

# Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

February 19, 2020, 8:00 a.m.

Howard College - West Texas Training Center

3501 N. US Highway 67

San Angelo, Texas

## Attendees

Advisory Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Mayor George Arispe	City of Eldorado	Not Present
Mayor John Baker	City of Tahoka	Present
Judge Mike Braddock	Lynn County	Present
Judge Charlie Bradley	Schleicher County	Not Present
Mayor Bob Brinkmann	City of Dumas	Not Present
Judge Terri Beth Carter	Sherman County	Present
Judge Bryan Cox	Martin County	Not Present
Judge Steve Floyd	Tom Green County	Not Present
Judge Ronnie Gordon	Hartley County	Not Present
Mayor Brenda Gunter	City of San Angelo	Present
Judge Kim Halfmann	Glasscock County	Present
Mayor Phillip Hass	City of Dalhart	Designee Present (James Stroud)
Judge Deborah Horwood	Sterling County	Present
Mayor Lane Horwood	City of Sterling City	Not Present
Judge Ernie Houdashell	Randall County	Not Present
Judge Terry Johnson	Midland County	Not Present
Judge Harold Keeter	Swisher County	Present
Mayor Bruno Lozano	City of Del Rio	Present
Judge David B. Mull	Hale County	Present
Mayor Ginger Nelson	City of Amarillo	Designee Present (Jared Miller)
Judge Foy O'Brien	Dawson County	Designee Present (Nicky Goode)
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Not Present
Judge Curtis Parrish	Lubbock County	Present
Mayor Patrick Payton	City of Midland	Not Present

Judge Francisco G. Ponce	Dimmit County	Not Present
Mayor Dan Pope ( <i>Chairman</i> )	City of Lubbock	Present
Mayor Ricky Reed	City of Stratford	Not Present
Judge Johnnie “Rowdy” Rhoades	Moore County	Designee Present (Dee Vaughan)
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Not Present
Mayor Pete Saenz	City of Laredo	Present
Judge David R. Saucedo	Maverick County	Not Present
Mayor Wayne Seiple	City of Carrizo Springs	Not Present
Judge James Tullis Shahan	Kinney County	Not Present
Judge Souli Asa Shanklin	Edwards County	Not Present
Mayor Wanda Shurley	City of Sonora	Not Present
Mayor Luis Sifuentes	City of Eagle Pass	Not Present
Judge Stephen H. Smith ( <i>Vice-Chairman</i> )	Sutton County	Not Present
Judge Hal Spain	Coke County	Not Present
Mayor Josh Stevens	City of Lamesa	Not Present
Judge Nancy Tanner	Potter County	Not Present
Mayor Shannon Thomason	City of Big Spring	Designee Present (John Medina)
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Present
Mayor David Turner	City of Odessa	Not Present
Judge Kathryn Wiseman	Howard County	Designee Present (Brian Klinksiek)
<b>Texas Transportation Commission</b>		
Commissioner Alvin New	Texas Transportation Commission	Present

## Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays  
Loretta Brown  
Blake Calvert  
Emily Clisby  
Brian Crawford  
John DeWitt  
Lauren Garduno  
Michael Haithcock  
Cliff Hallford  
Krista Jeacopello

Carl Johnson  
Mark Jones  
Steve Linhart  
Roberto Rodriguez, III  
Jared Sheffer  
Randee Shields  
Peter Smith  
Akila Thamizharasan  
Steve Warren

## Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver	Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Jerry Holder	Garver	Lena Camarillo	PCI
Michele Lopez	Garver	Colin McGahey	PCI
Kirsten McCullough	Garver	Joe Bryan	WSP
Tracy Michel	Garver	Michael Penic	WSP
Sean Wray	Garver		

## Other Attendees

Jarrett Atkinson	City of Lubbock
John Bertsch	Ports to Plains Alliance
Donna Bethune	West Texas Training Center/ Howard College
Manuel Chavez	City of Del Rio
Craig Cook	City of Del Rio
Deb Cottier	Ports to Plains Alliance
Cheryl deCordova	State Representative Drew Darby
Laura Lewis	State Senator Charles Perry
Nick Gallegos	Middle Rio Grande Development Council
Beverly Haggard	Ports to Plains Alliance
Duffy Hinkle	Ports to Plains Alliance
Major Hofheins	San Angelo Metropolitan Planning Organization
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough
Joe Kiely	Ports to Plains Alliance
Steve Massengale	City of Lubbock City Council
John Osborne	Lubbock Economic Development Alliance
Jamie Rainey	Howard College
Gerry Schwebel	IBC Bank
Cathy Shull	Ports to Plains Alliance
Lalo Uribe	Webb County

