insurance due to being mapped within the flood zone. The updated FEMA maps would improve the ability to obtain insurance.
    - An attendee mentioned that Ojinaga is at risk of flooding due to swollen rivers and unusually heavy rains. The storm drains are unable to handle the rain, and when flooding occurs, vehicle traffic on bridges in Ojinaga comes to a halt, causing congestion.

- Cesar Carrasco, from Ojinaga, mentioned that the Ojinaga-Presidio port lacks modern technologies to facilitate border crossings. Carrasco shared that the infrastructure in Ojinaga is inadequate for trucks. As a result, trucks transporting produce from Chihuahua prefer to use ports in McAllen instead of going through Ojinaga-Presidio due to these infrastructure issues.

- Stan Meador indicated that there is a growing interest in Mexican ports near the Pacific Ocean. Ferromex has connections to many ports in Mexico near the Pacific, and these rail lines connect through Texas-Pacifico to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. However, there are limitations to the route out of Topolobampo based on tunnels and bridges along the rail line. Topolobampo is primarily a bulk port and can transport commodities such as fertilizer, grain, and other light materials. These lighter materials can also be transported on the current rail line. Other ports that potentially can be connected via rail include the Port of Manzanillo and the Port of Mazatlán.

- An attendee offered to share a presentation on a plan called Cruse Transístmico, an effort to improve transportation across Mexico to improve its connections and trade with US, Asia, and Europe. This plan shows how transportation across Mexico can serve as an alternative to the Panama Canal.

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Paula Dowell, with HNTB, and Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to- Region Connectivity Study. This study was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan with the focus on enhancing multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to make travel safer and more efficient.

Border Region Socio-Economic Trends

- Severo Santiago, with the Agencia Nacional de Aduanas de México, shared that the Aduanas are operating from 9 AM to 5 PM at the request of the CBP, rather than 8 AM to 6 PM. Cattle move across the port, and the export of watermelon is growing. He emphasized that it is vital to ensure that the Aduanas and CBP are well-staffed to ensure continual transport, especially of perishable goods.

- Jose Portillo explained that the USDA office responsible for inspecting in Presidio is based out of New Mexico. It's difficult to attract personnel and veterinarians to come to Presidio for health inspection of cattle. After processing, meat from cattle, including delicacies such as the cow's head, tongue, bone, and bone marrow, which are not consumed in the US, is transported back to Mexico. Mexico is largely supplementing the beef supply in the US.

- John Kennedy, with the City of Presidio, shared a planned development for an industrial park west of the city center. This industrial park will be used for geothermal energy and agricultural processing. There are plans to pave and improve routes from Van Horn and Ruidosa to this industrial park.

- Paula Dowell asked to exchange information with John Kennedy to learn more about the City's plans.
- Isela Nunez mentioned that the port of entry needs to expand to accommodate the transmigrants. The current port of entry causes significant delays, particularly during holidays. Nunez stated that people are now traveling from Presidio to Canada, and businesses recognize the potential for growth at the port. Additionally, the port lacks a hazardous materials officer. Having the ability to transport hazardous materials would facilitate trade expansion.
    - Stan Meador stated that efforts to have the Ojinaga-Presidio port become a hazardous materials transporter have been underway for 2.5 years. He is hopeful to receive this designation.

Reasons Why Drivers Take Longer Routes Rather Than Shorter Routes

- Isidoro Montoya stressed that the poor road conditions in Mexico make drivers choose longer routes, traveling through El Paso instead of Presidio. The road in Ojinaga through Chihuahua is rural. Montoya offered to share GPS data from trucks.
- Don Deitch reiterated that commercial traffic primarily travels through US-67 north and south of Marfa. East of Marfa in Van Horn, a railroad underpass is 14 feet tall and limits the passage of trucks. West of Marfa, in Alpine, there is a low crossing of about 13.5 feet. Most trucks then take SH-17 north towards I-10, but this roadway is winding and is difficult for trucks to drive.

The Border Region Network's Existing Conditions

- Antonio Sanchez shared that the roadway in Ojinaga is classified as semirural. These roads are not suitable for truck traffic. The roadway would be sufficient if constructed as a Class B roadway. Sanchez asked how roadways in Texas, presented on the map, were classified.

- Will Smithson explained that roadways in the US are similarly classified as interstates, minor arterials, or collectors. Smaller roads are not convenient for trucks or may have safety issues. Roads of all classification types were displayed on the map.
- Don Deitch shared that US-67 becomes heavily traveled during the holidays.
- Don Deitch shared that service is spotty along US-67, and drivers are distracted while driving by the many notifications they receive when reconnected to the network. Several fatal accidents have occurred on the corridor.
- Antonio Sanchez shared that the roadway in Ojinaga is classified as semirural. These roads are not suitable for truck traffic. The roadway would be sufficient if constructed as a Class B roadway. Sanchez asked how roadways in Texas, presented on the map, were classified.
- Don Deitch shared that service is spotty along US-67, and drivers are distracted while driving by the many notifications they receive when reconnected to the network. Several fatal accidents have occurred on the corridor.
    - Portillo agreed that the intermittent signal makes drivers lose focus. Portillo shared that US-67 has a higher-than-average number of crashes. Many Presidio workers commute to the city after long oil field shifts outside of town. Portillo proposed that US-67 have more lights at curves and rest stops
- Alexis Amanero, with Presidio ISD, added that safety and visibility on US-67 need to be improved, especially for students and coaches who frequently travel at night by bus from events outside of town.

Truck Parking Study

Kale Driemeier, Freight and International Trade Planner with TxDOT, Vicky Carrasco, with Kleinman Consultants, Ramon Carrasco, with Kleinman Consultants, and Brian Comer, with HNTB, presented the El Paso and West Texas Truck Parking Study. This regional study was the result of a 2020 statewide study that looked at truck parking throughout the state.

- Regarding the US-67 Opportunity Site:
    - Ramon Carrasco shared that the land at this opportunity site is already owned by TxDOT and is closer to Presidio. Other sites can be built northward towards Marfa.
    - Jose Portillo mentioned that this improvement would greatly benefit the region. Big Bend State Park, the soon-to-open Chinati Mountains State Natural Area, and Big Bend National Park all draw tourists. The rest area will likely be utilized by tourists and other road users.
    - Don Deitch inquired about the number of trucks that could be accommodated in the facility.
        - Ramon Carrasco mentioned that the facility could accommodate 25 vehicles, with additional flexible space available for trucks that do not fit into a typical parking spot.
- Regarding other elements to include in the TxDOT-supported parking site in Presidio:
    - John Kennedy importance of including the park in city planning efforts. Kennedy will include consider the park in city planning efforts, for example, incorporating shaded sidewalks and planting trees for green infrastructure near the parking site.
    - Don Deitch praised coordination efforts with local companies for this project.
    - Clay Slack agreed that this space near the port would benefit the customers, the state, the county, and the city.

Closing Remarks

Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo closed the meeting by thanking attendees for their feedback and conversation. They emphasized that first-hand user experience is invaluable for confirming data and identifying gaps. They added that attendees are welcome to contact the project team for one-on-one meetings.

Sign In Sheets

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Presidio Binational Workshop – May 29, 2024
Taller Binacional en Presidio – 29 de mayo de 2024

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Natalia Valdez	Consula de México	
John T. Kennedy	City of Presidio/PMDD	john@bigbend.bike
Alexis [illegible]	PISD/PMDD	[illegible]@gmail.com
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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 29, 2024
Presidio, Texas
Page 13

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Presidio Binational Workshop – May 29, 2024
Taller Binacional en Presidio – 29 de mayo de 2024

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Adrian Flores	Big Bend Pest Control River Guide	
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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 29, 2024
Presidio, Texas
Page 14

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Presidio Binational Workshop – May 29, 2024
Taller Binacional en Presidio – 29 de mayo de 2024

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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 29, 2024
Presidio, Texas
Page 15

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Presidio Binational Workshop – May 29, 2024
Taller Binacional en Presidio – 29 de mayo de 2024

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Jose Portillo	County of Presidio	countyjudge@co.presidio.tx.us
Genevieve Bales	USDOT - FHWA	genevieve.bales@dot.gov

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: May 29, 2024
Presidio, Texas
Page 16

Photographs

June 12, 2024, Del Rio Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Notes

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 1 Del Rio, TX

Date and Time: June 12, 2024, at 10:00 am (CT)

Location: Del Rio Civic Center, 1915 Veterans Blvd, Del Rio, TX 78840

Attendees: See sign in sheets

Agenda

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Workshop
Del Rio, Texas
June 12, 2024

Agenda

10:00 AM to 10:10 AM	Welcome Remarks and Safety Minute	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT
10:10 AM to 10:20 AM	Opening Remarks	Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT
10:20 AM to 11:20 AM	First/Last Mile Connectivity	Jacobs
11:20 AM to 11:40 PM	Port to Port Connectivity	Jacobs
11:40 AM to 12:40 PM	Region to Region Connectivity	HNTB
12:40 PM to 12:50 PM	Break	
12:50 PM to 2:50 PM	US 90 Corridor Study	Michael Baker International
2:50 PM to 3:00 PM	Closing Remarks	Ms. Marvina Cephas International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT Mrs. Claudia Lagos-Galindo International Trade and Border Planning Manager, TxDOT

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting.

Robert Ryan, with ICF, presented safety minutes focused on heat safety. Marvina Cephas introduced studies presented, including First and Last Mile, Port-to-Port, Region-to-Region, and United States Highway 90 (US-90) Corridor. Claudia Lagos Galindo, International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT emphasized that the focus of this meeting is to gather input from users of these systems to ascertain if topics have been comprehensively captured, identify further research, and pinpoint areas where solutions are needed. This input will be used in the studies.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in B. Attendance.

Presentations

First/Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study reviewed multimodal (e.g., highway, rail, airport, seaport, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) infrastructure connectivity to the Texas-Mexico border crossings to identify needs and potential improvements. Dan Seedah, with Jacobs, discussed data sources for traffic volumes, levels of service, bottlenecks, speed, and crash statistics.

Feedback on data sources

- Trinidad Herrera, from the Economic Development Office of Acuña, suggested that the study should obtain information from the Secretary of Infrastructure and Public Works for the state of Coahuila. Currently, the Secretary of Infrastructure and Public Works has a master plan to develop their roadways and work on the international bridges in Acuña and Piedras Negras. Herrera offered to help connect with the office of the Secretary of Infrastructure and Public Works.
- Israel Villareal, with Puerto Verde shared that an industrial park is under development in Acuña. This park has over 50,000 workers, and the city of Acuña has plans to improve connectivity between this industrial park and Del Rio. He suggested reaching out to the City of Acuña to obtain detailed plans.
    - Iris Arias, with CANACINTRA Acuña, offered to help obtain more information on these development plans.

Highway Connectivity Challenges

- Israel Villareal, with Puerto Verde, shared that it has been challenging to find connectivity from Puerto Verde to US-277 and from there, to US-57. A study conducted by the Perryman Group has shown that in the next 20-30 years, Puerto Verde will have an increase in traffic that would exceed the current traffic flow in Laredo. With the expected commercial increase in the area, it is important to have good planning and communication for further development of the area.

- Claudio Lagos Galindo asked for clarification on what type of traffic the presidential permit issued for Puerto Verde allows for.
- Israel Villareal clarified the presidential permit for Puerto Verde focuses on freight rail transport, but also allows for commercial freight vehicles to cross.
- Claudia Lagos Galindo asked whether Puerto Verde would be willing to share data from the study conducted by the Perryman Group with TxDOT.
- Israel Villareal stated that he would discuss with Ruben Garibay, CEO of Puerto Verde, the possibility of sharing the study with TxDOT. He mentioned that sharing information from the document can ensure that infrastructure planning is done well.
- Placido Madera, from the City of Eagle Pass, mentioned that after crossing the bridges in Eagle Pass into the US, road traffic intersects with railroad crossings. The train traffic often creates traffic jams for vehicles, and there are a limited number of overpasses available to bypass the railways. Madera also noted that most traffic entering Eagle Pass from Mexico continues northward toward San Antonio on US-57. US-57 allows for a speed limit of 80 miles per hour, but there is not a large enough median between travel lanes in opposite directions. This creates a safety concern due to high-speed traffic and oncoming headlights causing visibility issues.

- Morris Libson, with the Eagle Pass Maverick County Economic Development Alliance, shared that roadway infrastructure needs to meet the growth occurring in Eagle Pass. He noted that Puerto Verde, the Camino Real International Bridge (Eagle Pass International Bridge II), and the Acuña II-Del Rio International Bridge are being developed or growing, and TxDOT needs to invest in infrastructure to meet the anticipated increases in traffic. Libson suggested developing infrastructure parallel to Interstate 35 (I-35). He acknowledged that the US-90 corridor study initiative and the I-27 Ports-to-Plains project will also improve connectivity.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo agreed with Morris Libson stating that Piedras Negras, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, and Acuña are the heart of I-27 Ports-to-Plains. She highlighted that Texas has 28 international bridges and six railroad crossings today. This number is growing, new presidential permits are being administered, and more applications for presidential permits are in the queue. She mentioned that TxDOT will continue to work to support this growth.
- Gabriela Sanchez, from the Municipal Presidency of Zaragoza Coahuila, mentioned that they are a municipality between Acuña and US-57. She noted that the infrastructure in Zaragoza is not adequate for heavy loads. For example, individuals have to lift electricity and telephone wiring when driving through to prevent damaging them. This leads to congestion at each block in the small town. Sanchez shared that Morelos is another city between Acuña and US-57, and it too does not have the infrastructure to allow for heavy loads to pass through.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo noted Zaragoza and Morelos are considered in the bypass master plan which is in place. She shared that the plan seeks to divert border traffic through bypass routes rather than through local traffic, to promote quality of life in border communities.
- Sandra Fuentes, from the Border Organization, mentioned that US-90 needs to be widened from Del Rio to San Antonio, especially in the section from Del Rio to Uvalde. Fuentes also added that more personnel are needed at Ports of Entry in Del Rio, as the lack of personnel has been causing congestion.

Transit / Pedestrian / Bicycle Connectivity Challenges

- Mary Aguero, with the Southwest Area Regional Transit District, mentioned that she would pass information along to Sarah

- Placido Madera highlighted that when Eagle Pass was first developed, pedestrian and bicycle initiatives were not given much attention. However, with the city's growth, there is now an increased focus on enhancing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. The acquisition cost of the right of way for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is a challenge. Currently, the sidewalks, which are typically 4 feet wide, are shared by pedestrians, cyclists, and electric scooters and need improvement. As the region serves lower-income communities, it is crucial to enhance pedestrian and bicycle pathways in Eagle Pass and at the bridges leading to Piedras Negras.
- Sandra Fuentes shared that the Ciudad Acuña- Del Rio International Bridge, is unique from points of entry in Laredo and Eagle Pass. The Acuña-Del Rio port of entry lacks sidewalks for pedestrians, bikes and scooters.
    - Jose Castillo, from the City of Del Rio, has informed us that there is a sidewalk to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists from the Ciudad Acuña- Del Rio International Bridge up to Alderete Ln. At the moment, there is no sidewalk past Alderete Ln, but efforts are underway to extend the sidewalks further.
- Omar Costilla, from the TxDOT Laredo District, mentioned that there is a lack of data in Laredo regarding the number of pedestrian and bicycle crossings, the volume of commuters traveling for work or school, the number of people crossing for access to shops, and the number of individuals utilizing public transit after crossing. While the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) could offer insights into the numbers of people crossing, obtaining additional data specifically related to pedestrian and bicycle crossings would be beneficial for planning efforts.
- David Rountree, with Bandix, shared that the Ciudad Acuña-Del Rio International Bridge, which has only two lanes, is a major bottleneck. Many of Rountree's operations in Acuña are located in the North, and the current route southward to the bridge is inadequate due to road conditions such as bumps and narrowing. Additionally, at the bridge, there is often only one travel lane open, causing significant congestion. It is crucial to either open a new Acuña- Del Rio bridge in the north or, if that is not possible, to double the size and capacity of the current Acuña-Del Rio International Bridge.

Freight Rail Connectivity Challenges

- Morris Libson shared that it would be beneficial to have a second railroad bridge in the Piedras Negras-Eagle Pass region. This would require working with Ferromex and Union Pacific.
- Pablo Covarrubias, with Claymex Brick and Tile, shared that US-57 and US-277 are dangerous. Bottlenecks occur due to accidents happening on the roadway. He shares that congestion is not necessarily occurring because of trucks, but rather because of the safety issues on these roadways. This affects both commercial and regular traffic.
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Connectivity between Border Crossings and Maritime Ports

Jolanda Prozzi presented the Port-to-Port Connectivity study – a study developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. This study focused on identifying levels of redundancy of connections among border crossings, potential needs, and potential/proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address challenges.

Feedback Received

- Morris Libson shared that there have been high levels of congestion on I-35. He offered that a connection between I-10 and SH 130 would help alleviate congestion levels on I-35.
- Claudia Lagos-Galindo explained that products from the interior of Coahuila are transported into the United States through border crossings. Shipments coming in through maritime ports often use Mexico ports to unload their products and then transit through Mexico to enter the United States through a border crossing. TxDOT does not have statistics on these modes of transportation.
    - Harvey Chapa, with Agencia Aduanal Servicios Internacionales Mercantiles, Sociedad Anónima de Capital Variable, mentioned that Acuña is classified as a heavy transportation industry. Many industries in Acuña receive merchandise from Asia and Europe, with the majority coming from Houston and Long Beach. Due to security issues in Mexico and logistic challenges, it can take months to unload products from maritime ports.
    - Jolanda inquired about where to obtain information about in-bond shipments.
    - Harvey Chapa responded that the information is most likely available from the Del Rio customs.
    - Liliana Flores from the CBP in Del Rio explained that information for in-bond shipments can be obtained from CBP. CBP also has data regarding freight traveling into Canada.
    - Luis B. Rodriguez from CBP in Eagle Pass added that data regarding in-bond shipments from Eagle Pass can also be found for their port. The majority of in-bond shipments passing through their port are registered as tractors- trailers or freight rail.
    - Claudia Lagos-Galindo emphasized the importance of knowing the origin and destination of the shipments.
- Angel Martinez, from the TxDOT Laredo district, mentioned that one of the key considerations is the development of port-to-port connectivity, such as between Houston and Laredo. Establishing a direct connection between these ports is important to alleviate congestion on I-35.
- Luis Angel Urraza, from the City of Acuña, mentioned that certain industries in Acuña have been exploring the development of a commercial school. However, they have faced challenges due to the drastic increase in ferro transportation prices, making it difficult for them to produce reports. He also highlighted the need for a reevaluation of exports and imports from companies, as the influx has impacted their annual reports.

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Paula Dowell from HNTB presented a study on Region-to-Region Connectivity, which was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to make travel safer and more efficient.

Border Region Socio-Economic Trends

- Morris Libson mentioned that Eagle Pass is experiencing faster growth compared to the rest of the state. However, the area lacks connectivity across the border region, to central Texas, and Maritime ports such as the port of Houston.
    - Paula Dowell added that as labor costs in Mexico rise, it is necessary to find other ways to reduce costs to support nearshoring practices in Mexico, including transportation and logistics costs.
    - Morris Libson concurred that nearshoring would continue to impact the region. Transportation agencies need to ensure timely delivery of materials and products to their destinations, making logistics and facilities crucial.
- Jorge Garza, with the city of Del Rio, shared that Acuña and Del Rio are experiencing growth in industry and commercial real estate. For example, in Acuña, a rail and automotive company, Bandix, recently opened. Currently, around 6,000 to 8,000 trucks are moving through the Acuña-Del Rio Bridge, and with increasing truck traffic, opening up the second bridge is vital. Additionally, the Del Rio International Airport has worked with CBP and is now open to air cargo. Most air cargo is flown in from Ramos Arizpe. With the growth, Del Rio has seen an increase in over 500 jobs in the last year. Garza emphasized that Piedras Negras, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, and Acuña are growing rapidly.
- Pablo Covarrubias mentioned that while infrastructure for roads and bridges is not keeping pace, cities are experiencing economic growth. For instance, in Acuña last year, there was approximately 1.6 billion pesos in private investment, in restaurants, commercial plants, gas stations, and merchandise stores. Moreover, medical tourism contributes significantly to the region's traffic. He was optimistic that meetings such as the Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop would continue to support the growth of the border region in Coahuila.

Reasons Why Drivers Take Longer Routes Rather Than Shorter Routes

- Harvey Chapa shared that drivers avoid traveling west of Del Rio due to a lack of infrastructure. He also added that roads west of San Antonio towards Del Rio need improvement and are accident-prone.
- Liliana Flores mentioned that Del Rio does not have a large truck stop. In addition, the lack of development and infrastructure in Coahuila is preventing trucks from traveling through Laredo. Coahuila has plans to develop loops or roadways to bypass smaller cities like Zaragoza, but until these are built, trucking companies will continue to choose more developed and safer routes, rather than shorter and faster ones. Flores also compared Laredo and Del Rio, stating that many companies prefer to travel through Laredo because trucks have better connections to central Mexico and Monterrey via MEX 85 D. However, road infrastructure in Mexico, to central Mexico, is not as well connected through Del Rio.
- An attendee mentioned that in Coahuila, there are plans to redirect traffic from cities such as Torreón, Monclova, Cinco Manantiales, and Zaragoza. This initiative was started under the previous governor of Coahuila and has been continued by the current governor, Manolo Jiménez Salinas. Additionally, Coahuila is collaborating with planners in Durango, Mexico to enhance infrastructure and connectivity to the Port of Mazatlán. The attendee also offered to share a map of the current plans with Claudia Lagos Galindo.

- An attendee shared that having access to facilities like gas stations, truck parking, and trucking repairs influences where truck drivers travel. Some drivers choose to take US-57 if travel on I-35 is congested, but US-57 needs widening in several areas. It needs to grow to accommodate expanding traffic.
- Jesus Lopez, with the City of Del Rio, shared that trucks have issues driving westward towards Sanderson because of road grade. With many hills, roads aren't safe and require experienced drivers. Additionally, he suggested that smaller towns get grants and funding to help build truck stops.
    - Paula Dowell shared that truck parking is a federal priority, and grant opportunities are available. Dowell suggested that cities contact TxDOT districts for more information on grant opportunities.

The Border Region Network's Existing Conditions

- Trinidad Herrera noted that the Amistad Dam International Bridge in Del Rio was not adequately addressed during the meeting. He pointed out that the bridge's inconsistent opening and closing times are causing issues and suggested that all relevant authorities should meet to coordinate and ensure consistent and predictable operation.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo acknowledged this as a known issue. While the US CBP mentioned that regular openings and closings are not currently feasible, Liliana Flores from the CBP offered to provide more information exploring ways to improve consistency in the bridge's schedule.
    - Paula Dowell mentioned that data illustrating the costs of inefficiencies at this bridge and in the region would support efforts to enhance the efficiency of crossings and roads.
- Jorge Ramon brought up the safety concerns and frequent accidents on the road from Del Rio to Sonora, which is part of the I-27 Ports to Plains study. He suggested that a straighter route would be beneficial.
- Claudia Lagos Galindo assured that the study would keep note of this for the Ports to Plains study.

US-90 Corridor Study

Curtis Jones, from TxDOT, Jeff Moore, and John Carl, from Michael Baker International, presented a study on US-90. The study focused on strategies and current projects for improvement. Nick Ortiz, from Michael Baker International, assisted in facilitating group discussions.

Importance of US-90 to the Border Region

- Trinidad Herrera mentioned that US-90 is the most direct route from Del Rio to Houston and San Antonio, and the route is crucial because a majority of the freight from Del Rio is destined for Houston and San Antonio cities.
- Gabriel Castillo mentioned that it is important because the San Antonio International Airport transports materials through air cargo.

Border Region Challenges on US-90 to be Considered

- An attendee mentioned that having only a two-lane highway to Uvalde is dangerous, especially when a heavy truck is going 50 miles per hour (mph) in a 75 mph zone, and people are trying to pass.

- Jose Ortiz, Val Verde County Sheriff, emphasized the importance of supporting not only infrastructure but also the resources necessary to respond to emergencies. He also pointed out that there are many DPS officers stationed along US-90, making it one of the safest highways in Texas. However, he warned that if resources for emergency management were to change, the situation would be different.
- Pablo Covarrubias highlighted that some areas from Del Rio to Van Horn lack cellular service.

Corridor-wide Improvement Strategies

- Placido Madera mentioned that the suggested improvement strategies were well-considered. He also inquired whether autonomous driving requires technology or marking in the road infrastructure, or whether all necessary technology is contained within the vehicle.
- Jeff Moore answered that current corridor-wide improvement strategies don't include autonomous vehicle technologies, as these many autonomous vehicle technologies are still developing. He also added that many new technologies require access to the internet or 5G services. He explained that improving network infrastructure in the region is vital for these future technologies.
- Jesus Lopez mentioned that newer vehicles have XM radio, which provides continuous service in the dead zones between Del Rio and Van Horn. He asked if it was possible to use XM radio's satellites to improve cell service in those areas. Additionally, he mentioned that the shoulders on US-90 are wide enough to ensure bike safety but suggested that adding more signage would further enhance safety for bicyclists.
- Jeff Moore answered that TxDOT does not have the capacity to improve cellular connectivity. However, he emphasized that the improved infrastructure could draw more private investment in the region which in turn could improve private investment in technologies and network connectivity.

Improvement Options and their Respective Priorities

- Jesus Lopez mentioned that some of the passing lanes from Sanderson to Del Rio are short. He added that it would be beneficial to have road signs indicating that no trucks are allowed in the left lane. Additionally, he mentioned that Dunbar Lane could serve as an alternative truck route to bypass Uvalde.
- Feedback on other suggestions for improvements to US-90 in the border region that have not yet been discussed or concerns regarding improvements to US-90 in general:
    - An attendee mentioned that there are many towns between Uvalde and San Antonio where speed limits must be observed. He asked if there were plans to create alternate routes to bypass these towns so that truck traffic can continue to travel efficiently.
    - Alvaro Arreola, Mayor of Del Rio, pointed out that the pavement conditions between Del Rio and Uvalde are poor and inquired about when the construction of super 2 passing lanes would begin.
        - Jeff Moore added that the study will follow up with TxDOT Laredo District is looking into improvements from Del Rio to the Uvalde/Kinney County line. He added that inquiries with the District will happen and follow up with Mayor Arreola later.

- Santos Limon, a congressional candidate from District 23, mentioned that Union Pacific operates about 3-4 trains a day from Eagle Pass to El Paso, leading to increased truck traffic. He asked about the progress of TxDOT in further developing I-20 and I-10.
    - Jeff Moore answered that the US-90 study improvements would influence connectivity to I-20 and I-10.
- Santos Limon inquired whether any of the port authority funds would be allocated to these projects and if the project study would take into account the traffic conditions in the last 5-6 years.
    - Curtis Jones answered that funding from the port authority will be used in the US-90 study and confirmed that safety and traffic conditions from the past years are considered in the study.

Closing Remarks

Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

Sign In Sheets

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Del Rio Binational Workshop – June 12, 2024
Taller Binacional en Del Rio – 12 de junio de 2024

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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: June 12, 2024
Del Rio, Texas
Page 12

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Del Rio Binational Workshop – June 12, 2024
Taller Binacional en Del Rio – 12 de junio de 2024

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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: June 12, 2024
Del Rio, Texas
Page 13

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Del Rio Binational Workshop – June 12, 2024
Taller Binacional en Del Rio – 12 de junio de 2024

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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: June 12, 2024
Del Rio, Texas
Page 14

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Del Rio Binational Workshop – June 12, 2024
Taller Binacional en Del Rio – 12 de junio de 2024

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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: June 12, 2024
Del Rio, Texas
Page 15

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Del Rio Binational Workshop – June 12, 2024
Taller Binacional en Del Rio – 12 de junio de 2024

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Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: June 12, 2024
Del Rio, Texas
Page 16

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Plan
Del Rio Binational Workshop – June 12, 2024
Taller Binacional en Del Rio – 12 de junio de 2024

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Limon for Congress	Limon for Congress D23	

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop
Meeting Date: June 12, 2024
Del Rio, Texas
Page 17

Photographs

July 30, 2024, Agency / Industry 1:1 Meetings

Meeting Details

The region-to-region connectivity leads facilitated discussions with binational stakeholders on both sides of the border. Large meetings and 1:1 meetings were conducted. This document summarizes several 1:1 meetings held in mid-2024.

Date, Time and Location

The Region-to-Region Connectivity Study 1:1 Agency and Industry Meetings dates, times and were conducted on Microsoft Teams as a follow-up to stakeholder requests from the workshops held in May and June, 2024.

Mtg:	Date:	Time:	Agency / Industry Representative:	Attendees:
1	07-30-2024	11:00 am CT	John T. Kennedy, City of Presidio	Marvina Cephas, TxDOT Kelvin Kroeker, HNTB Will Smithson, HNTB Eva Esquivel, HNTB
2	08-06-2024	2:00 pm CT	Tony Arce, Jr., Laredo Economic Development Corp.	Marvina Cephas, TxDOT Will Smithson, HNTB Alisha Catalano, HNTB Eva Esquivel, HNTB
3	08-08-2024	12:00 pm CT	Javier Garza, FWS Logistics	Marvina Cephas, TxDOT Will Smithson, HNTB Alisha Catalano, HNTB Justine Carreon, HNTB
4	08-12-2024	9:00 am CT	Luis B. Rodriguez, Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Marvina Cephas, TxDOT Will Smithson, HNTB Alisha Catalano, HNTB Eva Esquivel, HNTB
5	08-15-2024	11:00 am CT	Trinidad Herrera, Desarrollo Económico de Acuña	Marvina Cephas, TxDOT Will Smithson, HNTB Alisha Catalano, HNTB Analisa Ruiz, HNTB

Purpose and Summary

Outreach for the 1:1 Agency/Industry meetings was derived from representative attendance and input at five city workshops. Individuals who expressed interest in providing additional data or input specific to their communities, not captured in the technical presentations, were contacted for these 1:1 meetings. Representatives interested in discussing region-to-region connectivity and those interested in discussing all studies presented, region-to-region, port-to-port, and port-to-maritime studies, were contacted.

Scheduling and Logistics

The meeting utilized Microsoft Teams Virtual Appointments as the scheduling tool to coordinate the 1:1 meeting dates and times. An appointment calendar was created that allowed agency and industry representatives to select meeting dates and times based upon their availability. Scheduling included identifying a preference for a meeting in English or Spanish allowing for the appropriate attendance.

Upon setting an appointment, members received an immediate calendar notice with the representative's name, organization or industry name, and the previous location of the stakeholder meeting they attended.

The day before each scheduled meeting, members received a recap of the representative's comments made at the previous stakeholder workshop to reintroduce the topics of discussion that might occur in the 1:1 meeting.

Materials

A Discussion Guide (see appendix) was utilized to structure the conversation so the limited time together would remain focused and productive. By prompting specific questions or discussion points, members were able to facilitate continued conversation leading to a more in-depth and thoughtful exchange of information. Because of this, the meeting objective of obtaining additional information not captured in the presented data were met for all attendees.

Discussions

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT, typically led the meeting by presenting the region-to-region overview and ongoing discussions. She thanked the agency or industry representative for making time to contribute additional information to the study. A brief review was given of the areas of interest in which local area input and knowledge would be beneficial. Each agency or industry representative provided surrounding local area plans and data either not captured in the first round of stakeholder meetings or in areas where additional information might be needed to complete the study recommendations.

The focus of the meetings centered around the border region connectivity study areas on the U.S. and Mexico sides. The study aims to address connectivity challenges in those areas and provide viable solutions to meet those challenges.

Key points raised included the importance of safety within and between regions, resiliency efforts on both sides of the border, and the need for coordination with Mexico on infrastructure improvements. Each meeting ended with key takeaways and next steps.

Meeting 1: John T. Kennedy, City of Presidio

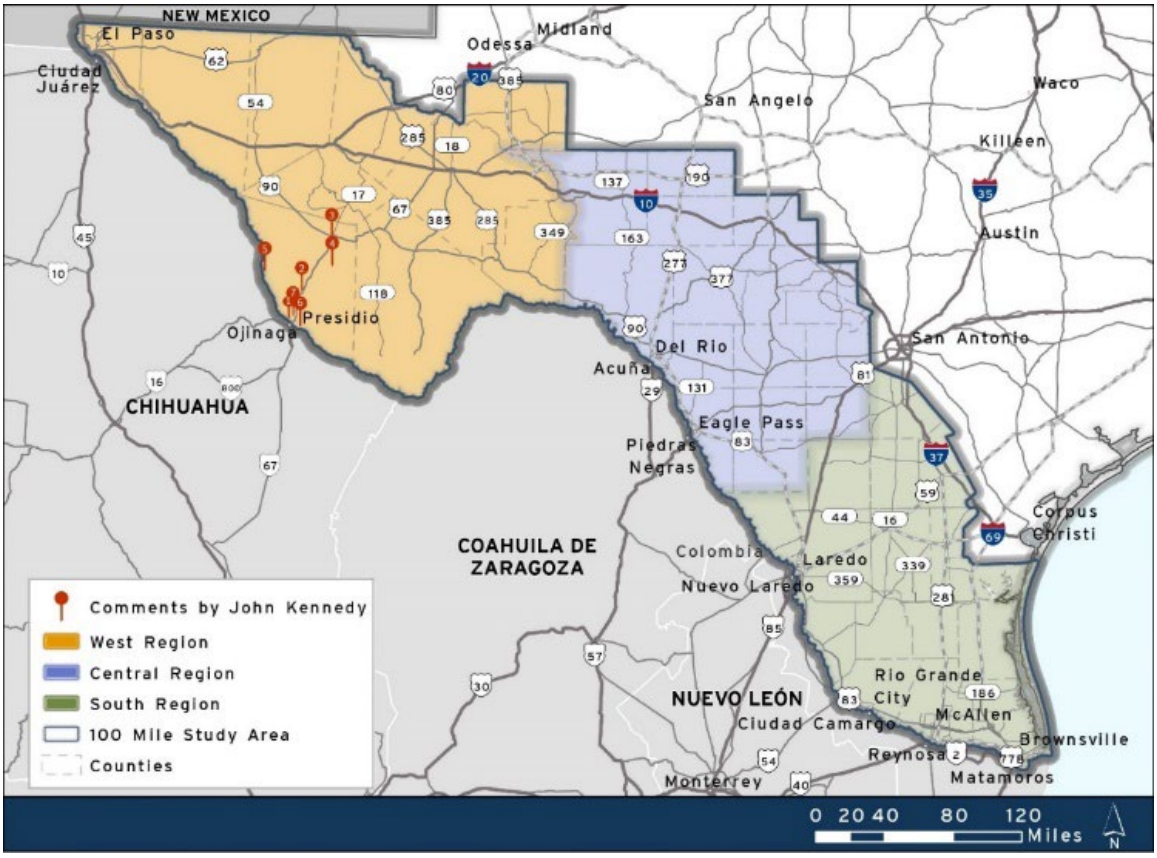
Key Themes

- Economic Development Plan: The City of Presidio is developing a comprehensive plan to stimulate economic growth.
- US Highway 67 Improvements: The City is addressing traffic congestion and safety concerns on Highway 67, including potential solutions like reconfiguring lanes, improving signage, and enhancing the port of entry facilities.
- Rail Infrastructure: The City is concerned about the impact of a new rail inspection facility and seeks to revitalize the existing rail area for intermodal transportation and cold storage.
- Other Potential Improvements: The meeting also discussed potential improvements to FM 2810, Casa Piedra Road, and Pinto Canyon Road.
- Tourism and Recreation: The City is working to incorporate its recreational tourism plan, including the Chinati Mountain Peak State Park, while considering the impact on local ranches.

Action Items

- Continue planning and implementation of the City of Presidio Economic Development Plan.
- Address US Highway 67 improvements, including safety measures and port of entry enhancements.
- Engage with the relevant authorities to address concerns about the rail inspection facility and revitalize the rail area.
- Explore potential improvements to other transportation infrastructure.
- Develop a comprehensive recreational tourism plan, considering the needs of local businesses and communities.
- Overall, the meeting highlighted the city's ambition to leverage its unique assets, such as its location, proximity to Mexico, and potential for intermodal transportation, to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life for its residents.

Figure 6. Location of comments made by John Kennedy

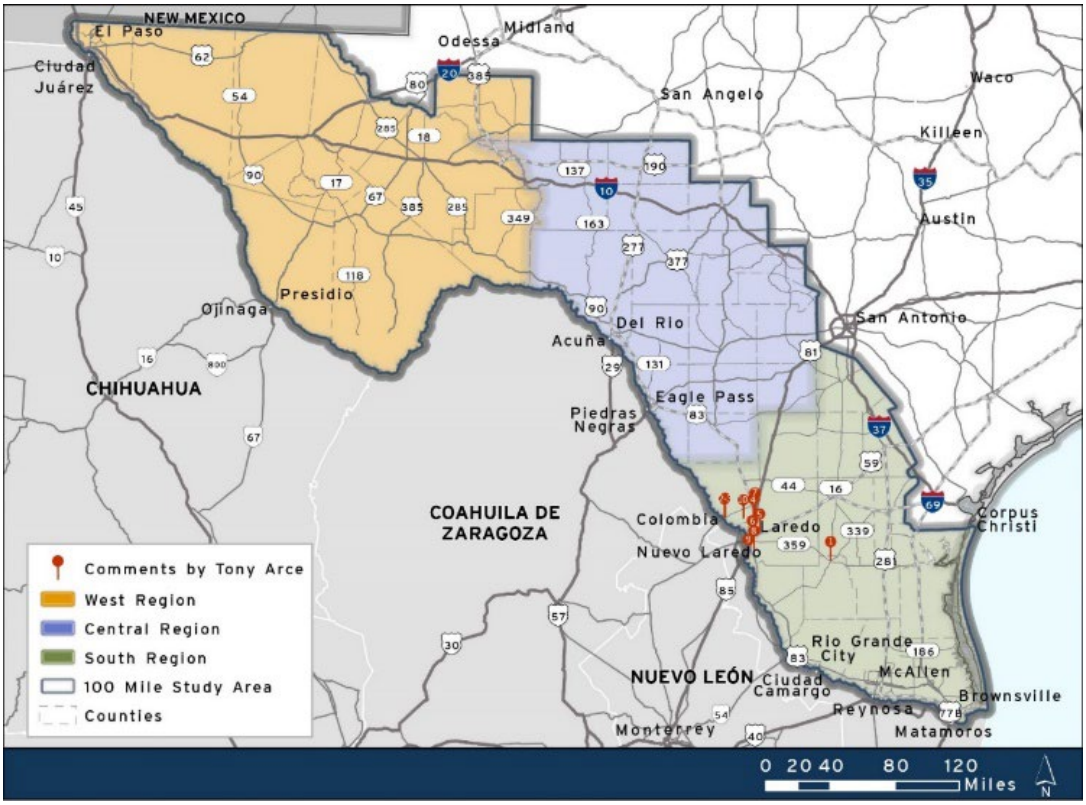


Meeting 2: Tony Arce, Jr., Laredo Economic Development Corp.

Key Themes

- Continued Growth: Laredo continues to experience significant growth in both residential and industrial sectors, especially in logistics and warehousing.
- Infrastructure Improvements: The City of Laredo is investing in infrastructure projects such as the expansion of SH 84 and the World Trade Bridge.
- Cross-Border Trade: Laredo remains the country's number one port of entry, and there are ongoing efforts to improve cross-border traffic flow and infrastructure.
- Transportation Challenges: Increased commercial truck traffic has led to congestion and safety concerns on local roads.
- Infrastructure Investment: There is a need for increased investment in infrastructure, including highways, toll roads, and EV charging stations.
- Regional Collaboration: Laredo is working with neighboring cities and regions to improve transportation and economic development.
- Workforce and Population: The region faces challenges in attracting retail and restaurants due to perceived population number limitations.
- Overall, the meeting highlighted the significant economic growth in Laredo but also emphasized the need for continued investment in infrastructure and collaboration with neighboring regions to address transportation challenges and support future development.

Figure 7. Location of comments made by Tony Arce



Meeting 3: Javier Garza, FWS Logistics

Key Themes

Customs Inspections: Lengthy inspections and temporary restrictions cause significant delays at border crossings.

- Limited Operating Hours and Staffing: U.S. customs operates within limited hours and often lacks sufficient staff, especially during peak periods.
- Infrastructure Condition: Roads at border crossings are in poor condition, leading to vehicle damage.
- Regulations and Policies: Anti-terrorism and anti-narcotic regulations can be complex and subject to frequent changes, disrupting transportation plans.
- Safety and Security: Smuggling activities continue to be a problem, and security protocols can be unclear.
- Weather Conditions: Extreme weather can affect border crossings, particularly for shipments requiring specific temperature conditions.
- Infrastructure Investment: China's increased investment in Mexico highlights the need for Texas to invest in its own infrastructure to enhance border connectivity.

