

# Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Meeting #3 Summary

WebEx July 15, 2020 | 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

## Attendees

Advisory Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Mayor George Arispe	City of Eldorado	Not Present
Mayor John Baker	City of Tahoka	Present
Judge Steve Floyd Designee: Commissioner Rick Bacon	Tom Green County	Designee 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
Mayor Wanda Shurley Designee: City Manager Arturo Fuentes	City of Sonora	Not Present
Judge Ronnie Gordon	Hartley County	Not Present
Mayor Brenda Gunter	City of San Angelo	Present
Judge Kim Halfmann	Glasscock County	Not Present
Judge Deborah Horwood	Sterling County	Not 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	Not Present
Mayor Bruno Lozano	City of Del Rio	Present
Mayor Shannon Thomason Designee: Asst. City Manager John Medina	City of Big Spring	Designee Present
Mayor Ginger Nelson Designee: City Manager Jared Miller	City of Amarillo	Designee Present
Judge David B. Mull	Hale County	Not Present
Judge Foy O'Brien	Dawson County	Not Present
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Not Present
Judge Curtis Parrish	Lubbock County	Present
Patrick Payton, Mayor	City of Midland	Not Present
Judge Francisco G. Ponce	Dimmit County	Not Present

<b>Advisory Committee Member</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Mayor Dan Pope, ( <i>Chairman</i> )	City of Lubbock	Present
Mayor Ricky Reed	City of Stratford	Not Present
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Not Present
Mayor Pete Saenz	City of Laredo	Not 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 Luis Sifuentes	City of Eagle Pass	Not Present
Judge Steve Smith (Vice-Chairman)	Sutton County	Not Present
Judge Hal Spain	Coke County	Not Present
Mayor Josh Stevens	City of Lamesa	Not Present
Mayor Phillip Hass Designee: City Manager James Stroud	City of Dalhart	Present
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Not Present
Mayor David Turner Designee: Asst. City Manager Phillip Urrutia	City of Odessa	Not Present
Judge Johnny "Rowdy" Rhoades Designee: Commissioner Dee Vaughan	Moore County	Not Present
Judge Kathryn Wiseman	Howard County	Present
Judge Nancy Tanner Designee: Director Sebastin Ysaguirre	Potter County Road and Bridge Department	Not Present
<b>Texas Transportation Commission</b>		
Commissioner Alvin New	Texas Transportation Commission	Not Present
<b>State Legislators</b>		
State Senator Charles Perry	District 28	Present

## Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays  
Brian Barth  
Roger Beall  
Kit Black  
Loretta Brown  
Blake Calvert  
Brian Crawford  
Eduardo Hagert  
Michael Haithcock  
Cliff Hallford  
Cory Henrickson  
Krista Jeacopello  
Julie Jerome  
Carl Johnson

Timoteo "Tim" Juarez, Jr.  
Steve Linhart  
Sherry Pifer  
Norma Rios  
Federico Rodriguez  
Roberto Rodriguez, III  
Jared Shaffer  
Peter Smith  
John R. Speed  
Akila Thamizharasan  
Trent Thomas  
Steve Warren  
Casey Wells

## Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver	Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Jerry Holder	Garver	Lena Camarillo	PCI
Michele Lopez	Garver	Kari Anne Sutton	PCI
Tracy Michel	Garver	Joe Bryan	WSP
Michael Spayd	Garver	Casey Carlton	WSP
Sean Wray	Garver	Michael Penic	WSP
Robert Ryan	Blanton Associates		

## Other Attendees

Shannon Harman	State Senator Charles Perry's Office
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough, LLP
Joe Kiely	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Benjamin Lancaster	State Representative Brooks Landgraf's Office
John Osborne	Lubbock Economic Development Alliance
Gerry Schwebel	IBC Bank
Andrea Stingley	Chief of Staff for State Representative John Smithee
Hal Talton	State Representative Four Price's Office

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

Advisory Committee Chair and City of Lubbock Mayor Dan Pope opened the meeting at 8:11 am. Mayor Pope welcomed the attendees to the meeting and reminded attendees they first convened 180 days ago in Lubbock, which seems like a long time ago. He said we have the wind at our back and the report looks very promising. The House Bill 1079 (HB 1079) was co-sponsored by State Senator Charles Perry and State Representative Four Price and laid out the path for us to go about this effort.

Senator Charles Perry provided opening remarks saying thank you to TxDOT and specifically to Caroline Mays for carrying the torch and keeping everyone on schedule and on task. Thank you to all the mayors and judges for meeting and taking this project seriously. He is looking forward to receiving the final report when the legislative session begins. The state legislature will continue to do their part on the federal and state side and hope this will get voted through with bipartisan support. He reiterated his thanks and said he appreciates everyone's efforts.