## 1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

### Opening Remarks

Advisory Committee Chair and City of Lubbock Mayor Dan Pope welcomed the attendees to the meeting. Mayor Pope gave a special thank you to the City of San Angelo Mayor Brenda Gunter for hosting the meeting in her City. He said it was great to be here in this beautiful community. He said this was the second HB 1079 Advisory Committee Meeting. The first was held in early October in Lubbock. He said quite a bit of activity has taken place since the first Advisory Committee Meeting with two rounds of Segment Committee Meetings and five public meetings. He said those meetings would be summarized during today's meeting.

Mayor Pope thanked the group for their time and effort to be present. He said we have a corridor stretching approximately 960 miles in Texas and there were several people who came a long way to be present at the meeting today. He stated time is our most valuable commodity and your effort to be here is not lost on me. He said the Ports-to-Plains Alliance board met yesterday and he acknowledged members attending the meeting from areas as far north as North Dakota, Nebraska and Colorado and welcomed the group to Lubbock.

Attendees sitting at the table introduced themselves.

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Freight, Trade, and Connectivity welcomed everyone to the meeting and said she looked forward to the great discussion today.

### Facility Safety Briefing

Mayor Pope gave a safety briefing in case of emergency. Next, he asked for Texas Transportation Commissioner Alvin New to speak and provide opening remarks.

Commissioner New said the process was going very well and the Segment Committee Meetings have been well attended. He stated he was happy to see attendees from Dalhart to Laredo in the room for the Advisory Committee Meeting. It keeps stakeholders at the table. He said the Committees were all doing good work and looked forward to seeing the results. He stated that all the committee members are volunteers and expressed his appreciation for their efforts on this study.

Mayor Pope said he wanted to set the expectations for the meeting before getting started. He said you've seen this information at the Segment Meetings, so he had hoped to move through the agenda in a timely fashion. He explained the Segment Committees will meet again the first week of April, the second week of May and again the second week of June. He said they will have meetings each month so the Committees could finish their work by the end of June. He explained the Segment Committees would hand over their recommendations to the Advisory Committee by the end of June. He said the Advisory Committee would meet in July, August, and September to have their recommendations completed by the October 31 deadline to TxDOT. He said the Advisory Committee's recommendations would go to TxDOT before going to the Governor and Legislature.

He thanked TxDOT staff for their hard work and he also thanked the consultant team.

Mayor Pope explained the Advisory Committee is studying the feasibility of a new north-south interstate in Texas. Texas is at 29 million people today, and we are on our way to 50 million people by 2045 to 2050. He said Texas has the 10th largest economy in the world, yet we only have one north-south Interstate route. He explained it is not possible to make I-35 wide enough to handle the traffic that will travel on it. He said our work in West Texas is important for many reasons. West Texas is important to this state. It is important we finish this job, which will be done in 6 months, when we hand the results of the study over to the Governor and to the Legislature. He encouraged the Committee members to stay the course and keep focused.

Ms. Mays explained a sign-in sheet was going around the room and requested committee members sign in to ensure their presence was recorded. She walked members through the meeting packet, including the handouts and presentations. She introduced Peter Smith, Division Director of TxDOT Transportation Planning and Programming Division for opening remarks.

Mr. Smith stated he looked forward to today's meeting. He mentioned the biggest challenge in any development is to get the funding to do it. Whichever alternative the Committee recommends, funding is the crucial component and it always requires money to get it done. He said he was happy to be here and be part of the discussion. Mayor Pope acknowledged that he understands the funding piece.

## **2. Update from Segment Committee and Public Meetings, Rounds #1 and #2**

Mayor Pope said next the Segment Committee Chairs would provide an update from their committees.