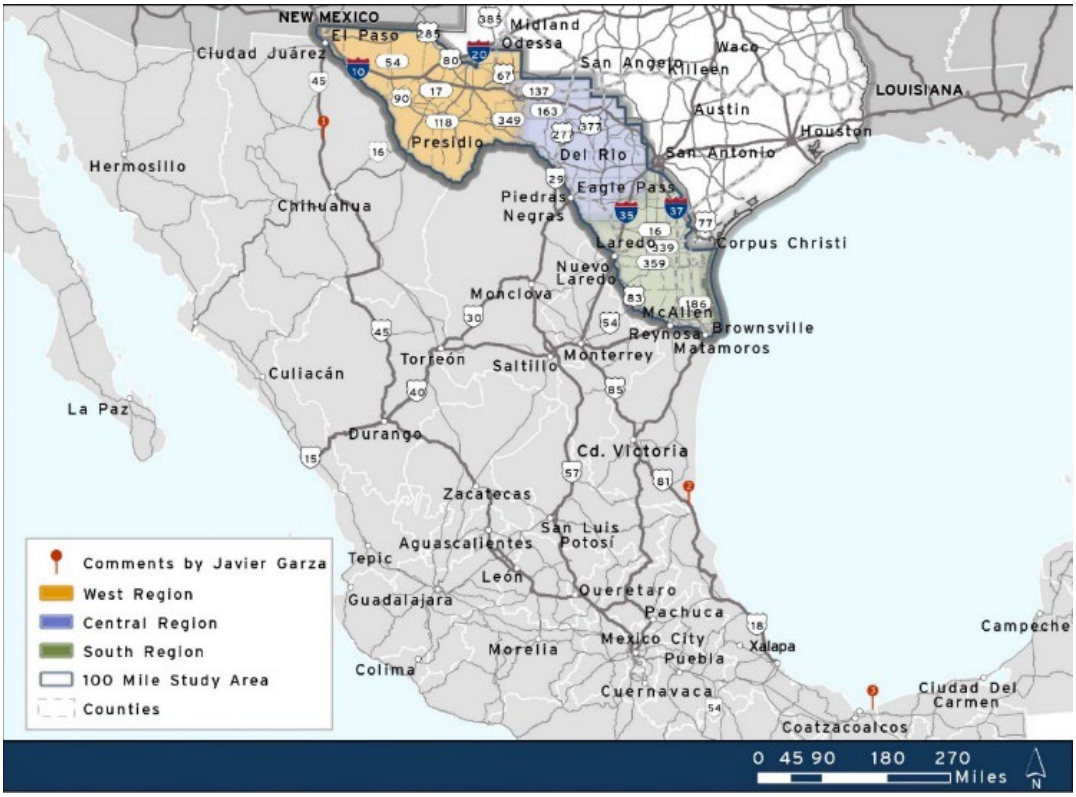
Action Items

- Diversifying Seaport Usage: Utilizing seaports in Brownsville, Harlingen, the Valley, Corpus Christi, Galveston, and Port Arthur can alleviate congestion in Houston.
- Infrastructure Development: Investing in infrastructure projects to connect the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico can offer significant economic benefits.

- Collaboration with Mexico: Strengthening collaboration with Mexico on infrastructure projects can enhance trade and economic ties between the two countries.

Overall, the meeting highlighted the significant challenges faced by companies operating across the U.S.-Mexico border and identified potential opportunities for improving border infrastructure, streamlining processes, and enhancing trade relations.

Figure 8. Location of comments made by Javier Garza



Meeting 4: Luis B. Rodriguez, Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection

Key Themes

- Increased Traffic: Eagle Pass is experiencing significant growth in both private vehicle and commercial truck traffic.
- Infrastructure Challenges: Existing roads and bridges are struggling to accommodate the increasing traffic volume, leading to congestion and delays.
- Border Crossing Capacity: The Port of Entry (POE) has limited capacity, and further expansions may be necessary to handle future growth.
- Infrastructure Improvements: The City of Eagle Pass is planning to expand Bridge 2 and improve pedestrian crossings.
- Nearshoring and Trade: The recent growth in near-shoring activities is contributing to increased trade and border crossing traffic.
- Transportation Infrastructure: Highways 57, 277, and 83 need to be widened to accommodate the growing traffic demand.

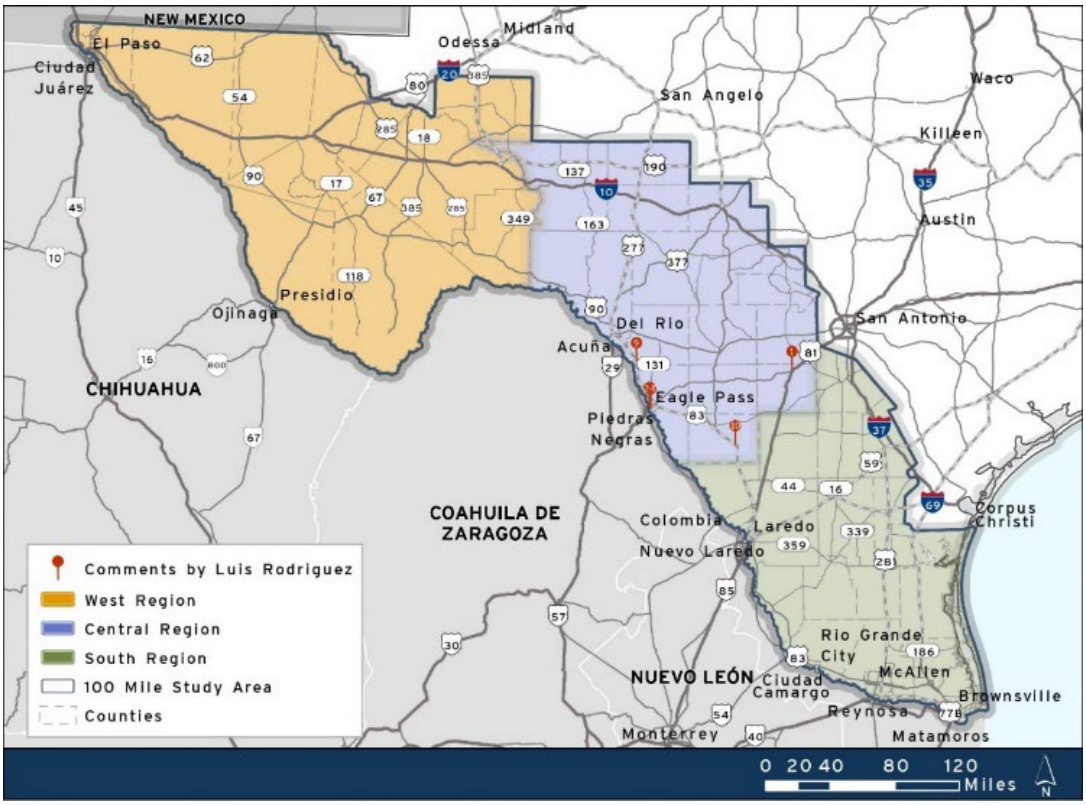
- Economic Development: Eagle Pass is experiencing commercial development, including industrial parks and rail infrastructure.

Action Items

- Continue planning and implementing infrastructure improvements for border crossings, roads, and bridges.
- Explore options for expanding the capacity of the Port of Entry.
- Collaborate with Mexican authorities on cross-border infrastructure projects.
- Promote economic development opportunities in Eagle Pass.

Overall, the meeting highlighted the significant growth and challenges facing Eagle Pass due to increased border crossing traffic and the need for substantial infrastructure improvements to support future development.

Figure 9. Comments taken from meeting with Luis Rodriguez



Meeting 5: Trinidad Herrera, Desarrollo Económico de Acuña

Key Themes

- Cross-Border Infrastructure: Improving infrastructure on both sides of the border is crucial to addressing bottlenecks and facilitating trade.
- Mexican Infrastructure: The conditions of Mexican roads are deficient, and many cities still lack bypass roads to divert traffic.
- Impact of Nearshoring: Nearshoring has primarily impacted regions in central Mexico, such as Coahuila, Saltillo, and Torreón.

- Connectivity: Connecting cities receiving investment to the border and the rest of the United States is essential to prevent traffic bottlenecks.
- Port-to-Plains: The Ports-to-Plains project, originally planned from Denver to Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and Laredo, highlights the importance of coordinated infrastructure development on both sides of the border.

Action Items

- Continue to advocate for infrastructure improvements on both sides of the border.
- Collaborate with U.S. and Mexican authorities to address bottlenecks and facilitate trade.
- Promote economic development in Acuña and other border regions.

Overall, the meeting emphasized the importance of coordinated infrastructure development and collaboration between Mexico and the United States to address the challenges and opportunities presented by nearshoring and increased trade.

Handout: Region to Region Connectivity Discussion Guide

Introduction

This document is an extension of the Border Region to Region Connectivity Study Binational Stakeholder Engagement Plan and is intended to provide general interview guidelines for the various stakeholder groups that will be engaged as part of the Border Connectivity effort. A brief overview the Border Transportation Master Plan is provided below.

The State of Texas understands the need to enhance multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to make travel safer and more efficient for people and goods, how it promotes economic development and binational trade, and the importance of improving resiliency and redundancy for border regions in Texas and Mexico.

The Region-to-Region Connectivity Study is advancing the recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan (BTMP) by identifying a Regional Border Connectivity Network, evaluating existing and future needs along these routes, and developing strategies and recommendations. The Study is being informed by binational stakeholder workshops, TxDOT Border Districts, and the public.

Conducting the Region-to-Region Border Connectivity Study requires a combination of analytical and technical analysis. Key analytical steps include data collection and material review, designing the core connectivity network, assessing current and future border connectivity needs and comparing to planned projects, and developing recommendations for unmet needs. The Study also includes stakeholder outreach with multiple group opportunities, as well as one-on-one meetings to acquire input not necessarily captured by the data.

The completion of this Study is projected to be January 31, 2025. TxDOT continues to actively engage in the development and implementation of a robust Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach Plan (SEOP) to facilitate meaningful collaboration and input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

Purpose of Stakeholder Interview

The Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach Plan requires the study to coordinate with TxDOT and the State of Texas to conduct:

- 3 District Meetings
- 2 rounds of up to five (5) in-person binational stakeholder workshops
- 1 Public Meeting
- Up to 30 virtual or in-person individual or small group interviews

Standardization of interview discussion helps to ensure that each stakeholder receives the opportunity to share a perspective on a topic being covered across the study. While every interview is expected to be unique and cover material specific to an individual stakeholder, raising similar questions across different stakeholders will help identify where feedback aligns and diverges.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the interview guides are meant to form a basis to stimulate discussion, and not to function as a hard script question-and-answer survey. Depending on the characteristics of the participants, it may not be necessary or possible to cover all topics in the same amount of detail. Participants primarily should be asked questions in their area of expertise and comfort, and follow-up discussions arranged if necessary. If requested, confidentiality of participant responses will be protected according to their preferences.

Conducting Interviews

Interviews should be conducted with key members attending a session, which enables the ability to focus on questions and discussion, take detailed notes, or assist with communications. Team members will be composed of TxDOT and HNTB. In some cases, the team will include Jacobs, ICF, and/or Humberto Treviño, depending on the interview. Recording of interviews, if necessary, should only be done with the acknowledgement and permission of the stakeholder. Adherence to TxDOT AI policies will be in place. Notes from interviews should be edited, organized, and circulated among attending members as soon as practical following the completion of the interview. This will facilitate aligning on specific details and identifying follow-up questions while recollections of discussions remain fresh in participants minds.

Interview Guides

For ease of reference during preparation for and execution of interviews, the interview guide is organized by stakeholder type. The interview guides should be updated and refined as needed to include common questions learned through the engagement exercise and to facilitate consistency.

Opening remarks: Introductions of all participants. Provide a brief description of the study effort (italicized below) and geography, and how the interview will inform the Region-to-Region Binational Connectivity Study. If the interview is being held in person, a copy of the fact/goals sheet will be shared with the interviewee. Acknowledge there are several concerns that occur on the border, but staff will highlight the goals and the regions of the area of study.

"The Region-to-Region Connectivity Plan is a comprehensive, multimodal, long-range plan for the Texas-Mexico border region and builds on the identified transportation issues, needs, challenges, opportunities, and strategies for moving people and goods efficiently and safely across the Texas-Mexico border recommended in the Border Transportation Master Plan. It identifies a regional border connectivity network, evaluates existing and future needs along the routes, and develops strategies and recommendations."

Study group will share with participants the program, policies and project recommended from the Border Transportation Master Plan that serve both inside and outside border crossings in Texas and their region.

Role in Organization: Please begin by describing participant(s) title(s) and role(s) in the organization functions and mission. What other organizations, public or private, do you typically collaborate with as related to border connectivity and movement of people and goods?

Follow Up Discussion:

Is there anything from our previous group meeting that you would like to build upon or discuss today? Are there things we missed that you would like considered as we develop reports and recommendations that relate to transportation in the border region?

Further Prompts: What are the top three considerations you believe are most important for regional connectivity in your area? From your organization's perspective, what overall regional connectivity challenges do you currently face or anticipate? *[If they are unsure how to answer, provide examples from subtopics below. Specific questions may guide conversation, highlighted questions were raised in previous stakeholder meeting]*

Shipper / 3PL / Logistics

1. Mobility and Reliability:
    a. What are the most significant obstacles to achieving efficient and reliable transportation in the border region? On major roadways – where are the major bottlenecks that create delays? Are they being addressed?
    b. What factors are impeding efficient traffic movement? Are these factors being addressed?
    c. Are there any short-term actions that you think could mitigate issues related to mobility/efficiency and reliability? (e.g., signals, lane/shoulder width, existing road conditions)
    d. Are there any long-term actions that you think could mitigate issues related to mobility/efficiency and reliability? (e.g., development of alternative routes/modes)
2. Economic Competitiveness:
    a. What improvements would most significantly affect operations and earnings?
    b. What connections are most important for the area you serve? (e.g., Laredo to Pharr, some connection from Mexico to I-10)
    c. How is the anticipated population growth in the region expected to impact shipping logistics?
3. Safety and Security:
    a. Do safety concerns impact the routes that passenger or commercial vehicles take? Do you have specific examples or experiences that you would like to share?
    b. Do your employees feel safe driving their designated routes? What kind of precautions or accommodations are made to ensure safety?
    c. What are the contributing factors that threaten safety and security in high-crash locations? (e.g. high auto/ped traffic areas, roadway characteristics, bridge clearances, lighting, excessive speeds, parked trucks, no gas stations)
    d. How would new/alternative routes impact safety and security?
4. Connectivity:
    a. What are the most important routes for border region connectivity? Are there any proposed routes that you believe should be prioritized?
    b. Are there recommendations on transportation efficiency improvements and commercial connectivity that can reduce congestions along the major transportation routes?
5. Cross-Border Resiliency:
    a. What are common causes of delays at the border?
    b. How do border delays affect residents, travelers, and commercial vehicles?
6. Asset Preservation:
    a. How would you describe the current condition of major roads in the area?
7. Equity:
    a. Who is most impacted by delays/lack of connectivity?

8. Sustainable Funding:
    a. What investments have you made or may be considering to improve the efficiency of your cross-border operations?
9. Customer Service:
    a. Do you regularly contact local governments for information related to roadways? What are common questions?
    b. What kind of information would you like to have available?
10. Stewardship and Sustainability:
    a. How do natural disasters impact operations and service?
    b. Do you foresee changes to the shipping industry that would impact sustainability?
11. Technology Deployment:
    a. What kinds of technology do you use today to improve the visibility and management of your cross-border operations?
    b. What additional road technology should be considered that can maximize safety and/or improve road efficiency?

Trucking Companies

1. Mobility and Reliability:
    a. What are the most significant obstacles to achieving efficient and reliable transportation in the border region?
    b. On major roadways – where are the major bottlenecks that create delays? Are they being addressed?
    c. What factors are impeding efficient traffic movement? Are these factors being addressed?
    d. Are there any short-term actions that you think could mitigate issues related to mobility/efficiency and reliability? (e.g., signals, lane/shoulder width, existing road conditions)
    e. Are there any long-term actions that you think could mitigate issues related to mobility/efficiency and reliability? (e.g., development of alternative routes/modes)
2. Economic Competitiveness:
    a. What improvements would most significantly affect operations and earnings?
    b. What connections are most important for the area you serve? (e.g., Laredo to Pharr, some connection from Mexico to I-10)
    c. How is the anticipated population growth in the region expected to impact shipping logistics?
3. Safety and Security:
    a. Do safety concerns impact the routes that passenger or commercial vehicles take? Do you have specific examples or experiences that you would like to share?
    b. Do your employees feel safe driving their designated routes? What kind of precautions or accommodations are made to ensure safety?
    c. What are the contributing factors that threaten safety and security in high-crash locations? (e.g. high auto/ped traffic areas, roadway characteristics, bridge clearances, lighting, excessive speeds, parked trucks, no gas stations)
    d. How would new/alternative routes impact safety and security?
4. Connectivity:
    a. What are the most important routes for border region connectivity? Are there any proposed routes that you believe should be prioritized?

b. Are there recommendations on transportation efficiency improvements and commercial connectivity that can reduce congestions along the major transportation routes?

5. Cross-Border Resiliency:

   a. What are common causes of delays at the border?

   b. How do border delays affect residents, travelers, and commercial vehicles?

6. Asset Preservation:

   a. How would you describe the current condition of major roads in the area?

7. Equity:

   a. Who is most impacted by delays/lack of connectivity?

8. Sustainable Funding:

   a. What investments have you made or may be considering to improve the efficiency of your cross-border operations?

9. Customer Service:

   a. Do you regularly contact local governments for information related to roadways? What are common questions?

   b. What kind of information would you like to have available?

10. Stewardship and Sustainability:

   a. How do natural disasters impact operations and service?

   b. Do you foresee changes to the shipping industry that would impact sustainability?

11. Technology Deployment:

   a. What kinds of technology do you use today to improve the visibility and management of your cross-border operations?

   b. What additional road technology should be considered that can maximize safety and/or improve road efficiency?

Major Employers

1. Mobility and Reliability:

   a. What are the most significant obstacles to achieving efficient and reliable transportation in the border region?

   b. On major roadways – where are the major bottlenecks that create delays? Are they being addressed?

   c. What factors are impeding efficient traffic movement? Are these factors being addressed?

   d. Are there any short-term actions that you think could mitigate issues related to mobility/efficiency and reliability? (e.g., signals, lane/shoulder width, existing road conditions)

   e. Are there any long-term actions that you think could mitigate issues related to mobility/efficiency and reliability? (e.g., development of alternative routes/modes)

2. Economic Competitiveness:

   a. What improvements would most significantly affect operations and earnings?

   b. What connections are most important for the area you serve? (e.g., Laredo to Pharr, some connection from Mexico to I-10)

   c. How is the anticipated population growth in the region expected to impact shipping logistics?

   d. How are business decisions affected by the current road network? What changes would most positively impact employees and businesses?

3. Safety and Security:

    a. Do safety concerns impact the routes that passenger or commercial vehicles take? Do you have specific examples or experiences that you would like to share?

    b. What are the contributing factors that threaten safety and security in high-crash locations? (e.g. high auto/ped traffic areas, roadway characteristics, bridge clearances, lighting, excessive speeds, parked trucks, no gas stations)

    c. How would new/alternative routes impact safety and security?

4. Connectivity:

    a. What are the most important routes for border region connectivity? Are there any proposed routes that you believe should be prioritized?

    b. Are there recommendations on transportation efficiency improvements and commercial connectivity that can reduce congestions along the major transportation routes?

5. Cross-Border Resiliency:

    a. What are common causes of delays at the border?

    b. How do border delays affect residents, travelers, and commercial vehicles?

6. Asset Preservation:

    a. How would you describe the current condition of major roads in the area?

7. Equity:

    b. Who is most impacted by delays/lack of connectivity?

    c. How long is the typical commute for your employees?

    d. How do most employees get to work?

    e. How do current road networks impact your service to surrounding areas/residents?

8. Customer Service:

    a. Do you regularly contact local governments for information related to roadways? What are common questions?

    b. What kind of information would you like to have available?

9. Stewardship and Sustainability:

    a. Does your company take any steps to preserve or enhance the land/water around you?

10. Technology Deployment:

A. What additional road technology should be considered that can maximize safety and/or improve road efficiency?

All

1. Closing: Are there additional issues or concerns on any of the connectivity goal and/ or transportation infrastructure for TxDOT for Texas-Mexico connectivity system we have not discussed?

    a. What organizations / contacts should we follow up with?

    b. If data collected by entity was discussed, whom should we contact to obtain it?

    c. May we follow up with you should additional questions arise?

September 23, 2024, Laredo District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting 3: Laredo District

Date and Time: Monday, September 23, 2024, at 1 pm (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization		
Andrew Canon	TXDOT TPP	Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Dan Seedah	Jacobs
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT TPP	Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Francisco Almanza	TxDOT TPP	Chris Burns	Jacobs
Epigmenio "Epi" Gonzalez	TxDOT Laredo	Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Roberto Rodriguez	TxDOT Laredo	William "Will" Smithson	HNTB
Luis Villareal	TXDOT Laredo	Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Adriana Munoz	TXDOT Laredo	Rahil Saeedi	CPCS

Agenda

Laredo District Meeting Agenda
September 23, 2024
Binational Connectivity Stakeholder Workshop Review
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

1:00 – 1:10 pm	Opening and Safety Minute **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
1:10 – 1:20 pm	Overview and Purpose **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning, TxDOT	
1:20 – 2:00 pm	Region-to-Region Connectivity **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Begin with context on nearshoring trends, then discuss progress and findings on region-to-region connectivity study.
2:00 – 2:40 pm	First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile multimodal connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
2:40 – 3:40 pm	Discussion and Input	
3:40 – 4:00 pm	Close and Adjourn **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

The meeting was initiated with Marvina Cephas leading the BTMP team introductions. The TxDOT District team introduced themselves, including Epigmenio “Epi” Gonzalez, District Engineer, and Roberto Rodriguez, District Director of Transportation Planning and Development. This was followed by Kelvin Kroeker introducing the HNTB consultant team and Jolanda Prozzi the Jacobs consultant team.

The purpose of this meeting was to update the Laredo TxDOT district on the progress of the BTMP recommended studies (Region to Region, Port to Port, Port to Maritime, and First Mile/Last Mile) before presenting the findings to the stakeholders, which will take place in October. This update follows the initial round of presentations, where the project objectives and goals were introduced.

Presentations

Nearshoring

- Rahil Saeedi delivered a presentation on key trends shaping the demand for the border region's transportation system, with a particular focus on nearshoring and its transformative impact on cross-border connectivity between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as within the border regions.

- The presentation began with a definition of nearshoring and its connections to broader global and national economic and policy trends. It then examined critical border region infrastructure supporting cross-border trade, highlighted key development patterns along the border, and provided insights into the future of nearshoring, including potential infrastructure needs.

Region to Region Connectivity

- For the Region-to-Region study, Will Smithson showcased the opportunity routes identified through the first connectivity network analysis, presented in round one, which assessed market access and people and goods movement.

- He explained that by building on this initial network, the next phase of the analysis would focus on the segments outside of larger urban areas. Interstates and planned future interstate routes were filtered out to remove redundant infrastructure from the analysis and identify less obvious but essential routes contributing to a more robust, interconnected system.

- The structure and format for upcoming stakeholder meetings were also discussed, ensuring alignment on the engagement process and expectations. Examples of recommendations and opportunities to be used in the stakeholder presentation, along with the process for identifying and prioritizing recommendations in four categories – Safety/Security, Operational/Technology, Capacity, and connectivity. Stakeholders will contribute by marking recommendations and opportunities on working maps using color-coded dots, each representing one of the four categories. An ESRI Experience Builder will also provide interactive, detailed views of corridors and associated metrics. This platform will allow real-time collaboration and engagement.

- Key numbers to highlight the network needs and challenges were presented, followed by the analysis summary that walked through the process of utilizing INRIX data to identify major border region origin-destination (OD) pairs, observed trip paths between each OD pair were mapped, allowing for deeper understanding of route patterns. The analysis then compared observer route choices with the shorter and faster routes available in a table in the following slide, revealing discrepancies in route utilization.

- Once the Border Region-to-Region opportunity routes were established and displayed, further analysis focused on evaluating key performance metrics, The following draft metrics were presented:

    - Connectivity and mobility metrics: evaluating the efficiency of travel.

- Fast Route Opportunity (for both 2022 and 2050)

- Short Rout Opportunity (for both 2022 and 2050)
- Time Travel Reliability
- Travel Demand Metrics: Highlighting traffic volume and flow patterns.
- Forecasted (2050) Total Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Forecasted (2050) Total Truck Vehicle Miles Traveled
- 2022 AADT Flow estimates for Mexican states that border Texas
- Safety metrics: identifying critical safety issues.
    - Historical Crash frequency and locations (2019-2023)
    - Historical Total Crashes (2019-2023)
    - Historical Truck related crashes (2019-2023)
    - Corridor safety score
    - Rail Highway Incidents (2010-2024)
- Infrastructure metrics: Evaluating the existing infrastructure challenges.
    - Percentage of mileage with 2 or less lanes
    - Percentage of millage with no access control
    - Corridors with 16' or less bridge clearance
    - Percentage of Mileage with Physical Median
    - The average width of outside shoulder lanes
- Equity metrics: Evaluating access to transportation and economic benefits.
    - Equity score methodology and score
    - TxDOT projects and recommendations from other corridor studies have been reviewed to assess the current network needs. The last two slides of the presentation had maps that showcased these efforts, labeled as identified needs.
    - The District suggested that the meaning of the term "avoidance" in two of the scoring metrics (shortest path avoidance and fastest path avoidance) presented to the District, may not be intuitive to the public or stakeholders. The team agreed and made adjustments to the workshop presentation scripts for the respective slides.

Border Crossing to Border Crossing Connectivity

- Chris Burns presented the teams' analysis of the needs and challenges between border crossings. Jacobs conducted a planning level route analysis to estimate how traffic will divert if a border crossing is closed. Jacobs analyzed the nearest suitable alternative crossing to the closed crossing, characterized the connecting routes, and analyzed the increase in traffic at the alternative, as well as the current average wait times and processing capacity at the alternative.
    - Chris presented the analysis done for the Colombia Solidarity Bridge as an example. For example, if the Colombia Solidarity Bridge closes, passenger operated vehicle (POV) traffic can divert to the Gateway to the Americas Bridge. For commercial motor vehicles (CMVs), the closest alternative is the World Trade Bridge.

- Chris showed that for POVs the Gateways to the Americas Bridge provides adequate capacity to process the diverted POVs/bus demand from the Colombia Solidarity Bridge. The Colombia Solidarity Bridge has eight processing lanes for CMVs. The World Trade Bridge has 19 processing lanes for CMVs, but is experiencing delays up to 55 minutes with current demand. Diverting CMVs to the World Trade Bridge could therefore result in substantial delays. Jacobs illustrated this point further by showing the CBP data analyzed that shows the number of processing lanes open and the average wait times experienced.

- Chris shared all the connecting roads that were analyzed in Mexico and Texas. These connectors represent the shortest road to the nearest alternative crossing in the event of a border crossing closure.

- Chris shared the key findings of the analysis by international bridge closure. He reviewed the distance to the nearest alternative crossing for POVs and CMVs, the minimum lanes on the connector roads, and the processing capacity (in terms of number of processing lanes) of the alternative crossing as a ratio of the processing capacity of the disrupted crossing.

- Chris concluded that the number of cross-border POVs and CMVs crossings are relatively modest compared to the typical capacities of and the number of connectors in the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo/Colombia region. The exception is Mines Road (FM1472) that is already congested. A major concern is the capacity and modes served by the international bridges. For example, CMVs crossing at the World Trade Bridge (19 processing lanes) would have to divert to Colombia Solidarity Bridge (with eight processing lanes).

- Jolanda shared the questions that will be reviewed with the stakeholders at the breakout tables. These questions were as follows:

  - Did we analyze the correct corridors? What other alternatives exist?

  - What are the corridor needs/challenges?

  - What are potential mitigation strategies?

  - What investments are needed?

Border Crossing to Seaport Connectivity

- Jolanda shared the progress to date on the border crossing to maritime port connectivity analysis conducted. The Jacobs team started by analyzing StreetLight data, available federal data, and the Transearch database to identify truck trips between the Texas-Mexico border and Texas' major seaports. The analysis revealed a very small percentage of trucks moving between the border and Texas' seaports north of Port Mansfield. Jolanda emphasized that this result required stakeholders to provide the team with the information and context to analyze the importance of and connectivity challenges between the border and maritime ports.

- Jolanda shared various statistics about the importance of waterborne trade with Mexico. Jolanda showed that:

  - Mexico represented about 11 percent of the total waterborne imports and exports handled at Texas' ports.

  - Mineral fuel and oil, organic chemicals, and vehicles and parts were the major waterborne trade commodities traded between Mexico and Texas in 2023.

  - Energy products (e.g., crude petroleum, distillate fuel oil) were the major commodities handled at Texas' ports in 2022.

  - Mexico's ports handled more of a variety of commodities in 2022/2023, ranging from general cargo to agricultural products, mineral products, and containers.

- Jolanda also showed the analysis of the Transearch data. In this analysis, the Jacobs team shows where major commodities handled by the Texas seaports are moving on the Texas highway network – i.e., petroleum, coal and gas; steel and iron; industrial chemicals; motor vehicles and parts. Jolanda emphasized that these flows arguably include commodity movements between the border and the Texas seaports, but the volumes are not known.

- Jolanda shared the insights obtained thus far from interviewing Texas port directors. Jolanda showed that the Port of Harlingen handled large volumes of refined fuels that cross by truck at the Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios and that the Port of Brownsville handled a variety of products (including mineral products, diesel, gasoline, metals) that cross by truck at the Veterans International Bridge. The Port of Vitoria and the Port of Beaumont are currently not aware of any cargo moving between the ports and the border, but the Port of Victoria mentioned that the new rail connection could potentially open a market for refined fuels and chemicals to move by rail from the port and crossing into Mexico at Laredo. Port Arthur mentioned that eucalyptus pulp for paper and aluminum move by rail from the port and cross at Laredo and Eagle Pass into Mexico.

- Jolanda shared the insights obtained from interviewing stakeholders in Mexico. Mexican stakeholders mentioned a lack of data/robust database that tracks the movement of trade between the initial port of entry, how the trade moves on the transportation network, and eventually crosses at the border. This lack of data hampers the accurate assessment of trade volumes and how it uses the transportation network. Brokers did, however, share that some cargo is moving from Latin America through Mexico's pacific coast ports, such as Lazaro Cardenas, in bond and cross at the border. Jacobs also heard about the challenges with rail bridge heights that do not allow for double stacked containers or automobile rail cars between the Port of Topolobampo and Presidio. Finally, the Jacobs team heard about a new planned port 25 miles north of the Port of Mazatlan that will serve automobile, aerospace, and technology imports from Asia.

- Jolanda shared insights obtained from stakeholders that pointed to future trends that will impact connectivity between the border and Texas' and Mexico's ports:

    - Increased congestion and the need for investment could divert traffic destined for Mexico away from Mexico's gulf coast ports to Texas' ports.

    - Congestion at California's seaports could divert traffic destined for the U.S. to Mexico's pacific coast ports.

    - Issues at the Panama Canal (traffic and water) could divert traffic destined for the U.S. to Mexico's pacific coast ports.

    - Mexico's federal government has released plans to invest in road and rail corridors that would link Mexico's pacific coast ports to the center of Mexico.

    - Nearshoring will result in increased maritime shipments that will cross the border into Texas.

- Jolanda shared the questions that stakeholders would work on at the breakout tables:

    - Which cross-border supply chains depend on Texas/Mexico maritime ports? (Today, In the future)

    - What are the major routes linking border crossings to Texas/Mexico maritime ports?

    - What are the challenges/connectivity gaps linking border crossings and Texas'/Mexico's maritime ports?

    - What investments are needed?

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda briefly reminded the district about the objectives of the first and last mile analysis. She mentioned that the Jacobs team received a lot of input from stakeholders during the May and June workshops. The team's analysis and stakeholder input are being compiled in a webapp. Joel Campbell demonstrated how the information was captured in the webapp. The webapp will be made available for viewing at the October workshops.

Action Items

- It was recommended that data/numbers be shown for the first rounds of stakeholder meetings.
- District requested further clarification on how the border region-to-region network was filtered from all TxDOT roadways (from the regional border connectivity network) and why urban areas and interstates were not included in the corridor scorings.
- District requested clarification on low, medium, and high scores for connectivity/mobility metrics; adding "avoidance" to the legend and "opportunity" to the title was suggested.

September 24, 2024, Pharr District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting 3: Pharr District

Date and Time: Tuesday, September 24, 2024, at 8 am (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Andrew Canon	TXDOT TPP	Dan Seedah	Jacobs
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT TPP	Chris Burns	Jacobs
Dora Robles	TxDOT Pharr	Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Norma Garza	TxDOT Pharr	William "Will" Smithson	HNTB
Pedro Alvarez	TXDOT Pharr	Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Rex Costly	TXDOT Pharr	Rahil Saeedi	CPCS
Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs		

Agenda

Pharr District Meeting Agenda
September 24, 2024
Binational Connectivity Stakeholder Workshop Review
8:00 AM – 10:00 AM

8:00 – 8:10 am	**Opening and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
8:10 – 8:20 am	**Overview and Purpose** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning, TxDOT	
8:20 – 8:50 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Begin with context on nearshoring trends, then discuss progress and findings on region-to-region connectivity study.
8:50 – 9:20 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile multimodal connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
9:20 – 9:50 am	**Discussion and Input**	
9:50 – 10:00 am	**Close and Adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

The meeting was initiated with Marvina Cephas leading the BTMP team introductions. Kelvin Kroeker then introduced the HNTB consultant team and Jolanda Prozzi, the Jacobs consultant team. The TxDOT District team introduced themselves, including Pete Alvarez, the District Engineer, along with Dora Robles, Norma Garza, and Rex Costly.

The purpose of this meeting was to update the Pharr TxDOT district on the progress of the BTMP recommended studies (Region to Region by HNTB, Port to Port, Port to Maritime, and First Mile/Last Mile by Jacobs) before presenting the findings to the stakeholders, which will take place in October. This update follows the initial round of presentations, where the project objectives and goals were introduced.

Presentations

Nearshoring

- Rahil Saeedi delivered a presentation on key trends shaping the demand for the border region's transportation system, with a particular focus on nearshoring and its transformative impact on cross-border connectivity between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as within the border regions.

- The presentation began with a definition of nearshoring and its connections to broader global and national economic and policy trends. It then examined critical border region infrastructure supporting cross-border trade, highlighted key development patterns along the border, and provided insights into the future of nearshoring, including potential infrastructure needs.

Region to Region Connectivity

- For the Region-to-Region study, Will Smithson showcased the opportunity routes identified through the first connectivity network analysis, presented in round one, which assessed market access and people and goods movement.

- He explained that by building on this initial network, the next phase of the analysis would focus on the segments outside of larger urban areas. Interstates and planned future interstate routes were filtered out to remove redundant infrastructure from the analysis and identify less obvious but essential routes contributing to a more robust, interconnected system.

- The structure and format for upcoming stakeholder meetings were also discussed, ensuring alignment on the engagement process and expectations. Examples of recommendations and opportunities to be used in the stakeholder presentation, along with the process for identifying and prioritizing recommendations in four categories – Safety/Security, Operational/Technology, Capacity, and connectivity. Stakeholders will contribute by marking recommendations and opportunities on working maps using color-coded dots, each representing one of the four categories. An ESRI Experience Builder will also provide interactive, detailed views of corridors and associated metrics. This platform will allow real-time collaboration and engagement.

- Key numbers to highlight the network needs and challenges were presented, followed by the analysis summary that walked through the process of utilizing INRIX data to identify major border region origin-destination (OD) pairs, observed trip paths between each OD pair were mapped, allowing for deeper understanding of route patterns. The analysis then compared observer route choices with the shorter and faster routes available in a table in the following slide, revealing discrepancies in route utilization.

- Once the Border Region-to-Region opportunity routes were established and displayed, further analysis focused on evaluating key performance metrics, The following draft metrics were presented:

- Connectivity and mobility metrics: evaluating the efficiency of travel.
    - Fast Route Opportunity (for both 2022 and 2050)
    - Short Rout Opportunity (for both 2022 and 2050)
    - Time Travel Reliability
- Travel Demand Metrics: Highlighting traffic volume and flow patterns.
    - Forecasted (2050) Total Vehicle Miles Traveled
    - Forecasted (2050) Total Truck Vehicle Miles Traveled
    - 2022 AADT Flow estimates for Mexican states that border Texas
- Safety metrics: identifying critical safety issues.
    - Historical Crash frequency and locations (2019-2023)
    - Historical Total Crashes (2019-2023)
    - Historical Truck related crashes (2019-2023)
    - Corridor safety score
    - Rail Highway Incidents (2010-2024)
- Infrastructure metrics: Evaluating the existing infrastructure challenges.
    - Percentage of mileage with 2 or less lanes
    - Percentage of millage with no access control
    - Corridors with 16’ or less bridge clearance
    - Percentage of Mileage with Physical Median
    - The average width of outside shoulder lanes
- Equity metrics: Evaluating access to transportation and economic benefits.
    - Equity score methodology and score

- Pete Alvarez mentioned he agreed on how the corridors were scored and the scores for segments around Pharr outside of Interstate 35.
- TxDOT projects and recommendations from other corridor studies have been reviewed to assess the current network needs. The last two slides of the presentation had maps that showcased these efforts, labeled as identified needs.
- District staff commented on the strong trend of industrial area growth, and how that will create even more need.

Border Crossing to Border Crossing Connectivity

- Chris Burns presented the teams' analysis of the needs and challenges between border crossings in the event of a disruption. Jacobs conducted a planning level route analysis to estimate how traffic will divert if a border crossing is closed. Jacobs analyzed the nearest suitable alternative crossing to the closed crossing, characterized the connecting routes, and analyzed the increase in traffic at the alternative, as well as the current average wait times and processing capacity at the alternative.

- Chris presented the analysis done for the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge as an example. For example, if the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge closes, passenger operated vehicle (POV) traffic can divert to the McAllen Hidalgo International Bridge and or the Donna Rio Bravo International Bridge. For commercial motor vehicles (CMVs), the closest alternative is the Progresso International Bridge approximately 20 miles to the east.

- Chris showed that for POVs the McAllen Hidalgo International Bridge provides adequate capacity to process the diverted POVs/bus demand from the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge. The Pharr Reynosa International Bridge has seven processing lanes for CMVs. The Progreso International Bridge has only one processing lane for CMVs. Diverting CMVs to the Progreso International Bridge could therefore result in substantial delays. The CBP data analyzed shows the number of processing lanes open and the average wait times experienced. For example, even with all seven CMV processing lanes open at the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge, CMVs still experience wait times of over an hour. Likewise, the Progresso International Bridge experiences delays of up to 30 minutes at its single processing lane.

- Chris also showed all the connecting roads that were analyzed in Mexico and Texas. These connectors represent the shortest road to the nearest alternative crossing in the event of a border crossing closure.

- Chris shared the key findings of the analysis by international bridge closure. He reviewed the distance to the nearest alternative crossing for POVs and CMVs, the minimum lanes on the connector roads, and the processing capacity (in terms of number of processing lanes) of the alternative crossing as a ratio of the processing capacity of the disrupted crossing.

- Chris concluded that the number of cross-border POVs and CMVs are relatively modest compared to the capacities of the connectors in the Pharr/Tamaulipas region. For example, all crossings in the McAllen region processes less than 7,000 northbound vehicles, but most connectors are four lane roads in Texas and Mexico with theoretical capacities in excess of 70,000 vehicles. The exception is US 281 that has stretches with single lanes, but high capacity alternatives in I-2 and I-69 exist that offers redundancy. The major concern is the capacity and modes served by the international bridges. For example, CMVs crossing at the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge would have to divert to either Starr-Camargo International Bridge (with two processing lanes), Progreso International Bridge (with one processing lane) or Veterans International Bridge (with four processing lanes).

- Jolanda shared the analysis that was done with StreetLight data on how traffic diverted when the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge was closed between April 11 and 13, 2022. Jacobs analyzed the typical northbound and southbound routes of CMVs crossing at the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge, the Anzalduas International Bridge (only southbound empties), the Progreso International Bridge, and the Free Trade International Bridge. The StreetLight analysis showed an overall reduction in the number of truck crossings during the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge closure. Southbound trucks, however, appeared to use similar routes during the closure, but some northbound trucks seemed to have diverted and crossed at the Free Trade International Bridge during the closure.

- Jolanda Prozzi shared the questions that will be reviewed with the stakeholders at the breakout tables. These questions were as follows:
    - Did we analyze the correct corridors? What other alternatives exist?
    - What are the corridor needs/challenges?
    - What are potential mitigation strategies?
    - What investments are needed?

Border Crossing to Seaport Connectivity

- Jolanda shared the progress to date on the border crossing to maritime port connectivity analysis conducted. The Jacobs team started by analyzing StreetLight data, available federal data, and the Transearch database to identify truck trips between the Texas-Mexico border and Texas' major seaports. The analysis revealed a very small percentage of trucks moving between the border and Texas' seaports north of Port Mansfield. Jolanda emphasized that this result required stakeholders to provide the team with the information and context to analyze the importance of and connectivity challenges between the border and maritime ports.
- Jolanda shared various statistics about the importance of waterborne trade with Mexico. Jolanda showed that:
- Mexico represented about 11 percent of the total waterborne imports and exports handled at Texas' ports.
- Mineral fuel and oil, organic chemicals, and vehicles and parts were the major waterborne trade commodities traded between Mexico and Texas in 2023.
- Energy products (e.g., crude petroleum, distillate fuel oil) were the major commodities handled at Texas' ports in 2022.
- Mexico's ports handled more of a variety of commodities in 2022/2023, ranging from general cargo to agricultural products, mineral products, and containers.
    - Jolanda showed the analysis done with the Transearch data. The Jacobs team showed where major commodities handled by the Texas seaports are moving on the Texas highway network – i.e., petroleum, coal and gas; steel and iron; industrial chemicals; motor vehicles and parts. Jolanda emphasized that these flows arguable include commodity movements between the border and the Texas seaports, but these volumes are not known.
- Analysis of StreetLight data showed the top truck routes to and from Port Isabel and the Port of Brownsville. Norma Garza mentioned that the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority could potentially be an additional data source for tracking movements between the border crossings and the Port of Brownsville and Port Isabel.
- Jolanda shared the insights obtained thus far from interviewing Texas port directors. Jolanda showed that the Port of Harlingen handled large volumes of refined fuels that cross by truck at the Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios and that the Port of Brownsville handled a variety of products (including mineral products, diesel, gasoline, metals) that cross by truck at the Veterans International Bridge. The Port of Vitoria and the Port of Beaumont are currently not aware of any cargo moving between the ports and the border, but the Port of Victoria mentioned that the new rail connection could potentially open a market for refined fuels and chemicals to move by rail from the port and crossing into Mexico at Laredo. Port Arthur mentioned that eucalyptus pulp for paper and aluminum move by rail from the port and cross at Laredo and Eagle Pass into Mexico.