Mayor Pope and Caroline Mays, TxDOT Director of Freight, Trade, and Connectivity, thanked Senator Perry for his opening remarks. Ms. Mays stated that the Advisory Committee did not have a quorum, but that there were no items requiring the Committee's action during the meeting. She then introduced Peter Smith, Division Director of TxDOT's Transportation Planning and Programming (TPP) Division, for opening remarks.

Mr. Smith said thank you for helping us get to this point. We will go through the presentation and go through the report with this new mode of virtual communication. Thank you to the staff and consultants as there has been a lot of teamwork to get us to this point. We will be walking through the presentations and recommendations from the Segment Committees.

Next, Ms. Mays introduced the next agenda item, which were presentations by the Segment Committee chairs to the Advisory Committee. City of Del Rio Mayor and Segment 3 Committee Chair Bruno Lozano presented the Segment #3 Committee Findings and Recommendations. Mayor Lozano emphasized that Segment 3 is a strategic area for trade that affects the entire North American continent. The ports at Del Rio and Eagle Pass do not connect to any interstate. Interstate 27 (I-27) would provide access to other interstates and could be a major relief route for I-35. Mayor Lozano pointed out what is not shown in this report, which is what is happening in sister cities of Acuña, Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, and other cities in Mexico that impact the area. The findings show a very valuable return on investment and benefit cost ratio. Segment 3 really stands out for the trade and brings in and exports all goods locally, nationally, and to North America. Mayor Lozano also provided insight on inquiries in the area from investors looking at the counties between Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and Laredo for future investments. Mayor Lozano asked if there were any questions on Segment 3. With none offered, Mayor Lozano thanked the group and departed the meeting to attend a COVID -19 meeting for his city.

Mayor Pope introduced City of San Angelo Mayor and the Segment 2 Committee Chair Brenda Gunter. Mayor Gunter talked about the importance of this study and that if Segment 2 is not done, then the value of Segments 1 and 3 both diminish. This is a vital energy corridor. Segment 2 is the connector. Mayor Gunter presented the Segment 2 Committee Findings and Recommendations to the Advisory Committee.

Judge Curtis Parrish of Lubbock County thanked the Mayor for her leadership for working with mayors and judges along Segment 2. Judge Parrish said he is honored to help, and this is just the beginning.

Segment 1 Committee Chair and City Manager of Amarillo Jared Miller provided the Segment 1 Committee Findings and Recommendations to the Advisory Committee. Mr. Miller said thank you to everyone for their hard work. The symbiotic nature of all three segments are what make this project work, and this is very important. Mr. Miller made note that one of the larger economic development impacts will occur in warehousing and distribution. Ms. Mays thanked Mr. Miller for presenting this information and asked if there were any questions for Segment 1. There were none.

Mayor Pope thanked all three chairs for summarizing their reports and had to step away from the meeting for a few minutes. Ms. Mays opened the floor to general discussion. She asked what some of the key issues are people want to see in the report.

Mayor Gunter said one of the key elements is national security. She said we talk about the importance of food, fuel, and fiber, but not as much about the relevance to national security, which makes this corridor very important. Also, regarding Segment 3, including Laredo, we should talk about truck routes and economic impacts. National security, trade, and safety are all important to discuss. We could change a lot of lives by giving alternatives for trade and safety in this area. Ms. Mays thanked Mayor Gunter for her input.

Mr. Gerry Schwebel of IBC Bank agreed and said the supply chain is very important. Potential disruptions may pop up on the Mexico side and there is a need to find options and/or strengthen other ports of entry (e.g., Eagle Pass and Del Rio). We need trade flowing and it takes time. We are planting the seed right now. We need to strengthen trade school programs and increase technical skills and the people that work in transportation and logistics. He is encouraged by what he sees and wants the information to be shared in Washington DC and Austin. Mr. Schwebel commends each segment on their presentations.

Mayor Gunter and Ms. Mays thanked Mr. Schwebel for his comments.

Ms. Mays said all three Segment Committee Reports are available online. The executive summary is available to share. She said on the Mexican side, there is a lot of interest in this corridor as a key facility to support trade and United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. Mexico is wanting to diversify and have more options to eliminate bottlenecks. She thanked Mr. Schwebel for his comments.

Mayor Gunter said as terrific of a job as we have done, ultimately when the corridor is built, we will see even greater gross domestic product in what can happen. She thanked the consultants for their analysis and providing the statistics of estimated Return on Investment and Benefit/Cost ratio. We must keep selling these numbers.

Mr. Schwebel asked if former U.S. Commerce Secretary Don Evans (now the Chairman of the Permian Strategic Partnership) had been engaged with what is happening with the Ports-to-Plains Corridor. Mr. Schwebel mentioned a presentation given on the Permian Miracle and asked if these statistics have been shared with this group.