### **Segment 1**

Segment 1 Committee Chair and City Manager of Amarillo, Jared Miller, provided an overview for Segment 1 saying they met on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. He said they had some weather challenges and had to hold the meeting by conference call, which was more fruitful than he ever thought a conference call could have possibly been. He congratulated TxDOT and thanked them for making the meeting happen in a successful way in a challenging setting. He explained the Segment 1 Committee's general discussion was about the increasing number of factories and meat packing plants, and an increasing population. He said they talked about having a lot of economic development in both the rural areas and urban areas which was driving some traffic needs. Segment 1 is one of our most developed sections regarding interstate portions, but Segment 1 would still see benefits of economic development and especially safety from expanding the Interstate facility. He said this is an interesting study between the benefits of interstate and non-interstate sections in Segment 1 because the southern half is interstate, northern half is not. He sees some distinct differences on how the two halves perform. The Segment Committee talked about agriculture, manufacturing, and distribution growth, renewable wind and petroleum-based energy production, and about economic diversification.

He said members are curious if improvements are made to the Ports-to-Plains Corridor, how the local population, economy, and land use would change. He said they talked about economic development

in the region and how connection to international trade with Mexico would have great benefits from improved transportation development and safer transportation throughout the corridor. He said Interstate development has helped to spur growth along its path with a need for support services, which will happen as the corridor develops. The high volume of truck traffic will increase with improvements to the entire corridor as it is improved for freight movement. That increase in truck traffic, is a function of both of our segment economic development growth as well as the entire corridor growth. As the entire corridor grows, each of our areas will experience more traffic being driven by those other segments.

Mr. Miller said the traffic forecasts show opportunities and challenges related to the differences in traffic volume between four-lane divided highway and interstate options. He said the committee talked about opportunities such as the potential for business expansion, and how an Interstate provides more growth and attraction for travelers. He noted the biggest theme in the discussion was safety and the benefits with Interstate segments and bypass opportunities. The challenges are lack of crossings as well as irrigation challenges for farmers and agricultural production (one of our largest economic drivers), need for fueling stations, access management, time for rural communities to adapt to increased traffic volumes and divergence from their usual traffic patterns, and funding which is a continuing theme.

He said the freight forecasts show opportunities and challenges related to the increase of freight within the corridor including ancillary industry growth to support trucking and freight movement/distribution, need for hotels, restaurants and fueling stations, effective traffic management planning with bypass/diversion routes which are essential for safety, and economic capacity and growth. Challenges include safety concerns with increased truck movement in small towns, lack of full interstate which impedes freight movement from a speed and safety standpoint, and infrastructure maintenance (regularly scheduled and increased need). The Segment 1 Committee reviewed the results of the feasibility study of a four-lane divided highway and Interstate and reviewed all the chapters prepared to date.

## **Segment 2**

Mayor Pope said the Segment 2 Committee had a segment committee meeting and a public meeting. He introduced City of San Angelo Mayor and the Segment 2 Committee Chair, Brenda Gunter.

Mayor Gunter provided an overview of the Segment 2 activities. She said we know in Segment 2 the number one issue is safety. The segment has some of the largest fatalities in the corridor. Safety is the number one issue for us in places like San Angelo, Sonora, Sterling City, Midland, Odessa, and Big Spring. We need a corridor that provides safety and that is an interstate quality facility. She said we need to look at fatalities.

She noted 32 percent of the nation's fuel is coming from the Permian Basin. Natural gas is around 20 percent. These are great economic drivers. She said we need to look at the state's economy. We have never had this focus on West Texas because of the importance of the energy industry. Our drivers are not driving on the best roads. We have an opportunity to make this the interstate of the future. We need to make sure the bridges correspond to the height of the trucks. We can design this interstate to accommodate the needs of the corridor. There is no north-south route in Texas aside from I-35 yet look at the economy. We've got to have people pay attention to us now.

Mayor Gunter said congestion is another issue. We cannot deal with it on I-35 efficiently because you cannot build it wide enough, high enough, and it costs too much. She said there is a need for an alternative to I-35 to divert traffic. She said if we build it, they will come and if we do not, they won't. She explained the data shows the four-lane divided highway will not create diversion. The only thing that will create diversion is an interstate quality facility. Look at the amount of freight coming up this corridor on two lane highways, not made for the weight and size of these trucks. She said she believes West Texas deserves protection from fatalities that occur on these terrible roads we have in West Texas. Mayor Gunter said you cannot talk about economic development if you do not talk about transportation. Transportation is economic development. If you are going to get food, fuel, and fiber to the locations of the market, you must have good highways. She said we have been talking about what is going through Laredo. She said we won't know what will happen when the rail bridge in Presidio opens and we do not know the economic impact from all that traffic. She explained it is going to be huge and it will come this way if we build a road this way. She asked why you would want to go from Laredo to I-35 north and go back west to go back north again. She said we must build another north-south corridor.