- Jolanda also shared the insights obtained from interviewing stakeholders in Mexico. Mexican stakeholders mentioned a lack of data/robust database that tracks the movement of trade between the initial port of entry, how the trade moves on the transportation network, and eventually crosses at the border. This lack of data hampers the accurate assessment of trade volumes and how it uses the transportation network. Brokers did, however, share that some cargo is moving from Latin America through Mexico's pacific coast ports, such as Lazaro Cardenas, in bond and cross at the border. Jacobs also heard about the challenges with rail bridge heights that does not allow for double stacked containers or automobile rail cars between the Port of Topolobampo and Presidio. Finally, the Jacobs team heard about a new planned port 25 miles north of the Port of Mazatlan that will serve automobile, aerospace, and technology imports from Asia.

- Jolanda shared insights obtained from stakeholders that pointed to future trends that will impact connectivity between the border and Texas' and Mexico's ports:

    - Increased congestion and the need for investment could divert traffic destined for Mexico away from Mexico's gulf coast ports to Texas' ports.

    - Congestion at California's seaports could divert traffic destined for the U.S. to Mexico's pacific coast ports.

    - Issues at the Panama Canal (traffic and water) could divert traffic destined for the U.S. to Mexico's pacific coast ports.

    - Mexico's federal government has released plans to invest in road and rail corridors that would link Mexico's pacific coast ports to the center of Mexico.

    - Nearshoring will result in increased maritime shipments that will cross the border into Texas.

- Jolanda shared the questions that stakeholders would work on at the breakout tables:

- Which cross-border supply chains depend on Texas/Mexico maritime ports? (Today, In the future)

- What are the major routes linking border crossings to Texas/Mexico maritime ports?

- What are the challenges/connectivity gaps linking border crossings and Texas'/Mexico's maritime ports?

- What investments are needed?

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Jolanda briefly reminded the district about the objectives of the first and last mile analysis. She mentioned that the Jacobs team received a lot of input from stakeholders during the May and June workshops. The team's analysis and stakeholder input are being compiled in a webapp. Joel Campbell demonstrated how the information was captured in the webapp. The webapp will be made available for viewing at the October workshops.

Action items

- It was recommended that Pharr be added to the route utilization table as an OD Pair.

September 26, 2024, El Paso District Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting 3: El Paso District

Date and Time: Thursday, September 26, 2024, at 10 am (CT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Andrew Canon	TxDOT TPP	Dan Seedah	Jacobs
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT TPP	Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT TPP	Chris Burns	Jacobs
Francisco Almanza	TxDOT TPP	Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Tomas Trevino	TxDOT El Paso	William "Will" Smithson	HNTB
Raul Ortega, Jr.	TxDOT El Paso	Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Marty Boyd	TxDOT El Paso	Rahil Saeedi	CPCS
Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs		

Agenda

El Paso District Meeting Agenda
September 26, 2024
Binational Connectivity Stakeholder Workshop Review
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM Noon MTN

9:00 – 9:10 am	**Opening and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
9:10 – 9:20 am	**Overview and Purpose** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning, TxDOT	
9:20 – 10:00 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Begin with context on nearshoring trends, then discuss progress and findings on region-to-region connectivity study.
10:00 – 10:40 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile multimodal connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
10:40 – 11:40 am	**Discussion and Input**	
11:40 – 12:00 pm	**Close and Adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

The meeting was initiated with Marvina Cephas leading the BTMP team introductions, followed by Kelvin Kroeker introducing the HNTB consultant team and Jolanda Prozzi the Jacobs consultant team. The TxDOT District team introduced themselves, including Tomas Trevino, District Engineer, and Marty Boyd, District Director of Transportation Planning and Development.

The purpose of this meeting was to update the El Paso TxDOT district on the progress of the BTMP recommended studies (Region to Region by HNTB, Port to Port, Port to Maritime, and First Mile/Last Mile by Jacobs) before presenting the findings to the stakeholders, which will take place in October. This update follows the initial round of presentations, where the project objectives and goals were introduced.

Presentations

Nearshoring

- Rahil Saeedi delivered a presentation on key trends shaping the demand for the border region's transportation system, with a particular focus on nearshoring and its transformative impact on cross-border connectivity between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as within the border regions.
- The presentation began with a definition of nearshoring and its connections to broader global and national economic and policy trends. It then examined critical border region infrastructure supporting cross-border trade, highlighted key development patterns along the border, and provided insights into the future of nearshoring, including potential infrastructure needs.
- District staff asked if there were any El Paso specific examples that could be worked in. Rahil mentioned that the information is general and not local.

Region to Region Connectivity

- For the Region-to-Region study, Will Smithson showcased the opportunity routes identified through the first connectivity network analysis, presented in round one, which assessed market access and people and goods movement.
- He explained that by building on this initial network, the next phase of the analysis would focus on the segments outside of larger urban areas. Interstates and planned future interstate routes were filtered out to remove redundant infrastructure from the analysis and identify less obvious but essential routes contributing to a more robust, interconnected system.
- The structure and format for upcoming stakeholder meetings were also discussed, ensuring alignment on the engagement process and expectations. Examples of recommendations and opportunities to be used in the stakeholder presentation, along with the process for identifying and prioritizing recommendations in four categories – Safety/Security, Operational/Technology, Capacity, and connectivity. Stakeholders will contribute by marking recommendations and opportunities on working maps using color-coded dots, each representing one of the four categories. An ESRI Experience Builder will also provide interactive, detailed views of corridors and associated metrics. This platform will allow real-time collaboration and engagement.
- Key numbers to highlight the network needs and challenges were presented, followed by the analysis summary that walked through the process of utilizing INRIX data to identify major border region origin-destination (OD) pairs, observed trip paths between each OD pair were mapped, allowing for deeper understanding of route patterns. The analysis then compared observer route choices with the shorter and faster routes available in a table in the following slide, revealing discrepancies in route utilization.
- Once the Border Region-to-Region opportunity routes were established and displayed, further analysis focused on evaluating key performance metrics, The following draft metrics were presented:

- Connectivity and mobility metrics: evaluating the efficiency of travel.
    - Fast Route Opportunity (for both 2022 and 2050)
    - Short Route Opportunity (for both 2022 and 2050)
    - Time Travel Reliability
- Travel Demand Metrics: Highlighting traffic volume and flow patterns.
    - Forecasted (2050) Total Vehicle Miles Traveled
    - Forecasted (2050) Total Truck Vehicle Miles Traveled
    - 2022 AADT Flow estimates for Mexican states that border Texas
- Safety metrics: identifying critical safety issues.
    - Historical Crash frequency and locations (2019-2023)
    - Historical Total Crashes (2019-2023)
    - Historical Truck related crashes (2019-2023)
    - Corridor safety score
    - Rail Highway Incidents (2010-2024)
- Infrastructure metrics: Evaluating the existing infrastructure challenges.
    - Percentage of mileage with 2 or less lanes
    - Percentage of millage with no access control
    - Corridors with 16’ or less bridge clearance
    - Percentage of Mileage with Physical Median
    - The average width of outside shoulder lanes
- Equity metrics: Evaluating access to transportation and economic benefits.
    - Equity score methodology and score

- TxDOT projects and recommendations from other corridor studies have been reviewed to assess the current network needs. The last two slides of the presentation had maps that showcased these efforts, labeled as identified needs.

- District staff made a comment about the growth trends and the need for capacity. Some stakeholders in our region are critical of the need for added capacity, and this is an important reminder of the need. District staff also asked if Interstate 10 main lanes and frontage roads would be a priority, and Will assured the group that investment in interstates is considered within the baseline.

Border Crossing to Border Crossing Connectivity

- Chris Burns presented the teams' analysis of the needs and challenges between border crossings. Jacobs conducted a planning level route analysis to estimate how traffic will divert if a border crossing is closed. Jacobs analyzed the nearest suitable alternative crossing to the closed crossing, characterized the connecting routes, and analyzed the increase in traffic at the alternative, as well as the current average wait times and processing capacity at the alternative.

- Chris presented the analysis done for the Santa Teresa crossing as an example. For example, if the Santa Teresa crossing closes, passenger operated vehicle (POV) traffic can divert to the Paso del Norte International Bridge and or the Good Neighbor International Bridge. For commercial motor vehicles (CMVs), the closest alternative is Bridge of the Americas.

- Chris showed that for POVs the two downtown El Paso bridges provide adequate capacity to process the diverted POVs/bus demand from the Santa Teresa crossing. The Santa Teresa crossing has three processing lanes for CMVs. The Bridge of the Americas has six processing lanes for CMVs. Diverting CMVs to Bridge of the Americas could, however, result in some delay. Jacobs illustrated these points by showing the CBP data analyzed that shows the number of processing lanes open and the average wait times experienced. For example, the analysis showed that during the period of analysis all six CMV processing lanes were never open at Bridge of the Americas even when delays reached more than 20 minutes. Likewise, only two CMV processing lanes were open at the Santa Teresa crossing during the analysis period even when delays exceeded 30 minutes.

- Chris shared all the connecting roads that were analyzed in Mexico and Texas. These connectors represent the shortest road to the nearest alternative crossing in the event of a border crossing closure.

- Chris shared the key findings of the analysis by international bridge closure. He reviewed the distance to the nearest alternative crossing for POVs and CMVs, the minimum lanes on the connector roads, and the processing capacity (in terms of number of processing lanes) of the alternative crossing as a ratio of the processing capacity of the disrupted crossing.

- Chris concluded that the number of cross-border POVs and CMVs are relatively modest compared to the capacities of the connectors in the El Paso/Juarez region. For example, all crossings in the El Paso region process less than 8,000 northbound vehicles, but most connectors are four lane roads in Texas and Mexico with theoretical capacities in excess of 70,000 vehicles. The major concern is rather the capacity and modes served by the international crossings. For example, POVs crossing at Bridge of the Americas (with 14 processing lanes) would have to divert to Ysleta International Bridge (with 10 processing lanes), which currently experiences delays of up to 50 minutes given existing demand.

- Jolanda shared the analysis that was done with StreetLight data on how traffic diverted when Bridge of the Americas was closed between September 18 and October 10, 2023 for cargo. Jacobs analyzed the typical northbound and southbound routes of CMVs crossing at Bridge of the Americas, Santa Teresa, and the Ysleta International Bridge. The StreetLight analysis showed that southbound trucks largely diverted to the Ysleta International Bridge during the closure, while northbound trucks largely diverted to the Santa Teresa crossing during the closure.

- Jolanda shared the questions that will be reviewed with the stakeholders at the breakout tables. These questions were as follows:
    - Did we analyze the correct corridors? What other alternatives exist?
    - What are the corridor needs/challenges?
    - What are potential mitigation strategies?
    - What investments are needed?

Border Crossing to Seaport Connectivity

- Jolanda shared the progress to date on the border crossing to maritime port connectivity analysis conducted. The Jacobs team started by analyzing StreetLight data, available federal data, and the Transearch database to identify truck trips between the Texas-Mexico border and Texas' major seaports. The analysis revealed a very small percentage of trucks moving between the border and Texas' seaports north of Port Mansfield. Jolanda emphasized that this result required stakeholders to provide the team with the information and context to analyze the importance of and connectivity challenges between the border and maritime ports.
- Jolanda shared various statistics about the importance of waterborne trade with Mexico. Jolanda showed that:
    - Mineral fuel and oil, organic chemicals, and vehicles and parts were the major waterborne trade commodities traded between Mexico and Texas in 2023.
    - Energy products (e.g., crude petroleum, distillate fuel oil) were the major commodities handled at Texas' ports in 2022.
    - Mexico's ports handled more of a variety of commodities in 2022/2023, ranging from general cargo to agricultural products, mineral products, and containers.
- Jolanda also showed the analysis of the Transearch data. In this analysis, the Jacobs team shows where major commodities handled by the Texas seaports are moving on the Texas highway network – i.e., petroleum, coal and gas; steel and iron; industrial chemicals; motor vehicles and parts. Jolanda emphasized that these flows arguable include commodity movements between the border and the Texas seaports, but the volumes are not known.
- Jolanda shared the insights obtained thus far from interviewing Texas port directors. Jolanda showed that the Port of Harlingen handled large volumes of refined fuels that cross by truck at the Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios and that the Port of Brownsville handled a variety of products (including mineral products, diesel, gasoline, metals) that cross by truck at the Veterans International Bridge. The Port of Vitoria and the Port of Beaumont is currently not aware of any cargo moving between the ports and the border, but the Port of Victoria mentioned that the new rail connection could potentially open a market for refined fuels and chemicals to move by rail from the port and crossing into Mexico at Laredo. Port Arthur mentioned that eucalyptus pulp for paper and aluminum moves by rail from the port and crosses at Laredo and Eagle Pass into Mexico.
- Jolanda shared the insights obtained from interviewing stakeholders in Mexico. Mexican stakeholders mentioned a lack of data/robust database that tracks the movement of trade between the initial port of entry, how the trade moves on the transportation network, and eventually crosses at the border. This lack of data hampers the accurate assessment of trade volumes and how it uses the transportation network. Brokers did, however, share that some cargo is moving from Latin America through Mexico's pacific coast ports, such as Lazaro Cardenas, in bond and cross at the border. In other cases, commodities are imported into Mexico, value is added in Mexico and then the intermediate or finished product crosses into Texas.

- Jolanda shared insights obtained from stakeholders that pointed to future trends that will impact connectivity between the border and Texas' and Mexico's ports:
    - Increased congestion and the need for investment could divert traffic destined for Mexico away from Mexico's gulf coast ports to Texas' ports.
    - Congestion at California's seaports could divert traffic destined for the U.S. to Mexico's pacific coast ports.
    - Issues at the Panama Canal (traffic and water) could divert traffic destined for the U.S. to Mexico's pacific coast ports.
    - Mexico's federal government has released plans to invest in road and rail corridors that would link Mexico's pacific coast ports to the center of Mexico.
    - Nearshoring will result in increased maritime shipments that will cross the border into Texas.
- Jolanda shared the questions that stakeholders would work on at the breakout tables:
    - Which cross-border supply chains depend on Texas/Mexico maritime ports? (Today, In the future)
    - What are the major routes linking border crossings to Texas/Mexico maritime ports?
    - What are the challenges/connectivity gaps linking border crossings and Texas'/Mexico's maritime ports?
    - What investments are needed?

First and Last Mile Connectivity

- Jolanda briefly reminded the district about the objectives of the first and last mile analysis. She mentioned that the Jacobs team received a lot of input from stakeholders during the May and June workshops. The team's analysis and stakeholder input are being compiled in a webapp. Joel Campbell demonstrated how the information was captured in the webapp. The webapp will be made available for viewing at the October workshops.
- TxDOT's El Paso district clarified that the speed profiles (congestion layer) do not show forecasted congestion. The Jacobs team confirmed that the layer shows the current speed profiles.

Action items

- No specific items or requests originated from this meeting

October 3, 2024, McAllen Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 2 McAllen, TX

Date and Time: October 3, 2024, at 8:30 am (MT)

Location: DoubleTree Suites by Hilton, 1800 S. 2nd St., McAllen, TX 78503

Agenda

Border Connectivity Studies Workshop Agenda
McAllen Binational Workshop
DoubleTree Suites by Hilton, 1800 S. 2nd St.,
McAllen, Texas 78503
October 3, 2024
9:30AM – 1:30PM

9:30 – 9:45 am	**Networking and Registration**	
9:45 – 9:50 am	**Welcome and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT **Andrew Canon,** Director of International Trade, Freight and Corridor Planning, TxDOT	
9:50 – 10:00 am	**Remarks** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning Branch, TxDOT	
10:00 – 10:30 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Discuss progress on region-to-region connectivity study.
10:30 – 11:20 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
11:20 – 11:50 am	**Lunch/Workshop Session Overview**	Instructions regarding breakout sessions
11:50 – 1:10 pm	**Workshop Stations** **Will Smithson,** HNTB **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Opportunity to provide ideas, questions, and feedback for each study. Reminders to move between stations will be announced.
1:10 – 1:25 pm	**Regroup and Summarize**	Reporting back to large group
1:25 – 1:30 pm	**Closing and adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting, introducing the goals of the working group. She emphasized that this workshop would focus on gathering input from users.

Safety minutes

Andrew Canon, Director of International Trade, Freight, and Corridor Planning with TxDOT presented safety minutes focused on attentive driving.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in **B. Attendance**

Opening Remarks

- Claudia Lagos Galindo, International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, introduced the studies presented, including Region-to-Region, Port-to-Port, and First and Last Mile analyses. She relayed that the input gathered during previous meetings has shaped the studies, and attendees to identify whether topics have been comprehensively captured, identify further research needs, and pinpoint areas where solutions are required.

- Javier Zarazua from the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP) agreed with Lagos Galindo's opening remarks. He emphasized the need for solutions to enhance east-west travel in Mexico, especially between Tijuana and Monterrey, citing geographical challenges as a limitation.

Presentations

Region-to-Region Connectivity

- Donald Ludlow, with CPCS, presented an introduction to nearshoring in the border region He discussed what nearshoring entails, key trade trends, challenges, and future outlooks. Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study and Analysis, developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and informed by feedback from the first round of workshop meetings in May. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to enhance travel safety and efficiency. The analysis included comments, feedback, needs, challenges, and further recommendations.

- Regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:

    - Route from Monterrey to Roma (Highway 54):

        - Shortest route but perceived as unsafe by trucking industry due to past issues.
        - Mexico has invested heavily in security and infrastructure on the route in recent years.
        - Industrial parks are growing along the route due to increased investment.
        - US infrastructure on the corresponding route (US 83 and Interstate 2) needs to be improved to handle future growth.
        - Roma is a potential alternative border crossing with faster processing times compared to Laredo.
        - A new commercial crossing near Roma is being discussed.

- Limited East-West Connectivity:
    - Trucks typically go through San Antonio because of poor East-West road infrastructure.
    - Existing East-West roads lack rest stops, lighting, and have limited capacity.
    - Mexican stakeholders propose a new arterial road from McAllen to I-10 to avoid San Antonio.
- Rio Grande Valley Border Crossing Capacity Problems:
    - Both commuter and commercial traffic experience congestion at crossings.
    - Congestion disrupts urban traffic and connectivity within the Valley.
- Monterrey-Roma (54) Highway Conflicted Perspectives on Security:
    - Truckers and some agents claim the road is insecure.
    - Mexican officials say recent investments improved security.
- Border Roads (Riverreña):
    - Unusable on both sides due to insecurity and lack of capacity.
- Additional Points:
    - Improve and expand riverside highway (Highway 2 or 82) from Nuevo Laredo to Matamoros.
    - Resolve transit issues for Mexican trucks in Zapata County. Related to the inclusion of Zapata County to the Commercial Zone status.

Port-to-Port Connectivity

- Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, introduced the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study that was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by feedback from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. This study aimed to identify levels of redundancy among border crossing connections, potential needs, and proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address existing challenges.
- Chris Burns, with Jacobs, presented a crossing closure analysis which highlighted alternative routes, crossing capacities, and wait times, in events of bridge closures.
- Jolanda Prozzi presented a case study on the closing of the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge from April 11th to 13th revealing that this closing led to an overall reduction in truck crossings. Southbound trucks traveled similar routes to typical crossings when the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge is open, while northbound trucks diverted towards the Free Trade International Bridge.
- Regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:

- Lower Rio Grande Valley:
  - Roma to Zapata US 83 can be an alternative route.
  - Companies look for raw materials in Mexico and the value is added in the U.S.
  - Connect SH 16 with US 83 via FM 755 to San Antonio. Roma-Ciudad Miquel Aleman International Bridge needs additional highway capacity to accommodate overweight loads.
  - Crossing capacity is inadequate for both commuter traffic and commercial traffic in the Valley. This results in cross-border trade and travel blocking urban traffic on both sides of the border (specifically at Roma). For the same reason, connectivity across the Valley at peak hours is problematic.
  - Improve access roads to the Anzalduas International Bridge and bridges in Matamoros to allow or expand commercial processing capacity (cargo). Specifically, improve and expand the ports-of-entry (Progreso and Los Indios International Bridges) for processing greater cargo traffic.
  - Circular POV route at Lack Falcon Dam Crossing.
  - Roma-Ciudad Miquel Aleman International Bridge currently processes over 200+ trucks daily, primarily carrying produce. Crossings have increased from 3,600 to 50,000 annually. From Roma, US 83 connects to Laredo.
  - No Mexican trucks with Mexican plates can cross Zapata County to go to Laredo (no commercial zone). HR 6240 introduced to expand commercial zone to include Zapata County.
  - SH 365 tolled overweight route under construction. Route will run from FM 1016 to US 281.
  - Need connection between SH 68 and FM493.
  - Need additional overweight routes within Hidalgo and Cameron Counties.
  - Need additional overweight corridors connecting to Port of Brownsville and Port of Harlingen.
  - Future East loop project from I 69E (relief route connecting to Veterans International Bridge) is high priority.
  - Need better connectivity from Roma to SH 16. Route used by trucks to get to interstate.
  - Donna International Bridge process southbound empties. Truck volumes are still low, but full commercial vehicle processing (northbound and southbound) anticipated in 3 to 4 years. Anticipate capacity of 4 to 5 lanes.
  - 2nd inspection station, 335-acre industrial parcel planned at Roma-Ciudad Miquel Aleman International Bridge. Extend SL 195 to FM 650 to connect to industrial park to bypass City of Roma. TxDOT loop needs to come further.

        - When Pharr Reynosa International Bridge closes, traffic is processed at Roma-Ciudad Aleman International Bridge. No issues processing increase in traffic. 60 % of traffic processed at Roma-Ciudad Aleman International Bridge is produce. Roma experienced a 50-60% increase in traffic year over year. Shorter inspection times because do simultaneous US-Mexico inspections. Potential future bottleneck as growth continues especially to new industrial park.

        - Anzalduas International Bridge facilities to process commercial vehicles being constructed on U.S. side. Expected opening in Summer/Fall 2025. Waiting on Mexico to construct facilities.

        - Two additional commercial lanes being added at Pharr Reynosa International Bridge. Changing traffic flow at POE (i.e., new exit for fast lane traffic on east side, bypass for wide load trucks). Twin span expansion of bridge. Opening expected end of 2025.

    - Tamaulipas:

        - There is significant growth in Flores and in the northeast of Monterrey, Nuevo León.

        - Salinas – Victoria has high demand for commercial space.

        - Safe stops for trucks in Mexico are needed. Potential collaboration with 7/11 or OXXO or locate next to the barracks. Safe stops will enhance regional economy, can be included in the National Economic Plan, and could reduce migratory flows.

        - Trucks avoid MEX 2D - toll road. They use side roads.

        - Detour from MEX-57 to Cienega is not viable.

        - Bypasses will be necessary in around many Mexican towns.

        - MEX-54 and MEX-2 require category modification to reach international bridges. Reynosa MEX-2 connects with MEX-54

        - MEX-30 can be used to reach the two states (Coahuila and Nuevo León).

Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity

- Jolanda Prozzi presented on the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study developed from Texas' Waterborne Trade Study in 2023 and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. She highlighted the top commodities moving between Mexico and U.S. ports, specifying the transportation routes of key maritime commodities along Texas highways, stakeholder interviews, and trends affecting border maritime port connectivity.

- Regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:

    - Texas:

        - Need full build out of US 77 to interstate standards between Corpus Christi and Brownsville (future I-69E).

        - US 281/Military Highway. Need to establish an Overweight Network. Legislation needed to connect the heavy weight corridors in Cameron County with the heavy weight corridors in Hidalgo County. Need to discuss permit interchange between these networks.

- Sporadic project cargo moves from Port Houston to Altamira using US 77. US 77 used to move overweight cargo for Caterpillar and to move wind turbines.
- Some truck traffic use US 281 and US 59 to move from the Valley to Houston depending on construction activities. Truck traffic on the segments is increasing every quarter.
- Lot of seasonal fruit and vegetables (Nov) using US 281/I-69C. About 30 to 35% truck traffic on corridor.
- 20 to 25% truck traffic on US 77 corridor.
- Overweight steel, oil, and combustibles from Port of Brownsville cross at Veterans International Bridge. When SH 4 was under construction, capacity was limited to one lane for two years. No other option. Cannot leave port with overweight permit when raining.
- OW combustible shipments from Port of Harlingen cross at Los Indios. Traffic issues are experienced at Veterans International Bridge. Veterans has one lane for southbound trucks and cars.
- Wind towers from Matamoros cross daily at Los Indios International Bridge and use US 77 to Port of Galveston/Texas City.

o Mexico:

- MEX-54 is important, it connects to Port of Manzanillo. Connects Monterrey to Mier. MEX-54 is not shown on most maps, but it is a critical route. It is important to highlight that MEX-54 reaches the border as an ""alternative route"" that is toll-free. Approximately 60 percent of the transport on this route consists of produce. The remaining 40 percent is miscellaneous goods.
- Tabasco – MEX-54 needs connectivity.
- Tuxpan to Tampico connection is missing.
- Mayors of Ciudad Apodaca and Miguel Alemán should be included in connectivity conversations.
- Need infrastructure improvements and enhance security to connect the Port of Altamira with Matamoros.
- Security problems for truck traffic traveling southbound into Matamoros. Northbound truck traffic is not experiencing issues because of CBP.
- Steel shipments from Port of Brownsville use MEX-40 to Monterrey. Oil tankers use MEX 101, MEX 40, and MEX-1 to Monterrey.
- Northbound automotive coils from Puebla/Tampico cross at Veterans International Bridge. Okara cross at Los Indios International Bridge.
- Route Tec-Mec: From Mazatlán through Torreón to Monterrey (using MEX-40) and MEX-54 from Monterrey to connect to Roma.
- Need infrastructure investment in MEX-40 (Reynosa) and MX-101 (Matamoros).
- Truck drivers leave Matamoros during the day because of San Fernando cartels.

- TAM-5 has two lanes but needs to be expanded to 4 lanes to connect Matamoros to Reynosa. Plan already proposed, but modifications are needed to better serve Matamoros. TAM 5 is the only route in this area as it is a peninsula with no southbound roads, leading to a 100km stretch to the water. A bypass is needed to divert some traffic. The distance from Port Matamoros to the junction is 62 km, with an additional 20 km to reach the API. The proposed road from the junction to La Rosita is approximately 48 km. The project is still in the conceptual phase, with challenges related to water and road curves that need to be addressed during planning.

- Products from International Origins (e.g., Yucatan, Progreso): steel (acero), scrap metal (chatarra), stone materials (pétreos), rolls/plates (rollos/placas), and profiles from southern Mexico. Existing Route: Mazatlán to Laredo (Route Tec-Mex). Proposed Route: Expansion to include Port Matamoros in the Tec-Mex corridor. Connect Port Matamoros to the Tec-Mex route to facilitate movement of goods into San Antonio via La Rosita, Matamoros. This would involve adding 160 km to connect with the existing infrastructure. Texas would need to realign with the Tec-Mex route for this to be feasible. Will not be ready for full operation for a few years. Key for efficiency to connect this port to Monterrey, especially for steel and other imports. The 300 km area around the port shows the most potential for efficient transport.

- Port of Brownsville more efficient for certain exports: 1,200 trailers of rock only require one payment when routed through Port Brownsville, instead of filing multiple times (e.g., 1000 individual files). Brownsville is a better short-term option until Port Matamoros is fully operational. Monterrey Transport: 7,000-9,000 petrochemical trailers already use Port Matamoros.

First and Last Mile Connectivity

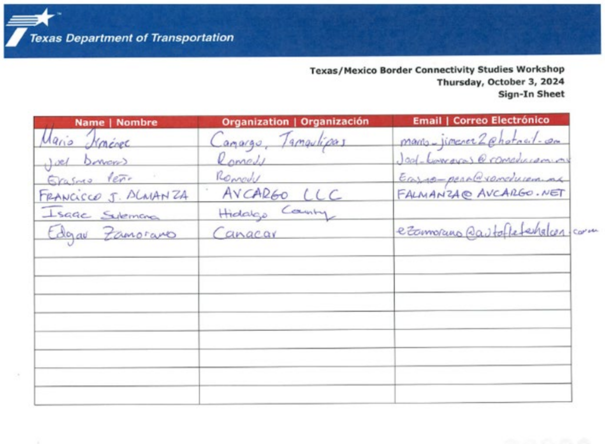
- Nair Barrios and Joel Campbell, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study and analysis developed based on recommendations from the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. The Border Connectivity interactive map was introduced, allowing users to view proposed improvements, identify bottlenecks and safety hotspots, and highlight optimal connections.

- No additional feedback was provided regarding the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study.

Closing Remarks

- Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

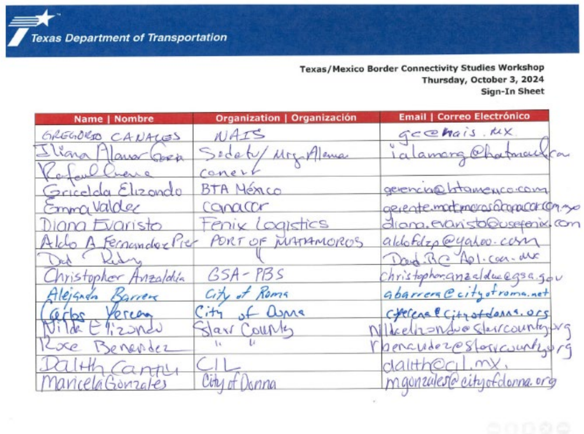
Sign In Sheets



Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Thursday, October 3, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

Name | Nombre	Organization | Organización	Email | Correo Electrónico
Mario Jiménez	Camargo, Tamaulipas	[illegible]
Francisco J. Almanza	AVCARGO LLC	FALMANZA@AVCARGO.NET
Edgar Zamorano	Canacar	[illegible]



Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Thursday, October 3, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

Name | Nombre	Organization | Organización	Email | Correo Electrónico
Griselda Elizondo	BTA México	[illegible]
Diana Evaristo	Fenix Logistics	[illegible]
Christopher Anzaldúa	GSA - PBS	[illegible]
Alejandra Barrera	City of Roma	abarrera@cityofroma.net
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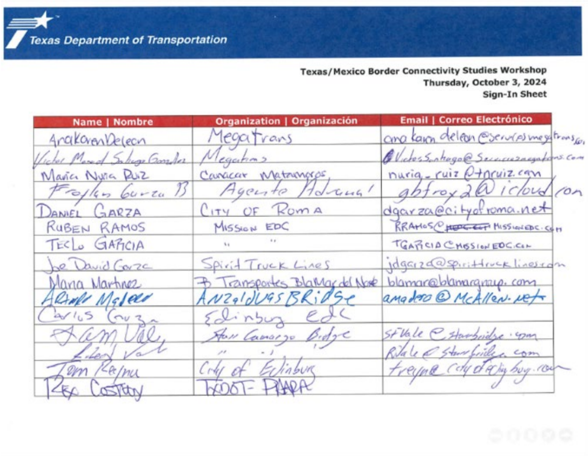
Marcela Gonzalez	City of Donna	mgonzalez@cityofdonna.org



Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Thursday, October 3, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

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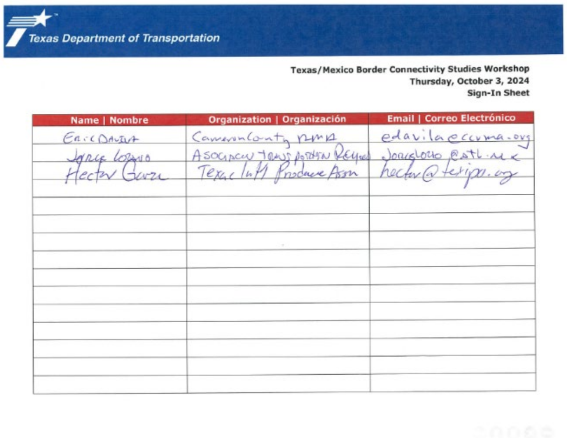

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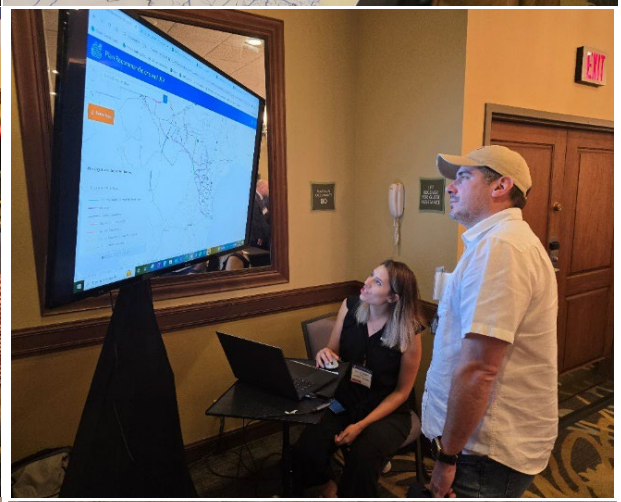


October 15, 2024, Laredo Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 2 Laredo, TX

Date and Time: October 3, 2024, at 9:30 am (MT)

Location: Embassy Suites, 110 Calle del Norte, Laredo, TX 78041

Agenda

Border Connectivity Studies Workshop Agenda
Laredo Binational Workshop
Embassy Suites, 110 C. del Norte
Laredo, Texas 78041
October 15, 2024
9:30AM – 2:00PM

9:30 – 9:35 am	**Welcome and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
9:35 – 9:50 am	**Remarks** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning Branch, TxDOT	
9:50- 10:20 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Nearshoring summary and discuss progress on region-to-region connectivity study.
10:20- 11:00 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
11:00- 12:10 pm	**Workshop Stations** **Will Smithson,** HNTB **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Opportunity to provide ideas, questions, and feedback for each study. Reminders to move between stations will be announced.
12:10 – 12:40 pm	**Lunch/Workshop Session Overview**	Instructions regarding breakout sessions
12:40- 1:40 pm	**Feasibility Study of Mines Rd (FM 1472)** **Entech Engineers** Laredo District, TxDOT	
1:40- 1:50 pm	**Regroup and Summarize**	Reporting back to large group
1:50 – 2:00 pm	**Closing and adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting, introducing the goals of the working group. She emphasized that this workshop would focus on gathering input from users.

Epigmenio "Epi" Gonzalez, TxDOT Laredo District Engineer shared his reflections from short course. He stated that TxDOT is focused on creating safe transportation systems, bringing ideas into fruition, implementing innovations, and being responsible stewards for the public. He encouraged participation during this meeting as the workshop will allow for the introduction of new ideas that would shape future transportation systems.

Safety minutes

Marvina Cephas presented safety minutes focused on attentive driving.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in **B. Attendance**

Opening Remarks

Claudia Lagos Galindo, the International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, introduced the studies being presented, which included Region-to-Region, Port-to-Port Connectivity, Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity, and First and Last Mile Connectivity. She highlighted that the objective of this meeting is to present the input gathered from users of these systems to determine whether the topics have been comprehensively addressed, identify further research needs, and pinpoint areas where solutions are required. She underscored that input and firsthand experience from users of border transportation systems is integral to the studies and has significantly contributed to shaping the analysis.

Presentations

Region-to-Region Connectivity

- Donald Ludlow, with CPCS, presented an introduction to nearshoring in the border region. He discussed what nearshoring entails, key trade trends, challenges, and future outlooks. Will Smithson, with HNTB.

- Donald Ludlow, with CPCS, presented an introduction to nearshoring in the border region. He discussed what nearshoring entails, key trade trends, challenges, and future outlooks. Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study and Analysis, developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and informed by feedback from the first round of workshop meetings in May. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to enhance travel safety and efficiency. The analysis included comments, feedback, needs, challenges, and further recommendations.

- Regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:

    - Cross-Border Trade and Infrastructure Needs

    - Nuevo Laredo and Colombia Bridge Connectivity:

        - Completion of the La Gloria-Colombia Highway will enhance connectivity between Nuevo León and Texas.

        - There is a need for a checkpoint and stop in Colombia to improve trade efficiency.

- Plans to modernize and expand the Saltillo-Monclova Highway to better connect Piedras Negras and improve overall regional trade flow.

- Bottlenecks and Congestion:

  - Traffic bottlenecks occur at Mines Rd and Loop 20, partly due to operational inefficiencies on the Mexican side.

  - Mexican truck drivers face significant delays (4–5 hours) at the World Trade Bridge due to accidents caused by congestion, impatience, and inattentiveness.

  - Rural roads that could serve as diversions are not suitable for heavy cargo due to poor conditions and functional classification.

- Safety and Resilience:

  - The Piedras Negras to Nuevo Laredo Highway needs upgrades for improved connectivity and resilience.

  - Frequent accidents and safety concerns in areas like Los Chorros and La Carbonera call for stricter enforcement of regulations and inspections.

- Freight and Trucking Needs

  - Secure Stops and Lighting:

    a. Establish secure truck stops every 50 km to improve safety and reduce accidents.

    b. Additional lighting is needed on the first exit of Mines Rd to prevent backups and improve visibility.

  - Rural and Secondary Roads:

  - Roads like US 277 and US 377 are missing from maps and should be prioritized for improvement.

  - Many rural roads that could serve as alternates are not designed for heavy trucks, exacerbating wear and tear from increased oil field and manufacturing traffic.

- Regional Connectivity Projects

  - High Priority Routes:

    a. Convert the Torreón to Monclova highway into a new, modernized highway to connect Coahuila's central region with Piedras Negras.

    b. Expand the Monterrey-Saltillo free road, which faces numerous operational challenges.

    c. Improve connectivity from Ojinaga to Coahuila (Monclova and Saltillo) to establish direct trade routes to Highway 57 and the U.S.

  - Federal Train Project:

    a. Nuevo León has proposed a Monterrey-Laredo-San Antonio-Dallas train as part of a federal passenger train initiative.

- Map and Visualization Feedback
    - Add US 277, US 377, and TX-255 expansion projects to maps.
    - Highlight the need for improved connectivity between I-35, I-10, and El Paso for traffic headed to California.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study:
    - Will Smithson acknowledged participants for their feedback, noting that their firsthand experiences are not available from data sources typically used by planners. Policy feedback included clarifying what materials can cross at various bridges. Suggested expansions included widening US Highway (US) 59, an important east-west route connecting Corpus Christi to Laredo. Suggested new connections included extending Texas Loop 20 to Bridge 4/5, in conjunction with the Outer Loop, and enhancing Texas State Highway (SH) 44 as a route from Corpus Christi to Laredo. Safety issues were highlighted, with several recommendations including increasing shoulder width, separating commercial and private traffic at the Laredo checkpoint, and improving signage approaching the Laredo Checkpoint.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo highlighted several key infrastructure needs, including the construction of new or improved roads between the Pacific coast and the Texas-Mexico border and between Coahuila, and Chihuahua. Feedback also emphasized the importance of improving the transportation on MEX 85.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo mentioned that safety stops are needed across many roadways, especially towards Puebla and Veracruz in roadway networks across Columbia. Regarding infrastructure attendees shared that the La Gloria- Columbia highway expansion is expected to become a vital route to cross border traffic.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo mentioned that in the United States, stakeholders from Mexico described a need for road improvements in areas such as, Carrizo Springs, Uvalde, and Del Rio, where existing roads should be upgraded to Super 2 roadways or two-lane divided highways. Additionally, there is a pressing need to modernize and standardize technologies used in infrastructure, as discrepancies between U.S. and Mexican systems at border crossing create inefficiencies. Many of these concerns involve federal sections of highway that require attention and investment.

Port-to-Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, introduced the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study that was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by feedback from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. This study aimed to identify levels of redundancy among border crossing connections, potential needs, and proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address existing challenges.

Claudia Lagos Galindo noted that Laredo has significant experience adapting to closures. After a tornado in 2017 and other recent storms, the networks between the Colombia Solidarity Bridge and the World Trade Bridge have been crucial for continuous transportation.

Chris Burns from Jacobs presented an analysis of crossing closures, emphasizing alternative routes, crossing capacities, and wait times in the event of bridge closures. The analysis highlighted that limited crossing capacities are a significant constraint in the Laredo region.

- Regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:

- Laredo

  - FM 1472 (Mines Road) is a chokepoint in Laredo. Bottlenecks occur on Mines Road and Loop 20. Number of industrial zones along Mines Road.
  - Truck queuing presents an issue. Loop 20 is three lanes up to the World Trade Bridge.
  - Need westbound overpass for trucks to merge on FM 1472 from World Trade Bridge so truck traffic can get to warehouses easier. Congestion on Mines Road is also an issue for emergency vehicles.
  - SL 20 overpass needed (future I-69). Long queues when crossing at Colombia. High traffic volumes on Mines Road, resulting in slow traffic.
  - Additional connectors to I-35 will alleviate traffic on FM 1472 (Mines Road). Nearshoring traffic will cross at Colombia Solidarity International Bridge, but FM 1472 is a chokepoint.
  - Additional connectivity is needed between Eagle Pass and Laredo. Old Mines Road is not fully paved.
  - TxDOT planning Outer Loop to connect I-35 to US 83 and the future Laredo Bridge 4/5. Laredo Bridge 4/5 is soon to be under construction, but new connectivity to the Bridge is required. The Bridge is scheduled to open in four years. The Laredo Outer Loop would connect Laredo Bridge 4/5 directly to I-35, offering a shorter route to Mexico. A connection from US-83 to Loop 20 is also needed.
  - Truck queues are backed up to mile 8 on I-35 because of the Checkpoint. POV detour needs signage. Only two lanes for trucks at the Checkpoint instead of three. Extra lane is needed for staging. New CBP checkpoint costs $50 million.
  - No alternative for diverting traffic away from the Checkpoint. A couple of years ago a 40-mile queue resulted from a two-lane closure. I-35 frontage road is needed.
  - Infrastructure at border check points on I-35 not able to handle truck volume - needs more lanes and pull-out areas. For proposed widening and expansion of planned roads, recommended TxDOT acquire ROW now and begin environmental studies, so segments will be shovel ready (and avoid future land developments).
  - Need to increase capacity (i.e., lanes) to connect Eagle Pass to I-35. Expansion of I-35 overall is critical due to high traffic volumes, where even small closures cause major backups.
  - New interchange at Vallecillo Road overpass needs funding. Hurricane opened a way to use Colombia Solidarity Bridge. Resilience response was two days (max) instead of one week. 10 percent of POVs want to bypass Laredo.
  - Plans for presidential permit to expand Colombia Solidarity International Bridge.
  - Trucking companies use World Trade Bridge predominantly; no indication that this will change.
  - World Trade Bridge is major crossing because of customs permitting and relationships with warehouses. Not the same business connections in Eagle Pass (for example). World Trade Bridge has the capacity and technology to process commercial traffic. Both Colombia and Eagle Pass cannot handle the capacity so trucking companies use Laredo. Trucking companies can only use I-35 through San Antonio on the way to Dallas or Kansas City.
  - A single accident on US 277 can result in the closure of the entire road. Trucks share the road with POVs and oil field traffic- each operating at a different speed.
  - Colombia Solidarity International Bridge has a bonded warehouse, handles a lot of perishable commodities, and vehicle parts that needs to be stored and shipped back to Mexico for assembly.
  - Recommendation to widen SH 255 near the Colombia Bridge.
  - World Trade Bridge and Colombia Solidarity Bridge are in two different Mexican states. A southbound truck cannot divert to Colombia if the World Trade Bridge is closed or experiences delays because of state specific customs payments.

        - Laredo experiences high levels of congestion between 4:00 and 6:00 PM. For truck drivers that are paid by the distance, there is an incentive to cross faster.
        - Queue to cross World Trade Bridge can be 4/5 hrs. Longest queues at 5:00 pm.
        - Need to invest in I-69. Road still goes through small towns.
    - Nuevo Laredo/Colombia
        - Nuevo León is investing in highway infrastructure that will connect to the Colombia Solidarity International Bridge.
        - Colombia Solidarity International Bridge is expected to be first 24-hr crossing because of the safety plans for the region. 15,000 security personnel will be stationed on MEX-1 leading to Colombia Solidarity International Bridge.
        - If issues at Colombia, shipments are diverted to Eagle Pass using MEX-57. There is a dirt road that is more direct. The dirt road is in poor condition between Colombia and Piedras Negras. Connectivity improvements are needed.
        - Mexican truck drivers are paid by trip completed, about $20-$30 per roundtrip. Accidents occur when drivers exit off the World Trade Bridge, which can cause 4/5 hour delays and minimize daily profits. Trucks get into accidents due to impatience, inattentiveness, and congestion.
        - Trucking companies' ability to divert to another crossing is controlled by Mexico. Diverting requires permit changes and agreements between the U.S. and Mexico. When the Aduanas system is down in Mexico, it delays trucks for several hours. The Aduanas system is down 3-4 times a week. In Mexico, there are challenges shifting Aduanas personnel to respond to needs along the Texas-Mexico border. Mexican duties collected are paid to respective states. Aduanas need backups for when Mexico system fails, because they do not use conditional releases like CBP on the US side.
        - Operational border issues in Mexico because crossings are State-run, not Federal. Cannot divert traffic to Colombia when World Trade Bridge is closed as Mexico registered trucks have a predetermined entry/exit point.
        - MEX-23 is too out of the way to provide connectivity between Eagle Pass and Laredo.
        - MEX-85 between Nuevo Laredo and Monterrey is in a flood zone. MEX-85 from Monterrey to Nuevo Laredo (140 miles) experiences high congestion levels. The 140 miles can take 5 to 8 hrs. Trucks divert to MEX-40 to cross in McAllen.
        - Need highway connector between MEX 57 and MEX 85 at Canoas, Mexico
        - Lack of infrastructure, rest areas, and security concerns in Mexico. Capacity will be even worse in future. Mexico is also starting to experience driver shortages.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study:

    - Nair Barrios mentioned several key points. For existing infrastructure, the connection between World Trade and Colombia Bridge presents challenges in both the US and Mexico, particularly at I-35 and MEX-85. Attendees expressed a need for more maintenance on the I-35, and improvements on Mines Road. In Mexico, enhancements to the Colombia Bridge connection are expected to increase demand, potentially leading to extended bridge operating hours. The TxDOT Laredo District shared that the newly anticipated Bridge 4/5 will require new connections. Attendees working in development shared that the distribution of industrial land in Laredo may shift as new connections and roadways are being developed.

    - Chris Burns reported that challenges at Mines Road were discussed. Attendees proposed using Old Mines Road, connecting to Eagle Pass, as an alternative to US 83. They also recommended widening SH 255 near the Colombia Bridge. Additionally, they noted an operational issue with border crossing agents in Mexico; unlike in the U.S.,

where officers move between bridges if one bridge is closed, officers in Mexico do not relocate in the same manner.

- Carlos Garza, with CODEFRONT, noted that during contingency planning for bridge closures, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas face unique challenges due to their differences in state revenue and resources. For example, during the 2017 closure of the World Trade Bridge, the traffic was redirected through the Colombia Bridge. Although discussions about addressing such issues have been ongoing since 2017, the existing protocols have yet to be implemented in Mexico to effectively manage similar situations in the future.

Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi presented on the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study developed from Texas' Waterborne Trade Study in 2023 and guided by data collected from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. She highlighted the top commodities moving between Mexico and U.S. ports, specifying the transportation routes of key maritime commodities along Texas highways, stakeholder interviews, and trends affecting border maritime port connectivity.

- Regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:
  - Texas
    - Upgrade US 59 to interstate standards (future I 69). Need to expand US 59 to connect Laredo to Texas' seaports. TxDOT has funding for first 20 miles. Need to acquire ROW and begin environmental studies now to ensure shovel ready when funding becomes available. US 59 from Laredo to Port of Houston is not a 4-lane divided road from Laredo to Goliath. Needs to expand to 4-lane divided road to relieve pressure on I-35 and I-10 to Houston.
    - Refined sugar shipments in April to October was diverted from Veracruz to Port of Houston. These shipments previously crossed at Colombia, World Trade Bridge, and Eagle Pass by rail. Laredo lost the business to the seaports.
    - Need a 4-lane divided road that links Laredo to Port of Corpus Christi.
    - US 59 (connecting Laredo to the Port of Corpus Christi) is an alternative to Port Houston.
    - Need for enhancements to SH 44 to improve connectivity to the Port of Corpus Christi.
    - Need to increase capacity (i.e., lanes) on US-281 to accommodate increased port traffic.
    - Need to connect I-2 to Corpus Christi. Potential for cargo to move through Corpus Christi.
    - Recommendation to allow ocean going containers (53 feet) handled at Texas ports to be transported into Mexico.
  - Mexico
    - Lázaro Cárdenas shipments routed through Laredo by train due to better rail access. COVID prevented boats from docking at Los Angeles/Long Beach ports. Future strikes at California ports could cause similar delays.
    - Ports in Mazatlán and Manzanillo are receiving increasing volumes of electronics and auto parts from Asia.
    - Plans to start processing 53-foot rail containers through Veracruz to eliminate the need for transloading. Currently not operational, but plans are in place.
    - 80% of trade traffic is truck-based, causing capacity issues due to an imbalance of goods trade - more goods exported to the U.S. than imported to Mexico. Transportation and logistics companies are challenged with this imbalance as revenue must be generated in both directions. Finding carriers that can operate in both directions is difficult due to the different tax and customs systems; limiting flexibility.

- Infrastructure at both Port of Veracruz and Port of Manzanillo is lacking. Some expansion in Manzanillo, but congestion remains a problem. Port of Veracruz is seen as a key artery for the southeast, but Mexico needs to improve the port's capacity to receive goods.
- Cartel activity in Matamoros affect transportation and logistics operations. Manufacturers need to set up contingencies for carriers to use Matamoros as a backup.
- Sabinas river is susceptible to flooding, which can shut down operations deep into Mexico.
- Trucking company mentioned movement of liquors between Monterrey (Mexico) and Houston. Substantial freight movement between La Port and Laredo.
- Commodities move from Monterrey to Tampico and then by ship to Houston. Non time sensitive commodities move from Monterrey to Veracruz and then by ship to Houston.
- Investment in Mexico's port infrastructure is critical to facilitate future trade.
- MEX-85 from Monterrey, Mexico to Laredo is a nightmare. Numerous construction projects result in long wait times and slower travel speeds. The alternative is to cross at Reynosa.
- In general, there are less amenities for truck drivers in Mexico. Mexico is also starting to experience driver shortages.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study:

    - Jolanda Prozzi reported that numerous participants highlighted the need for enhancements to US 59 and SH 44 to improve connectivity to the Port of Corpus Christi. Stakeholders in Mexico indicated that MEX 85, between Monterrey and Laredo/Colombia, is experiencing increased congestion due to ongoing construction projects, resulting in longer wait times and slower travel speeds. Consequently, this has led to a shift from truck transport to rail or maritime transportation, specifically from the Port of Altamira to the Port of Houston. Mexico's connectivity issues are further compounded by limited capacity and inadequate investment in rest areas for trucks. Additionally, Mexico is now starting to face driver shortages.

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Nair Barrios, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study and analysis developed based on recommendations from the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. The Border Connectivity interactive map was introduced, allowing users to view proposed improvements, identify bottlenecks and safety hotspots, and highlight optimal connections.

- Regarding the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:
    - Laredo Outer Loop will connect I-35 to future Laredo Bridge 4/5.
    - Need for additional lights on first exit on Mines Road to prevent backups.

Feasibility Study of Mines Road (Farm-to-Market 1472)

Roberto Rodriguez, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Laredo District Transportation and Planning Director, went over their feasibility study for Mines Rd. Introducing the project development process and the existing road conditions.

Adriana Muñoz, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Laredo District Project Manager, presented the feasibility study limits, what a feasibility study is, and the project development process.

Rodger Gonzalez, with Entech, presented the existing road conditions, feasibility study needs, upcoming or ongoing projects, and next steps.

Closing Remarks

Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

Sign In Sheets

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Number of Staff: 36

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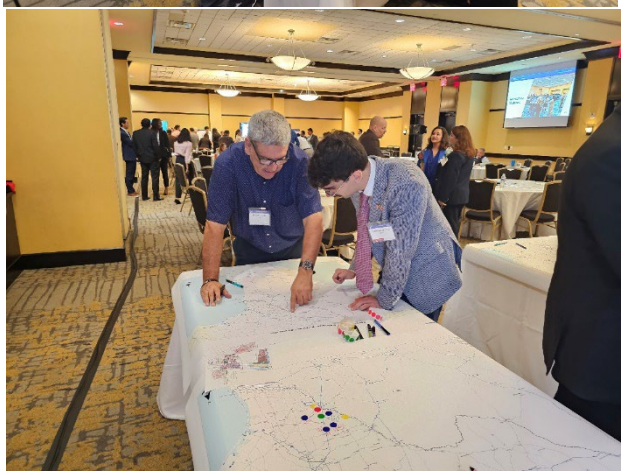
Jorge de la Cruz	CPCS
Kelly Lemke	CPCS
Donald Ludlow	CPCS
Adithya Ajith	Jacobs
Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Istiak Bhuyan	Jacobs

Photographs





October 16, 2024, Eagle Pass Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 2 Eagle Pass, TX

Date and Time: October 16, 2024, at 10:00 am (CT)

Location: International Center for Trade, 3295 Bob Rogers Drive, Eagle Pass, TX 78852

Attendees: See Sign In Sheets

Agenda

Border Connectivity Studies Workshop Agenda
Eagle Pass Binational Workshop
International Center for Trade, 3295 Bob Rogers Drive
Eagle Pass, Texas 78852
October 16, 2024
10:00AM – 2:00PM

10:00 – 10:15 am	**Networking and Registration**	
10:15 – 10:20 am	**Welcome and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
10:20 – 10:30 am	**Remarks** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning Branch, TxDOT	
10:30 – 11:00 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Discuss progress on region-to-region connectivity study.
11:00 – 11:50 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
11:50 – 12:20 am	**Lunch/Workshop Session Overview**	Instructions regarding breakout sessions
12:20 – 1:40 pm	**Workshop Stations** **Will Smithson,** HNTB **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Opportunity to provide ideas, questions, and feedback for each study. Reminders to move between stations will be announced.
1:40 – 1:55 pm	**Regroup and Summarize**	Reporting back to large group
1:55 – 2:00 pm	**Closing and adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting, introducing the goals of the working group. She emphasized that this workshop would focus on gathering input from users.

Safety minutes

Marvina Cephas presented safety minutes focused on attentive driving.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in B. Attendance

Opening Remarks

Claudia Lagos Galindo, the International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, introduced the studies being presented, which included Region-to-Region, Port-to-Port Connectivity, Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity, and First and Last Mile Connectivity. She highlighted that the objective of this meeting is to present the input gathered from users of these systems to determine whether the topics have been comprehensively addressed, identify further research needs, and pinpoint areas where solutions are required. She underscored that input and firsthand experience from users of border transportation systems is integral to the studies and has significantly contributed to shaping the analysis.

Alvaro "Al" Arreola, Mayor of Del Rio, mentioned that Eagle Pass, Del Rio, Piedras Negras, and the state of Coahuila are working together to promote development and improvement in the region.

Homero Balderas, City Manager of Eagle Pass, acknowledged TxDOT for organizing the meeting and expressed readiness to plan for the growth of Eagle Pass and Del Rio.

Claudio Bres, representing the Governor of Coahuila, conveyed appreciation for the meeting and interest in discussing regional growth and nearshoring.

Presentations

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Kelly Lemke, with CPCS, presented an introduction to nearshoring in the border region. She discussed what nearshoring entails, key trade trends, challenges, and future outlooks. Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study and Analysis, developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and informed by feedback from the first round of workshop meetings in May. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to enhance travel safety and efficiency. The analysis included comments, feedback, needs, challenges, and further recommendations.

- Regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:
    - Northern Mexico
        - The Economic Corridor of Northern Mexico, linking MEX 30, MEX 57, and US 57, is important for cross-border commerce between Mexico and Texas, with 15% of trade relying on Coahuila's policies.
        - Saturation in Saltillo and Monterrey: Heavy traffic calls for relief corridors, particularly to Eagle Pass.
        - Frequent closures on MEX 57 disrupt freight movement for up to a day.

- Coahuila's industrial expansion, with two new businesses established weekly, increases freight volumes, placing further strain on infrastructure.
- While railways like the Northern Pacific Railway (Eagle Pass to Chicago) and CPKC Railway (Eagle Pass to Kansas) provide some capacity, the absence of a railroad in Mazatlán limits multimodal transport and efficient cross-border trade.
- Although security does not represent a major problem at present, it is important to keep the issue as one that should be closely monitored.
- Opportunities:
    a. Expansion of the Piedras Negras to Nuevo Laredo highway to four lanes is necessary to enhance capacity.
    b. Completion of the Sabinas to Muzquiz and Ojinaga road could relieve pressure on I-10.
    c. Modernizing and expanding the Sabinas-Hidalgo (Coah)-Colombia highway would improve regional trade flows.
    d. Widening roads around Piedras Negras.
    e. Constructing a bypass near Piedras Negras, like the Eagle Pass bypass (SL 480).
    f. The highway projects of greatest interest are associated with the so-called economic corridor of northern Coahuila. Which includes better connectivity from Torreón to Monclova.
    g. A very high priority is to widen Federal Highway 57 from Saltillo to Monclova to 4 lanes.

o Eagle Pass

- For Eagle Pass, addressing highway capacity, connectivity gaps, and safety concerns can alleviate congestion and enhance trade flows.
    a. Limited capacity on US 57 and delayed funding for the SL 480 bypass increase city center congestion. Expanding US 57 to a 4-lane divided highway and accelerating SL 480 bypass funding are critical priorities.
    b. Missing links on El Indio Road and Old Mines Road hinder freight movement efficiency between POEs of Eagle Pass and Laredo.
    c. Future traffic growth threatens Laredo-Eagle Pass connectivity.
    d. Roads like US 83 and US 277 lack rest stops, lighting, and sufficient capacity, creating safety risks.
    e. Overloaded regional roads from events like the Carrizo Springs fracking boom highlight the need for long-term infrastructure improvements.

- City of Del Rio
    - Investments in truck infrastructure and alternatives to protect agricultural areas are key to maintaining economic and freight efficiency.
        a. Modal Preferences: Reliance on truck freight for toll revenues discourages rail investment, limiting multimodal options.
        b. Capacity Constraints: US 277 lacks sufficient capacity to serve as a viable alternate route to I-10.
        c. Opposition to Traffic Reroutes: Proposals to funnel traffic through La Pryor to US 90 face resistance due to concerns about impacts on the Winter Garden region's agricultural production. TxDOT San Angelo/Austin Districts are studying US 290.
        d. Implement project for additional lane on the current bridge.
        e. Preliminary studies are being developed for the construction of a second bridge.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study:
    - Will Smithson observed that the ongoing feedback from participants is invaluable for improving the planning process. Attendees shared that El Indio Highway needs both operational efficiency and overall connectivity improvement. Similarly, US 277 has become an important corridor, particularly due to the fracking boom, but it is also facing significant safety and capacity challenges. Attendees urged the completion of Texas Loop 480 sharing that it will help improve connectivity. Additionally, one attendee suggested that US 57 is a key area for continued investment and planning, particularly with the goal of connecting it to Interstate (I-) 37 south of San Antonio and tying it into Texas Loop 1604. This connection will enhance east-west connectivity. Regarding safety, US 83 has operational recommendations in place to address ongoing safety concerns, and the stretch of I-35 to Carrizo Springs is also facing safety and capacity issues. Overall, the feedback provided focused on balancing both operational connectivity and safety improvements across these critical corridors.

    - Claudia Lagos Galindo highlighted the need for safety rest stops in Mexico. Attendees emphasized better connectivity between Coahuila and Chihuahua, and improving safety and capacity on Mexican Federal Highway (MEX) 2. Similar to Laredo feedback, Eagle Pass attendees mentioned that expanding the La Gloria-Columbia highway is crucial. They also noted Saltillo as a key stop for truck traffic from central Mexico, with roads leading to Laredo, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, and Brownsville. With TxDOT District staff, attendees identified US 57 and Farm-to-Market roads as potential connectors to I-10 north of San Antonio.

Port-to-Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, introduced the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study that was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by feedback from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. This study aimed to identify levels of redundancy among border crossing connections, potential needs, and proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address existing challenges.

Chris Burns from Jacobs analyzed crossing closures, noting that crossing volumes are below typical highway capacities. He highlighted reliability risks for commercial vehicles at Del Rio's Camino Real International Bridge due to its single lane for commercial traffic.

Jolanda Prozzi presented a case study of the impacts of the Del Rio International Bridge closure from September 17, 2021, to September 25, 2021. As a result of the closure, southbound traffic diverted to Eagle Pass, and there was increased use of US Highway (US) 277.

Claudia Lagos Galindo asked that attendees share their experiences when the Eagle Pass Bridges close.

- Regarding the Port-to- Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:
    - Eagle Pass/Del Rio
        - Significant delays on connectors to Camino Real International Bridge. Need to increase lanes at Bridge from 6 to 12.
        - 10 min delay on US 57 will block the cross streets.
        - Need to increase southbound capacity of US 57; a 4-lane eastbound section would be better.
        - US 377 section (part of future I 27) needs to be upgraded.
        - Trucks experience long waiting times on SH 480. Bottlenecks around the checkpoints (smallest and oldest checkpoint with no secondary screening area). Need ITS Improvements (signage and radar) and dedicated truck lanes.
        - Need to improve Old Mines Road for better connectivity between Eagle Pass and Laredo (currently unpaved connection, 177 mile).
        - SH 255 needs improvement (e.g., maintenance) to enhance connectivity between MEX 2 and I-35.
        - US-90 needs to be upgraded to four lanes.
        - Extend I-27 to Del Rio
        - Need to enhance US 90. US 90 is dangerous: narrow, undivided, and has seen increased truck traffic.
    - Piedras Negras/Ciudad Acuña
        - Need highway connector between COAH 15 and COAH 23 to improve connectivity between Del Rio and Monterrey. COAH 23 is an undivided 2-lane road and is not safe.
        - MEX 29 is an undivided 2-lane route and needs to be upgraded (to include support services).
        - MEX 2 has no lights. Drainage (curb and gutter) issues. MEX-2 is unsafe, narrow, insecure. Trucks avoid MEX-2.
        - Proposed connector between MEX 57 and MEX 40 from Santa Cruz (Coahuila) to Saltillo. Need to realign road to be straighter.
        - Mexico plans to improve MEX 57. Bottleneck results in 1 hour wait time. A relief route has been requested for 50 years. MEX 57 is too narrow and goes through two small towns.
        - The Puerto Verde project will require infrastructure development as it is implemented.
        - The bypass and interconnection of bridges in Piedras Negras and Acuña are also very relevant.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study:
    - Chris Burns received feedback to improve Old Mines Road for better connectivity between Eagle Pass and Laredo. Attendees mentioned MEX 2 is dangerous, causing some drivers to use Eagle Pass. They suggested that completing Texas Loop 480 and widening US 57 could alleviate traffic congestion at checkpoints. Recommendations also included upgrading MEX 29 to bypass towns for smoother commercial travel. Lastly, they noted that MEX 57 may be upgraded enhancing system resiliency.

Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi presented on the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study developed from Texas' Waterborne Trade Study in 2023 and guided by data collected from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. She highlighted the top commodities moving between Mexico and U.S. ports, specifying the transportation routes of key maritime commodities along Texas highways, stakeholder interviews, and trends affecting border maritime port connectivity.

- Regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:
    - Texas
        - Port of Corpus Christi is important to Eagle Pass; provides alternative to Port Houston and Port of Galveston (automotive industry). Land Port of Eagle Pass wants partnership with Port of Corpus Christi to cross automotive parts.
        - Top commodities crossing at Camino Real International Bridge are automotive parts and beer (Modelo). Top routes/corridors serving the bridge are US 57/US 281, and FM roads to avoid San Antonio congestion.
        - Expand SH 44 to connect I 27, I 35, I 69W, I 64 E. One east-west road that connects three interstates.
        - All OS/OW loads from Laredo to Houston use US 59; lots of small towns with many traffic stops along route.
        - I 69 - US 59 have OS truck clearance.
        - Expand US 277 to connect to Corpus Christi
        - Train crews need to switch in middle of bridge.
        - Proposed implementation of Paisano Program to allow 24-hour operations at Eagle Pass POEs.
        - Oil/gas carrier truck safety concern because of stop and go traffic on US 277.
        - Need connectors from Colombia Solidarity Bridge to downtown Laredo.
        - Need for overpasses on US 57 from Eagle Pass to San Antonio.
        - Proposed six lane expansion of Camino Real International Bridge (2 CMV + 04 POV lanes)
        - SH 255 need improvement (e.g., maintenance) to enhance connectivity between MEX 2 and I 35.
        - Need enhanced connectivity between Ojinaga and Monclova.
        - US-90 needs to be upgraded to four lanes.
        - Need to extend I-27 to Del Rio.

- Need to enhance US 90. US 90 is dangerous: narrow, undivided, and has seen increased truck traffic.
- Shorter time for trucks to cross at Del Rio relative to Laredo. Del Rio does not have adequate infrastructure, so logistics companies prefer Laredo. SH 239 and US 377 cannot compete with I-35.
- Del Rio is better situated geographically to connect the interior of Mexico to Canada, but a lack of infrastructure prevents trucks from crossing at Del Rio. Road infrastructure cannot compete.
- Castroville needs relief route, bottleneck downtown but historic bridges prevent from widening (Texas Historic Commission issue).
- Rivers on each side of Uvalde blocks traffic when flooding. Need a loop around downtown Uvalde. City is also growing (airport and junior college) and presents bottleneck for commercial traffic.
- Potential industrial zone between US 90 and US 277 (by Gibbs St.). Location for 2nd International Bridge. Currently 2,000 POVs and 8,000 trucks cross per month. Expect 15 percent increase in traffic due to nearshoring in both Eagle Pass and Del Rio. Del Rio has seen an increase in oil/gas pipes and tankers.
- Proposed industrial Park at SH 480 and FM 1021.

o Mexico

- Mazatlán needs an east/west rail connection to Durango. Lack of east/west rail connection between Mazatlán and Durango is due to the terrain in this area. Existing roads along this area are windy and curved due to the mountainous terrain. This could make a future rail line connection challenging.
- The existing rail lines force merchandise from received from the port of Mazatlán to move South towards Guadalajara, and then rerouting north towards Monterrey, with the end destination being the U.S. border. Importers rent containers from shipping companies and need to return them empty. If they could shorten the rail route, the containers can return sooner.
- Manzanillo and Acapulco already have direct access to rail lines and could be more favorable ports.
- Corpus Christi to Torreon, Mexico - US 281 to MEX 40 is shortest route. Recommended alternative to connect to US 281 to US 57 so traffic destined for Torreon can cross at Piedras Negras.
- Only Reynosa, Matamoros, and Colombia can process inbound cargo from Gulf coast ports. From Pacific coast ports only Juárez can process inbound cargo by rail (not trucks).
- Five companies in Eagle Pass move commodities by rail - up to 100 rail crossings/day. Proposed Puerto Verde Trade Corridor will reroute commercial vehicles and rail around the urban center and be served by the Puerto Verde's Green Eagle Railroad. The rail line will be 20 miles total (1 mile on U.S. side and 19 miles on Mexican side). The U.S. side is all farmland so quick to build. The Mexican side is an existing coal mining site, and follows an existing ROW owned by the Mexican government.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study:
    - Jolanda Prozzi noted that Port of Corpus Christi is important to Eagle Pass; provides alternative to Port Houston and Port of Galveston (automotive industry). Currently, access to Port Houston is via US 57, US 90, and I-10. Attendees highlighted the need for investment in SH 44 to link Corpus Christi with I-35, I-69, and the future I-27.
    - Christian González from Rifeline noted that attendees highlighted the necessity for a rail connection between Mazatlán and Durango. However, the mountainous terrain in this region may present a significant challenge.

First and Last Mile Connectivity

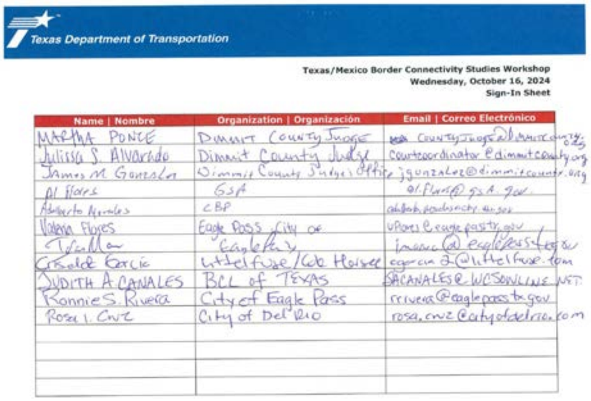
Nair Barrios, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study and analysis developed based on recommendations from the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. The Border Connectivity interactive map was introduced, allowing users to view proposed improvements, identify bottlenecks and safety hotspots, and highlight optimal connections.

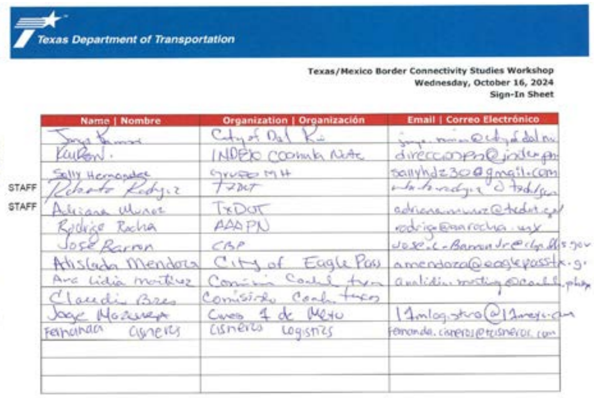
- Before the workshop session, the following questions were asked regarding the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study:
    - An attendee asked whether more information regarding rail was included in the study, or whether more rail corridors would be developed in the Eagle Pass, Del Rio region.
        - Jolanda Prozzi mentioned that rail data could be further discussed at the First and Last Mile workshop table. She mentioned more information from stakeholders would be helpful to further understand the connectivity between rail corridors and ports.
        - This attendee offered to share more information, explaining that Laredo and Nuevo Laredo are connected by the Canadian Pacific Kansas City railway, and El Paso is connected with BNSF, Ferromex, and Union Pacific.
- Regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during the breakout session:
    - There is an industrial park near the dam. Industrial workers cross daily (300-400 vehicles per day). Travel time between the dam and the housing development is 15 minutes. Crossing is only open from 10 am – 6 pm Monday – Sunday. Crossing needs to open earlier.

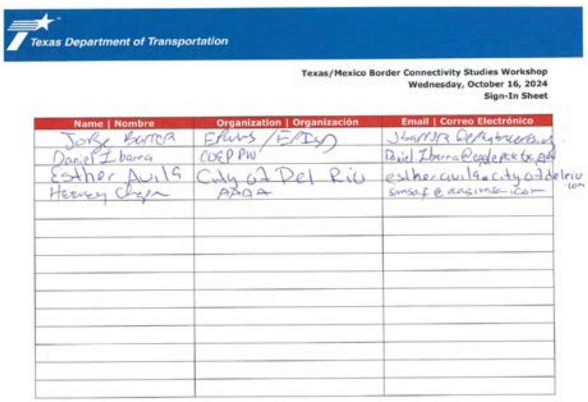
Closing Remarks

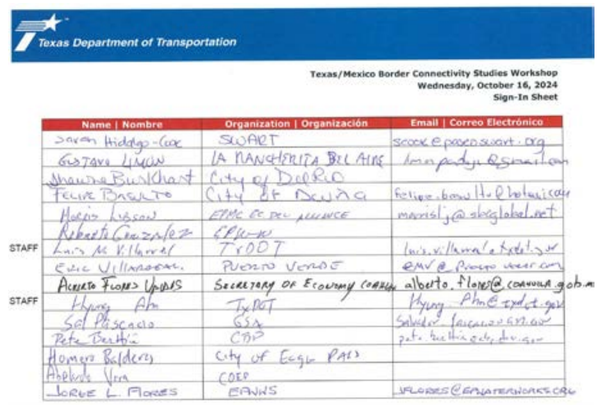
Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

Sign In Sheets









Number of Staff: 29

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Francisco Almanza	TxDOT
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Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Istiak Bhuyan	Jacobs
Christopher Burns	Jacobs
Joel Campbell	Jacobs

Name | Nombre	Organization | Organización
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Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs
Rob Faubion	Rifeline
Christian González	Rifeline
Humberto Treviño	
Gilysa García	ICF
Elvia Leyva	ICF
Sangeetha Puthigai	ICF
Robert Ryan	ICF

Photographs






October 22, 2024, El Paso Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 2 El Paso, TX

Date and Time: October 22, 2024, at 9:30 am (MT)

Location: El Paso Convention Center, 1 Civic Center Plaza, El Paso, TX 79901

Attendees: See Sign In Sheets

Agenda

Border Connectivity Studies Workshop Agenda
El Paso Binational Workshop
El Paso Convention Center, 1 Civic Center Plz
El Paso, Texas 79901
October 22, 2024
9:30AM – 1:30PM

9:30 – 9:45 am	**Networking and Registration**	
9:45 – 9:50 am	**Welcome and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
9:50 – 10:00 am	**Remarks** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning Branch, TxDOT	
10:00 – 10:30 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Discuss progress on region-to-region connectivity study.
10:30 – 11:20 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
11:20 – 11:50 am	**Lunch/Workshop Session Overview**	Instructions regarding breakout sessions
11:50 – 1:10 pm	**Workshop Stations** **Will Smithson,** HNTB **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Opportunity to provide ideas, questions, and feedback for each study. Reminders to move between stations will be announced.
1:10 – 1:25 pm	**Regroup and Summarize**	Reporting back to large group
1:25 – 1:30 pm	**Closing and adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting, introducing the goals of the working group. She emphasized that this workshop would focus on gathering input from users.

Safety minutes

Marvina Cephas presented safety minutes focused on attentive driving.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in **B. Attendance**

Opening Remarks

Claudia Lagos Galindo, the International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, introduced the studies being presented, which included Region-to-Region, Port-to-Port Connectivity, Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity, and First and Last Mile Connectivity. She highlighted that the objective of this meeting is to present the input gathered from users of these systems to determine whether the topics have been comprehensively addressed, identify further research needs, and pinpoint areas where solutions are required. She underscored that input and firsthand experience from users of border transportation systems is integral to the studies and has significantly contributed to shaping the analysis.

Presentations

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Kelly Lemke, with CPCS, presented an introduction to nearshoring in the border region. She discussed what nearshoring entails, key trade trends, challenges, and future outlooks.

- Before the workshop session, the following questions and discussion regarding the nearshoring introduction occurred:
    - Eduardo Calvo, with the El Paso MPO suggested discussing the effects of nearshoring at a global level, and the consequences of disruption on global supply trade.
    - Humberto Treviño added that information sharing regarding nearshoring is not aggregated. Several organizations document information on trade and transportation, but there needs to be a better effort to share information on types of industry, and materials traded in different regions, and between the US and Mexico.
    - Claudia Lagos Galindo stated that transportation and trade are well documented, and there should be more sharing of information between different industries and governmental departments to document the types of industries contributing to regional economies. This would help provide a clear picture of which industries are growing in the border region and their global impact.
    - Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study and Analysis, developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and informed by feedback from the first round of workshop meetings in May. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to enhance travel safety and efficiency. The analysis included comments, feedback, needs, challenges, and further recommendations.
- Regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:
    - Key priorities include modernizing infrastructure, strengthening cross-border connections, improving freight corridors, and addressing safety and capacity issues on both sides of the border.

- El Paso (U.S.): The urban and regional focus includes bridges, bypasses, and increased interstate connections such as linking US-62 to I-10 via a east/west connector east of El Paso.

- Mexico (Chihuahua and Juárez): Regional corridors (e.g., Juárez-Santa Teresa, Ojinaga to Chihuahua) and agriculture-specific routes (e.g., Guadalupe Calvo to Los Mochis) dominate Mexican-side priorities.

- Binational Issues: Cross-border challenges like trade flow disruptions at ports of entry (Santa Teresa, Ysleta/Zaragoza) and fragmented federal/state road maintenance conditions in Mexico impact both sides.

- El Paso and U.S. Areas:

  - El Paso Urban Region: Proposed improvements at Bridge of the Americas in South El Paso aims to reduce downtown congestion by redirecting truck traffic to alternative crossings. Ysleta/Zaragoza Crossings require modernization to handle growing trade volumes.

  - Proposed transfer of the Bridge of the Americas to county management for better oversight.

- US Corridors:

  - US-62: Limited demand as a trade route

  - US-90 and US-83: Truckers prefer these routes due to shorter travel times, but lack of lighting, stops, and amenities pushes them to use I-10 instead.

  - Presidio Bypass: Proposed on the east side to facilitate bridge access and improve freight flow.

- Mexico Side:

  - Juárez and Surrounding Areas: Improvements on Juárez-Santa Teresa connectivity on Mex 2, including expanding a parallel toll road and widening the Juárez to El Porvenir section.

  - Juárez-Ascension Road: High accident rates necessitate safety upgrades.

- Chihuahua and Border Regions:

  - Ojinaga to Chihuahua: Needs road functional classification upgrades and better maintenance on federal sections.

  - Guadalupe Tornillo and Other Key Routes: Projects like Guadalupe-Ysleta/Zaragoza and Janos-Agua Prieta target critical trade flows.

  - Freight Corridors: Infrastructure improvements are crucial for high-volume routes like Guadalupe y Calvo to Los Mochis (vegetable transport) and the Mennonite Corridor in Cuauhtémoc.

- Key Themes:
    - Modernization and Safety Needs:
        - Crossings like Ysleta/Zaragoza and ports like Santa Teresa require technological upgrades.
        - Safety concerns dominate, especially on the Juárez-Ascension Road and stretches like Durango to Parral which suffers from poor maintenance conditions on the federal sections of the highway.
    - Freight and Trade Corridor Development:
        - Both sides of the border prioritize expanding and maintaining key routes, such as:
            a. Guadalupe Tornillo to Universidad del Sur and Topolobampo to Guadalupe y Calvo for agricultural exports.
            b. Sabinas-Muzquiz-Ojinaga connectivity to streamline freight flows.
    - Cross-Border Collaboration: Coordinating investments in U.S. and Mexico-side infrastructure is critical to address challenges, such as outdated systems at crossings, fragmented road conditions, and growing freight demands.

Port-to-Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, introduced the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study that was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by feedback from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. This study aimed to identify levels of redundancy among border crossing connections, potential needs, and proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address existing challenges.

Chris Burns from Jacobs analyzed crossing closures, noting that crossing volumes are below typical highway capacities. He identified risks to reliability in the region related to the capacity and modes served by crossings. He explained that the alternative to the Bridge of the Americas is the Ysleta International Bridge, which has fewer lanes, and that the pedestrian volume at the Paso del Norte Bridge has limited potential for diversion.

Jolanda Prozzi presented a case study of the impacts of the closure of the Bridge of the Americas from September 18, 2023, to October 10, 2023. As a result of the closure, southbound truck traffic diverted to the Ysleta International Bridge, and Northbound truck traffic diverted to the Santa Teresa International Bridge to enter New Mexico.

- Before the workshop session, the following questions and discussion regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study occurred:
    - Manuel Sotelo with Fletes Sotelo mentioned that due to inefficiencies at the Bridge of the Americas, trucks sometimes reroute through Tornillo. The current capacities of the truck crossings cannot meet the demand. If a bridge closes, customs checks can stretch up to 20 kilometers long. This situation forces exporters to transport goods by air instead of relying on truck transportation.
    - Jolanda Prozzi shared that Manuel Sotelo's observations were shared in the Pharr Region. She shared that the final report submitted to TxDOT will include studies of closures across the border region.
    - Eduardo Calvo asked whether the crossing times or length of queues during bridge closure was captured in the study.
        - Jolanda Prozzi noted that wait-times were not recorded but could ask colleagues at Texas A&M Transportation Institute if they could be tracked.

        - Patricia Theriault with D.P.T. Unlimited, LLC noted that when a bridge closes and trucks must wait, it increases fuel, time, and labor costs.

    - Eduardo Calvo noted that, in addition to monetary and time costs, having trucks wait also incurs environmental costs. The air quality deteriorates because trucks remain idle for extended periods.

        - Patricia Theriault agreed with this observation, stating that the poor air quality hurts drivers and people living in the border region.

    - Allyson St Onge with BRP inquired about whether the study captured or could capture the financial costs associated with bridge closures beyond labor and time, specifically considering the loss of manufactured goods due to inadequate storage.

        - Jolanda Prozzi explained that in the Pharr-Reynosa study, there was a decrease in the number of crossings following the bridge closure, but this pattern was not observed in El Paso. If attendees had personal experiences that differ from this data, she encouraged them to share this information with the study.

        - Allyson St Onge mentioned that the cost of the bridge closure was 5 million dollars per week.

        - Rogelio Fernandez, representing Fideicomiso Puentes Fronterizos de Chihuahua, reported that their data indicates the bridge closure resulted in a reduction of 24,695 truck crossings and a loss of $2 billion in merchandise.

- Regarding the Port-to- Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:

    - El Paso Region

        - Widening of I-10 could address congestion at the POEs in El Paso.

        - An alternative to the two-lane FM road is needed in Tornillo in case an emergency happens on I-10 near Tornillo.

        - Rail investments (in El Paso) will create more traffic issues in Mexico.

        - Expanding or moving infrastructure in El Paso is impacted by the geography, which includes mountains, the airport, and Fort Bliss.

        - The northbound peak hours are in the morning, while southbound peak hours are in the afternoons. To address the northbound peak:

            a. CBP opens all lanes in the morning.

            b. The City of El Paso pays overtime to help CBP keep more lanes open.

            c. More lanes open for longer helps ease bottlenecks.

            d. When there is a bottleneck/situation at one POE, CBP allows traffic to divert to other lanes or POEs.

        - Biggest issue is southbound traffic. Need to work with CBP to collect number of southbound trucks at each POE. Overall, the number of trucks has decreased since the pandemic.

        - Santa Teresa POE in New Mexico helps to alleviate congestion in El Paso.

        - When El Paso POEs were closed for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) influx, New Mexico POE crossings increased from 600 a day to 1,800 a day. The line to enter New Mexico was 18 kilometers long.

        - Construction of the Border Highway Connector begins in 2025, which will connect Sunland Park to SH 375.