Ms. Mays said yes, they have been contacted and TxDOT is preparing a freight plan. She agreed and emphasized the importance of having discussions with key partners. Ms. Mays noted she believes Mayor Pope has reached out to Mr. Evans, but that topic would be a discussion to have with Mayor Pope and he is not in the meeting currently. Ms. Mays discussed three distinct attributes that are in this corridor and are very important, including agricultural production, energy production, and trade. Mayor Gunter said the benefit is for the corridor, not the individual segments.

Ms. Mays asked if there were any other questions. No questions were raised. A break was taken at 9:10 a.m. The meeting resumed at 9:22 a.m.

Ms. Mays reviewed the overall Segment Committee Recommendations. She said we are now shifting gears, and the Advisory Committee report will focus on the entire corridor. Ms. Mays began to discuss the similarities between segments, including common project recommendations and common policy recommendations.

Mayor Gunter agreed that each segment is important, but that the corridor is the important outcome. Ms. Mays said HB 1079 outlines the process and the Advisory Committee recommendation is for the entire corridor.

Mr. Schwebel asked if the corridor's security checkpoints had been reviewed. There is one on US 83. We need to make sure there is a security checkpoint on the corridor.

Ms. Mays said that is included on Segment 3 and Mayor Lozano has brought this up several times during planning. She thanked Mr. Schwebel and confirmed the border patrol checkpoints will be considered with care to make sure that these do not become chokepoints. We must balance safety and security.

#### Discussion of Advisory Committee Report Outline and Schedule

Ms. Mays reviewed the original report outline presented during the October 1, 2019 Advisory Committee meeting and showed modifications that better present the information. She asked Mayor Pope if this approach was approved.

Mayor Pope said he was happy with this but wanted to know what others think. He likes that the outline has been modified. Mayor Gunter added she thinks it makes sense and the report approach is going in the right direction.

Ms. Mays reviewed the Advisory Committee schedule including three additional meetings in August, September, and October. The Advisory Committee report is due October 31 to TxDOT. She also stated that a public meeting is scheduled for August 25, 2020. Mayor Gunter asked what would be presented at the public meeting on August 25th. Ms. Mays said HB 1079 requires the Advisory Committee to provide the public an opportunity to provide feedback on its preliminary recommendations. Mayor Gunter asked if the meeting would be virtual due to COVID concerns. Ms. Mays said yes, this public meeting will be virtual and the previous public meetings in May were also virtual.

## Discussion of Advisory Committee Report

Wendy Travis, AICP, Garver, presented Chapter 1 – “Introduction”. The first chapter is an introduction to the report that highlights the importance of the corridor, key challenges, the charge the committee was given per HB 1079, the study process, organization of the report including appendices, an overview of HB 1079, and a list of Advisory Committee members. A graphic will be included to show the study process, milestones, and organization of what is presented in the report.

Ms. Travis opened the floor to discussion.

Ms. Mays said the biggest change is the necessity to articulate key challenges of the corridor that exist today. She noted that Mayor Lozano previously mentioned how trade has quadrupled since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994. The population is growing. We think it is important to capture these key issues, including safety, upfront in the report. I-27 was completed in 1992 with 124 miles existing today. Del Rio does not have direct access to an interstate.

Mayor Pope asked if Chapter 1 is where it is important to discuss prioritization, or if that will be discussed somewhere else in the report. Ms. Mays said that will be discussed further into the report with specifics. Chapter 1 is where we want to set the stage to why the study is important, provide details, then get into prioritization later.

Mayor Pope asked if there were any questions. There were none. Mayor Gunter agreed with the layout and approach for Chapter 1.

Tracy Michel, Garver, discussed Chapter 2 – “Current and Future Corridor Conditions and Assessment”. Chapter 2 is a summary of Segment Committee findings.

Mayor Gunter asked if we could talk about the Congressional designation as a “High Priority Corridor” on the national highway system in 1998 versus the request today to designate I-27 as an interstate. Ms. Mays acknowledged yes, there is a difference. The interstate designation allows the road to be built to interstate standards. The “High Priority Corridor” designation is different. The only criterion for being a Congressionally designated High Priority Corridor is that it is what Congress designates.

Mayor Gunter said let us just make a point that the “High Priority Corridor” national designation has not gotten us anywhere yet in extending I-27.

Ms. Michel continued with the Chapter 2 slide review. Mayor Gunter commented that the report should include what percent decrease there would be in crashes. Mayor Pope said this was a good comment and opened the floor to comments. He called on Joe Kiely of the Ports-to-Plains Alliance for input.