She said mobility and national security are important. Should the U.S. ever be in the position of war again; you must move food, fuel, and fiber from this part of the country to where it needs to go. Natural resources are huge for economic development and for the safety of our country. She said what we provide in terms of food, fuel and fiber is hugely important. The spotlight is on us and we must make it happen. We cannot talk about dollars and cents; we must talk about our priorities. If you have priority, dollars will follow. We have proven the statistics that that we need this corridor.

### Segment 3

Mayor Pope said the Segment 3 Committee met once in Del Rio and once in Laredo and had a public meeting in each location. He introduced City of Del Rio Mayor and Segment 3 Committee Chair Bruno Lozano to provide an update from the meetings.

Mayor Lozano said the committee discussed similar concerns of movement of freight and higher amounts of traffic and impact on our economies from the expansion of 2-lane to four-lane divided highway to an interstate level facility. He said the committee discussed creation of jobs and enhancing quality of life. Similarly, safety is a major issue. Segment 3 is getting some improvements with a Super 2 highway, but it is not enough. He said Segment 3 is rural, and we must enhance safety through an interstate facility because of having to compete with the trucks and port of entries. He said the uniqueness of Segment 3 is our ports, and trade with Mexico. It will only increase commercial trade with the passing of the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (USMCA).

He said Del Rio and Eagle Pass are ports of entry that are not connected to the highway system. Del Rio and Eagle Pass enhance the port of entry in Laredo. He said we are going to see an increase of inbound and outbound traffic. He said we are already having issues on I-35, so why choose Texas if there are alternative methods in other states. He said we also need to emphasize that border control stations need to be enhanced or there will be a gridlock if the inspection facilities remain the same. They are below standard. A lot of commercial trucks are stalled. He said we stand with the other segments on emphasizing the need for safety. Rest facilities are also needed in this area.

Mayor Lozano said Segment 3 is the least developed, but saving a life makes it worth it. Safety is of utmost importance. Our infrastructure won't be able to handle forecasted increases in inbound and outbound traffic. The investment in this corridor will not only enhance our communities but other

communities that are not directly tied to the corridor. The conclusion is that the interstate is the way to go. We did review Chapters 1 and 2. The uniqueness of Segment 3 are the ports of entry and border trade. He thanked everyone and said he was happy to be there.

Ms. Mays thanked the Segment Committee Chairs for their updates. She said we had a great meeting in Laredo and the public meeting was well attended. There were some weather challenges for the Segment 2 Committee meeting, but participation was great and there was a lot of great feedback from the committee members. She said the public meeting in Segment 2 was well attended and there was some good input received. The Segment 1 Committee meeting had to be held via WebEx because of weather conditions, but there was good participation and feedback from the Committee members.

Ms. Mays said she wanted to highlight the drafted Chapters 1 and 2 of the Segment Committee Reports. She said we have received really good feedback from all three Committees and staff is addressing the comments and revising the Chapters based on those comments. She thanked the members for taking the time to review the Chapters and provide feedback. She said each Segment is unique with Segment 3 having trade and port of entries, Segment 2 having energy sector, and Segment 1 – agriculture production and movement. All three committees voiced safety as a key issue within the corridor. She thanked the consultant team and the San Angelo District for making last minute arrangements to host a WebEx for the Segment 1 and 2 Committee meetings.

### **3. Forecasted Corridor Conditions and Needs**

Before the consultant team made its presentation on forecasted corridor conditions and needs, the Advisory Committee and TxDOT management engaged in a discussion on a “four-lane divided hybrid” highway option. Advisory Committee members who reviewed the presentation in advance noticed this and wondered where it came from as it is not in House Bill 1079 and it is the first time it had been mentioned during the study. TxDOT management explained that the term “hybrid” was meant to describe limited access facilities around urban areas through a locally preferred route. The traffic modeling results of the four-lane divided highway that was shown to the Segment Committees during their early February meetings did not make the same assumptions as the interstate highway in that the interstate option left it open as to whether you go through town or around town. TxDOT believed that modeling the traffic of a four-lane divided highway with the same assumption as the interstate (i.e. the highway would go around urban areas) was needed for comparison and directed the consultant team to conduct that modeling activity. The traffic modeling showed that neither highway option (four-lane divided, four-lane divided hybrid) is precluding what the local preference is in each urban area or what the alternatives might be whether you go through or around. It was suggested by the committee to use the term “safety reliever route” and not use the term “hybrid” moving forward.