- The only Hazmat POE is the Ysleta POE. There is no Hazmat support in Santa Teresa.
- There is controversy surrounding the Bridge of the Americas (BOTA) expansion because families nearby have argued that it will create more pollution in neighborhoods and schools.
- El Paso needs to rethink the decision to close BOTA for commercial trucks. New Mexico Economic Development Department supports BOTA processing commercial trucks.
- Before any improvements are made to BOTA, the Santa Teresa POE should be enhanced to be fully prepared for the traffic that will be diverted once construction begins at BOTA.
- If you remove commercial trucks from BOTA, the processing at the rest of the ports will result in slower delivery times and clients will begin charging more money because it will take longer to deliver a product.

o Ciudad Juárez Region

- MEX 2 from Janos to Agua Prieta should be widened, and from Janos to Nuevo Casas Grandes also.
- A rail separation is needed at the Zaragoza bridge.
- MEX 2 (Outer Loop) needs better infrastructure and should be expanded in Tornillo.
- Road parallel to MEX 2 needs to be upgraded to be more accessible for POVs.
- There is no way to turn into the Santa Teresa POE driving from Foxconn, so drivers need to drive up to 18 kilometers south to enter the POE line.
- All areas south of the Ysleta POE in Mexico presents a safety concern.
- Paso del Norte is not a full-service POE, so people living in the vicinity have to drive further to the Santa Teresa POE.
- MEX 2 is not maintained and needs to be upgraded.
- Porta potties have been installed along MEX 2 because there are no bathrooms or rest stops along the highway for truck drivers to use.
- Most of Juarez's population is on the north side (along the border). The area south of Santa Teresa is rural and not populated. The area is not economically attractive, which deters companies from building warehouses or setting up near there. Many companies have said that once the area is built up and populated, they would set up shops there. The area needs hospitals, homes, and schools. Most of the land in the area is privately owned (by a family). The government could try to buy it from the family.
- An intermodal hub is needed in Samalayuca, and an international intermodal hub is needed in Santa Teresa to ease the bottlenecks and create a right of way for commercial trucks.
- There was a recent shooting on MEX 2 in Mexico across from Tornillo between the National Guard and armed civilians. The cartel is known to have control over MEX 2 that presents security risks for drivers and truckers. Mexican
- Immigration (ANAMA/Aduanas) needs to take care of MEX 2 because while it is a longer route, it would still save time because there is less traffic. Overall, it is too dangerous to drive on right now. Juárez has neighborhoods along MEX 2, and manufacturers should begin setting up shops near those neighborhoods.
- Improvements on Juárez-Santa Teresa connectivity on MEX 2, including expanding a parallel toll road. Also connecting Anapra to Santa Teresa.
- Lack of infrastructure (for shippers and drivers) in Juárez.

- The City of Juárez announced a significant investment in rail. Promoting rail would not cause issues in El Paso, but would create more traffic conflicts in Mexico.
- Manufacturers requested a rail line from Parque Electrolux to Samalayuca, but the rail infrastructure exists. Funding is the issue.
- Improvements and widening of MEX 2 from Juárez to El Porvenir
- Safe stops on the new route between Samalayuca and El Porvenir.

Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi presented on the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study developed from Texas' Waterborne Trade Study in 2023 and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. She highlighted the top commodities moving between Mexico and U.S. ports, specifying their transportation routes along Texas highways, top truck routes, stakeholder interviews, and trends affecting border maritime port connectivity.

- Before the workshop session, the following questions and discussion regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study occurred:
    - Eduardo Calvo inquired whether the study included western coast ports, such as those in Los Angeles and Long Beach. He mentioned that some goods and materials are transported through El Paso are destined to or are from these western ports.
    - Jolanda Prozzi mentioned that their team is interested in collecting this data and asked attendees for insights on the matter. The study currently lacks information on the volume and types of goods being transported to these western ports.
- Regarding the Port-to- Maritime Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:
    - Texas
        - Asian goods from West Coast ports (California) cross through El Paso Bridges into Mexico.
        - I-10 is the major corridor for trade. If snowstorms/sand storms (from Van Horn to Pecos) occur, alternative routes must be found.
        - For I-10, US 90 can be a major alternative route. Workshop attendees suggested extending US 62 as an alternative route as well.
        - The following commodities cross at El Paso: automotive parts, agriculture products, household goods, groceries and food, electronics, and meat.
        - Several maritime containers are cross-docked in port hinterlands before being distributed.
        - I-10 and I-20 are major corridors for port to border connectivity.
        - Few products from Texas seaports cross at El Paso. Lot of cross-dock operations occur in El Paso.
        - Inbound shipments go to bonded warehouses or Foreign Trade Zones (FTZs). These are difficult to track. FTZs allow manufacturers to cross products into US. FTZs allow for addition of components to products, after which finished product can cross the border. The product does not need to go to Mexico to be finished. Free Trade Zones thus save on duties.

- Investment needed in alternatives for I-10.
- Interest in the new rail crossing near Puerto Verde / Eagle Pass. Stakeholder wanted to know when it will be ready/finished. Acknowledged that Union Pacific is very opposed to this rail crossing.
- Trucking Company primarily uses highways over rail, with terminals in El Paso, Laredo, and Nogales, AZ. Some limitations on southbound routes used due to security risks. Used Del Rio as an alternative during strikes in Laredo. Goods transported mainly include electronics and automotive products, many sourced from Mexico and California, with a significant volume of imports from Asia via Long Beach.
- More lanes (infrastructure) and staffing are needed on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border to support commercial traffic. Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) projects on the U.S. side may help alleviate some of these issues but needs to be reflected on the Mexico side.

o Mexico

- Mexico's Pacific Coast ports, such as Manzanillo and Lázaro Cárdenas, provide alternatives to California's ports. These ports are the alternative ports for Texas to connect to the Pacific Coast.
- MEX 9 in Mexico is an alternative to I-10.
- Mexico's Pacific Coast ports are largely tourist ports but are close to regions with car manufacturers.
- Security Concerns: Reports of Mexican carriers facing extortion from cartels for safe passage, primarily in southern Mexico; less impact reported in the north.
- New rail line to connect the Gulf and Pacific via Tehuantepec.
- Double stacking from Topolobampo is not feasible due to vertical height restrictions. South Orient Rail Bridge is expected to open within the year to facilitate rail traffic between Ojinaga and Dallas.
- Chihuahua-Pacific Rail Route: Known as "The Chepe" covers the area between Chihuahua and Mazatlán/Topolobampo. Costly and lengthy project timelines deter potential investors.
- Manzanillo: Considered an important port option, though highway security remains a concern. Manzanillo considered the Mexican Silicon Valley. Asia wants to put operations in that area but security concerns limit ability to do so.
- Baja Port Expansion: FerroMex aims to develop a port in northern Baja California with the goal of routing shipments through Columbus. However, development is expected to take several years to match Long Beach's capacity.
- Guadalajara: Aggressive anti-cartel measures have been implemented, but proximity to the U.S. remains a limitation for export opportunities.
- Foreign Investment: Chinese companies express interest in establishing operations in Guadalajara and Juárez. However, Juárez lacks direct flights to Los Angeles, which limits connectivity.
- Tourism Rail Potential: Discussion of opening certain rail routes, like the Chihuahua-Pacific, to public tourism; cost remains a significant barrier.

        - Infrastructure Needs: Proposed overpasses in downtown Juárez. Santa Teresa border crossing currently closes at 10 PM, limiting traffic flow.
        - Border Crossing Limitations: Chihuahua's government raised concerns about cross-border project delays. As the only Mexican state bordering two U.S. states, efficient infrastructure in this region is critical.
        - A connection is needed from Topolobampo to Guadalupe y Calvo.
        - A bypass around Flores Magon is needed.

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Nair Barrios, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study and Analysis developed based on recommendations from the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. The Border Connectivity interactive map was introduced, allowing users to view proposed improvements, identify bottlenecks and safety hotspots, and highlight optimal connections.

- Regarding the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:
    - El Paso
        - The Fort Hancock El Porvenir Bridge needs to be replaced.
        - Department of Public Safety (DPS) inspections after Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) facilities create bottlenecks at El Paso's POEs.
        - The infrastructure and technology at Ysleta/Zaragoza need to be updated.
        - Tornillo is too far from the origins and destinations of shipments. Infrastructure improvements including stop lights are needed on both sides of the border as the area keeps growing.
        - While public transit improvements are a good idea for El Paso POE's, it is unlikely that the community will support the idea.

- Juárez
    - Agency presence to facilitate trade, for agriculture, hazardous materials, and SENACICA is needed at Marcelino Serna Bridge.
    - Mexico's Customs and Immigrations Services (ANAM) creates bottlenecks both north and southbound.
    - The Zaragoza bridge is landlocked on both sides.

- Group discussion around the map, mostly in Spanish, included the following discussion points:
    - In general, updating infrastructure and technology at Ysleta/Zaragoza facilities.
    - In Guadalupe, updating agency presence to facilitate trade, for agriculture, hazardous materials, and SENACICA

Closing Remarks

Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

Sign In Sheets

Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Tuesday, October 22, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

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Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Tuesday, October 22, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

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Texas Department of Transportation

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Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
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Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Tuesday, October 22, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

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Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Tuesday, October 22, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

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Number of Staff: 24

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Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT
Justine Carreón	HNTB
Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Eva Esquivel	HNTB
Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Amber Mejia	HNTB
Will Smithson	HNTB
Kelly Lemke	CPCS
Griffin Rock	CPCS
Simran Arora	Jacobs
Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Istiak Bhuyan	Jacobs
Christopher Burns	Jacobs
Joel Campbell	Jacobs
Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs
Rob Faubion	Rifeline
Christian González	Rifeline
Nora González	Rifeline
Adrianna Peralta	Rifeline
Humberto Treviño	
Gilysa García	ICF
Sangeetha Puthigai	ICF
Catherine Ramírez	ICF
Robert Ryan	ICF

Photographs

October 23, 2024, Presidio Stakeholder Workshop

Meeting Details

Meeting: Connectivity Studies Stakeholder Workshop 2 Presidio, TX

Date and Time: October 23, 2024, at 10:00 am (CT)

Location: Presidio Activity Center, 1200 E O'Reilly St, Presidio, TX 79845

Attendees: See Sign In Sheets

Agenda

Border Connectivity Studies Workshop Agenda
Presidio Binational Workshop
Presidio Activity Center, 1200 E O'Reilly St.
Presidio, Texas 79845
October 23, 2024
10:00AM – 2:00PM

10:00 – 10:15 am	**Networking and Registration**	
10:15 – 10:20 am	**Welcome and Safety Minute** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	
10:20 – 10:30 am	**Remarks** **Claudia Lagos Galindo,** Manager, International Trade and Border Planning Branch, TxDOT	
10:30 – 11:00 am	**Region-to-Region Connectivity** **Will Smithson,** HNTB	Discuss progress on region-to-region connectivity study.
11:00 – 11:50 am	**First and Last Mile and Port-to-Port Connectivity** **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Discuss first and last mile connectivity deliverable and progress on port-to-port connectivity study.
11:50 – 12:20 am	**Lunch/Workshop Session Overview**	Instructions regarding breakout sessions
12:20 – 1:40 pm	**Workshop Stations** **Will Smithson,** HNTB **Jolanda Prozzi,** Jacobs	Opportunity to provide ideas, questions, and feedback for each study. Reminders to move between stations will be announced.
1:40 – 1:55 pm	**Regroup and Summarize**	Reporting back to large group
1:55 – 2:00 pm	**Closing and adjourn** **Marvina Cephas,** International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator, TxDOT	

Purpose and Summary

Marvina Cephas, International Trade and Border Planning Coordinator with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the meeting, introducing the goals of the working group. She emphasized that this workshop would focus on gathering input from users.

Safety minutes

Marvina Cephas presented safety minutes focused on attentive driving.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Attendance is detailed in **B. Attendance**

Opening Remarks

Claudia Lagos Galindo, the International Trade and Border Planning Manager with TxDOT, introduced the studies being presented, which included Region-to-Region, Port-to-Port Connectivity, Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity, and First and Last Mile Connectivity. She highlighted that the objective of this meeting is to present the input gathered from users of these systems to determine whether the topics have been comprehensively addressed, identify further research needs, and pinpoint areas where solutions are required. She underscored that input and firsthand experience from users of border transportation systems is integral to the studies and has significantly contributed to shaping the analysis.

Jose Portillo, Presidio County Judge, expressed appreciation to TxDOT for supporting the City and the border, noting the positive impact on the county's economy. John Fergeson, Mayor of Presidio, highlighted the importance of transportation and border trade for the city's future. Lucy Marrofo Acosta, Presidenta Municipal de Ojinaga, acknowledged TxDOT's engagement in the conversation and expressed hope for the growth of Ojinaga and Presidio. Juanita Bishop, Presidio County Justice of the Peace, thanked those for visiting Presidio. Antonio Sanchez and Cesar Carrasco, former Presidents of Municipal de Ojinaga, extended a welcome to all participants in the discussion.

Presentations

Region-to-Region Connectivity

Kelly Lemke, with CPCS, presented an introduction to nearshoring in the border region. She discussed what nearshoring entails, key trade trends, challenges, and future outlooks.

Humberto Treviño noted that in the 1960s, Mexico's automotive industry did not exist—all cars were imported. Now, Mexico is a hub for the industry. He urged attendees to consider how they and their region can contribute to society and foster strong development. The border region is important and continues to grow.

Will Smithson, with HNTB, presented the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study and Analysis, developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and informed by feedback from the first round of workshop meetings in May. The study focused on improving multimodal connectivity within and between border regions to enhance travel safety and efficiency. The analysis included comments, feedback, needs, challenges, and further recommendations.

- Regarding the Region-to-Region Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:
    - Cross-Border Trade and Economic Growth
        - Presidio seeks to grow as a trade hub but needs cold storage facilities, better distribution infrastructure, and customs modernization (e.g., card-only toll payments).
        - Livestock crossings at Ojinaga highlight the need for infrastructure upgrades to support trade.

- Transportation and Connectivity
    - Bypasses Needed: Proposed bypasses for Presidio (east side) and Marfa to redirect trucks and ease congestion.
    - Highway Upgrades: Key routes like Ojinaga to Chihuahua, Camargo to La Mula, and Sabinas-Muzquiz-Ojinaga need maintenance and expansion.
    - Shorter Routes: Better connections between Alpine, Fort Stockton, and Presidio would reduce detours caused by low bridges.
- Freight and Trucking Needs
    - Cold Storage Gaps: Lack of facilities forces drivers to bypass Presidio or endure long trips (10–15 hours) to the next stop.
    - Driver Amenities: Insufficient stops, signage, and facilities on key routes like Route 67 and Rankin to San Angelo hinder efficiency.
- Tourism and Regional Development
    - A Presidio to Los Mochis rail service could attract tourists, create jobs, and elevate Presidio as a destination.
    - Tourist-focused improvements, such as color-coded signage on Route 16, would support regional growth.
- Binational Infrastructure Challenges
    - Poor road conditions and missing links between Los Mochis to Ojinaga and Agua Prieta disrupt freight and safety.
    - Disconnected routes from Presidio to Juárez limit trade opportunities.
    - On the U.S. side, bypasses like the Presidio Bypass and improvements to US-83 and US-90 aim to alleviate bottlenecks.

Port-to-Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi, with Jacobs, introduced the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study that was developed as a recommendation of the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by feedback from the May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. This study aimed to identify levels of redundancy among border crossing connections, potential needs, and proposed improvements or mitigation measures to address existing challenges.

Chris Burns from Jacobs analyzed crossing closures, noting that border volumes are relatively modest compared to typical highway capacities. He mentioned that the main concern for reliability in the area is the lack of nearby crossings for several hundred miles in either direction around Presidio.

- Regarding the Port-to-Port Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:
    - Presidio, Texas
        - US 67 from Marfa to Presidio is not safe. The road is narrow and dark, making it dangerous to drive at night. This is also dangerous for truck drivers who use the Ojinaga POE to deliver shipments from the U.S. to Mexico and Guatemala – the dark dangerous roads do not allow them to see the Mexican Customs and Immigrations (Aduanas). Widening the highway and adding light fixtures would help with this issue.

- There have been so many accidents involving truck drivers that deliver gas to Presidio and into Mexico on US 67 because they drive at extremely high speeds. Recently, a truck driver was driving 100 mph and he did not make the curve of the highway, and he crashed. There were no lights or cameras around so the only reason he was found was because there were eyewitnesses. He passed away on impact, but the autopsy found alcohol and substances in his system.

- Many drivers speed along US 67 into Presidio because they need to use the restroom. There are no restrooms or shoulders along the road. A solution that the community and TxDOT are working on is adding reflectors and shoulders to this highway for drivers and truckers to stop in case of an emergency or to even just use the bathroom. The sheriff's office will sometimes add port-a-potties but there needs to be permanent bathrooms and rest stops.

- US 90 from Marfa to Van Horn is very isolated. There are no rest stops or bathrooms along that highway.

- The traffic is usually congested around Sam's Auto Repair body shop along US 67.

- US 67 is wide but the curves in the roads cause accidents and there are not enough law enforcement or officials to patrol the highway frequently enough.

- When traffic is heavy the Department of Public Safety (DPS) will re-direct people from the Ojinaga POE.

- The rail bridge from Mexico into the U.S. has been completed. The rail is not operational yet because there is no Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) facility to facilitate entries. The CBP facility is expected to be completed in 2026. The facility will include holding cells and x-ray machines.

- The lack of shoulders or parking lots near the Presidio POE leads to truck drivers parking in the driving lanes. This leads to longer waiting times and more traffic. TxDOT has been asked to add signs stating truck drivers cannot stop or park in these lanes.

o Ojinaga, Mexico

- A new highway is needed from Ciudad Juárez to Ojinaga. Juárez is more autonomous and does not rely on state support as much as Ojinaga does.

- In March 2024, when the El Paso POEs closed, everything got redirected to Ojinaga. Juárez should support Ojinaga in expanding their POE for this reason.

- A solution is to build another POE near Ojinaga for when El Paso POEs close.

- Mostly machinery crosses through Ojinaga.

- The valley between the Rio Conchos and the Rio Grande experiences flooding. A new port was proposed north of the two rivers to avoid floods from the rivers.

- The max dimensions for trucks have changed from 45 ft to 50 (estimate) ft but Mexico has not updated these dimensions yet, causing discrepancies. Truck drivers are getting ticketed on MEX 16. The federal part of MEX 16 is from Chihuahua to the fork at 16, which is where drivers get stopped and must pay a fine. This causes a loss in business for drivers because companies want to limit drivers along MEX 16 as it loses them money. A solution would be to expand and widen MEX 16, as well as for federal officials to stop fining trucking companies.

- A new relief route is needed from Ojinaga to Presidio that would allow cars to go through faster when the POE is backed up with trucks.

Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity

Jolanda Prozzi presented on the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study developed from Texas' Waterborne Trade Study in 2023 and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. She highlighted the top commodities moving between Mexico and U.S. ports, specifying their transportation routes along Texas highways, top truck routes, stakeholder interviews, and trends affecting border maritime port connectivity.

- After the workshop session, the following key highlights were presented to the stakeholders regarding the Port-to-Maritime Port Connectivity Study:
    - Texas
        - Midland-Odessa businesses have expressed interest in transporting oil products and equipment to Chihuahua (speculation) through Presidio.
        - Building cold storage facilities would expedite trade, attract private investment, and address logistical needs, enabling Presidio to process more agricultural goods.
        - A strong focus on expanding agricultural imports through Presidio, including products like avocados and beer. Presidio lacks USDA inspection facilities, limiting agricultural trade potential. Current inspection facility only inspects limited products for a set number of hours a day. Produce from nearby areas in Mexico is routed to the Rio Grande Valley instead. Infrastructure exists but requires specialized inspectors to support agricultural imports. There is a desire to increase staff (specifically, inspectors) or other mechanisms to increase ability to cross agricultural trade through Presidio.
        - Presidio needs a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ). Presidio would share in revenue and Mexican companies would pay less taxes.
        - Drought in Texas has led to an increase in cattle crossings at Presidio. Cattle imported from Mexico go to Amarillo for slaughtering. Mexico buys back bone marrow, tongue etc. Strict inspection requirements can halt cattle crossings if issues arise, such as missing identification tags. Santa Teresa offers an alternative port for cattle crossings because it is a dry river crossing, which allows livestock to cross without water barriers. Stakeholders expressed interest in doing something similar near or along Presidio.
        - Large parcels of land along US 67 and north of the airport (800 acres) have been bought, suggesting preparations for future expansion. Property (7,000 acres) is being sold along the South Orient Rail line. Large car dealers from DFW and Louisiana visited Presidio.
    - Mexico
        - Interest in connecting Presidio with Topolobampo by rail, although limitations exist due to bridge and tunnel restrictions that prevent double-stacked containers. The area has seen increasing mining activity, especially in southwestern Chihuahua, along with agricultural developments.
        - Mexican Industry Revival: Some manufacturing is moving back from China to Mexico, recognizing logistical benefits. Nearshoring activities are occurring in the Sonora region, Mexico. The shift is sparking renewed interest in using existing infrastructure in Presidio.

- Completion of MEX 30 was confirmed; MEX 24 shows promise but raises security concerns. MEX 40 has significantly improved travel times, now taking 2.5 hours instead of six. MEX 40 to MEX 49 to MEX 67 is seen as secure, with no recent security issues reported.

- On the highway from Ojinaga to Chihuahua, the expansion and improvement of the junction (point known as El Huérfano) to Aldamas is required.

- A rail line was inaugurated between Oaxaca (west coast) and Coatzacoalcos (east coast) in December 2023 for passenger services and freight. Industrial parks are proposed along rail line. Mexico wants to increase tourism and wants tourists to use rail. This could impact cargo transport.

- The highway (67) from La Mula to Camargo is in very bad condition. Improve maintenance and widening to Ojinaga.

- Change the classification of the highway from Ojinaga to Chihuahua to type B, which is now considered type C and maintain the federal section.

- Improve and modernize the Cuauhtémoc to Chihuahua highway.

- Apples are grown in Cuauhtémoc for export. There is a need to improve and modernize the highway between Cuauhtémoc and Chihuahua.

First and Last Mile Connectivity

Nair Barrios, with Jacobs, presented the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study and Analysis developed based on recommendations from the 2021 Border Transportation Master Plan and guided by data collected from May 2024 Border Connectivity Plan Binational Workshop. The Border Connectivity interactive map was introduced, allowing users to view proposed improvements, identify bottlenecks and safety hotspots, and highlight optimal connections.

- Regarding the First and Last Mile Connectivity Study, attendees provided the following feedback and discussion during workshop session:

    - Beer in the amount of $2.5 million are sold annually in Texas. Stakeholder wants to divert 140 trucks per day to cross at Presidio.

    - 8,500 farmers grow vegetables in Chihuahua; sell in Presidio.

    - Price of cement has quadrupled. The largest cement plants are in Chihuahua.

    - Hours of operation are limited at other POEs, resulting in traffic being diverted to Presidio POE.

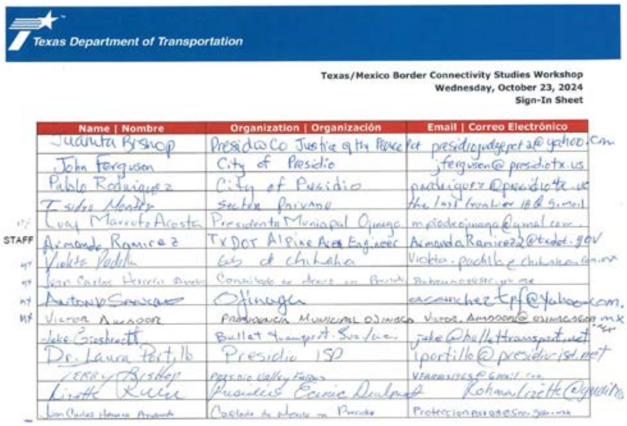
    - Build a Presidio bypass on the east side to facilitate access to the bridge.

    - Modernization of the toll booth area: extend the payment to dollars.

Closing Remarks

Marvina Cephas and Claudia Lagos Galindo concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the attendees for their feedback and discussion. They underscored the importance of firsthand user experience in validating data and pinpointing gaps.

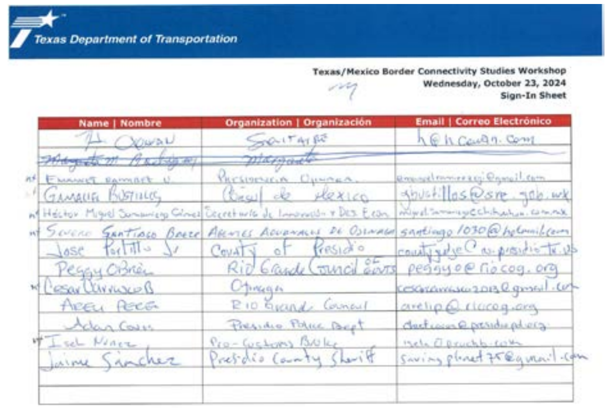
Sign In Sheets



Texas Department of Transportation

Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Wednesday, October 23, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

Name | Nombre	Organization | Organización	Email | Correo Electrónico



Texas Department of Transportation

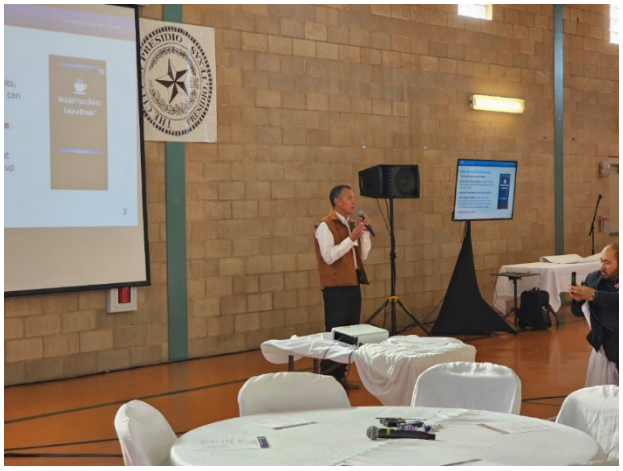
Texas/Mexico Border Connectivity Studies Workshop
Wednesday, October 23, 2024
Sign-In Sheet

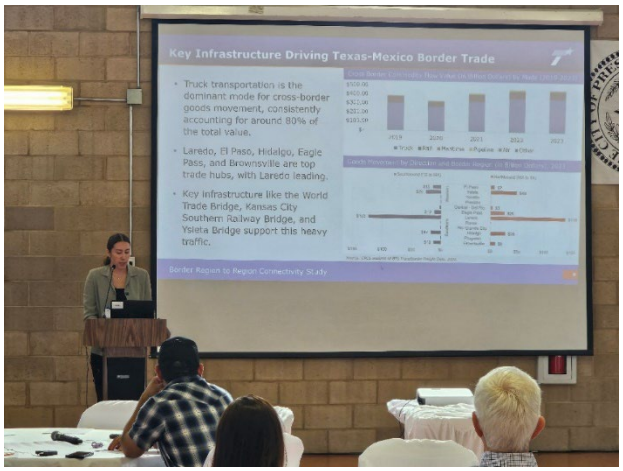
Name | Nombre	Organization | Organización	Email | Correo Electrónico

Number of Staff: 26

Name | Nombre	Organization | Organización
Marvina Cephas	TxDOT
Claudia Lagos Galindo	TxDOT
Justine Carreon	HNTB
Alisha Catalano	HNTB
Amber Mejia	HNTB
Kelvin Kroeker	HNTB
Amber Mejia	HNTB
Will Smithson	HNTB
Kelly Lemke	CPCS
Griffin Rock	CPCS
Simran Arora	Jacobs
Nair Barrios	Jacobs
Istiak Bhuyan	Jacobs
Christopher Burns	Jacobs
Joel Campbell	Jacobs
Jolanda Prozzi	Jacobs
Rob Faubion	Rifeline
Christian González	Rifeline
Nora González	Rifeline
Adrianna Peralta	Rifeline
Humberto Treviño	
Gilysa García	ICF
Sangeetha Puthigai	ICF
Catherine Ramírez	ICF
Robert Ryan	ICF

Photographs





Stakeholder Engagement Results

Round One

Meetings: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study District Meeting: Pharr District, Laredo District, and El Paso District; One-on-one interviews

Location: ESRI Experience builder dashboard

Summary

Stakeholder input was collected during each team's meeting, and a link was shared, allowing participants to provide feedback at their convenience.

This round of input focused on reviewing the Regional Border Connectivity Network identified and collecting feedback or recommendations for additional roads or areas of interest.

TxDOT District Meetings

Name	Organization	Comment	Category
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	Connect port to SH 4	Other
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	Connect to FM 509 by FM106	Other
Unknown	Pharr District	Port Connector Rd. Roadway connects the Port of Brownsville to SH 4.	Other
Unknown	Pharr District	FM 2062 (Jackson Rd) From Interstate 2 to US 281 Military Hwy	Other
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 1017. An alternative route for Trucks to and from the Valley to Laredo when US 83 is too congested.	Other
Unknown	Pharr District	SL 195 (new location): Need to add the 3 seg of SL 195 connecting Roma to Rio Grande City. It will run parallel to US 83 to the north.	Other
Rex Costley	Pharr District	FM 650 Will be a new OS/OW route. 300 acres Industrial park, the long-term goal is to add a new POE north of Roma-M Aleman to add an overweight, oversize opportunity	Miscellaneous Projects
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 1015 connects to Progreso International Crossing	Other
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 396 connects to Anzalduas, an ongoing improvement project to POE	Miscellaneous Projects
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	Future interchange.	Capacity Projects

Name	Organization	Comment	Category
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 649 goes through El Sauz. It is currently not being utilized enough, and it is currently in the process of increasing capacity, shoulders, etc.	Capacity Projects
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 755 from Rio Grande City to US 281 is currently not being utilized enough. We are in the process of increasing capacity, shoulders, etc.	Capacity Projects
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	Super 2 Hwy project to connect Starr County, north Hidalgo, and Brooks County	Capacity Projects
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 490 from McCook to I-69C, McAllen Industrial Park, is expanding, and Edinburg is looking to expand its Airport facilities and utilize the industrial zone.	Other
Pedro Alvarez	Pharr District	FM 1015 Industrial Area/Park	Other
Epi Gonzalez	Laredo District	Future project to continue the Ward State Loop	Connectivity Projects
Tomas Treviño	El Paso District	I-10 and Eastlake. There is a great need for operational improvements along I-10 and 375, like direct connectors and fully functional interchanges instead of the diamond interchanges we have. They do not operate well at high volumes.	Other
Tomas Treviño	El Paso District	I-10 and Horizon. There is a great need for operational improvements along I-10 and 375, like direct connectors and fully functional interchanges instead of the diamond interchanges we have. They do not operate well at high volumes.	Other
Marty Boyd	El Paso District	The Odessa district has done a good bit of work on US 67 to the El Paso District boundary.	Other

One-On-One Agency/Industry Meetings

Name	Organization	Comment	Category
John Kennedy	City of Presidio	Port improvements necessary- parking, resurfacing, a rest facility that includes bathrooms and shade	Other
John T Kennedy	City of Presidio	The Cibolo Creek Ranch area needs a new parking area with amenities	Other
John T. Kennedy	City of Presidio	State road/County road- partly paved, part dirt; Paving it may not be the natural solution; could be an alternate route for congestion on Hwy 67; the county would consider working with the State on long-term planning for this road	Other
John T. Kennedy	City of Presidio	Casa Piedra Road - Better alternative for pavement	Other
John T. Kennedy	City of Presidio	Pinto Canyon Road; next to State Park- Chinati Mountain Peak; city of Presidio coordinating this into their recreational tourism plan; with sensitivity for bigger ranches along the road (D.J.)	Other
John T. Kennedy	City of Presidio-	Past Inspection Facility- below El Changarito; revitalize rail area; cross produce to include cold storage; area for redevelopment; intermodal facility; work with Texas - Pacifico US Customs	Other
John T. Kennedy	City of Presidio	The west side of the port (Bridge St) has the potential for a bypass that can connect to an industrial park	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	The only border crossing in Tamaulipas	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Location for potential improvements, old toll road might be updated	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Lots of traffic on this route. Strengthen interstate system	Other

Name	Organization	Comment	Category
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Future I-69	Connectivity Projects
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Traffic from the Rio Grande Valley	Other
Tony Arce Jr.	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Laredo works closely with the port (and energy sector) of Corpus Christy	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Future industrial center around this area	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Loop 20 is highly used by the workforce that travels to industrial areas up north	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Bridge 4-5 location Webb County Bridge	Other
Tony Arce Jr	Laredo Economic Development Corporation	Industrial Area location	Other
Javier Garza	FWS Logistics	Sinaloa - Chihuahua, future improvements that will ensure a safe corridor and access to Mexican ports	Other
Javier Garza	FWS Logistics	Location of a new investment that will impact Texas.	Other
Javier Garza	FWS Logistics	New route location will connect the Pacific and Golf	Connectivity Projects
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Congestion where US 57 to I-35	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	4 lanes, 1 to Tractor-Trailers, 1 SENTRI, 2 POE, increased bus traffic	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Busses prefer Eagle Pass to Laredo, which might save about 10 mi	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Future improvement to 6 lanes instead of 4	Capacity Projects
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	2 Lanes, high pedestrian crossings	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Location of very much congestion	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Location of very much Congestion	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	New city ordinance: Trucks must go in 480	Other
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	New location for industrial/ commercial development	Other

Name	Organization	Comment	Category
Luis Rodriguez	Eagle Pass Customs and Border Protection	Location of Union Pacific main track	Other

Round Two

Meeting: Region-to-Region Connectivity Study Public Stakeholder workshop

Location: El Paso, Presidio, Eagle Pass, Laredo and McAllen

Summary

Stakeholder input was collected during each workshop, a link was shared, allowing participants to provide feedback at their convenience using the ESRI experience builder platform.

This round of input focused on identifying potential recommendations for the region's connectivity under four categories: Connectivity, Capacity, safety/security, and operational/Technology.

Marks without comments were accounted for but not included in the following list.

McAllen Workshop:

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Not Provided	Not Provided	Capacity	Post-COVID-19 capacity problem	TX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Capacity	Turn road to Highway (carretera to Autopista) Torreon-Monclova	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Capacity	upgrade roadway to highway (Saltillo - Monclova)	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Capacity	Not provided	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Capacity	Capacity and more lanes for access and exits for toll booths for acceleration and deceleration	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Capacity	Convert roadway to highway	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Connectivity	Bypass to Cienega de Flores by the not toll road, MX85	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Connectivity	Monclova Bypass	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Connectivity	Sabines By-Pass	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Connectivity	To 16	TX

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Alex Barrera	City of Roma	Connectivity	Connect Road Loma Blanca to FM0649 or HWY 16	TX
Javier Zarazua	CSCMP	Connectivity	54/2/83 Cerralvo, Miguel Aleman / Roma project in development	MX
Alex Barrera	City of Roma	Operational/Technology	Possibly connect Industrial Park to ST 195	TX
Sergio Ruiz	SEA Manufacturing and Logistics Services	Operational/Technology	Industrial parks along route 54 are growing	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Operational/Technology	Overweight corridor needed, north RGV	TX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Operational/Technology	Checkpoints every 30 miles in US90. Could the checkpoint have FAST or something similar?	TX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Operational/Technology	US83 is an alternative on US side but Zapata stretch has a heavy freight restriction	TX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Operational/Technology	Fast RFID lecture	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Operational/Technology	Operational Improvements "Los Chorros"	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	All MX2 needs security, Colombia to Piedras Negras approx. 30 Km (NL)	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safe rest stop	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safe Rest Stop (San Rafael, NL)	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Riverside safety	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Km26 problems in three areas (if they remain)	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Section with no highway	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safety and rest area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safety and rest area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safety and rest area in the corridor	MX

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Rest area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safe Rest Area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Arco Norte needs safety and safe rest area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safe Rest Area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safe Rest Area	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Rest area and load transfer in Nava	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Safe Rest stop	MX
Not Provided	Not Provided	Safety/Security	Security Highway Short	MX
Sergio Ruiz	SEA Manufacturing and Logistics Services	Safety/Security	there is a perception that this route is unsafe, but there have been many investments, and there are now multiple security checkpoints; the route to Roma is currently underutilized	MX

Laredo Workshop

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Capacity recommendation	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Interchange project	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Increase capacity	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Capacity	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Capacity Issue	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Major imbalance northbound (3x vs 4x)	MX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Export manifest in Mexico by State	MX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	CBP Bottleneck on Mines Rd and Loop 20	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Widening SH 255 near Colombia Bridge	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Alternative Route to US83	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Alternative Route to US83	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	(Claudia's table)	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Future SH84: relief for mines road, another Vallecillo	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Outer loop connecting US83 to Bridge 4-5 Loop 20 Extension	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	New La Gloria Road	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	An alternative route to I-10	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Connection from Colombia to Piedras Negras	TX
Iker Ruiz	CANACAR	Connectivity	Undergoing improvements in La Gloria-Monterey Hwy	MX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Improve Eagle Pass Rd/Mines Rd to connect Laredo to Eagle Pass	TX

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Not provided	Not provided	Operational/Technology	Bilingual signs	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Operational/Technology	Operational mark, no other comments	TX
Andrew L Carrasco	South Webb Industries	Operational/Technology	Signage for commercial	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Operational/Technology	Hofusan Industrial Park 8msf	MX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Additional lights first exit on Mines Rd. to prevent backups	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Accidents	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Perception of security	MX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Accidents	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	More amenities need better lighting	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Safety issues	MX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Better lighting	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	lighting, safety, and amenities	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Lighting, road, and safety improvements	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Pinnacle Cold storage industrial warehouses	TX

Eagle Pass Workshop

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Expansion in progress	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	lack of investment	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Prioritize Capacity	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Capacity	Need OS/OW lanes	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Kickapoo casino	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Competition of SL480	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Extend US85 and US57 to Toll Rd 130 to Bypass San Antonio (Claudia's table)	TX
Morris Lisbon	EP Business and Economic Development	Connectivity	Extend US57 to Toll Road 130 to by-pass San Antonio	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Extend 57 to by-pass San Antonio and connect I-10	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Connectivity	Widening	TX
Morris Libson	EPMC	Connectivity	Extend 57 (88) to Toll Road parallel to I-10 to by-pass San Antonio	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Unusable ranch roads	TX

El Paso Workshop

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
Patricia Theriault	D.P.T. Unlimited, LLC	Connectivity	Connect Border Highway East Project to I-10	TX

Presidio Workshop

Name	Organization	Type	Comment	Location
H Cowan	Solitaire	Capacity	Oversize and overweight are not able to drive from Marfa to Valentine, forced to drive to Fort Davis	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Operational/Technology	Dynamic messaging Pre-US 90	TX
Not provided	Private	Operational/Technology	Commercial vehicle incident due to ice on the road, signaling could be helpful as a warning	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Operational/Technology	Cold storage facilities are needed, but also Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services needed	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Rest Area	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Lighting and rest areas needed	TX
Not provided	Not provided	Safety/Security	Lighting and rest areas needed	TX

Texas-Mexico Border Connectivity Study

First and Last Mile – Port-to-Port Meeting Summaries

Texas Department of Transportation

Contents

First and Last Mile Meetings

December 1, 2023, TxDOT Rail Division Meeting 1
November 28, 2023, Laredo District Meeting 3
November 28, 2023, El Paso District Meeting 6
December 11, 2023, Pharr District Meeting 9
December 18, 2023, BNSF Railroad Company Meeting 11
December 19, 2023, Valley Metro Meeting 14
January 3, 2024, City of El Paso Meeting 17
January 4, 2024, Union Pacific Railroad Meeting 20
January 12, 2024, McAllen Airport Meeting 23
January 16, 2024, El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting 25
January 18, 2024, Laredo District Meeting 30
January 26, 2024, Rio Grande Valley MPO Meeting 32
January 26, 2024, City of McAllen Meeting 35
January 26, 2024, Sun Metro Meeting 38
January 26, 2024, CPKC Meeting 40
January 26, 2024, El Metro Transit Meeting 42
February 6, 2024, City of Laredo Meeting 44

Maritime Port Meetings

July 1, 2024, Port of Houston Meeting 46
July 2, 2024, Port Arthur Meeting 48
July 3, 2024, Port of Victoria Meeting 49
July 10, 2024, Port of Harlingen Meeting 50
July 16, 2024 TxDOT Maritime Division Meeting 52

Follow Up Meetings - First and Last Mile

August 9, 2024, Southwest Area Regional Transit District (SWART) Meeting 53

Follow Up Meetings - Port-to-Port

July 1, 2024, Francisco Marquez (Broker) Meeting 57
July 2, 2024, Francisco Marquez (Broker) 2 Meeting 60
July 8, 2024, CANACAR Meeting 62
July 16, 2024, Eduardo Ramos Meeting 65
August 5, 2024, CBP Del Rio Meeting 68
August 9, 2024, Texas Pacifico Meeting 73
August 15, 2024, Dicex Meeting 76
August 28, 2024, Puerto Verde Meeting 78
September 4, 2024, Puerto Verde 2 Meeting 81

First and Last Mile Meetings

December 1, 2023, TxDOT Rail Division Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: TxDOT Rail Division

Date and Time: December 1, 2023, at 1:00-2:00 PM (CT)

Location: Virtual

Attendees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, TxDOT Rail Division, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and

Discussion

El Paso

Grant funding was used to eliminate at-grade rail crossings in the El Paso area, which addressed some of the previous challenges. Challenges, however, remain with scanning trains to meet CTPAT requirements. There are also some multi-modal connectivity issues that were brought about by the expansion of I-10 and the Texas Tech campus is still separated by trains. A Regional Rail Freight study was not conducted in El Paso.

Presidio

The Presidio International Rail Bridge burned down in 2008. Initially, TxDOT required the railroad operator to rebuild the bridge, but eventually TxDOT rebuilt the bridge. At the moment, the Railroad Division (RRD) is working on satisfying the inspection requirements of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in order for the bridge to open. The bridge is scheduled to re-open in June 2025.

The fact that the Presidio International Rail Bridge is not operational presents a connectivity gap. The rail bridge was partially motivated by congestion in the border railroad network. Once the bridge opens, Ferromex will cross completed cars and cement northbound from Mexico (and aggregate for cement southbound), as well as refined petroleum products. Trains are considered more secure than pipelines due to illegal tapping.

Laredo

In 2018, Kansas City Southern (KCS) attempted to relieve some of the issues with trains blocking at-grade crossings in Laredo by not switching rail crews in the middle of the international rail crossing. Instead, Mexican nationals employed by KCS would operate the nine miles between the Mexican border and the KCS rail yard in Laredo, Texas. KCS estimated that it would save 20 minutes per train at an average of six to eight trains per day (see Arbitrators favor Kansas City Southern in border-related labor dispute - FreightWaves). This practice was, however, not adopted at the other international rail crossings along the Texas-Mexico border.