TxDOT management apologized to the Advisory Committee for not informing them in advance of this new traffic modeling activity and it was not intended to create a new alternative. Although the committee members were surprised by this activity and expressed to TxDOT that they would have preferred it be better communicated in advance of the meeting, the committee would work through it during the meeting and asked TxDOT to proceed with presenting the forecasted corridor conditions.

## Population/Economic/Land Use Forecasts

Kirsten McCullough of the consultant team presented the forecasted conditions. She said the same information was presented at the Segment Committee meetings. The presentation is focused on the corridor and a higher view of the entire corridor. She said we will present forecasted data for population, economic, land use, traffic, and freight.

Forecasted population conditions show growth at a rate of 61 percent. Segment 2 is really where this growth is expected. As shown on the maps, growth is projected to be strong in the Permian Basin area in Midland and Ector County. You also see growth in Lubbock, Amarillo, Webb County and Laredo areas.

She said median income shows an increase of 180 percent in the corridor, not adjusted for inflation, but in today's dollars. You see income growth in all three segments. Segment 1 tends to have the highest income growth and that might just be a function of having lower incomes to begin with and growing at a faster rate.

Mayor Pope commented this is a remarkable slide, even without inflation adjusted. It is good news for West Texas regarding median household incomes.

Ms. McCullough noted that we look at this demographic data to better understand what the corridor is going to look like in 30 years without any improvements to Ports-to-Plains, without any changes to it. It helps us to understand what we are dealing and what we are preparing for. Then, we can look at how the corridor improvements can potentially change these forecasts when we get into the economic modeling later.

Ms. McCullough presented employment data showing 17 percent growth. She noted Segment Committee members, including Mayor Pope, had questioned why employment growth is lower than the percentage for population growth. She said the team has reached out to the state demographer and are investigating why employment growth is so much lower than population growth. She said part of that explanation is that the population includes persons not in a workforce age group, such as young kids or older populations.

Ms. McCullough presented employment by industry. There is not a lot of change between industries between 2020 to 2050. She also presented the gross domestic product (GDP) forecasted data, which is another indicator of economic growth. She explained GDP is expected to see 69 percent growth.

Next, she presented information on existing development and constraints that would prevent development in the corridor. Seventy-six percent of the corridor is considered developable, 19 percent is developed (*cities and towns*), and five percent is not developable (*areas generally constrained by environmental features and terrain*). Developable land in each segment is as follows: 81 percent in Segment 1, 78 percent in Segment 2, and 57 percent in Segment 3.

Mayor Pope asked about whether the GDP slide should be in billions instead of millions. Ms. McCullough said yes.

Mayor Gunter asked about the slight change on the maps. She noted there appeared to be a slight change on the maps in Segment 2 compared to the maps shown last time. Ms. Mays said the data sets are based on the county level and is beyond just along the corridor.

Ms. McCullough presented the first question for feedback using the Mentimeter inactive tool.

**Mentimeter Question 1: What factors do you think are influencing future population, economic, and land use conditions?**

*There were 17 responses. They are summarized as: energy production (8), job growth and availability (4), agriculture industry (2), domestic and International trade, USMCA (2) and transportation and freight industry services (1).*

Judge Terri Beth Carter of Sherman County commented immigration and water use. She said where they are, the Ogallala Aquifer is not being recharged, but we're still needing to provide food for the projected population. It is going to be a challenge.

**Mentimeter Question 2: Do you envision the local population, economy, and land use changing if improvements are made to the Ports-to-Plains Corridor? If so, where?**

*There were 13 responses. They are summarized as: Yes, more economic development and job growth in the region and connection to trade (5), yes, improved infrastructure will attract business and individuals to relocate (3) and interstate development has helped to spur growth along its path with a need for support services and housing (2).*

Mayor Baker commented Tahoka is never going to be an industrial mecca, but we can be a great bedroom community for Lubbock. He said with the Lubbock outer loop going in, we could benefit, and it will bring people farther out. We're going to have to have some support industry. They are going to need some help with housing.

### **Forecasted Traffic Conditions**

Michael Penic of the consultant team explained he will be presenting traffic information and hopefully answer questions about the four-lane divided highway with relief route. He said the team used the statewide analysis model (SAM). He explained the model lacks some sensitivities for certain things that are being encountered during the study, including the effects of the relief routes. He said when we conducted the modeling, SAM was not able to tell the difference between the four-lane divided highway and interstate scenario because of the difference in their operating speed which were so different across the corridor. The typical operating speed of the state highways were in the 50's mph or sometimes upper 40's mph. The typical speed of the interstate is 75 mph. He said the speed of the different facilities is what made the difference. He explained the four-lane divided highway showed very little impact on diversion to the corridor and therefore the only growth stemmed through the demographic and employment growth, whereas the interstate had the demographic and employment growth plus the diversion from other corridors because of the increased speed. He explained approximately 80 to 90 percent of all that diversion came from within the state usually within 100 miles.

Mayor Gunter stated that we had an analysis done and presented to us that have statistics for four-lane divided highway and interstate. The statistics never talked about anything for something in between. Mr. Penic confirmed and stated the four-lane divided highway and interstate alternatives

remain in their original form. Ms. Mays stated that has been added for today's discussion is the four-lane divided highway with safety reliever routes around the urban areas.

Mayor Lozano asked what was defined as an urban area. He commented that Del Rio and Eagle Pass compared to Midland/Odessa/Lubbock, depending on different opinions, may not be quantified as an urban area, and might be considered a rural area. He expressed his concerns that Segment 3 is the least developed and we come here trying to push for safety and reiterate the fact of increase in commercial trade traffic. We need the highest quality road structure possible because of the safety concerns that we are already experiencing in our communities. He said he emphasized in the Segment 3 meeting where Highway 90 and 277 splits, that is already part of this study.

Brian Klinksiek, Road and Bridge Engineer with Howard County asked whether the assumption TxDOT is making on the four-lane divided highway could be summed up by what is currently done in Big Spring. Currently, we are building a safety route around Big Spring that, when completed, would be the model to look at. It is a four-lane divided highway going in and out of Big Spring. Now you have increased speeds to match the speeds of four-lane divided highway to the interstate. The problem with the model assumption is the left turns at places on a four-lane divided highway versus an interstate with controlled access, because that is what we see in Howard County. Mr. Klinksiek referred to FM 846, where we have huge volumes of truck traffic making those turning movements and many accidents at that because of those turning movements. You increase the speeds but do not improve the safety.

City of Laredo Mayor Saenz stated since meeting in Laredo, some people have approached him about FM 1472 which truly should be considered a relief route that connects Laredo to Eagle Pass. In Laredo, we have two major bridges, one is the World Trade Bridge on FM 1472 but disconnected to I-35. Portions of that road are even busier than I-35 with over 60,000 trucks, Our concern is when they exit this bridge, we're basically dictating going into the intercity then take I-35, then US 83, when there is a more direct route of FM 1472 which connects to Eagle Pass. That would be for me a relief route and border patrol has also been insisting on that because of security and it hugs the river in some areas more so than others. This is something that I know is not on the map, but do not know if it is too late for that, but as discussions develop, that has been brought to my attention. This has got to be a progression; this would attract more funding with border security issue.

Ms. Mays said these are great comments. The bill defines the corridor but does not define studying relief routes or any other alternative corridors. This bill is very prescriptive. The committee can make recommendations regarding relief routes along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor.

Mr. Miller stated that he would like to encourage us to keep primarily within our goals. Our number 1 challenge is safety, number 2 is congestion. We could compromise that by worrying about funding when we do not know where funding is coming from or constraints may be. It is hard to justify compromising now by creating "hybrids" for a more cost-effective corridor. We need to set up a plan that best addresses our safety and congestion.

Mayor Pope agreed with Mr. Miller and added to Mayor Saenz that it is a point well made. We are not to study other corridors but may be able to mention that when we get to the committee reports. That is down the road.

Mr. Penic continued presenting forecasted traffic conditions. The corridor responds to the population and employment growth and does not pull traffic from other routes because they are also operating at similar speeds. They are equally competitive. With the interstate level, we get the maximum level of diversion.