Laredo received a grant in 2017/2018 to "identify potential grade separations, grade crossing closures, railroad relocations, or other transportation system improvements along railroad corridors in the City of Laredo" (see Laredo Mobility Study (state.tx.us)). However, it is not clear whether the city adopted any of the recommendations.

Eagle Pass

TxDOT applied for a TIGER grant in 2017 to double track some of the rail lines in Eagle Pass. HDR assisted with the grant application and conducted the benefit cost analysis. TxDOT was not successful in securing the grant, because the DOT was promoting a multi-modal approach, and there was some sentiment that the project should have been funded by the private sector.

Brownsville

Brownsville is also impacted by the stopping of trains when switching the rail crews. The issue is how many trains can be moved on the rail network without blocking all crossings. Project leads were referred to the Texas Rail Plan (being updated by HDR) for additional information on the border crossings and the Rail Waybill data analyzed.

Shortline Railroads

The Rio Valley Switching Company (RVSC's) received a CRISI grant for the Rio Valley Rail Capacity Improvement Project.[1]

Observation

The lack of cross-border passenger rail between Monterrey (Mexico) and San Antonio (Texas) is a connectivity gap.

[1] "The proposed project involves final design and construction activities to complete track-related improvements and upgrades to multiple bridges along an estimated 50-mile-long corridor on RVSC's rail network. In sections where there is excepted track standard, the improvements will be built to FRA Class 1 track safety standards; in other sections, the project will maintain current FRA Class 1 track standards. The project aligns with the selection criteria by improving system and service performance and safety as it will improve rail operations and safety to accommodate project growth in the Rio Valley region, as well as continue interchange services with Union Pacific. RVSC will provide a 30 percent non-Federal match" (https://texasrailadvocates.org/post/texas-to-benefit-from-3-rail-projects-in-fra-nationwide-14-billion-crisi-grants).

November 28, 2023, Laredo District Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: November 28, 2023

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Highway Bottleneck Locations

Holidays like Thanksgiving or Mexican holidays cause a lot of congestion around Bridges 1 and 2. Bridge 2 backs up to I-35 as far as three miles. The same scenario occurs during the weekends. Issues are exacerbated by train traffic.

The highway bottlenecks identified in the study seemed at first glance to be accurate. The bottlenecks continue to be on FM 1472 (Mines Road). The road serves both residential areas and industrial traffic. There are also a lot of new developments (warehouses) coming to the area.

Freight Rail

Downtown Laredo continues to have the same issues with multiple at-grade railroad crossings and limited right-of-way (ROW), but the City of Laredo received a grant to study potential grade separations through downtown. That study should be finished in the upcoming months.

Trains blocking the at-grade crossings affect access to the transit center and it is believed that the number of trains will increase with the expansion of the rail bridge. Freight rail trains impact downtown Laredo.

The CPKC rail yard affects (west of I-35) downtown Laredo the most because freight trains that cross the rail bridge impede access to Bridge 1 and 2 as they traverse across downtown Laredo to the rail yard.

The UP rail yard near the rail bridge (east of I-35) affects the communities west of Santa Maria but it does not have as much regional impacts as the trains that cross downtown to the CPKC rail yard. The UP rail yard has more implications for equity since it is low-income communities that live between the rail yard and the river that are impacted.

The new rail bridge will be located next to the existing one. It is anticipated that the increased capacity will worsen rail traffic blocking at-grade crossings through downtown Laredo. When trains are blocking the at-grade crossings it creates a barrier for traffic wanting to cross.

KCS owns the LAX downtown rail yard, but this switching yard is not utilized anymore. There are talks about the rail yard being redeveloped.

Airports

Currently, the airport is served by Loop 20 and Bustamante Street. Bustamente Street west of the airport provides freight access to the airport. There are some issues with freight access to the airport through Bustamante St. at its intersection with BUS 59 (Airport Dr.)

Passenger access to the airport is only from Loop 20. Safety is a concern and there is limited access for passenger vehicles if there are any issues or crashes at the single access point. The MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) currently includes a planned overpass on Loop 20 at the airport.

Currently, most of the air freight are FedEx trucks that are not causing too many issues. There are, however, a number of residential areas around the airport, and there are also a number of air freight intensive facilities being developed around the airport (e.g., AFCO). These facilities will create connectivity issues with freight accessing the airport.

Transit

There are two existing transit/intercity bus services identified in Laredo. [1]

Bike-Ped Infrastructure

Only Bridge 1 (Gateway of the Americas) has a pedestrian and bicycle crossing. Bridge 1 is near the transit hub (inter-city terminal), but it is a steep walk and the bike/ped infrastructure is old and needs to be American with Disabilities (ADA) compliant. The sidewalks are uneven. There is a project to improve/install sidewalks for three blocks in the direction of the transit hub in collaboration with TxDOT and the City of Laredo (using Transportation Alternatives Program [TAP] funding). The bridge also has a dedicated bike lane which has helped increase bike traffic along this bridge. The data included in the Active Transportation Plan is a little outdated, but it can be shared.

On May 3rd, 2021, Customs and Border Protection announced that only those who have enrolled in the SENTRI Trusted Traveler Program will be processed at the Gateway of the Americas bridge. [2] This announcement pertained to the processing of personal vehicles only (i.e., not pedestrians and bicycles).

Questions:

(Laredo MPO) asked if there will be opportunities for other stakeholders to add their input to this discussion since entities like the City of Laredo would have very in-depth knowledge. (Jacobs) mentioned these discussions are starting with MPOs and TxDOT Districts, but the study is open to adding more stakeholders. (Laredo MPO) said he will send an email with details for other stakeholders to be included for the study to collate with the existing list and add those missing.

(Laredo MPO) was surprised there is no crash activity on the south section of the Outer Loop. He asked what timeframe was used for the crash analysis. (Jacobs) answered it was 2014-2022 but the lack of crash activity was due to the route not being one of the main connections to the existing border crossings. The crash data was collected just for the main connecting corridors. (Jacobs) mentioned a review of such connections would be beneficial to look for potential future connectivity issues in such segments since Bridge 4/5 will be connected to that facility.

(Laredo MPO) can provide data for northbound crossings from 2017 to 2022 broken down by vehicle type. The MPO provided a link to crossing data for the Laredo Bridge System (see Bridge System | Laredo, TX (cityoflaredo.com). (Laredo MPO) mentioned the MPO was able to get historical data from 2011 to include in their MPO model. They have available data for all roads along the border and can provide. The MPO also obtained crossing data from Mexico from (1) Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Transportes, (2) Caminos y Puentes Federales de Ingresos y Servicios Conexos, (3) Unidad Administrativa Regional Reynosa and (4) Subgerencia de Administración – Informática that the MPO is willing to share with the study.

November 28, 2023, El Paso District Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: November 28, 2023

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, TxDOT El Paso District, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Highway Bottleneck Locations

TxDOT recommended that the study include Santa Teresa (New Mexico) in the analysis. He also commented that Sunland Park is applying for a presidential permit.

TxDOT mentioned that there are a number of studies that contain information relevant to the current effort. These include:

1. Paisano Drive study,
2. Alameda corridor study,
3. Reimagine I-10, and
4. US 67 (Presidio) study

Bottlenecking along US 85/Paisano Drive to US 62 caused by people waiting to cross at the bridge backing up into the lanes. This is a passenger vehicle issue.

It mentioned that TxDOT's Multimodal Study identified the areas where bottlenecking occurred but did not relate bottlenecks to specific crossings. There is not a draft available to share but Adriana R. will look into sharing some of the summary information. The Multimodal Study will include recommendations as to how TxDOT can support local government plans.

Freight Rail

A lot of the freight rail has moved to Santa Teresa, but there is still activity on the rail track in downtown El Paso. The El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will be a good source of information on freight rail challenges.

Airports

The El Paso International airport is served by State Spur 601 and US 62, but there is always room for improvement. The area between Global Reach Drive, Spur 601, Montana Drive, and Loop 375 is being leased by the city and more development that generates freight is expected in this area. An express lane connecting State Loop (SL) 375 to Global Reach Drive would remove traffic from the city streets. But Fort Bliss and its traffic impacts complicate matters.

The widening of SL 375 will also alleviate connectivity issues. The Borderland Expressway will also increase connectivity for the east side and also to the airport. The Yarborough connector to the airport would have also increased connectivity.

The RTS line – a bus rapid transit service - on Montana takes you from downtown to the airport.

Santa Teresa has its own airport, and the Fabens airport is currently being expanded.

Transit

There are five public transit stations, and two existing intercity bus locations identified in the El Paso area (see service TRAX for Transit services at West Texas Opportunities)

Bike-Ped Infrastructure

Many pedestrians cross in El Paso. At Zaragoza, there is no transit facility within half a mile of the crossing. Many pedestrians crossing at Zaragoza are picked up on the U.S. side. The nearest transit terminal is more than a mile away (on Alameda).

The Paso del Norte trail – a bike and pedestrian facility – along the Texas-Mexico border is currently under construction. The 63-mile facility goes along the border and links to Sunland Park and Paisano Drive. The Paso del Norte trail will be within walking distance to all the downtown El Paso border crossings. It will be a critical connection because it will connect to Paisano Drive and all the activity centers along it.

The Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) is considering putting bike stations at all the downtown border crossings to allow students and pedestrians to go to school and access facilities. For example, the RMA is considering bike stations at the Bridge of the Americas that pedestrians can use to access medical facilities. The RMA can also put bike stations on the Mexican side; something that TxDOT or the MPO cannot do.

In addition to the Paso del Norte trail, the Alameda corridor and North Loop have included bike lanes in their plans. There is also a bike lane planned for Paisano Drive, because it is planned as a multimodal corridor with bus service and the trolley close to Santa Fe. This will also take advantage of the connection to UTEP.

In addition, places like Marfa and Presidio want to have better connectivity between their communities and attractions such as the Federal and State Parks (near Van Horn).

At Presidio, there is no shade for pedestrians crossing the border. Shaded pedestrian facilities are needed at Presidio for students going to school as there have been instances of students fainting and being in distress during the summer months. A number of short-, medium- and long-term projects have been identified at Presidio, including projects to address the need for truck parking. The US 67 corridor plan have already resulted in the implementation of some of the short-term improvement recommendations. Mobile homes, tomatoes, and chillis cross at Presidio/Ojinaga. On-demand transit (e.g., users have to call in advance) is available for residents to access, for example, medical facilities.

Fort Hancock is a bridge crossing serving pedestrians (e.g., kids that go to school). The bridge is a wood structure. There are no sidewalks on the roads connecting to the crossing or speed reduction measures. There is also no scheduled bus service. On-demand transit is available mostly for elderly and special needs users.

The Marcelino Serna Bridge (previously Guadalupe-Tornillo) will be impacted by the new UTEP campus. UTEP has its aerospace engineering campus in Fabens. The campus also conducts drone research. In additional, significant traffic is expected from the new Mexican road connection to the Marcelino Serna Bridge. In addition, industrial development will also impact the bridge. Blue Origin, for example, have their facility at Van Horn. The County is working on an outer loop and a trail near the bridge.

Action Items

Study group to reach out to:

- (New Mexico DOT) about connectivity challenges at Santa Teresa
- (International Bridge Director, City of El Paso)
- (El Paso MPO)
- (GSA) about the work planned at Bridge of the Americas (with the $600 million in grant funding). There is a lot of local pressure to divert freight traffic from Bridge of the Americas to Marcelino Serna and Zaragoza.

December 11, 2023, Pharr District Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: December 11, 2023

Time: 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, TxDOT Pharr District, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

The Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has made great efforts to promote bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the region.

TxDOT recommended that study look at the Airport Master Plan and reach out to the McAllen Airport Director: Jeremy Santoscoy. Study leads should also reach out to the port directors at Brownsville, Harlingen, and Port Isabel.

There are no pedestrian crossings at the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge, but TxDOT noted a number of bike/pedestrian projects along I-Road/South Veterans Blvd and US 281/Military Highway. For example, a shared use path on South Veterans Blvd to the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. TxDOT also restriped the four corners interchange at US 281 to add bike lanes to US 281 (north and south) connecting the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge to the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

There were plans to restripe all of US 281 that serve the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge to add bike lanes, but the project did not materialize.

TxDOT mentioned that the building of the Bicentennial overpass addressed many of the connectivity issues at the McAllen Airport by providing a faster, more direct route.

Between the Donna International Bridge and the Pharr Reynosa International Bridge, additional investments are planned on the International Bridge Trade Corridor (IBTC) connecting I-2 to Military Highway.

Action Items

Study leads to reach out to:

- Evelyn Garcia (Bike/Pedestrian Coordinator at the Rio Grande Valley MPO) about the bike/pedestrian needs in the community.
- Eduardo Mendoza (City of McAllen Engineering Department).

December 18, 2023, BNSF Railroad Company Meeting

Meeting Details

Meeting: Border Connectivity Study Presidio, TX

Date and Time: December 18, 2023, at 1:30-2:30 PM (CT)

Location: Virtual

Attendees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, BNSF Railroad Company, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic, and
- network gaps.

Purpose and Summary

Crossing the border requires paperwork that needs to be processed, and there is a security aspect when people and freight cross the border. There are therefore a lot of stakeholders involved in cross-border movements (e.g., Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Aduanas, brokers, etc.).

Discussion

In terms of security, less than 20 percent of all truck cargo crossing the border is inspected, while 100 percent of all rail cargo is inspected.

Highways are public infrastructure, but the railroads are largely private infrastructure. The amount of infrastructure per truck load is much higher than the amount of infrastructure needed per carload. In the case of rail, all rail cargo is pre-cleared. The efficiency of crossing cargo by rail is therefore very high. But trains are long.

Actions that can be taken to further improve the efficiency of rail crossings include unified cargo processing (UPC) and allowing international crews to cross the trains. At most border crossings, most trains need to stop, and the crew needs to switch while the trains are stopped on the international bridge. KCS is piloting the feasibility of using international crews in Laredo for northbound rail crossings. If adopted, this will increase rail capacity. However, there are primarily two issues concerning international crews: the need for visas and language requirements. The second is labor unions are concerned about members losing jobs. The latter is not a big issue – as far as BNSF is concerned – because the number of northbound and southbound trains are the same. There was talk about implementing the use of international crews at Eagle Pass also, but it has not been implemented.

There is also an issue with the mechanical inspections that are required and conducted. Northbound trains are mechanically inspected in Mexico. These inspections are guided by Association of American Railroads (AAR) rules. Trains are inspected again when crossing the border following Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) rules. These two inspections are not 100 percent alike. If FRA accepts the inspections done according to AAR rules, the impact on communities will be less. There is therefore a need for harmonizing the inspection process between the US and Mexico. One of the issues is that the FRA has no authority to audit inspections in Mexico.

Providing rail infrastructure is expensive, cross-border operations can be improved by making trains faster and not requiring trains to stop.

Regarding the issue of at-grade rail crossings, in some cases there are operational solutions and in some cases there are not. It is, however, clear under Federal law what the responsibility of the railroad company is.

TxDOT has several tools to address at-grade rail crossings on the state-maintained system, but many of the at-grade crossing issues are on local roads. Per Federal law, the railroad's contribution to an overpass/under pass project is five percent. Federal funding exists, but often local jurisdictions do not have the expertise to apply for the federal dollars. Similarly, the Texas legislature was interested in participating in addressing the at-grade rail crossing issues, but TxDOT does not have the authority to build on local roads. The state can provide match funding.

The preference for over or underpasses depends on the location. Every location is unique. It is, however, harder to elevate a railroad. Typically, the railroad tracks stay at-grade.

Eagle Pass encounters similar issues with at-grade rail crossings as Laredo, but the impact is different. Typically, the larger the city, the larger the impacts.

In El Paso, the BNSF bridge crosses trains 18 out of 24 hours per day. Rail cross-border operations are 24 hours in Eagle Pass and 24 hours in Laredo. The 18 hours of operations in El Paso are possible, because of four overpasses that were constructed in Ciudad Juarez. One more overpass is needed to be built to allow 24-hour operations. In Mexico, the Federal Government concession both the rail infrastructure and the operation of rail service to private companies. This impacts investment in rail infrastructure, because at the end of the concession the railroad track goes back to the Federal Government.

There also seems to be a need for the development of policy to guide land use development around rail lines to prevent neighborhoods and businesses from encroaching on rail lines.

The cross-border process can be made faster if all information is shared in advance of the train arriving at the border. Different government agencies need different types of information. For example, some agencies need to know if the cargo is hazmat, while CBP needs to know what type of cargo is crossed to calculate import tariffs. It is recommended that all needed information be entered into a central database that all public agencies can access to retrieve the data needed. The only activity left is then the inspection of the cargo, which is done when the train is passing through the x-ray machine at the border. A seamless border/21st Century Customs border is needed. With so many different stakeholders and so many laws (including Mexican laws) to comply with, a central database will reduce the need for infrastructure.

Finally, cross-border rail movements involve the application of the rules and regulations of two countries. Differences in the rules and regulations of the two countries are expected. There should, however, be no difference in the inspection processes applied between different crossings. The inspection process should not be a function of where the cargo crosses. This happens on both the US and Mexico side of the border and is very frustrating for trade.

In conclusion, there are many operational improvements that can be made, but additional bridge capacity will still be needed in the future.

The morning of December 18, both the Eagle Pass and El Paso rail bridges were closed. CBP diverted resources to help with the processing of migrants. All trains will be stopped from crossing the border until the crossings are open. This has significant impacts on cross-border rail movements.

December 19, 2023, Valley Metro Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: December 19, 2023

Time: 2:30 – 3:30 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, Valley Metro, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks, and
- network gaps.

Discussion

Brownsville

About 50 percent of Valley Metro's ridership is visitors, students, and workers from Mexico. For this reason, Valley Metro relocated its Brownsville terminal near the Gateway International Bridge (i.e., approximately one block away). The Brownsville terminal provides links to both the Brownsville and Matamoros International Bridge and the Veterans International Bridge at Los Tomates. At Veterans International Bridge, people cross walking (pedestrians), by bicycle, and by electric scooters. The electric scooters use the same lane as the cars. The scooters weave among the cars to the front of the line.

Free Trade International Bridge crosses mostly cars and trucks (i.e., not a lot of pedestrian traffic). FM 509 serves the bridge.

Finally, the four border counties have identified a need for transit service at Progreso and have been asking for transit service to the Progreso International Bridge. There is a need to serve people that want to access medical services, pharmacy services for prescriptions, and groceries.

Donna International Bridge

The Donna International Bridge built a park-and-ride facility with 200 parking spaces at the Donna International Bridge. Rio Bravo wanted to add transit service to the bridge, but the service was suspended in 2015. Buses were serving Donna, but the ridership was low because the town of Donna is five miles away from the bridge.

Rio Bravo currently provides a shuttle service between the airports in Harlingen/ McAllen and Reynosa, Tamaulipas (Mexico) for medical patients. The shuttle transports patients across the border to the medical facility in Reynosa and back again.

Pharr International Bridge

Although the Pharr International Bridge processes only cars and trucks (i.e., no buses), there is still a need for transit service for workers at distribution centers in the vicinity of the bridge, but there is no transit service available.

McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge

Hidalgo has a high level of transit services. A private company provides transit services between the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge and the McAllen transit terminal (a 30-minute ride). The provider uses smaller units with a seating capacity of 12 to 20 seats and standing capacity to provide the service. From the McAllen transit terminal, passengers can access either Metro McAllen or Valley Metro.

Anzalduas International Bridge

Similar to the Pharr International Bridge, the Anzalduas International Bridge processes only cars and trucks (i.e., no buses). No transit services serve the bridge.

Starr-Camargo International Bridge

Transit services are available about half a mile away from the bridge, but no direct service to the bridge exists. On the U.S. side of the bridge, there are good sidewalks to the bus stop.

Los Ebanos Ferry

COVID resulted in the suspension of the scheduled transit service to the Los Ebanos Ferry. Currently an on-demand service is provided that is open to both Mexican and US nationals. Users need to schedule the service 24 hours in advance.

Roma-Ciudad Miguel Aleman International Bridge

Many students from Mexico attend school in the City of Roma. A bus terminal was therefore built near the bridge to serve these students. The students cross by foot, walk to the bus terminal, and access the transit services.

There are no cross-border transit services in the Valley. Coaches (such as Omnibus) provide services across the border. In general, transit bus drivers do not want to work in Mexico.

Circulo Rojo was an international cross-border transit service in Brownsville that was abandoned in the 1970s.

Surveys in 2011/2012 revealed that a little over 20 percent of the Valley Metro transit ridership were Mexican nationals. In Brownsville and McAllen, Mexican nationals were more than 50 percent of the ridership of the former Metro Connect service (that preceded the current RGV Metro Express service). Brownsville, specifically, had traditionally a high level of Mexican transit riders.

Valley Metro does not have the frequencies that riders expect from the transit service, because of a lack of funding. Valley Metro can only provide basic services with existing funding sources. Valley Metro expects that if the agency could add two buses, it will still have standing room only at Progreso, but the agency has no funding.

Valley Metro therefore has good basic infrastructure but needs additional funding to increase service frequency.

Similar to other transit agencies, Valley Metro also experiences manpower challenges. Specifically high bus driver turnover.

Finally, the Valley's street network was developed without sidewalks. The public has, however, started to expect bike racks on buses and sidewalks. Valley Metro started to implement bike racks on their bus fleets in early 2000. The region is also investing in sidewalks and hike and bike trails.

Logan observed that bicycle users are the best advocates for infrastructure. Valley Metro is also the lead agency for the region's bike sharing program. Brownsville, McAllen, and Harlingen participate in the RGV B-Cycle program. There are no bike stations at the international bridges though. The partners selected the locations for the docking stations.

Action Items

Study to review the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Tourism Plan that was developed by municipalities of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Cameron County's Caracara Trail system (see Caracara Trails | A TrailNation Project | Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (railstotrails.org).

When appropriate, Logan will also connect the study with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to provide input on bicycle and pedestrian connectivity challenges and proposed improvements.

January 3, 2024, City of El Paso Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 3, 2024

Time: 10:00 – 11:00 AM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, City of El Paso, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic, and
- network gaps.

Discussion

Highway Bottleneck Locations

It was recommended that the study add the Santa Teresa International Crossing, because cross-border rail and truck movements impact the El Paso region. Specifically, most trucks that cross at Santa Teresa travel on I-10 through downtown El Paso.

The mix of privately operated vehicles (POVs) and trucks on I-10 wanting to cross Bridge of the Americas (BOTA) causes the bottlenecks on I-10. This bottleneck presents a safety issue when traffic is blocking I-10.

After the I-10 Connect project, issues and bottlenecks emerged in downtown El Paso. Because of the bottleneck that developed to cross at BOTA, many POVs changed their travel patterns to avoid the bottleneck and started to cross at the Good Neighbor Bridge. The queueing of cross-border travelers to cross at Good Neighbor Bridge impacts downtown commuter traffic and the people that work downtown – specifically Stanton Street and Paisano Drive. Downtown traffic volumes have doubled. This creates traffic problems in downtown El Paso. POVs are not respecting the traffic lights and asking the Police Department to enforce traffic laws is not sustainable over the long-term.

To avoid the I-10 bottleneck that emerged, traffic also diverted to US 54.

Robert T. also recommended that the study look at future bottlenecks. Once TxDOT opens the Oregon Street exit on Loop 375, it will provide another option for traffic to use Loop 375 to cross into Mexico. This is not an option today, but the bottleneck situation may quickly change once TxDOT opens Oregon street. It will result in another queue into Mexico. The City of El Paso has completed a study to look at the issues before and after the I-10 Connect project.

Freight Rail

Most of the rail issues are on the Juarez side of the border. The rail in El Paso does not mix – and therefore interfere – with regular traffic. The railroads are still crossing into downtown El Paso and BNSF is still growing its rail traffic in the region, but the City of El Paso is not receiving many complaints. The railroad divides the City of Juarez as the railroad goes through downtown Juarez.

Short Line rail lines exist in El Paso. There are many warehouses lined up against the railroad in the Hopkins, Stiles, and Fabens areas. The rest are in the downtown area. There are also rail lines that are used by the military. The track of these sidings is old. In Stiles, some railroad crossings have been closed. In the industrial areas, trains only use the track sporadically. At Gateway and Cotton Street, there are some minor traffic interferences with the rail lines at times. There are no rail impacts on traffic at Wyoming Street, because the roadway is depressed.

Bike-Ped Infrastructure

There are no dedicated bike lanes for bicyclists to cross the international bridges in El Paso. Coming northbound, bicycles can cross either through the POV lanes or the pedestrian lanes. When crossing southbound, bicyclists pay the same toll as pedestrians. Bicycles, however, represent a very small percentage of the crossings. There is no bicycle culture in Mexico, because of the size of the vehicles (mostly pickup trucks are used) and because of a lack of respect for bicyclists.

Students typically cross into downtown El Paso as pedestrians. Most of the schools are in downtown El Paso.

Both BOTA and Ysleta do not have good transit or pedestrian connectivity.

Cars are also typically cheaper in border areas, so most people buy cars and travel by car because it is more convenient and faster. This negatively impacts the usage of transit and other active transportation modes.

El Paso received a RAISE grant for pedestrian improvements at the Ysleta International Bridge. The City is in the process of finalizing the agreement for the $15 million grant. Construction is expected to start in 2025.

Transit

Most of the pedestrians that cross into El Paso at one of the two downtown bridges use transit, because transit has good connectivity.

At Bridge of the Americas (BOTA) and Ysleta, pedestrians typically arrange to be picked up by someone. It is unclear whether a transit service to these bridges will be helpful. Transit terminals near the downtown bridges are problematic because of the traffic situation.

Paso del Norte has good connectivity to transit.

There are limited cross-border transit services. The Transborder Yellow bus provides cross-border transit services according to a loose timetable. The company has a limited bus fleet and there is no dedicated lane for the bus service. The bus uses the POV lanes. The bus passengers must disembark the bus with their belongings to clear customs, while the bus clears customs through the POV lane. The buses operate between the bus terminal in Juarez and the airport. The northbound crossing of the Transborder Yellow Bus is more efficient, because the right lane on the international bridge is also a SENTRI lane. The bus uses as of December 2023 the SENTRI lane (as approved by both CBP and the Fidecommisso). This change will result in a much faster transit service.

Prior to 1974, the streetcar provided cross-border transit service. The Good Neighbor bridge has an arch (steep upward slope) which makes it difficult for the elderly or pedestrians with lung or heart conditions to cross the bridge. The bridge also does not have good or safe connectivity in El Paso.

When the streetcar service resumed in 2018, the routes did not include a cross-border transit service. Initially, the intention was to offer a cross-border service, but when the resumption of the streetcar service was discussed in 2000, the private operators were not consulted. This was a big mistake in generating support for the cross-border streetcar service. There are still conversations about a cross border streetcar service, but the big transit proponents are no longer on the Council. Furthermore, bridge lanes will have to be dedicated to the streetcar and the international bridge capacity is constraint. It will also be very expensive, so costs also factor into the discussion. There is also a potential for transit only bridges, but CBP has brought up security concerns. It is unclear as to how to inspect the merchandise and belongings that transit riders bring into the U.S.

Airport

The nearest international bridge to the airport is Bridge of the Americas. Connectivity is not an issue for POVs, but there is limited connectivity for pedestrians and no transit services.
Sun Metro operates a route to the airport, but there is no direct service to the bridges.

January 4, 2024, Union Pacific Railroad Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 4, 2024

Time: 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, Union Pacific Railroad, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic, and
- network gaps.

Discussion

Union Pacific (UP) mentioned that the railroads have no connectivity issues to or from Mexico. The rail bridges have sufficient capacity. CPKCR is adding capacity at Laredo. Eagle Pass has sufficient capacity. In terms of border facilities, additional capacity has been added at Clark's Park railyard five miles north of the rail bridge at Eagle Pass. Port Laredo 10 miles north of the bridge has sufficient capacity. The Olmito yard at Brownsville has sufficient capacity. Similarly, in El Paso, the rail yard is at the border. There is therefore sufficient capacity at the rail yards in all the border regions. UP is not aware of any bottlenecks. The railroads are not constraint by a lack of rail infrastructure.

Capacity can also be increased by adding rail cars to a train and not only by investing in additional infrastructure. For example, the average length of a train that crosses into Mexico in Texas is about 12,000 ft. In Los Angeles/Long Beach, the average length of a train is 15,000 ft. Capacity can therefore be increased by increasing the length of a train (i.e., adding rail cars).

UP has increased the length of its sidings in Texas from 7,000/8000 ft to 12,000/18,000 ft. Mexico did not invest in sidings to handle longer trains, which is impacting the length of the trains that crosses into Mexico.

Every train that crosses into or from Mexico must stop and change the crew. Having international crews would add capacity and increase the speed of cross-border rail movements.

In Eagle Pass, northbound trains stopping on the bridge to comply with crew change requirements, block the at-grade rail crossings in Piedras Negras. Efficiency will therefore be enhanced with international crews as the trains will not be required to stop on the bridge.

Capacity can also be increased if the border is open 24/7. In El Paso, trains can only cross in the daylight hours, because Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has limited resources. In Laredo and Eagle Pass, the railroads operates and crosses 24/7. Brownsville also does not operate 24/7. If CBP has additional resources and operates 24/7, then additional capacity will be available.

UP has a good working relationship with CBP and meets with the agency monthly. UP talks CBP through current and expected train volumes and therefore the need for additional CBP staffing resources. Support is needed from the State and Federal governments.

Eagle Pass is currently facing challenges with migrants, leading to the closure of rail bridges. UP is collaborating with CBP to address this issue. Media coverage, including photos of migrants on trains, can impact government policy. However, the actual number of migrants on trains crossing the border is minimal.

Rail bridge closures (the most recently being a weeklong closure) is therefore not because of migrants being transported on cross-border trains. The issue is that migrants ride on trains in Mexico (Mexican railroads) from the south. The media published photos of migrants traveling on trains and the rail bridges were closed because of security concerns.

UP has made the point to CBP that trade should continue to move. When a rail bridge is closed, trains had to be pulled over and the railroads cannot accept any shipments. Trains can also not be diverted to other rail crossings, because there is not sufficient capacity. Rail bridge closures hurt businesses and companies. For example, UP had to embargo the receivers and shippers of all auto parts during the recent rail bridge closures. The rail bridge closures were a major disruption to the border and the US economy.

The blocking of at-grade crossings by trains in border cities can be improved with international crews. Some Texas cities have invested in under and overpasses. This has not been the case in Mexico. UP is always working with cities to improve efficiency and limit the blocking of at-grade crossings.

Unified Cargo Processing (UCP) has been implemented in Eagle Pass. CBP looks at this implementation as a best practice. With UCP, both CBP and Aduanas look at the same images. In the case of northbound trains, if CBP identifies an issue, it alerts UP and UP moves the train to the nearest yard where the inspection is completed. In the case of a southbound train, the process is similar. If there is a migrant onboard, the train is stopped and the person removed, but these occurrences are minimal.

The railroads do not experience operational bottlenecks. Only crew changes requires that cross-border trains are stopped. In Eagle Pass, a private entity has raised bottleneck concerns that have been included in TxDOT studies and extrapolated to the railroads.

Regarding Short Line railroads, there are no specific needs in the border region. UP is serving both long haul and local customers. UP moves rail freight, including the first and last mile customers at the border. The Port of Brownsville is served by a Short Line railroad (i.e., the Brownsville & Rio Grande International Railroad). UP hands over to the Brownsville & Rio Grande International Railroad at its Olmita Yard.

UP recommended that the study set up a meeting with KCS to get more visibility into what is happening in Mexico (e.g., what is the strategy in Mexico, how is overpasses and underpasses build, etc.). For example, in Mexico the railroads do not own the rail infrastructure. Rather the railroads have a concession(s) to operate on the rail infrastructure that is owned by the government.

Regarding required train inspections, UP follows FRA guidelines and UP does their own safety inspections despite the inspections in Mexico. A single inspection is a policy decision that requires the FRA and Mexican counterpart to agree. One valid inspection would be more efficient.

Implementing international crews is a long process. KCS has made some progress with implementing international crews in Laredo, because they operate in both Mexico and the US. UP does not have a concession to operate in Mexico. A manual with the rules (e.g., crews are required to comply with FRA standards), visa requirements, etc. is required. Furthermore, labor groups represent the rail workers. The process thus involves two countries and two labor unions. The unions (specifically in Mexico) have pushed back on implementing international crews. International crews will, however, save a lot of time for the international crossing of rail freight.

Action Items

UP provided the study with the following KCS contacts for this effort: Larry Lloyd (Larry.Lloyd@cpkcr.com) and Kyle Morgan (Kyle.Morgan@cpkcr.com).

UP also recommended that include Chad Coburn at TxDOT's Rail Division. Finally, UP asked that TxDOT provide UP with a copy of the report for review before publishing.

January 12, 2024, McAllen Airport Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 12, 2024

Time: 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, McAllen Airport, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic, and
- network gaps.

Discussion

The McAllen airport is not served by rail, but the airport has good access to bike and pedestrian networks. In addition, the airport is connected and served by two on-system roads: one connects directly to the McAllen-Hidalgo International bridge. The airport is strategically located geographically.

The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge serves personal vehicles and commercial motor vehicles. The Anzalduas International Bridge serve many Mexican nationals (from Monterrey) because of the direct connection to the Autopista (Mex 40). A better connection from the Anzalduas International Bridge to I-2 will improve traffic flow and help with the connectivity gap. Currently, the Anzalduas International Bridge is connected to I-2 via SH 396.

The Allegiant Air flight from McAllen to Las Vegas brings 145 to 170 cross-border travelers daily into the city. Border wait time can be a problem.

Improvements to the Bicentennial Overpass addressed connectivity gaps in the region and eased westbound and eastbound congestion on I-2.

The Reynosa International Airport is a regional airport near the Texas-Mexico border and a competitor for the McAllen airport. The Reynosa International Airport is near the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge. Texas residents crosses the border and fly into Mexico from the Reynosa International Airport. Flying out of Reynosa means travelers do not have to pay international taxes on the air ticket. The same phenomenon occurs on the U.S.-Canada border. Wait times at the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge present connectivity issues and challenges for cross-border travelers (in both directions).

In the future, the airport would like to have some type of light rail (people mover) serve the airport. Metro McAllen provides transit services to the airport from the Central Terminal. Mexican national can cross the border, use a bus to the airport, and fly internationally from the McAllen airport. Texas residents have the same options to fly from Mexico.

In general, the McAllen airport has good connectivity. The City is already working with the state on projects to address the few remaining connectivity gaps. In terms of airport infrastructure, the airport wants to extend the runway and eventually add another runway.

The McAllen airport is not a major freight airport. The airport averages about one million pounds of inbound and outbound cargo. UPS uses a Boeing 767 to fly cargo in and out of the McAllen airport. UPS moved their operations from the Harlingen Airport (who still have DHL and FedEx) to the McAllen airport because of the airport's location and because it was an old military base and therefore has long runways. The McAllen airport does handle specialty cargo, including expensive parts for the maquiladoras that need to be delivered to Mexico in a timely manner. Trucks (18 wheelers) and specialty vehicles deliver cargo to the airport. It is, however, felt that the airport is better set up for commercial passenger operations rather than air cargo.

Another focus area for the airport is General Aviation Traffic/ Private Planes. As technology develops and the regulations are established, there will be an opportunity for the McAllen airport to serve more private planes. The McAllen airport is open 18 hours a day. The McAllen airport serves a number of international and private planes and foresees that based aircraft will eventually be 50 percent of their market share. A "based aircraft" is an aircraft that sits on the ground for more than 6 months. The airport will consider new technologies when developing the airport.

January 16, 2024, El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 16, 2024

Time: 9:30 – 11:00 AM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, El Paso MPO, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Highway Connectivity

In El Paso, 85 to 87 percent of northbound truck trips that cross into El Paso originate in Ciudad Juarez. Most of the transborder cargo that crosses into El Paso is produced in Juarez and drayed across the border. Once the cargo is crossed into El Paso, the cargo is transloaded into the El Paso region. The origin/destination (O/D) patterns in El Paso are very different from Laredo. In El Paso, the first and last mile represent a larger percentage of the total trip. Long distance trips are typically from the Chihuahua maquilas to inland destinations in the U.S. The U.S. wants Mexican companies to participate in Free and Secure Trade (FAST)/ Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) programs. In principle, these programs should allow for faster inspections at the crossings. However, the benefits at these inspection points get diluted by crossing and waiting times. Mexican Aduanas is the bottleneck.

Currently two inspections of northbound trucks are conducted: one by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and one by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) at the Border Safety Inspection Facilities (BSIF).

TxDOT has made several investments to improve access to the El Paso ports of entry, including Loop 375 and the IH 10 Connect project. In addition, the Artcraft/IH project linking to Santa Teresa will let in 2024. Trucks moving containers destined for the UP facility cross at Santa Teresa.

Mexican truck drivers tend not to travel into the U.S. for insurance and language proficiency reasons. The percentage of truck trips originating in Juarez and destined for U.S. inland destinations are small. Drayage drivers typically make two to five trips per day. The number of trips is a function of schedules and wait times at the crossings. Commodities, such as automobile parts and medical equipment, that are inputs following a JIT schedule cross at El Paso. There is therefore a need for a focused approach to make border crossings more efficient since the crossing time at the border represents a large percentage of the total trip time.

Southbound truck movements have started to experience congestion with Aduanas being replaced by military management because:

- The military is less sensitive to citizen issues. Aduanas was more sensitive to stakeholder issues. The military administration is less flexible with unusual needs and/or quick response scenarios.
- U.S. visitors in passenger cars are sometimes stopped multiple times. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), State Troopers or the El Paso Police Department will stop vehicles multiple times to check for weapons.
- Southbound inspections of vehicles are a more recent phenomenon. There are no secondary inspection facilities to inspect vehicles. The Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan (BTMP) recognizes the need for southbound primary and secondary inspection facilities at Bridge of the Americas (BOTA). BOTA is a non-toll bridge.

Toll booth operations become an issue on the U.S. side with cars going southbound having to pay tolls in cash. Northbound is seldom an issue because the throughput capacity of CBP is less than the toll capacity.

At the downtown bridges, traffic is queuing to cross southbound. The situation got worse when Aduanas was replaced by the military. The need for coordination became evident when Mexico implemented a new system in which they assigned a booth on one side of the crossing to trucks, but the change was never communicated to the U.S. El Paso needed to implement a similar system to prevent trucks from having to weave on the bridge.

El Paso will start a Strategic Plan for Border Crossings using their new International Traffic Demand Model (iTDM). The development of the iTDM was complicated given the need to share resources between the two countries. The iTDM will allow the El Paso MPO to test different scenarios and get a better understanding of available options. The iTDM should be considered a first draft. The model has some issues, but the issues will be resolved in the second round. There is also an effort to do microsimulations around the bridges.

GSA has allocated $700 million for the modernization of CBP inspection facilities at BOTA. The El Paso MPO wants to divert trucks away from BOTA because of environmental justice concerns. The iTDM will allow the MPO to obtain a better idea of the origins and destinations (O/D) of trucks, as well as to conduct "what if" analysis (e.g., can the other bridges handle an increase in truck traffic if BOTA is closed) and test different scenarios. The El Paso MPO did not have good O/D data, so the MPO invested in travel surveys of passenger cars, pedestrians, and trucks at the border crossings. The MPO was, however, limited in its use of U.S. funds in Mexico. CS developed the iTDM. El Paso MPO is also funding micro-simulations of the crossings. CBP allowed for observations at the crossings that allowed for the calculation of crossing times for cars, trucks, and pedestrians. The El Paso MPO needs delay by lane, by mode, by direction, and by crossing.

Freight Rail

Ferromex has 15 at-grade crossings in Mexico. The railway line is parallel to Francisco Villa Avenue in Juarez. Trains crossing the border are more than one mile long. There was a commitment from the railroads to build five rail separations in downtown Juarez to allow 24-hour operations. Out of the five rail separations,[1] three were built. Currently, rail operations are restricted to a 14-hour window. Approximately 11/12 trains cross into El Paso per day (seven BNSF trains and 5 UP trains).

The BNSF rail line in El Paso is operated as a big spur for the line to Belen (in Albuquerque). BNSF does not have many trains operating on the rail line. The rail line in El Paso is not part of BNSF's main line. The opposite situation pertains to UP. The UP rail line in El Paso is the Sunset line (largest revenue earner for container traffic) coming from Los Angeles (California). All rail traffic from Los Angeles moved by UP goes through El Paso: approximately one-third of the trains go to Chicago and two-thirds of the trains goes south of El Paso where they split at the Sierra Blanca junction to San Antonio/Houston/New Orleans and Dallas/Fort Worth. UP invested $0.5 billion in its intermodal terminal at Santa Teresa. The proposed West Rail bypass project (south of Samalayuca and connecting at Santa Teresa) will benefit BNSF more than UP. UP is opposed to the bypass project.

In El Paso, the Zaragoza Avenue at-grade crossing is the number1 priority for grade separation. UP supported the El Paso MPO's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant application for a grade separation, but the project was not selected for a CRISI grant.

Transit

Transit in El Paso needs a complete overhaul. Transit is currently losing money. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has asked Sun Metro to look at solutions.

The Streetcar is not considered a good solution. Much more is needed than the Streetcar to address transit issues in El Paso. For example,

- Changes in land use policies. Current zoning and land use policies do not support transit. Land use and accessibility solutions (such as Transit Oriented Development) and improving transit services are needed.

- First and last mile is an issue. Pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure, kiss-and-ride, and park-and-ride facilities are needed.

The idea behind the Streetcar was that it would be an attraction, but ridership levels are low.

Sun Metro is receiving 3507 funding to operate transit within the El Paso city limits. This means that the outlying and sprawling communities, such as Socorro, Horizon City, and San Elizario, do not receive transit service. Communities, such as Socorro and Horizon City, are growing fast and have low density. Sun Metro does not service these communities, but the County (through South Central Regional Transit) provides some services in the areas outside of El Paso. The headways of the county provided services are typically one hour.

El Paso's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service offers no benefit in terms of travel times. The headways on the BRT are typically 20/25 minutes. As the travel times are getting worse, fewer people are using the service.

The pandemic impacted the number of pedestrian crossings and transit users in El Paso. Juarez residents make up 78 percent of all crossings in the El Paso area. Pedestrians crossing use transit to go to specific areas. For example, pedestrians crossing at Paso del Norte use transit to access the shopping district (low value retail area). Pedestrians crossing at Zaragoza are mostly Mexican residents that are U.S. citizens that go to school in El Paso. Pedestrians crossing at BOTA use transit to high and middle schools in El Paso. Juarez is looking to invest and improve connectivity to the border crossings. Juarez is mostly focusing on BRT development. The Chihuahua State Government is investing in buses to connect to the crossings in downtown El Paso and Zaragoza. The BRT system (5 lines) has dedicated lanes and large BRT stations. As a reference, the El Paso BRT moves 20,000 riders per day. The Juarez BRT is expected to move 600,000 riders per day. Currently, only one line is operational: Eje Zaragoza. The first BRT phase should be operational by March/April 2024. Juarez is planning three more lines to optimize BRT access. These three lines are not fully implemented, because in two cases traffic lanes need to be taken away from cars. A second BRT has been implemented, but the fare collection technology has not been installed. Once installed, the buses will start to operate. This development will change the transit landscape. The El Paso MPO is looking to invest in good transit services to the POEs. The idea is that BRT service will be available in El Paso to the bridges, transit riders will cross the bridges as pedestrians, and access the BRT in Juarez.

Most pedestrians that cross at the downtown bridges shop in downtown El Paso (between the border and Paisano drive). UTEP students that cross at the downtown bridges walk to the Paisano stop to access either the Streetcar or the BRT. The BRT and Streetcar follow the same alignment in serving UTEP. About 20/25 percent of the transit users are students.

The nearest bus stop for pedestrians crossing at BOTA is on Paisano drive. The headways are 35/40 minutes.

The transit routes are not very direct. They tend to meander through the city.

Some U.S. residents cross at Zaragoza to buy groceries in Mexico. Most Mexican residents that cross at Zaragoza go to school in El Paso. Some schools operate buses to pick up high school students at the Zaragoza bridge. About 10/15 percent of the people crossing at Zaragoza cross to access health services. For pedestrians, it can take 20/25 minutes to cross northbound in the off-peak (60/90 minutes in the peak). Southbound, it takes pedestrians 10/15 minutes to cross in the peak at Zaragoza.

At the Paso Del Norte bridge it takes pedestrians 45 minutes to cross. At BOTA, pedestrians can typically cross in 10/15 minutes.

Transborder transit is not seen as beneficial, because transit riders will have to disembark the bus to get processed and the bus will have to be inspected. It is better for pedestrians to access transit services near the crossings.

Transborder Red Buses operated in the 1970s, but the service was discontinued. Mexican legislation does not allow U.S. buses to operate in Mexico.

Airport Connectivity

There is no direct service between El Paso Airport and Juarez Airport. Travel time between the two airports is two hours.

The Yellow Bus provides a hybrid service from Mexico to the El Paso airport. Connectivity is not optimal.

Sun Metro serves the El Paso airport. Sun Metro opened a BRT station at the airport that provides service to Cielo Vista Transit Center. Mexican residents can connect at Cielo Vista to Route 59 that provides service to downtown El Paso. From there, Mexican residents can cross into Juarez as pedestrians.

January 18, 2024, Laredo District Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 18, 2024

Time: 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, TxDOT Laredo District, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Eagle Pass

The District is currently not concerned about the at-grade crossings in Eagle Pass. The proposed Puerto Verde facility may bring about some challenges. The new proposed rail line will cross US 277. The main concern in Eagle Pass is the potential congestion associated with the new rail line at-grade crossings and new road linking to FM-1589. The developer is proposing a connector to FM 1589. FM 1589 currently has an average daily traffic (ADT) of 200 vehicles. The road was not designed for truck traffic. The District wants the private developer to fund improvements and grade-separations. There are no rail spurs in Eagle Pass, and no Short lines operate in Eagle Pass.

The District secured funding for the Eagle Pass relief route – Loop 480. A study is also being conducted on connecting Eagle Pass to IH 35 via US 57.

Laredo

The District mentioned the at-grade rail crossing issues in Laredo. In Laredo, all the rail crossings are at-grade except at IH 35. The KCS rail line traverses downtown Laredo so trains block the city streets (only the IH 35 main lanes have grade separation). This has been an ongoing issue for many years.

The District built overpasses/grade separations on US 83 and Loop 20 to remove conflicts between trains and highway users. There has been some discussion about building on and off ramps to IH 35 to address the lack of grade separations in downtown Laredo, but spacing is a concern. TxDOT cannot build under and overpasses on city streets.

UP crosses under Mines Road. Between Mines Road and the downtown UP rail yard, only Lafayette street has an overpass. There has been a planned grade-separation of the UP line at Carlton Road, but it has been deferred for a long time. At FM1472 there is an elevated crossing (Mines Road). The District constructed an overpass at US 59.

Carriers Drive also has an overpass. The District has been looking at an elevated crossing at Uniroyal Dr serving the Unitec industrial park (also known as Puerto Grande), but the engineering is challenging. The area is also developing rapidly on both sides of IH 35. An alternative road and interchange at IH 35 will require the building of an expensive overpass (north or south of the industrial park).

The number 1 concern in the District is the at-grade railroad crossings in Laredo. There are currently 23 trains/day that crosses between Texas and Mexico, but this number is likely to increase with the second railroad bridge currently under construction. The second railroad bridge is likely to exacerbate issues with at-grade crossings in Laredo and specifically at Puerto Grande. On the Mexican side, the second railroad bridge will potentially eliminate the grade separation at C. Cpe Victoria (i.e., closing of the underpass).

Laredo is seeing significant growth. In 2023, developers built two million square feet of warehousing and the space was sold out before the construction was completed.

Airport

Connectivity to and from Laredo International Airport is via US 59 and Bustamente road. The District is unaware of any connectivity concerns to the airport.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Infrastructure

Pedestrians crossing at Laredo Bridge II need to cross Santa Ursula Ave to access downtown Laredo. Convent Avenue has a bike lane that serves Bridge 1. Similarly, Santa Maria Ave has a bicycle lane.

January 26, 2024, Rio Grande Valley MPO Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 26, 2024

Time: 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, Rio Grande Valley MPO, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Hidalgo County

The Progreso International Bridge (a privately owned bridge) has a pedestrian and tourism (specifically, medical tourism) focus. Pedestrians must access the bridge by vehicle and cross as pedestrians into Mexico. There are parking spaces at the bridge and amenities for pedestrians. Since most of the traffic is medical tourism (e.g., dentist, glasses), the trips are mostly day trips with very little traffic during the evening hours. The Progreso Bridge is the most used bridge because there is a notion of it being the “safer” bridge. The distance between the crossing and the amenities and shops on the Mexico side make it easier to access. The McAllen Bridge (Hidalgo) sees more personal vehicle traffic since the bridge is surrounded by neighborhoods. Both bridges cross a number of bicyclists.

The Donna International bridge has no pedestrian crossings.

The Progreso International Bridge is not served by transit and pedestrians crossing from Mexico have to walk quite a distance to access the nearest bus stop. There are sidewalks along segments of the road, but not the entire length, and the sidewalks are not well maintained. The road serving the Progreso International Bridge is a four-lane divided road with a continuous right turn lane. The road is a higher speed facility.

Brownsville

Cameron County receives a lot of pedestrian traffic that crosses from Mexico. There is a general lack of wayfinding signage and service infrastructure. For example, there are no signs for bicyclists and pedestrians to direct them, for example, to where restrooms are. The same is true for transit wayfinding. Funneling pedestrians through the corridors would be a good investment.

Mexico Boulevard and SH 4 serves the two downtown bridges in Brownsville. Mexican residents cross the downtown bridges to go to the technical college and university. These pedestrians cross the bridges and then don't know where to go. The downtown Brownsville bridge need pedestrian facilities and loading and unloading areas.

The West Rail trail is an eight-mile route in Cameron County. The West Rail trail currently stops at Palm Boulevard. It is possible to extend the trail to the Brownsville and Matamoros (B&M) Bridge. There are also efforts to connect Santa Ana Wildlife refuge to the communities in Mexico but currently, there are no crossings available.

Regional transit connectivity is good in Brownsville. The Brownsville bus terminal is near the international bridges. From the terminal there is good connectivity to intercity transit buses, interstate buses, and regional transit. The terminal also has a parking garage and good restrooms.

Valley Metro has a route into Roma and a bus station near the Roma-Ciudad Miquel Aleman International Crossing. Similarly, the Rio Grande City bus stop (on Pete Diaz Ave) is near the Star Camargo International Bridge.

The RGV MPO obtained access to one month of transit data. When the two universities (University of Texas-Pan American and University of Texas at Brownsville) merged the transit routes of the two universities merged and facilitated the streamlining of transit services and better coordination among transit agencies in the region. Students represent a high percentage of t transit ridership. The RGV MPO is currently working with Valley Metro on streamlining how data is obtained to ensure better data.

The Progreso International Bridge is the closest bridge to Harlingen airport.

Rail information is typically not available to the RGV MPO. There is a perception that the maquila companies do not have first/last mile connectivity to rail. For example, wind blades are built in Matamoros, but the companies could not get the blades to rail. The Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority's (CCRMA) investment in the new rail bridge improved rail connectivity and efficiency to the Port of Brownsville and Port of Harlingen. The East Loop project will divert traffic away from SH 4, which is prone to congestion. The Brownsville airport expansion project will allow the airport to accommodate cargo planes (to serve Space X). East loop will become the new oversize/overweight (OS/OW) corridor that serve the Port of Brownsville.

Finally, the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) development along the Port of Brownsville will require a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system to transport the 5,000 workers that will operate the LNG facilities. The expected workforce needed to operate the LNG facilities over a 24-hour period is 5,000 workers.

The checkpoint to Space X will be relocated to ensure that the workers of Space X are not impacted by the inspections required for people going to or coming from the beach.

January 26, 2024, City of McAllen Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: January 26, 2024

Time: 10:00 – 11:00 AM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, City of McAllen, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic, and
- network gaps.

Discussion

Highway Connectivity

The Anzalduas International Bridge has four lane connectivity to I-2 via SH 396 and to I-69C via I-2. The Anzalduas bridge does not have direct connectivity to I-2 and I-69C via a controlled access facility. This presents a gap in the International Bridge Trade Corridor (IBTC) System. The Bridge Board has submitted a proposal for consideration to TxDOT to provide the Anzalduas bridge with connectivity to a controlled access facility three miles north of the bridge to I-2.

As Hidalgo becomes more urban, the McAllen-Hidalgo International bridge will also need a more direct connector to I-2.

The Anzalduas bridge crosses mostly passenger operated vehicles (POVs) and southbound empty commercial vehicles. The bridge does not process many pedestrians. SH 396 is a four-lane divided highway and not bike/ped friendly.

Minor upgrades/investments in the order of $100 to $115 million are needed to enhance connectivity to the Anzalduas bridge.

Mexico has made significant investments in Mexico's highways to improve connectivity between Monterrey and the Anzalduas bridge. Development around the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge is constraint by the historic Hidalgo downtown and downtown Reynosa. Since downtown Reynosa is problematic, many business travelers cross at Anzalduas because of increased mobility.

Anzalduas is currently investing more than $80 million to allow the bridge to process commercial vehicles. Reynosa is a node for commercial vehicles serving both north-south and east-west commercial traffic. Reynosa receives loads from the Pacific Coast, the Gulf, and Central Mexico; providing great potential for growth in truck crossings at Anzalduas once the I-2 connector is completed.

Before the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge became operational, commercial traffic crossed at the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge. No commercial traffic currently crosses at the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge, because the existing infrastructure would not be able to support commercial vehicle crossings. The bridge crosses POVs, pedestrians, and buses. Most pedestrians cross at the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge, because the bridge is in downtown Hidalgo and provides direct access to the downtown area. From personal observation, pedestrians coming for shopping cross at the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge. Most of the POV crossings at the bridge are also people living in Reynosa. As mentioned earlier, most of the Maquiladora business travelers cross at the Anzalduas bridge. Also, holidays and weekends, the Anzalduas bridge sees an increase in POV crossings.

Approximately 240,000 vehicles cross at the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge per month as opposed to 113,000 vehicles per month at the Anzalduas bridge (which represents mostly people living on the outskirts of Reynosa and Maquila business travelers). Approximately 100,000 pedestrians cross at the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge per month. Finally, approximately 300 empty trucks cross southbound per day at the Anzalduas bridge. All the traffic statistics can be obtained from the McAllen.net website. The Bridge Board meeting minutes contain data by month for multiple years.

The pedestrians crossing at the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge include thousands of students, workers (that work in warehouses and restaurants), and business owners that shop in McAllen.

A major challenge is the lack of CBP staffing resources. The bridge has 12 northbound lanes that can process vehicles, but at times only four to six lanes are open, because CBP does not have sufficient staff. This creates artificial congestion and hurts the region. Despite infrastructure investments to add lane capacity, throughput is not increased when additional staffing is not added. CBP has had the same number of lanes open for many years.

Also, if CBP has a seizure, CBP will close the bridge, and nobody will know why it happened. It should be noted that the Anzalduas bridge has four physical lanes. Before, COVID all four lanes were open on the bridge. Since COVID, only one lane on the bridge is open to traffic, which results in traffic being backed up (queuing into Mexico). During COVID, the Federal Government ordered that no non-U.S. citizen could cross from Mexico into the U.S. In response, CBP funneled all traffic from Mexico into one lane on the bridge. CBP has not reversed this decision. Mexico has created a bypass to handle the traffic that is queuing into Mexico. For southbound traffic, the full capacity of the bridge (four lanes are used) at the Anzalduas bridge, as well as at the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge (eight lanes). CBP does not inspect southbound traffic.

Transit

On the US side, there is a privately owned bus system that operates 17-seater buses that transport people from the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge to and from more inland areas. In McAllen, the large buses are not as efficient to transport people. There is an area designated for the 17-seater buses. It is not a bus terminal, but rather a bus stop/staging area for buses. The City of Hidalgo issues the permits for the bus operators on the U.S. side. On the Mexican side, taxis and buses transport passengers.

Airport Connectivity

In general, there is good highway connectivity to the airport. There are two routes to the airport that provide good connectivity from the McAllen-Hidalgo bridge. There is also good connectivity to the airport from the Anzalduas bridge; it is just a longer route. No data is available on how many cross-border travelers use the airport.

January 26, 2024, Sun Metro Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: February 2, 2024

Time: 12:00 – 1:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, Sun Metro, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Passenger vehicle traffic in downtown El Paso makes it problematic for buses to access terminals in the vicinity of the downtown international bridges/crossings. Specifically, congestion on Paisano Drive (resulting from passenger vehicles queuing to cross into Juarez from El Paso) makes is problematic for buses to access bus terminals. It is detrimental to the bus terminals even when they are in very good locations for pedestrians/transit users to access. A lack of enforcement of traffic laws around the crossings exacerbates the problem. The downtown bridges and Zaragoza are the most impacted by congestion.

There are no dedicated bike lanes or striping in the area around the Paso del Norte bridge. The sidewalks are in good condition. The bridge is about one-third of a mile to the downtown bus terminal, but there are no park-and-ride facilities.

A similar situation persists around the Good Neighbor bridge. There are no bike lanes in downtown El Paso because the right-of-way is used for parking. Sidewalks – from personal recollection - are believed to be well maintained, but the information would need to be verified.

The nearest transit stop for pedestrians crossing at Bridge of the Americas (BOTA) is on Paisano Drive. Most of the traffic that cross at BOTA are commercial 18-wheelers. There are no bike lanes or bicycle activities on Paisano Drive. The sidewalks are in good condition. However, the area is being redesigned, and bus stops will be relocated closer to the intersection/crosswalk on the street nearest to the bridge. This is being coordinated with the TxDOT District under a multi-use agreement.

Bus services to the Zaragoza bridge (north to south) are the most problematic because buses get stuck in daily traffic (e.g., on the access road from Loop 375). Going north there is no sidewalk or bicycle lane to the bridge. There are sidewalks going south. The only available bus stop is across the street because of the design of the road. Sidewalks are needed and the crosswalk needs to be improved. It is not considered safe given the number of pedestrians that cross at the bridge.

A cross-border transit service is available from Juarez to El Paso. The existing service called "Transborder" is provided by a Mexican operator. Passengers are picked up and dropped off at designated stops and locations. Transborder riders use Sun Metro services in El Paso.

Students represent a large share of Sun Metro's ridership. The downtown bridges and Zaragoza have a lot of students that cross as pedestrians. There is high student demand and need for transit at Zaragoza. There is a good circulator to provide these students with access to schools, but it is challenging because Zaragoza is farther away from the main destinations in El Paso. Sun Metro does not have enough resources to provide good coverage for the Zaragoza crossing. UTEP students crossing downtown have better transit coverage.

January 26, 2024, CPKC Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: February 5, 2024

Time: 3:00 – 3:45 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, CPKC, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Every time a train must stop, a bottleneck is created. CPKC is always looking into:

1. how to prevent trains from stopping. CPKC has invested more than $100 million in the second Laredo rail bridge.
2. how to streamline crossings from a CBP standpoint. CPKC is investing in technology upgrades (new technological advancement and improvements), such as cameras, people detection equipment, and scanners to get approvals faster to prevent trains from stopping and to get trains to cross the border faster. Approvals to allow trains to cross the border could be more streamlined (may be through joint scheduling or live coordination). CPKC is also Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) certified, which allows CBP inspections to be conducted in the CPKC rail yard in Laredo.[1]

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) requires the Class I railroads to conduct a brake test at the border to ensure the brakes meet FRA standards. It would be beneficial if the trains got stopped less often. All northbound trains are inspected according to FRA protocols. All southbound trains are inspected according to Mexican protocols. A reciprocity agreement between Mexico and the FRA could help to eliminate some of the inspections.

The City of Laredo received a Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program grant to study at-grade crossing upgrades in Laredo. The grant will be used to explore options to alleviate the downtown lockdown situation. The study is expected to start soon. CPKC is looking into double tracking its rail line through downtown Laredo. The second track will be built within

the existing right-of-way (ROW). If the railroad had to purchase all new ROW, it would have been prohibitively expensive. Moving the rail line to East of Laredo to eliminate the blocking of crossings in downtown Laredo would require a new ROW so it is not feasible. There was a study in the last 15 years. A reroute would greatly affect their Mexican operations.

CPKC does not experience any issues in Mexico. CPKC invests a lot in security. The main concern is ensuring the product is ready at the scheduled time to prevent rail cars from sitting idle (ready to be filled) while the train is assembled.

If there are international bridge closures, CPKC does not really have an option to reroute. The railroad must bring back the product to Mexico or to their U.S. point of origin. Sometimes the railroads only get a 12-hr warning about crossing closures.

CPKC crosses in Laredo and Brownsville. CPKC does not cross the Texas-Mexico border in El Paso or Eagle Pass. In Laredo, CPKC does not change crews in the middle of the international rail bridge. CPKC is the only Class I railroad that can change crews at their rail yard in the U.S. In Brownsville they still need to change crews at the border.

UP has trackage rights in Laredo to use the CPCK crossing. UP and Ferromex must still stop at the border and change crews.

January 26, 2024, El Metro Transit Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: February 7, 2024

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, El Metro Transit, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

The number of pedestrians crossing from Mexico to Texas has reduced dramatically, impacting El Metro's ridership levels. A challenge for El Metro is restoring ridership to pre-Covid levels. The key question is how to get Mexican nationals to feel welcome in Laredo. Mexican nationals do not feel welcome because of the current rhetoric. Mexican nationals used to cross into Laredo to go to school, shop, and access medical services. Before the pandemic, El Metro services were well utilized. Currently ridership levels are about 20 percent lower compared to pre-pandemic levels (i.e., 1.8 million riders currently compared to 2.3 million riders pre-Covid).

Another challenge is congestion on Mines Road and an increase in the number of pedestrian incidents on Loop 20 (both northbound and southbound).

El Metro's Transit Center is near the international bridges in downtown Laredo. El Metro operates a fixed route service. The El Metro Transit Center is about six blocks from Bridge I. There is a bus stop one block from Bridge 1 where pedestrians can board a bus to the Transit Center. Most pedestrians, however, walk to the Transit Center. A survey is needed to understand why pedestrians walk six blocks as opposed to one block.

The Transit Center is the hub of El Metro's operation, and the bus routes start and end at the Transit Center. El Metro recently implemented a Circular Route in South Laredo that serves the HEB and Laredo College in South Laredo. This eliminated the need for transit riders to come all the way downtown to the Transit Center and then transfer to another bus route to go to South Laredo. Given congestion levels, the City of Laredo and El Metro applied for funding for a North Hub, but El Metro also needs a South Hub. Funding has been received for a new operations and maintenance facility.

Approximately, 85 percent of the design is completed. El Metro hopes to go out for bids this year (2024).

The Laredo MPO has issued a Request for Proposals to conduct a feasibility study of micro-transit to help alleviate congestion. Micro-transit has a different target audience (e.g., business people) and is often a faster way to travel.

Several large shops (e.g., HEB, Walmart, and Target) are adjacent to IH 35 near downtown Laredo. Drivers drop their trailers and use their tractor-trailers/rigs as a means of transportation to access these shops. This contributes to congestion. One idea to remove trucks from the road is for drivers to use transit. The idea is that drivers park their tractor-trailers at a park-and-ride facility (hub) and use transit to access restaurants or shops downtown. The transit service can be provided as a fixed route or on-demand service.

Funding is a challenge. The safety of clients that are Mexican nationals is also of concern.

A major challenge for El Metro is the blocking of at-grade crossings in downtown Laredo. When trains block the at-grade crossings, they also block the transit routes. This results in buses being delayed. Southbound trains into Mexico can take a very long time to clear (e.g., sometimes it can take one hour). In these situations, El Metro re-routes the buses, but it costs the agency time and fuel. The only way to cross is via IH 35. The trains therefore impact the bus schedules. People are waiting at the Transit Terminal for the bus. The trains block the at-grade crossings every weekday between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm.

Nuevo Laredo want to duplicate El Metro in Mexico.

In the past (between 1997 and 2006), buses operated a shuttle system between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. El Metro is interested in a feasibility study to pilot a cross-border autonomous shuttle from Nuevo Laredo to the El Metro Transit Center.

El Metro does not serve many areas in Laredo. Most developments in Laredo are not bus friendly and it is therefore difficult to provide service to those developments.

Laredo's population has more than doubled since 1990, but the transit services has stayed the same. El Metro is not offering any new routes or park-and-ride facilities. There is a need to alleviate congestion in the City of Laredo: whether micro-transit or something else.

February 6, 2024, City of Laredo Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: February 6, 2024

Time: 9:00 – 10:00 AM

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Planning and Programming Division, City of Laredo, Jacobs

Agenda

To identify connectivity issues around border crossings by looking into conflict points including:

- safety,
- congestion that negatively impacts economic activities,
- bottlenecks for freight traffic,
- network gaps, and
- lack of sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

Discussion

Mines Road is the City of Laredo's number 1 priority. The city has one technician dedicated to monitoring traffic signals and incidents on Mines Road. The City of Laredo has been working with the TxDOT Laredo District to acquire surveillance cameras that cover both the Colombia-Solidarity Bridge and the World Trade Bridge. There are 270 traffic signals in the City of Laredo.

At the World Trade Bridge, the City has implemented three-minute traffic signals to accommodate trucks and prevent congestion at the end of the corridor. The city would rather see traffic queuing on Loop 20 than on Mines Road. Many residential developments along Mines Road are resulting in traffic conflicts with the commercial traffic that uses the World Trade Bridge.

With the expansion of the World Trade Bridge, the big question is whether Mines Road can handle the additional truck crossings (i.e., 80 percent of the current crossings is drayage traffic) since Mines Road (FM1472) also serves the residential areas and associated traffic around the World Trade Bridge.[1]

The intend of the World Trade Bridge expansion is to increase throughput. The expansion includes two northbound Free and Secure Trade for Commercial Vehicles (FAST) lanes and six southbound truck lanes. There will be a total of eight lanes on the new span in addition to the 10 lanes on the current span. The World Trade Bridge opened in April 2000. The Bridge cannot expand to the west, because of residential and industrial developments. It is a challenge to find a balance between international trade and the daily expectations of the residents that live around the bridge.

The proposed new Laredo bridge in the south does not have the infrastructure to support it. The 5th bridge should be between the Colombia-Solidarity Bridge and the World Trade Bridge.

The City of Laredo received a $2 million grant to upgrade traffic signals along Mines Road. This includes getting power to traffic signals. On Mines Road, the city cannot afford for traffic signals to be without power. The city needs to upgrade and standardize all traffic signals along Mines Road, as well as upgrade the Traffic Management Center. Smart technology is available but needs to be implemented at all traffic signals.

At the Downtown Bridge 1, pedestrians crossing from Juarez into Laredo intersect with passenger operated vehicles at Convent Avenue. There is a signal at Convent Avenue to allow pedestrians to cross safely, but this results in the backing up of traffic. Sometimes entities responsible for the construction of sidewalks are more concerned about aesthetics than safety.

At the Downtown Bridge II, Mexican holiday shoppers coming to Laredo can cause traffic to queue onto IH 35. This presents safety concerns.

Maritime Port Meetings

July 1, 2024, Port of Houston Meeting

Meeting Details

Attendees: Trade Development Manager (Latin America) at Port Houston, Director of Trade Development Port Houston

Discussion

People confuse the sip channel with the Port of Houston. Trade with Mexico is huge. PEMEX has facilities along the ship channel. Port Houston has 8 public facilities in the ship channel and operates the two container terminals: Bayport and Barbours Cut. Port Houston handles more than 80 percent of the containers coming into the Houston area. Port Houston handles mostly steel, minerals, and bulk products (e.g., agricultural products) and other items such as machinery and car parts at their multi-purpose facilities. Jacinto Port is also theirs but there are landlords.

Port Houston and Mexico Trade

In the 1990s, Port Houston handled a lot of Mexican cross-border business. Port Houston received and shipped cargo that crossed the border via 48 and 53ft trailers. In the mid-90's, Mexico made a push to privatize the ports and by the late 90's/early 2000s they succeeded, and the service started improving at Mexican ports. By 2003, the trade was fading rapidly even though Houston had been considered the port for Mexican trade until then. Altamira y Veracruz started growing and Port Houston started to loses business to Mexico's ports. Before that products were coming into Houston having the paperwork/inspection processed in Houston and then transported inbound across the border to Mexico. But CBP still inspected inbound containers at the border for trafficking etc., increasing cost and time. Monterrey was the biggest recipient of Port Houston cargo. Once shippers had the option to use Mexico's ports, they diverted to Mexico. By privatizing Mexico's ports one inspection was reduced by eliminating the US inspection for trafficking. By going to Mexican ports, it was only the Aduanas inspection.

For the Port of Houston, they don't keep information on what containers are carrying. They only count totals since that is the only economic marker for them. American Chamber of Commerce in Monterrey (from the Mexican National Association of Import and Export Businesses) provided information on the products in each container. The Chamber has representatives in San Antonio. Only until recently, the actual commodities have become relevant again. Ricardo Arias is leading this effort for the Port of Houston. They are interested in the effects of nearshoring: What manufacturing is moving from Asia to Central America that could represent opportunities for the Port of Houston? Ricardo has most of his connections in the private sector.

However, not 100 percent of the shipments diverted to Mexican ports. Some commodities handled at Port Houston still cross at Laredo. Maritime containers going to Chihuahua (Cd. Juarez) do come through Houston or LA/LB because they are dealing in car/automotive parts.

There are rumors of issues with the Mexican ports being congested but industries are still looking for solutions in Mexico.

Ricardo Arias mentioned the results would be available for coordination.

Steal shipping from the Port of Brownsville goes into Mexico. Jolanda mentioned that in that instance there is evidence of those moments in the data available, however the issue is with movements past the Port of Harlingen. Those get lost perhaps due to trips being broken.

Ricardo mentioned that most of the commodities they handle (e.g., containers, breakbulk, steel) are moves by truck. They do not have access to a multimodal facility currently. Barbours Cut was supposed to service Mexico, but it never materialized. In theory rail is a good idea, but there are lot of challenges (policy and logistics).

Refined fuels are moved by rail (i.e., unit trains of liquid bulk) into Mexico but that is from the ship channel as a whole not from the Port of Houston. Rail (box cars/hopper) is also used to transport grains/rice.

As far as infrastructure is concern, the tolls levied by cartels have become an issue. There has been increasing concern about safety at Laredo and at the final destination in Mexico.

The availability of rail equipment is another challenge. Rail cars may not be available, because of an imbalance in loads.

US 59 is typically used for most cargo moving between Port Houston and Port Laredo (both in terms of containers and flat cars).

July 2, 2024, Port Arthur Meeting

Meeting Details

Attendees: Port Arthur Director

Discussion

Corridor flows from Port Arthur into Mexico are mostly waterborne and done mostly for big industrial pieces. Trade flows are predominantly rail-based, mostly transporting eucalyptus pulp, for paper products coming from South America (Brazil or Uruguay) that come to the port and then it is moved by rail down to the Mexico City area. There is a major producer in the region, they are the main consumer, smaller producers clustering around. This trade crosses into Mexico through Laredo, maybe using Eagle Pass, mostly on CPKC- or UP-owned lines.

The volumes also include five rail-corridors a day with about 10 to 90 cars fully loaded with aluminum per rail. It comes from South America (Argentina) and is sent by float down to Mexico. If managed by truck, it is crossing through Piedras Negras. Port Arthur is small in these operations in comparison to Port of Harlingen. There used to be activity from Valero along the same route, but they have moved operations to Corpus Christi.

Trade movements from South America to be taken down to Mexico are done this way instead of directly through Mexico because Texas has better facilities. They are better equipped at handling bulk break services. The added connectivity of the new CPCK system is also giving these Texas-Mexico trade moments some momentum.

Port Arthur also handles a lot of military cargo (mainly for mission support), but that is all internal US trade for Fort Bliss, Fort Seal, Fort Ridley, among others. The Port of Beaumont has a similar situation.

Port Arthur is adding capacity to the port. It was initially built as an export port and developed into an import port. Now they are back to mainly handled export activities. But the line is thin, and it changes easily based on the economy and the commodities being traded.

MIP & SCP Programs (?) are critically important to ports in keeping international trade flowing. The State needs to do a better job at supporting the ports and recognizing their importance for the economy. 1 in 4 dollars of the Texas economy is driven through Texas ports.

First and last-mile connections to the port have issues with transnational trade. The hangups at the border also affect cargo movements. But the greatest delay is still the staff and crew swaps at the border. There are also delays towards the end of the week or on the weekends from brokers getting stuck on pedimentos to move through. The peaks and valleys of travel volumes are pronounced and a little unpredictable. This usually reduces the work week into a four-day week.

The movement of car parts and appliances into the US is one of the main pieces of this puzzle. The availability of 50ft high-cube box cars is also a determining factor for these ebbs and flows.

Altamira Modular Yard (?)

July 3, 2024, Port of Victoria Meeting

Meeting Details

Attendees: Executive Director for the Port of Victoria, TxDOT Maritime

Discussion

Port of Victoria

The Port doesn't have trade with Mexico. However, they are expecting to open the market for chemicals and liquid chemicals now that they will have a rail connection they were lacking (Diesel, Gas, etc.). UP and BNSF will be providing service. Enquiries and the interest come from people looking for alternatives routes to get Diesel down to Mexico.

TxDOT granted funds for the rail track to be built, and it was matched by the county and the port. 2700 acres for development are open for this investment.

They think they will see some growth because of the closeness to Laredo (3 hours) and Houston (2 hours). They see opportunities in the warehousing industry.

I-69 completion timeframe is also challenging because it won't be completed soon enough. The current 2-lane and stop signs configuration makes it unattractive.

They have coordinated with Laredo in the past but the condition of the road connection is very poor. US 59 needs to be top priority.

A future issue that can affect multiple ports. The port owns a rail bridge that needs maintenance, but they do not have funding for maintenance, replacement, or improvement. If the bridge fails, it would be a logistical nightmare. It currently has up to 30 trains going on in a day. The Port cannot afford a match for a replacement project.

They think a grant would be necessary. UP, BNSF, and CPCK have services. UP (owners of the track) doesn't want to take the structure over because it would not be a good "business decision". The Port doesn't receive any money from it but the agreement was made in the 50's. back when the demand on the region was not as big as today (1 train per day).

July 10, 2024, Port of Harlingen Meeting

Meeting Details

Attendees: Port Director, PR Manager for the Port

Discussion

Port of Harlingen

Most of the trade coming out of the port goes to Mexico, as a response to the geographical proximity with the Mexican border, however, they have been facing considerable challenges in the last 3 years. 90% of the Port's cargo goes to Mexico.

The biggest commodity volumes out of the port are for refined fuels. Since 2017, the port has had 2 very well-established exporters of refined fuel. As a whole the port exports around 2.8B tons of refined fuel to Mexico on an annual basis. Other important commodity flows include fertilizers for agricultural uses and grains like sorghum and corn for cattle feed. Refined fuel comes from Corpus Christi and Houston, fertilizers come from Houston, and grains come from all over Texas. Port authorities know grain shipments are headed all over Mexico, some as far south as Queretaro. Refined fuels are also headed to destinations nationwide, but the biggest volumes are headed for central and eastern Mexico. Finally, fertilizers are mostly for consumption along the Border region. Most volumes leave the port by rail but refined fuels go on freight trucks. They take advantage of the OS/OW corridor (only available to refined fuel trade) into the Los Indios Bridge, but that corridor has had significant challenges in recent years including refined fuels only being able to use certain ports of entry per Mexican policy.

There are no commodity flows from Mexico into the US in route to the port, but there have been recent inquiries about moving aggregates through the Port in route to Louisiana and Alabama. At this point, it is only interest.

The last three months have been marked by the unreliability of the hours of operation of Mexican ports, making it difficult to export refined fuels in the same volumes as before. In some instances, only one of three bridges has been open for refined fuel exports. Some port costumers have had to send cargo to Laredo and West Texas as an alternative. Costumers have a sense that the flow of refined fuels is being chokehold that is the sentiment being communicated by the Mexican operators, who are also the only source of notice when a closure is instituted.

The port mentioned they have refused the flow of freight trucks to half its previous volumes (400 trucks/day) and down to only 8-12 trucks on some occasions. This represents almost 60% of exports by their estimation. The bridge at Los Indios is the most consistently open bridge for this commodity.

The bridge in Brownsville is also only accepting regulation-rated trucks, so the Port of Brownsville has reached out looking to use logistics operations in Harlingen due to this problem. Customers using the Port of Harlingen have had to re-route regulation-size trucks to Eagle Pass (5 hours away) and Laredo (3 hours away) on occasion because of the lack of east-west connections between OS/OW corridors.

Other customers go to Pharr where there are transload facilities, there the refined fuels are moved onto Mexican oversized/overweight trucks before going through the border.

The Port supported a bill during the last Legislative session to build connections between Harlingen, Los Indios and Pharr, however, the bill was opposed by DPS and didn't advance.

July 16, 2024, TxDOT Maritime Division Meeting

Discussion

Harlingen to Mexico will have much more than 27. It might be 200.

They don't think there is much movement from the ports to Mexico besides Harlingen and Brownsville. Geir asked if the data was based on finished products?

Mansfield is looking to do pendulum services soon (2 or 3 customers lined up after the last grand round), that service being back and forward.

There are small-time importers/exporters that might take advantage of that movement but until there is an economy of scale it won't be feasible for them to go directly to crossings for ports. It would be easier to look for traffic from the border to manufacturing facilities and then follow trips from those to the ports. That is probably a more used route.

Mexico is opening between the Pacific and the Gulf Coast, in response to the issue happening in the Panama Canal. This points to potentially more Asian fares being shipped to a Mexican Port and then rail through Mexico and sail out through the Gulf up to the US or else. Coatzacoalcos (?) to Salina Cruz Rute through the Tehuantepec Isthmus. It will be based on the infrastructure of the Mayan Train with added industrial facilities to support this freight passage. Causes for this include non-industry friendly policies, overcrowding at the border, and security concerns along the trip.

Harlingen struggles with some of the security components of the border crossings. They also struggle with permits, which are only useful for a single port of entry, and if they try another route, they are detained by DPS. Providing permits with an official route but including alternative routes could help reduce these instances.

South Port Connector Road is a couple of development phases away from construction. It was a route connecting the border directly with Brownsville port.

The Maritime Division can provide the appropriate contacts when contacting ports, thereby enhancing the likelihood of participation.

Economic Impact Analysis is being developed by Martin & Associates and requested by the Port Association. It will be ready in a couple of months. They offered to provide it to us. This would be the only data they would be very confident about.

They are developing the 89 Legislature document, which will include a Connectivity Report, this would include a lot of the road and/or intersection improvements identified by the port. This would be funded by bucket funding. The Seaport Connectivity Program was established in 2015, previously the RIDER program.

Follow Up Meetings-First and Last Mile

August 9, 2024, Southwest Area Regional Transit District (SWART) Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: August 9, 2024

Time: 12:00pm

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: Southwest Area Regional Transit District (SWART), Rifeline, Jacobs

Discussion

Cook introduced herself as the General Manager for the Southwest Area Regional Transit District (SWART), covering nine counties in the Middle Rio Grande region of Texas, including Eagle Pass. She highlighted that SWART recently became urbanized due to the 2020 census, necessitating collaboration with the City of Eagle Pass to establish a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Their first MPO meeting was held on July 22, 2024, marking a significant milestone as they transition from rural to urbanized federal funding.

Background and Experience

Cook shared her 34-year experience in the transit industry, mentioning her transition from working with a community action agency to leading SWART as a standalone system since 2012. She emphasized her focus on community and economic development in rural areas.

Transit System Overview

Jacobs asked about Cook's involvement in the 2021 Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan. Jacobs noted the limited data on non-highway modes like transit and mentioned that their workshops revealed new scheduled services in Eagle Pass, such as the Blue Line and Red Line. She was curious if these new services resulted from Eagle Pass becoming urbanized.

Cook explained that the fixed routes in Eagle Pass were an outcome of a route analysis funded by rural discretionary funding before the urbanization. Originally, the routes were flex routes, but the analysis showed that fixed routes would better serve increasing ridership. The transition to fixed routes was delayed by the pandemic but was eventually implemented in 2021. The border closure during the pandemic drastically reduced ridership by 85%, dropping to about 50 riders per day, which only began recovering after the border reopened in late 2022.

Ridership Trends and Future Plans

Ridership on the fixed routes has increased significantly since the border reopening, especially during the holiday season. SWART plans to transition to a micro-transit system, especially in more populated areas, and has secured funding to develop this system in Eagle Pass and surrounding counties. The micro-transit system will integrate demand-response services and a paratransit system, with a focus on reducing reliance on rural funds for urbanized areas.

SWART noted that a 2021 study highlighted the efficiency of a micro-transit system especially to serve the colonias as a more efficient system than a fixed route, which could also reduce pressures on the on-demand services in Eagle Pass.

Challenges and Delays

SWART highlighted the challenges in securing property for a multimodal facility in Eagle Pass. Initial plans were delayed due to soil contamination at the proposed site. After identifying a new site, further delays occurred because the project now requires federal urbanized funding rather than rural funds. This delay is compounded by the fact that SWART cannot access full federal urbanized funds until the MPO completes the necessary plans and submissions to federal agencies.

SWART also noted that with NPO approval, the need to submit regularly required studies and plans will be a challenge with current resources, which are only for rural services and don't support urban service models.

Infrastructure and Connectivity Issues

SWART discussed ongoing infrastructure challenges, such as poor road connectivity in colonias and inadequate infrastructure for SWART's vehicles and technology. Eagle Pass's growth has also led to accessibility issues, with inadequate sidewalks and no shelters or benches at bus stops in the downtown area – noting that most sidewalks are only 4 feet wide, which cannot accommodate a bench or shelter. Collaborating with the city to improve these conditions has been difficult due to space constraints. SWART also noted that federal funding to address these issues has been repeatedly denied.

SWART noted that there is not enough demand in the colonias for fixed routes, so they plan to implement micro-transit, which is zoned on-demand transit. The zones will be limited to transportation within 5-7 mile radius areas, and all would include paratransit access. Currently, the transit would not cross zone-to-zone, but that option would be studied for the future.

Rifeline's Experience with CARTS Micro Transit Projects

Rifeline mentioned that transitioning from a fixed route to micro-transit in Central Texas, especially in the city of Taylor, significantly increased ridership, quadrupling it in just a week.

SWART on Expanding Workforce Transportation

SWART detailed a recent discussion with TxDOT and Enterprise about expanding workforce transportation, focusing on rural areas, including the Eagle Pass region. She emphasized the need for a multi-modal facility to accommodate various transportation services, including Greyhound, taxis, TNCs like Uber, Mexican bus services, and non-emergency medical transportation. She also noted that the need outweighs the current funding, especially in Eagle Pass.

Challenges in Public Transportation Infrastructure

SWART highlighted the pressing need for better infrastructure, more funding, support services, technology improvements, and expertise to support public transportation. Despite recent investments, such as moving into a new leased space, they are quickly outgrowing it due to increasing demand.

They also face challenges with securing parking and maintaining a robust mobility management program, supported by various funding sources from TxDOT. For example, she has to utilize 5310 funding to support outreach and rider education.

Funding and Local Support Issues

SWART explained the financial difficulties, particularly the lack of local support, with minimal contributions from counties like Maverick and Eagle Pass (which only contribute $10,000 annually).