Commissioner New asked about the moderate additional growth. He wants to see the data and the number. The four-lane divided hybrid highway would attract moderate additional growth over the No Build or four-lane divided highway option.

Mr. Penic said overall corridor traffic growth starting from existing conditions to interstate highway all the way is a projected 125 percent increase. The portion associated with the existing conditions alone is projected to increase 54 percent. The various alternatives in between can be anywhere. The planned projects in the UTP, bring us to 67 percent from 54 percent. The four-lane divided highway as originally defined, which did not include improvements within urban areas, is projected to increase 80 percent and the four-lane divided highway with the safety reliever routes is projected to increase 115 percent. These projected increases are related to time savings.

Mr. Penic explained that in travel demand models like SAM, there is a density, or a development variable attached to every road. As every population grows within the geographic area of the piece of road, it is given a different form of density and it is what you would expect for rural, exurban, suburban, urban, or downtown. As development occurs, that population and employment appear in the model in adjacent areas. It is projected to the road itself and road speed is forced to go down in the modeling process.

### **Mentimeter Question 3: What are the opportunities and challenges related to the differences in traffic volume between the four-lane divided highway and interstate options?**

*There were 10 responses. They are summarized as: Opportunities were safety and traffic flow (4), decreased congestion (3), expedite freight movement more easily with interstate option (3) and more cost-effective to build interstate option to proactively suit the projected growth (2); and, challenges were increased congestion during construction and redevelopment in smaller communities (3), four-lane divided highway will not be adequate for projections (1) and left and right turns, traffic signals, traffic backlog, speed, lack of frontage to business/street/access control (1).*

Mayor Gunter commented with the statistics that have been presented, opportunities only arise with the interstate.

Mr. Penic noted that there is a fundamental difference between an interstate and four-lane divided highway where the interstate provides access control and no driveway connections.

### **Freight Forecasts**

Joe Bryan of the consultant team presented future freight conditions for the corridor. He said the freight modeling is based on global, national, and regional models. He said it was a baseline projection of what the growth in freight will look like without the improvements to the corridor.

Corridor total truck freight growth is projected to grow 78 percent. Top locations for growth are in Laredo, Midland/Odessa, and Lubbock. Corridor truck traffic connects across the state and is

forecast to grow broadly. Corridor inbound truck tonnage is projected to grow 73 percent by 2050 while outbound truck tonnage is projected to grow by 89 percent. International truck tonnage is projected to grow 116 percent with half the export growth being in Laredo. The rest is widespread along the corridor. Import truck tonnage is projected to grow 214 percent by 2050 with one-third of the import growth occurring at Laredo. Other significant import growth is in Lubbock, Zavala, Midland, Ector County, Tom Green, and Val Verde Counties. The corridor trade network is extensive and is forecast to grow everywhere.

Food and agriculture outbound freight is projected to grow 72 percent and inbound freight by 42 percent. Energy and oil field outbound freight is projected to grow by 35 percent and inbound by 43 percent. Petroleum products are trucked mainly within the corridor.

**Mentimeter Question 4: What are the opportunities and challenges related to the increase of freight within the corridor?**

*There were 12 responses. They are summarized as: economic development and employment growth (4), improved safety and traffic flow (3), and more efficient freight movement (1); and, challenges were traffic congestion is inevitable (5), safety concerns with increased truck movement in small towns (3), and lack of full interstate impedes freight movement (1).*

**10:15-10:30 BREAK**

#### **4. Planned and Programmed Projects and Gaps**

Ms. Thamizharasan explained HB 1079 stated the study should evaluate the need for a continuous flow, four-lane divided highway meeting interstate highway standards to the extent possible. She presented the planned and programmed projects for each segments of the corridor. A planned project is a project identified in a TxDOT or Metropolitan Planning Organization Plan. A programmed project has been funded or partially funded. She also identified the gaps in the corridor. A gap is also where there are no planned or programmed projects that will upgrade the existing roadway to a four-lane divided highway or interstate. Next, the Committee participated in a map exercise. She asked the members to go to the maps on the tables at the back of the room and share their comments on the maps of where potential strategies should be developed along the corridor. She said there were markers and post-it notes for the members to use to identify their strategies.