She noted that public transportation serves not only local residents but also a significant number of cross-border travelers, which adds to the financial strain, as current funding structures do not support Mexican residents' use of the transportation systems, even though they make up the majority of the ridership – especially on the fixed routes in Eagle Pass.

The need for more local match funding, especially as urbanized areas grow, was emphasized.

Cross-Border Ridership and the Pandemic's Impact

Jacobs asked about cross-border ridership, and SWART confirmed that 75-80% of fixed-route service users are cross-border travelers. The pandemic saw a significant drop in ridership when the border closed, highlighting the reliance on cross-border travelers, who often use the service to access specific locations like blood banks, Walmart, HEB, and medical facilities.

Transportation for Students from Mexico

SWART described the demand response system for students from Mexico attending schools in Eagle Pass. They are transitioning this service into a fixed route to streamline operations, offering morning and afternoon services, which will reduce the dispatchers' workload.

Bicycle Use

Jacobs asked if there is a lot of bicycle use by transit riders.

SWART said that all the fixed route buses are equipped with bike racks, but for the most part people walk. She also noted that the city lacks any bicycle infrastructure.

Congestion Issues at the Border

Rifeline brought up congestion issues at the border, particularly in the afternoons when trucks offload, get inspected, pay tariffs, and reload, coinciding with school and work traffic. SWART confirmed that this congestion affects their services, forcing them to detour routes, which increases fuel consumption and mileage. Additionally, the train from Mexico also causes significant traffic delays downtown.

Impact of the Train on Transportation Services

Jacobs inquired about the train's impact, and SWART confirmed that it disrupts all downtown travel, further complicating public transportation. SWART noted that the train stops downtown every day, which backs up all traffic. During holiday periods, traffic back-up stretches outside the city. She noted that they often must reroute buses due to the train, which is more costly in terms of fuel and time.

Towards the end, Rifeline asked SWART about potential improvements that could help mitigate congestion and improve transportation services. SWART mentioned that there is a need for better coordination between different state agencies and local communities, such as Health and Human Services, TxDOT, veterans' services, and education. They point out that these agencies often operate in fragmented ways, with differing regulations, some of which are federally driven. This lack of coordination hinders the ability to implement seamless services, such as transit systems, which could benefit from shared resources like joint insurance carriers, fueling, and compatible scheduling software. SWART suggests that this coordination should be driven at the state level, possibly through legislative action, to ensure that agencies can work together more effectively, ultimately benefiting the communities they serve.

Another challenge is the lack of internet infrastructure in the area. This causes delays in communication with the drivers and dispatchers, in addition to all the bus systems running on internet systems (including security systems on the buses, fare and payment systems, drivers' tablets, etc). She noted that there is a constant lag in communications between drivers and dispatchers.

She also noted the difficulty of offering virtual or digital payment options in converting pesos for Mexican national riders; the mobile apps for scheduling rides or refilling passes don't accommodate for pesos, or ability for the SWART to draw down funds in their account on a daily basis.

Finally, she noted the disconnect between funding sources understanding the specific needs of rural communities – and specifically in the border areas. She noted how rural areas are very specialized, and the border towns even more so, with transit concerns for U.S. residents, Mexican residents, freight, and even tourists.

Follow Up Meetings-Port-to-Port

July 1, 2024, Francisco Marquez (Broker) Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: July 1, 2024

Time: 4:00pm

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: TxDOT, Jacobs, Rifeline, Francisco Marquez (Broker)

Purpose and Summary

Jacobs welcomed Francisco and introduced the attendees. The meeting aimed to follow up on the border connectivity study, specifically the border-to-border connectivity and border-to-maritime board connectivity.

Discussion

Border Connectivity Study

Jacobs highlighted that the small connectivity study is well understood. The focus of the meeting was to gain a deeper understanding of the border-to-border and border-to-maritime board connectivity from Francisco's perspective as a customs broker.

Typical Shipment Process

TxDOT asked Francisco to describe a typical northbound and southbound shipment process. Francisco explained the export process from Mexico to the US and the role of customs brokers.

Northbound Shipment Process

Exporting from Mexico to the US involves less stringent requirements. The Mexican customs process requires an electronic signature on the pedimento, payment of duties and taxes before crossing. The US customs process allows 30 days to pay duties and taxes, making it simpler and faster.

Southbound Shipment Process

More complex due to stringent Mexican government requirements. Cargo first arrives at a US warehouse, where it is inspected and classified. Payment of duties and taxes must be completed before presenting cargo to Mexican customs. The process often results in long lines at the border after 3-4 PM due to the timing of paperwork and payments.

Challenges and Insights

The disconnect between production lines and finance departments in import companies can delay shipments. Companies aim to maintain zero inventory, keeping inventory on wheels. Storage fees and warehousing depend on client agreements; some cargo may stay in warehouses for extended periods. Crossing times vary significantly depending on the time of day, with peak times causing substantial delays.

Discussion on 24-Hour Border Operations

Francisco noted that simply extending border hours wouldn't resolve issues since authorization processes for duties and taxes aren't staffed 24/7. Large clients like Amazon and the automotive industry demand quick crossings due to their tight delivery and production schedules.

Logistics and Transportation Adjustments- Flexibility in Dispatch Locations

Clients can easily switch the dispatch of merchandise between Laredo and Piedras Negras based on logistics needs. Adjusting transportation arrangements can be challenging due to pre-established budgets with transport companies.

Drayage Companies and Logistics

Some transport companies have drayage services; others do not. Adjusting logistics involves contracting different transport companies for different routes, such as from Piedras Negras to Laredo and then to Mexico.

Border Crossing Preferences- Route and Security Considerations

Companies prefer routes with shorter queues and better security. Conditions of the roads and security issues affect the choice of border crossing. Example: Clients initially used Laredo but switched to Eagle Pass due to long lines and delays.

Infrastructure and Economic Impact

Laredo offers better road infrastructure (Max 85 to US I-35) compared to Eagle Pass, influencing logistic decisions. Economic factors such as the cost of transport also play a crucial role.

Customs and Brokerage- Licensing and Operations

US licensed custom brokers can operate across all borders, while in Mexico, brokers are assigned specific ports of entry but can collaborate with other brokers to cover more ports. Joint ventures with other brokers help manage operations across multiple ports smoothly.

Upcoming Regulatory Changes

Mexico plans to introduce an "agency broker" system, allowing brokers to operate across the entire country, similar to the US system. However, the implementation and regulations are pending.

Border Infrastructure Challenges- Funding and Staffing Issues

Infrastructure development, such as new bridges, faces significant funding challenges. Staffing shortages at border points exacerbate delays and inefficiencies. Example: Laredo struggles with insufficient CBP officers despite high traffic volume.

Impact on Logistics

Delays and logistical inefficiencies result in significant economic costs. The federal government's budget constraints hinder infrastructure improvements and staffing at the borders.

In-Bond Shipments and Seaport Connectivity

A significant portion of cargo moves in bond from Mexico to US ports and vice versa. Cargo from Latin America enters through Mexican ports like Lazaro Cardenas and moves in transit to the US border. The term "transito" (T1) is used for in-bond shipments in Mexico, similar to the US concept of transit cargo. Tracking transit cargo involves looking for specific legends like T1 in port statistics to understand the movement of goods between Mexico and the US.

July 2, 2024, Francisco Marquez (Broker) 2 Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: July 2, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Invitees: TxDOT, Jacobs, Rifeline, Francisco Marquez (Logistics Broker)

Discussion

Laredo and Texas Ports

Exporting from Mexico into US – The exporter doesn't have a lot of requirements, from Mexico once the merchandise arrives at the Border most of the time there is no need from a pedimento (permit). Shippers use an electronic signature that was processed by the owners before the merchandise reaches the Border. If you don't have it before getting to the Border you get penalized because Aduanas assumes you are doing illegal movements. Duties and taxes are also paid before getting to the Border. The U.S. on the other side grants you 30 days from the day you cross to pay the duties and taxes on merchandise. The Customs declaration for the U.S. is very simple and doesn't require a lot of details because they know what cargo is once it goes through the border.

CTPAD (?) program – Members of the program are exempted from inspections when coming into the US. The Mexican side requires a lot of inspection before going into the country. That is why there are a lot of holding facilities on the American side and not a lot in the Mexican side. The whole process of inspecting and classifying for tax calculation and payment must happen before they come into Mexico. This process is done by the broker and then they ask for the required amount from the owner. This payment has to be made it to the broker, who then submits payments, gets a signature from Aduanas and then the shipment can be sent to the border. This process is done over the course of a day. This causes short lines in the morning and huge backlogs in the afternoon (7PM). This rush hour implies cargo waiting 3 to 4 hours to cross.

Companies try not to have inventory, managing the commodities flow so it is always moving.

Time-sensitive commodities like "Prime" deliveries and car parts (those with fines for failure to delivery on time) increase the issues for rush hour traffic.

Permits in the United States can be used in any bridge. On the Mexican side, the pedimento is attached to a specific bridge. If the cargo driver shows up at the wrong bridge, the cargo would be considered illegal. The change of the bridge in the pedimento is a quick process.

Brokers only pivot to an alternative crossing when the closure of a bridge would take a week or longer. The changes in permits are not challenging, the challenging part is the changes in price/implications of changing contracts/specs with transportation companies. The challenge is logistical, not policy related.

There is a preference to travel along the US side when moving along the border due to security, quality of roads (for example, no quality roads from Eagle Pass into Mexico), and distances.

On the US, once you are a licensed broker you can operate on any border. On the Mexican side, once you are a licensed broker you are assigned a POE that is your base, however you can use up to 3 other POEs. To be able to provide service from every POE that a client might need, brokers form joint-ventures with others so they can handle merchandise everywhere. This is a standard practice.

The weakest link in the system seems to be lack of funding for the improvements on both sides of the border, while infrastructure is the main thing lacking followed by lack of personnel and staffing. The demand exists but the budget for maintenance and staffing is not available.

There are commodities that come in from LATAM in transit through Mexico into the US.

July 8, 2024, CANACAR Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: July 8, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 4:00pm

Discussion

Data Aggregation and Discrepancies

Stakeholders noted discrepancies in trade data between Mexico and the United States. Official databases primarily record data at the initial point of entry, often missing subsequent movements through other ports and crossings. This incomplete data hampers accurate assessments of trade volumes and patterns.

Considerations were made to enhance data integration systems to incorporate information from maritime ports and subsequent border crossings. This would provide a more comprehensive view of trade flows and facilitate better decision-making regarding infrastructure and operational improvements.

Supply Chain Delays

Industry representatives highlighted significant delays in supply chains due to inefficiencies at border crossings. These delays affect various sectors, including the transportation of auto parts, metals, and fuels.

Discussions centered on the need for streamlined processes and improved coordination between stakeholders to reduce these delays. Suggestions included optimizing inspection protocols and implementing advanced notice systems for truck arrivals to expedite cargo processing.

CBP Staffing and Operational Issues

Concerns were raised about staffing shortages within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), leading to operational challenges at border crossings. Participants noted instances of lane closures and reduced operational hours, exacerbating congestion and wait times.

Participants recommended exploring strategies to address CBP staffing shortages, such as increasing recruitment efforts and implementing flexible staffing models to accommodate fluctuating traffic volumes effectively.

Proposals

Stakeholders proposed enhancing data aggregation systems to include information from all points of entry, including maritime ports and subsequent border crossings. This comprehensive approach would provide a more accurate depiction of trade flows and facilitate better planning and resource allocation.

Suggestions included leveraging technology and data analytics to improve real-time monitoring of cross-border movements and identifying areas for operational improvement.

Improved Communication and Coordination

Considerations were made to establish a formal notification system for stakeholders regarding operational changes at border crossings. This would enable industry partners to adjust their logistics and transportation plans proactively, minimizing disruptions caused by sudden closures or delays.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of regular communication between CBP, industry representatives, and government agencies to address operational challenges collaboratively.

Infrastructure and Operational Enhancements

Discussions focused on infrastructure upgrades at key border crossings to accommodate increased traffic volumes and enhance operational efficiency. Proposed initiatives included expanding inspection facilities, optimizing traffic flow management systems, and extending operational hours to facilitate continuous movement of goods and vehicles.

Participants underscored the need for long-term planning and investment in border infrastructure to support economic growth and improve regional connectivity.

Stakeholder Insights

Mexican stakeholders emphasized the importance of efficient border operations for facilitating trade in metals, fuels, and auto parts. They highlighted the need for seamless cross-border processes to minimize delays and ensure the timely delivery of goods to U.S. markets.

Considerations from Mexican counterparts included enhancing collaboration on border security measures while maintaining efficient trade facilitation processes.

Industry Concerns

Representatives from various industries expressed concerns about supply chain disruptions and regulatory challenges at border crossings. They stressed the impact of delays on production schedules, inventory management, and overall business operations.

Industry stakeholders called for proactive measures to address operational bottlenecks and streamline customs procedures to support economic competitiveness and growth.

CBP Input

CBP representatives acknowledged the operational challenges posed by staffing shortages and increasing trade volumes. They discussed ongoing efforts to optimize resource allocation and improve operational efficiency at border crossings.

CBP officials highlighted initiatives to enhance training programs for personnel, adopt new technologies for cargo inspection, and collaborate with industry partners to address shared concerns about border connectivity and security.

Action Items

Data Analysis and Reporting

Stakeholders committed to conducting a comprehensive review of current data collection methods and reporting mechanisms. This includes evaluating opportunities to integrate maritime port data into existing trade databases to improve data accuracy and reliability.

Actionable steps include forming a working group to oversee data integration efforts and developing plans for enhancing cross-border data sharing and analysis.

CBP Coordination

Plans were discussed to establish a collaborative framework between CBP, industry stakeholders, and government agencies to address staffing challenges and operational inefficiencies at border crossings.

Initiatives include exploring innovative staffing solutions, enhancing communication protocols, and implementing performance metrics to monitor and improve border crossing operations.

Infrastructure Planning

Participants agreed on the importance of strategic infrastructure investments to modernize border facilities and enhance operational capabilities. This includes prioritizing projects that support increased traffic flow, improved inspection processes, and accommodating future growth in trade volumes.

Stakeholders will collaborate on identifying funding opportunities, conducting feasibility studies, and engaging with local communities to ensure infrastructure projects align with regional development goals.

July 16, 2024, Eduardo Ramos Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: July 16, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 4:00pm

Discussion

Challenges in Trade Movement Data

Emphasis on the difficulty in obtaining precise data on the movement of goods between the eastern United States seaports and Mexican ports of entry. Current data does not establish a clear connection between seaport cargo and border movements. There's an evident need to identify the types of products moving across borders and the specific challenges faced in reaching seaports or transitioning between land ports.

Logistics vs. Infrastructure

Eduardo Ramos discussed how companies typically rely on habitual transportation methods and lack crisis management in logistics. He noted that many companies do not have logistics specialists and tend to overspend during crises to ensure goods reach their destinations. The need for a stronger logistics framework was highlighted, including alternatives like rail and charter routes, rather than solely relying on land transportation. Ramos pointed out that while some companies are strong in logistics, others are aware of their weaknesses but lack the knowledge to make informed decisions during crises.

Potential for Collaborative Efforts

There is an opportunity for collaborative efforts between Texas and Mexican states such as Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. Combining efforts could align objectives and enhance transportation efficiency across borders. Ramos stressed the importance of understanding the goals and purposes of each entity involved, emphasizing infrastructure for Texas and logistics optimization for Mexican companies.

Communication and Information Sharing

Effective communication about existing routes and transportation alternatives is crucial for both sides. For example, the Zaragoza bridge in Juárez often becomes a bottleneck despite lane expansions due to traffic funneling. Ensuring better communication can help in identifying other potential routes and infrastructure expansions to alleviate congestion.

Logistics Decision-Making

Knowing when to use rail versus truck transportation can significantly impact logistics efficiency. Providing information at the producer level can help in making better logistics decisions and utilizing infrastructure effectively. Ramos suggested that clear communication about the benefits of specific routes and infrastructure projects can enhance decision-making for producers and transporters.

Industry Interests and Infrastructure Needs

Chihuahua is heavily involved in the aerospace industry, with growing interest in the automotive and semiconductor sectors. Sharing logistics and infrastructure information with these industries can support better planning and utilization of routes. Long-term infrastructure projects need to be coordinated between Texas and Mexican states to ensure consistency and quality on both sides of the border.

Proposed Survey for Data Collection

Ramos proposed conducting a survey to gather concrete data from companies about their transportation preferences and logistical needs. The survey could help validate assumptions and provide actionable data for improving logistics and infrastructure planning. Ramos suggested leveraging relationships with industry groups like Index to distribute the survey and gather meaningful responses.

Building Long-Term Relationships

Establishing long-term partnerships between Texas and Mexican states can ensure ongoing collaboration and effective infrastructure planning. A survey backed by data can support these partnerships by providing insights into the transportation needs and preferences of companies.

Next Steps and Coordination

A proposal to draft a survey similar to one previously conducted on the American side. Eduardo Ramos agreed to prepare a draft of the survey and a document explaining its benefits to companies. Both parties will coordinate to finalize the survey and document, ensuring comprehensive data collection and clear communication of benefits to stakeholders.

Action Items

1. **Draft Survey Creation**

A draft survey was prepared for review by Eduardo Ramos. The survey will aim to gather data on transportation preferences, logistical challenges, and infrastructure needs from companies.

2. **Document Preparation**

Eduardo Ramos to draft a document explaining the benefits of the survey to companies and how the data will be used to improve logistics and infrastructure planning. This document will be coordinated with Jacobs for finalization.

3. **Survey Distribution and Data Collection**

Once finalized, the survey will be distributed to relevant companies through industry groups like Index. Data collected from the survey will be analyzed to inform future logistics and infrastructure projects.

4. **Long-Term Coordination**

Establish a framework for ongoing collaboration between Texas and Mexican states to ensure consistent and effective infrastructure planning and logistics optimization. Regular updates and communication between the parties involved to monitor progress and address any emerging issues.

August 5, 2024, CBP Del Rio Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: August 5, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 10:00am

Invitees: CBP Del Rio, TxDOT, Jacobs, Rifeline

Purpose and Summary

The focus was on a border connectivity study examining trade between Texas ports of entry and maritime ports.

Discussion

Overview of Del Rio Port of Entry

Geographical Uniqueness

Del Rio is uniquely located, being the furthest port within the Laredo Field Office, covering Del Rio to Brownsville. It is approximately six hours from Presidio, the next port to the west, making it relatively isolated. The distance between Del Rio and other ports adds to its unique position in handling border traffic.

Port Infrastructure and Capacity

The port underwent reconstruction in 2009 to support anticipated growth for the next 50 years. It has ample room for expansion and can handle significant traffic volumes. Liliana emphasized the port's ability to support growth and its readiness to accommodate increased trade.

Trade and Commodities Handled

Del Rio handles a variety of commodities, including in-bond shipments that come through Long Beach and transit through Del Rio to exit the U.S. The commodities are diverse, including Chinese products, clothing, shoes, and miscellaneous items. There is no significant dominance of a particular commodity like auto parts; the trade varies and fluctuates.

Port Closures and Operational Challenges

- **2021 Haitian Migrant Surge** - The port was closed entirely for seven days due to a surge of Haitian migrants. This closure severely impacted trade, the traveling public, and stakeholders. All traffic was rerouted through the Eagle Pass Port of Entry, located 65 miles east of Del Rio (approximately a one-hour drive).

- **December 2023 Migrant Surge** - Another migrant surge affected both Eagle Pass and Del Rio. Del Rio reduced operations to one lane but continued processing trade and regular traffic. The Trusted Traveler Program (SENTRI lane) was temporarily closed to ensure fairness in processing times. The Amistad Dam crossing remained open during this event but is not a reliable contingency option.
- **Amistad Dam Crossing**- The Amistad Dam is managed by the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). It is not suitable for commercial traffic, buses, or vehicles hauling large items like boats. The dam crossing can be closed with little notice, as occurred recently when it was closed for three days due to maintenance. Closures can happen suddenly, and the IBWC does not always provide advanced notice.

Importance of Contingency Plans

Liliana emphasized that all stakeholders should have contingency plans due to the unpredictable nature of port operations. Situations can change rapidly, affecting both trade and daily commuters. She cited an example where a bomb threat at a local high school led to a two-hour wait time as parents rushed to pick up their children. Stakeholders are encouraged to plan for alternative routes, communication with contacts on the other side, and flexibility in operations.

Stakeholder Notifications

Previously, CBP (Customs and Border Protection) sent out closure notifications, even when not directly responsible for the closure. In recent events, the IBWC has started posting updates on social media platforms like X/Twitter. Liliana forwards these updates to media outlets, brokers, and stakeholders to disseminate information quickly. On the Mexican side, she notifies the Port Director and the City of Acuña, who then share the information with local media.

Communication with Brokers and Carriers

Liliana maintains an email distribution list for local brokers and carriers, which has grown over time. She provides regular updates during closures or significant events, sometimes three times a day. Updates include information on wait times, operational changes, and any factors affecting port operations. Stakeholders appreciate these updates as they allow for better planning and adjustments in operations. Assistant Director of Field Operations for Trade: Armando, the Assistant Director, also sends out notifications to a broader audience, including trade associations. These communications help ensure that stakeholders are informed and can adjust accordingly.

Operational Decisions During Closures

Decisions on lane closures or reductions are made based on the situation. During the December 2023 event, the decision was made to close the SENTRI lane to ensure fairness. Liliana felt it was unjust to allow trusted travelers expedited crossing when others were facing significant delays. The port aims to balance efficiency with fairness during challenging times.

Coordination with Other Agencies: During closures, other agencies like the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) play a role. DPS inspections outside the port can contribute to delays. DPS may provide exemptions for certain permits or distance requirements to facilitate rerouting.

Trade Flow and Challenges

Peak Times and Resource Allocation: For passenger vehicles, peak times are from 6:00 AM to 8:00 AM, coinciding with workers and school traffic. During these times, all lanes (six in total) are open to accommodate the influx. For commercial traffic, peak times are in the afternoon, typically from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM. Despite efforts to encourage morning crossings, commercial operators often stick to their established schedules.

Challenges in Shifting Operations: Changing operational hours for trade requires adjustments in personnel, costs, and logistics. Companies may find it challenging to shift to morning crossings due to these factors. Liliana continues to advocate for operational changes to alleviate congestion and improve efficiency.

Competition with Other Ports: Del Rio competes with ports like Eagle Pass and Laredo for trade traffic. Carriers often choose routes based on cost per kilometer and proximity to their destinations in Mexico. Del Rio is slightly farther from key locations like Saltillo, adding to transportation costs.

Advantages of Del Rio: Despite being farther, Del Rio offers faster processing times and shorter wait times. Testimonials from carriers highlight significant time savings, even during peak times or inspections. The port's capacity and efficiency are strong selling points to attract more trade.

Infrastructure on the Mexican Side: A major challenge is the route through four small towns where 18-wheelers have to pass through town centers. This causes congestion and slows down traffic.

The Governor of Coahuila initiated a plan in 2019 to construct bypass loops around these towns. Property acquisition for these loops is complete, but construction has not yet started. Completion of these loops is expected to improve traffic flow and make Del Rio more attractive to carriers.

Infrastructure and Road Conditions

U.S. Highways: From Del Rio to major highways like US 90 and US 277, road conditions are generally good. There is a narrow section on the route from Del Rio to I-10 near Sonora, which has been a point of concern. Improvements are ongoing, and road widening projects have been under construction.

Connectivity to San Antonio and Eagle Pass: The highway to San Antonio is wide and accommodates heavy traffic. The route to Eagle Pass has been improved, with parts expanded to four lanes. Increased 18-wheeler traffic has been observed, indicating growing trade movements.

Data Availability and Sharing

Trade Data: Liliana mentioned that CBP has comprehensive data on inbound and outbound trade. She offered to provide a public link to trade statistics, which includes information on commodities and trade volumes. The data may include origin points, but she was unsure of the specifics.

Requesting Detailed Data: For more detailed or specific data, such as vehicle throughput during closures, a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request may be necessary. Liliana agreed to inquire internally but noted that certain data might require formal requests.

Use of Data in Planning: Chris Burns expressed interest in analyzing data to understand the impact of closures on traffic and diversion to other ports. Having refined data would help in assessing infrastructure needs and planning for redundancy.

Resource Management and Staffing

Staffing Challenges: Delays and longer wait times are often due to personnel shortages, especially outside peak hours. The port allocates resources to ensure all lanes are open during peak times, holding over officers as needed. During non-peak times, fewer lanes are open due to limited staffing, leading to increased wait times.

Efforts to Improve Efficiency: Liliana and her group are continuously working to optimize staffing and lane management. They aim to reduce wait times and improve the overall crossing experience for both trade and the traveling public.

Infrastructure Enhancements: The port collaborated with the City of Del Rio on a Donation Acceptance Program project. This project led to the construction of two additional lanes: one for cargo and one for the Trusted Traveler Program. These lanes opened in November 2023 and have significantly improved traffic flow. During the December closure, the additional cargo lane helped manage the unexpected surge in 18-wheeler traffic.

Future Initiatives

Encouraging Trade to Utilize Del Rio: Liliana is actively engaging with stakeholders to promote Del Rio's advantages. She highlights the port's capacity, faster processing times, and efforts to improve infrastructure. Success stories from companies that shifted operations to Del Rio serve as testimonials.

Infrastructure Development Needs: There is a need for more warehouse space and cold storage facilities in Del Rio. These facilities would support a wider range of commodities, including produce. The port is in discussions with the City of Del Rio and other stakeholders to explore development opportunities.

Continued Collaboration: Collaboration with Mexican authorities is crucial, especially regarding infrastructure improvements on their side. Completion of the bypass loops in Coahuila would

significantly enhance trade flow. Liliana has been in contact with officials like Claudia Lagos to stay updated on progress.

Stakeholder Education and Engagement: Liliana emphasizes the importance of educating stakeholders about the port's capabilities and encouraging contingency planning. Regular meetings, updates, and open communication channels are key to fostering strong partnerships.

Questions and Clarifications

Communication Channels with Brokers - Chris Burns inquired about the existence of email distribution lists for brokers. Liliana confirmed that they have such lists and regularly communicate with stakeholders. The list has grown through referrals and stakeholder additions over time.

Data on Trade Diversion - Chris asked about data showing how closures at Del Rio affect traffic at Eagle Pass and Laredo. Liliana acknowledged the importance of such data and agreed to look into availability. Understanding trade diversion patterns would help in infrastructure planning and assessing redundancies.

Impact of Closures on Trade Decisions - Nair asked about exceptions or recommendations provided to brokers during extended closures. Liliana explained that on the U.S. side, brokers can file entries at any port, while on the Mexican side, brokers are more limited. During closures, carriers may partner with other brokers or reroute to other ports, considering factors like distance and cost.

Action Items

- Liliana will send the public link to CBP trade statistics to TxDOT.
- TxDOT will analyze the data and consider submitting a FOIA request for more detailed information if necessary.
- Chris Burns will share the throughput data they currently have to compare with any new data provided.
- All Parties will continue to communicate and collaborate on improving port connectivity and stakeholder engagement.

August 9, 2024, Texas Pacifico Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: August 9, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 10:00am

Invitees: Texas Pacifico, Jacobs, Rifeline

Discussion

Connectivity Issues Between Ports and Border Crossings

Discussed the importance of connectivity between ports and land border crossings, highlighting it as a challenge mentioned in the border master plan. Noted the perception among prominent stakeholders that connectivity is critical. Texas Pacifico acknowledged the importance of the issue. Mentioned that there might be some data available from Ferromex on the volume of trade from Mexican ports to Texas and the connectivity challenges between rail and truck transport.

Ports and Rail Connectivity

Texas Pacifico identified key Mexican ports, including those on the Pacific side (Topolobampo, Guaymas, Mazatlán) and the Gulf ports (Veracruz, Altamira, Coatzacoalcos). Noted that Ferromex serves these ports and discussed the impact of recent rail industry changes, such as the CP KC merger. Discussed various port specialties and infrastructure challenges. Mentioned that while some ports handle specific types of commodities, the integration of rail and trucking for cross-border transport is complex, and the fluidity of moving commodities from a port across the land is important.

Data and Analysis

Jacobs requested data on the volume and types of commodities moving through Mexican ports and crossing into Texas. Texas Pacifico indicated the need to verify data on cargo and dollar value. Noted that data was currently in weight measurements and not in carloads, noting that some product does come from Asia to Mexican ports for transportation to the U.S.

Infrastructure Challenges

Texas Pacifico mentioned past infrastructure investments, including a $40 million investment into a rail bridge project and subsequent improvements. Noted that the Presidio bridge is behind schedule, and his company is not planning any more infrastructure investments until that bridge opens. Highlighted ongoing challenges in funding and completing infrastructure projects. Specific challenges included the need for significant upgrades to handle different types of freight and to address terrain issues in the Copper Canyon.

Future Investments and Industry Trends

Texas Pacifico discussed potential future investments in Mexican ports and the impact of global logistics changes. Emphasized that while there is interest in making ambitious investments, current focus should be on completing existing projects and addressing immediate challenges. Noted that his company is planning for another $55 million investment for infrastructure on the Texas Pacifico line, including upgrades to the existing infrastructure and additional siding rail lines, but funding will be based on new revenue once the Presidio bridge is completed. Texas Pacifico also mentioned the challenges of port to border transport, specifically through the Copper Canyon region; approximately 80 bridges and 75-80 tunnels make up the route, but the tunnels are not high enough to accommodate double-stacked containers or automobile transport railcars. His company is making plans for a big investment, but not until the Presidio bridge reopens.

Current Challenges and Commodities

Jacobs inquired about the origin of commodities crossing the bridge and Stan's perspective on them.

Texas Pacifico noted key commodities crossing the border include:

- Bulk and Hopper Cars: Significant volumes coming from Mexico.
- Refined Fuels: Moving from Texas to northern Mexico.
- Grain: Smaller volumes moving north, larger volumes south; used for local consumption or export.
- Steel: Crosses in both directions.
- Automotive Products: Expected to increase in northbound traffic.
- Highlighted the importance of the $55 million investment for bridge approval to handle increased capacity and upgrading 100-year-old rail, with an estimated two streams per week.

Market Impact and Traffic Diversion

Jacobs asked if the new market served would be from existing traffic or if it would divert traffic from other routes. Texas Pacifico clarified that the traffic is not new but provides relief to congested ports. Provided an example of cement currently routed inefficiently from Chihuahua to Fort Stockton, Texas, which would benefit from the new route, reducing distance and improving efficiency. Emphasized that DFW's role as a hub would benefit from this more efficient routing and noted potential diversification of crossing portfolios to avoid congestion.

Investments and Infrastructure Needs

Rifeline asked about additional investments needed, specifically on the Texas side, and if there are any current constraints. Texas Pacifico indicated that rail infrastructure is generally in place, and current investments are more about creating new opportunities rather than addressing constraints. Mentioned that while there are no significant issues with rail constraints, ongoing investments will focus on new facilities and opportunities. He also noted that about 40 trains per day passing through the 4 border crossings every 24 hours.

Customs and Border Inspection Processes

Rifeline questioned if customs and border inspection processes slow down transportation, especially when bringing products into Mexico. Texas Pacifico acknowledged that there were challenges with new Mexican inspection processes starting January 1, 2023, but these have been resolved. They described current inspection efficiency with the CBP's CT-PAT program, which speeds up processing for certified shippers and railroads.

Future Data and Reporting

Texas Pacifico agreed to investigate and provide additional data on rail traffic numbers to offer better reference points for future discussions.

Action Items

- Jacobs following up with Pyramex for insights on commodity data and cross-border trade volumes.
- Texas Pacifico will look into obtaining more precise data on cargo volumes and value. Acknowledged the need for ongoing discussions about infrastructure and future investments.

August 15, 2024, Dicex Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: August 15, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 10:30am

Invitees: TxDOT, Jacobs, Rifeline, Dicex

Purpose and Summary

Focusing on the connectivity between maritime ports in Texas and Mexico and the border crossings. The goal is to understand supply chains involving both a port and a border crossing, the challenges, and potential solutions.

Discussion

Scope and Operations

Dicex provided an overview of their operations as customs brokers, highlighting their presence in 28 ports of entry in Mexico and along the US-Mexico border. He noted that 53% of their customers are linked to the automotive industry.

Supply Chain Scenarios

Southbound Flows: He described a common scenario where products from Asia are routed through Long Beach, California, and then shipped to Mexican border ports such as Laredo, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Brownsville, or McAllen before entering Mexico.

E-commerce Freight: Another scenario involved e-commerce freight that consolidates in the US from Asia before being partially shipped to Mexico.

Alternative Ports

Dicex mentioned that while California ports are commonly used, some shipments also come through Houston, especially from Europe. However, Mexican ports such as Altamira and Veracruz are often preferred for destinations in northern and central Mexico.

Challenges and Opportunities

Regulatory Compliance: Alejandro discussed challenges related to regulatory compliance, especially concerning the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and the attempts by some companies to bypass content regulations by minimal assembly in Mexico. He referenced an example a company sending agricultural products from Canada to Mexico and having to comply with FDA inspections.

Chinese Investments: Alejandro highlighted the influx of Chinese investments and products, noting challenges in compliance with local content regulations and increasing import duties on certain goods from Asia.

Overweight Shipments: There are ongoing issues with overweight shipments trying to maximize container capacity, which often violates regulations.

Discussion on Material Flows

Nearshoring Impacts: Dicex noted that nearshoring has led to a shift in raw material flows, with more products coming from China through Mexican ports, particularly Manzanillo, which is currently facing capacity issues.

Impact on Automotive Industry: Jacobs inquired about the impact of these shifts on the automotive industry's value-added requirements under USMCA. Alejandro acknowledged the complexities and the need for strict compliance.

Logistics and Transportation

Houston and Brownsville**:** Alejandro mentioned that Houston and Brownsville are key ports for oil products, including diesel and gasoline, which are primarily transported to Mexico via pipelines, trucks, and rail.

Intermodal Challenges: He discussed the challenges faced by intermodal companies in Mexico due to a lack of equipment, which hampers the ability to balance northbound and southbound freight flows effectively.

Potential Use of Mexican Seaports: Alejandro noted that there are companies exploring the use of Mexican seaports such as Tuxpan, Veracruz, or Altamira for exporting goods to the US, with Houston being a potential port of entry.

Conclusion

The meeting provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities related to the Texas-Mexico border connectivity, particularly in terms of supply chain dynamics, regulatory compliance, and logistics. Dicex emphasized the need for strategic planning to address these challenges, especially with the growing influence of nearshoring and the complexities introduced by increased Chinese investments.

August 28, 2024, Puerto Verde Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: August 28, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 11:00am

Invitees: TxDOT, Jacobs, Rifeline, Puerto Verde

Purpose and Summary

This study is interested in the Texas/Mexican port-to-border connectivity, and Jacobs is looking at the first and last leg issues and connectivity between ports and the border – both in Texas and Mexico. The study is particularly looking at gaps between the border crossings and ports, including supply chains affected by connectivity between the Mexico west coast ports and the U.S./Mexico border.

Discussion

Ports and Rail Connectivity

Puerto Verde is working with the Mexico government on a new seaport in Sinaloa (they are conducting the environmental study). It will be about 25 miles north of the existing port in Mazatlan. The new seaport at Sinaloa is being developed as an alternative landing port for Asian goods coming into the U.S., and as an alternative to goods having to go through San Diego. Goods coming into the new port will be predominantly domestic for distribution across Mexico, in addition to imports into the U.S. The new port is also being touted as an alternative to the Panama Canal, which has experienced back-up due to traffic and low water issues, and as a route to move goods from the Mexican west coast to the eastern U.S. The government is also investing in new railways and roadways from the Mexican west coast to existing infrastructure in the mainland. The Sinaloa port is also being created, instead of simply upgrading the existing port in Mazatlan, due to physical restrictions at the Mazatlan port; the seabed and available land at Sinaloa is more conducive to expansion, and the port is being planned for 100 years of growth.

Data and Analysis

We have the Puerto Verde port in Eagle Pass for Texas-to-Mexico goods transportation. It is being expanded to accommodate a greater volume of goods coming across the border. We are still working on a connection and volume growth for the seaports. We can't tell yet what the expected cargo growth will be, but we should have new numbers in a few months.

Future Investments and Industry Trends

Puerto Verde is creating a short line utilizing the existing rail infrastructure: BNSF on the Mexican side and UPRR on the U.S. side. The rail line will interchange with Ferromex at the border. The infrastructure additions will be a rail line and motor vehicle bridge, which all be commercial (no personal vehicles or foot traffic). The rail line will be 20 miles total (1 mile on U.S. side and 19 miles on Mexican side). The U.S. side is all farmland so quick to build. The Mexican side is an existing coal mining site, and follows an existing ROW owned by the Mexican government. The existing roadway will be upgraded for commercial use, with the rail line running parallel to the rail line. The rail line is a new build, proposed as a double track running in the ROW next to the roadway. David noted that due to a DNA, he can't discuss ownership or participation of Class 1 rail lines. Jacobs noted that TXDOT now has the funding in place for Loop 480, and David added that Loop 480 is a necessary piece of the infrastructure to get from Highways 57 and 277 to avoid urban routes. He also noted that TXDOT plans to expand 57 to a 4-lane divided highway and upgrade 277 to an interstate highway (as the future I-27 commercial corridor).

Infrastructure Challenges

No investments needed on the U.S. side in the near future, but issues remain on the Mexico side. For example, Piedras Negras has more issues on the Mexican side than the U.S. side, due mainly to having 20+ rail crossings at grade. The railway is inefficient, which causes daily traffic back-ups when trains are forced to stop or are delayed crossing the border. In addition, frequent bridge closures due to security concerns also cause back-ups. The new Puerto Verde corridor will be secured for both commercial and rail to avoid stops along the corridor, leaving only the regular stop for customs. In addition, the rail will bypass urban areas to further avoid security stoppages.

Current Commodities

Rifeline asked about commodities coming through Puerto Verde. It was mentioned that no new commodities are expected for the expanded port; it's being built as a replacement crossing for the existing supply chain. However, it will be designed to accommodate oversized cargo, and his company is seeking port authority as a free trade zone. He noted that trade along the border is anticipated to triple by 2050. He also noted that the new port has been a part of the masterplan for the region for at least 2 decades. The speed in approval and construction is because they are utilizing the existing coal mine infrastructure and state-owned ROW on the Mexico side. The new port will also have the same benefits as the major border crossings – except for easy access to interstate connectivity, which is being developed.

Additional Investments and Infrastructure Needs

Trucks experience lots of congestion on MX 57, which also causes a lot of pollution and delays. The new route will solve some of those issues. MX 57 still serves as the main route from the border, but some areas in the interior of Mexico are single lane each direction. The route also travels through numerous urban areas, so plans are being crafted to address this with bypass routes. MX2 runs along the border, so it is not considered a predominant route for the Puerto Verde port; although some commercial traffic does go to Laredo, MX2 is not expected to be a main route, especially since it is bisected with a gap along the full route.

Future Data and Reporting

David said he would connect Jacobs with Arturo Garcia to further discuss the Sinaloa project and seaports data.

Action Items

- Jacobs to follow up with Puerto Verde on connecting with Arturo Garcia (DONE) to schedule a virtual meeting.
- Puerto Verde to provide updated cargo growth data in a few months.

September 4, 2024, Puerto Verde 2 Meeting

Meeting Details

Date: September 4, 2024

Project name: Border Connectivity Study

Location: Virtual

Time: 12:30pm

Invitees: Jacobs, Rifeline, Puerto Verde

Purpose and Summary

Jacobs introduced the Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Plan, which aims to assess connectivity needs between maritime ports and border crossings. Initial data analysis has not shown significant movement between Texas ports and the border, but stakeholder interviews suggest potential traffic increases due to West Coast congestion.

Discussion

Current Mexican laws require containers imported into Mexico to be returned to ports empty, which is a limitation for cross-border trade. He highlighted the need for changes in legislation to allow loaded containers to move across borders, which would improve efficiency. Puerto Verde is developing a dedicated cargo facility with inspection processes for containers arriving from Asia, which will cross the Texas-Mexico border. This facility would handle containers efficiently through a dual inspection process between Mexican and U.S. customs.

Puerto Verde identified potential beneficiaries of the new port as automotive, aerospace, and technology industries, especially companies sourcing raw materials from Asia. The facility could support nearshoring efforts, where companies in North America would assemble products using materials from Asia.

Many existing Mexican ports are not equipped to handle large container ships due to shallow waters or existing concessions for specific industries (e.g., oil, gas, grain). The proposed Puerto Verde port would resolve these issues by accommodating larger vessels.

Puerto Verde outlined the transport options from Mazatlán to Piedras Negras, including rail and highway. Multimodal facilities in Durango will allow cargo to be transferred from trucks to rail, offering flexibility based on shipment urgency. Future Cargo Airport: Puerto Verde plans to develop a cargo airport in northern Mexico to support its multimodal logistics strategy.

Infrastructure Investments

Mexico Side: Mexico is planning significant highway upgrades to support increased traffic, especially along the northern routes, over the next 3-5 years. The improvements will help handle an expected increase in cargo, with projections of 200,000 containers in the near future, growing to 500,000 annually.

U.S. Side (Highway 57): Highway 57, which connects to I-35, is heavily congested and requires investment. Mexico's federal government is investing approximately $500 million to upgrade infrastructure to accommodate the growing trade flow.

Legal and Regulatory Barriers

- Mexican Law Changes Needed
- Jacobs asked about the need for changes in Mexican laws to allow for better cargo movement between maritime ports and border crossings.
- Arturo confirmed the need for legislative adjustments, especially regarding container usage between Mexico and the U.S.

Conclusion

Jacobs emphasized that current data shows minimal cargo movement between maritime ports and border crossings. Puerto Verde agreed with this assessment but emphasized the potential for growth if legislative and infrastructure improvements are made.