#### **5. Preliminary Corridor Feasibility Analysis**

Ms. Thamizharasan continued the presentation by reviewing what a feasibility analysis is and how it is performed. She presented the difference between a four-lane divided highway and an interstate.

Next, Mr. Penic presented traffic conditions and diversions. The four-lane divided highway with safety reliever routes would attract less traffic compared to an interstate. Traffic congestion on an interstate route would be alleviated through controlled access and improve reliability and route attractiveness, diverting traffic to the corridor.

Mayor Pope commented that his understanding is that TxDOT will study US Highway 287. Mr. Penic responded yes.

Mayor Pope asked if traffic flow would go Lubbock and across to Wichita Falls and catching I-44 there. Mr. Penic said they would use US Highway 277 instead.

Mayor Pope asked as they go farther south, the work on US Highway 277 is being done. We would impact the east, too. Viewing a national map that showed diversions as part of Mr. Penic's presentation, he asked what happens to the traffic on I-70 once it crosses the Utah border, and where it goes. Mr. Penic replied it splits into multiple roads that fall below the threshold of the map lines.

To promote safety and mobility criteria, Mr. Penic presented crash rates and travel time evaluations. With an assumed travel speed of 75 mph, the interstate alternative has the lowest crash rates of all route types and provides the best mobility and travel time savings of 212 minutes on the entire corridor.

## **6. Advisory Committee Meeting #3**

Mayor Pope discussed the upcoming dates for the Advisory Committee meetings as July 15, 2020 and August 20, 2020. He said dates for the meeting in September would be determined later.

Mayor Pope said the Advisory Committee would see draft versions of the Advisory Committee Report prior to those meetings.

Ms. Mays responded saying the Segment Committees will finalize their reports by June 30<sup>th</sup>. She said the Advisory Committee will discuss their report and recommendations in July and August. Much of the Advisory Committee Report will focus on the recommendations from the Segment Committees. She said the biggest challenge is how the Advisory Committee will sift through the Segment Committee recommendations and create corridor wide recommendations. She reminded everyone the Advisory Committee report is due to TxDOT by Oct 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Open Discussion**

Mayor Pope stated he will spend some time with Caroline and Peter in the next week or two to decide how best to proceed. He said Mr. Smith's point is well made about the difference between the four-lane divided highway and interstate. Commissioner New said he supports that approach as well.

Mayor Pope opened the floor to anyone wanting to say a few words.

Commissioner New acknowledged those who travelled. He provided examples of Brian Crawford, TxDOT District Engineer from Amarillo and Mayor Lozano from Laredo and said he wanted to let everyone know he really appreciated it. TxDOT District engineers run businesses that are hard to take care of and stay on top of. He appreciates their effort. He asked them to think about this – if you leave this as is, you get a certain outcome, not the one you want. If you construct a four-lane highway through a community, you gain something in between towns but you do not gain any advantage over another corridor. Then you have controlled access by interstate. Controlled access means frontage roads where you still have people passing through at normal speeds. Those were our

three perspectives. A fourth was introduced today in the four-lane divided highway with safety reliever routes, so you do not have to slow down through town.

Mayor Pope thanked Commissioner New and said he represents the largest portion of the state, and West Texas is so well represented by him. He said the Commissioner digs in and understands things. He said they appreciate the Commissioner's leadership and support.

Mayor Lozano thanked everyone for coming. He commented Del Rio is one of the largest populations without access to the Interstate system. He said in the last 10 years the population has exploded, and very similar to cities along this corridor, Interstate accessibility for trade is very important. He said we have an Interstate system in Laredo, but Del Rio and Eagle Pass ports have no direct access to the Interstate system. He said they get bottlenecks in Laredo and Del Rio and it affects the border crossings. He explained Presidio is adjacent to Mexico industry and manufacturing, and we can be the access in helping with those industries. He said the USMCA data does not include what is happening in Mexico. Coronavirus is halting manufacturing in China and makes other industries look at Mexico as an option for manufacturing productivity. He said we need to be that advantage to getting goods out. We need to ensure that we could be that alternative to I-35. He said industry, including the energy sector looks at this corridor and it can help give new identity to West Texas. He said this corridor is the backbone of trade, oil and gas energy and we are what Texas and the U.S. needs.

Mayor Pope thanked the members for coming and he thanked Howard County and Mayor Gunter for hosting the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:44 a.m.

#### Action Items:

- Schedule July and August Meetings