Mr. Kiely said that he thinks as we look at data in Chapter 2, it is the current and future information, and all the demographic data, without the interstate. However, when it comes to traffic, the interstate is brought in. He recommends limiting the data to what is currently happening and what is

expected to happen without the interstate. He said that to be an interstate, the facility must be recommended to the National Highway System.

Mayor Gunter agreed with Mr. Kiely's comments regarding the National Highway System designation. Ms. Mays agreed with removing the interstate comparison in Chapter 2. Judge Terry Carter, Sherman County Judge, said the highway designation should be used as a springboard to get us to interstate status.

Ms. Mays said the maps will state what type of roads are included (e.g., interstate, Super 2 highway, etc.) to help with the background for cost analysis.

Michelle Lopez, Garver, presented Chapter 3 – "Corridor Interstate Feasibility Analysis and Findings". Mayor Gunter made a comment regarding legends on the maps. She said that when using shades of the same color it is hard to decipher the meaning of the map. The thickness of lines is not readable with similar shades of color. Ms. Mays said that the maps will be updated for better readability. Mayor Pope noted that he would like the "\$4.1B" to be more prominent in the report, as it is an impressive number.

Mayor Gunter discussed the designation of the highway corridor back in 1998. She noted that the development of wind energy, solar energy, and fracking for oil and natural gas is much more evolved and robust now than it was back in 1998. Even when Congress designated the Ports-to-Plains Corridor as a High Priority Corridor, these things were not even happening or were just beginning.

A question was asked about the economic impact. Mr. Joe Bryan, WSP, said the economic impact numbers use 2020 constant dollars. A 3 percent discounted rate is used, which allows for time value of money. Therefore, inflation is accounted for throughout. He noted that these are recent numbers.

Ms. Mays asked what the committee would like to stress on the report chapters that were discussed. Do any key items stand out? Mayor Gunter said Commissioner Alvin New said it well in a previous meeting: safety, national security, congestion, and economic development.

Ms. Travis moved on to Chapter 4 – "Public Involvement and Stakeholder Engagement". This chapter includes the number of meetings for public involvement and the Advisory Committee. Pictures of meetings and interaction will be included.

Mayor Pope would like to see the Segment Committees information included in the chapter. The Advisory Committee report is based on the Segment Committees analyses and that process is woven into the chapter. Ms. Mays said yes and asked Ms. Travis to add the Segment Committees meetings in Chapter 4 and the consultation with TxDOT districts.

Mayor Pope asked if anything else was needed or if there were any further questions on Chapter 4. None were offered. He noted that the committee would likely have feedback when they see it.

## Discussion of Advisory Committee Preliminary Recommendations and Implementation Plan

Ms. Mays discussed Chapter 5 – “Recommendations and Implementation Plan”. The project list includes the entire corridor, including 20 interstate upgrade projects and 26 relief route projects. Ms. Mays said that extensive consultation with TxDOT districts occurred to provide short-, mid-, and long-term ranges for projects to be implemented, not prioritized. The Segment Committees used a different strategy. TxDOT looked at a realistic and strategic implementation plan. No costs or funding are represented here for individual projects. The cost estimates are for the entire corridor.

Mayor Pope asked if there were any questions. There were none.

Regarding recommendations for “Safety and Operational Improvements”, Ms. Mays said that the TxDOT districts raised some points that if interstate designation occurs, some of these improvements would already be included.

Mayor Gunter asked about funding. Where is the funding coming from and how do we understand high priority funding? How do we figure this out from a funding perspective? We can designate it all day long, but without funding, the projects will not move forward.

Mayor Pope said this is more of a prioritization effort with federal and state dollars. These are the projects that we think need to be started in the short-term, mid-term, and long-term. Same with route projects that are already underway. He noted he was curious to know what others think.

Mayor Gunter asked which of the 11 short-term recommended projects would happen first. Ms. Mays said that different projects in different districts could occur at different times.

Mayor Pope asked if this is a place where we should mention TxDOT’s 10-year Unified Transportation Program (UTP) and how that impacts funding at the district level. Ms. Mays said yes, we could mention the UTP, but projects are driven by the project development process.

Mr. John Speed, TxDOT Odessa District Engineer, explained the funding, priority, and implementation process. He said that as soon as this study is submitted, TxDOT will look at priorities within their districts. Each district would ask for funding through the UTP process.

Steve Warren, TxDOT Lubbock District Engineer, added that what we provided is a timeline assuming funding is available. To get into the UTP, funding must be identified. We would move forward as quickly as possible to develop these projects. Peter Smith, TxDOT Director of Transportation Planning and Programming noted that there would be a process to look beyond 10 years and start initial work to coordinate with the districts.

Mayor Pope commented on environmental studies. All projects require environmental study. Should environmental be done for large pieces of the corridor at one time? Is that realistic?

Ms. Mays asked the district engineers that were present for input. Carl Johnson, TxDOT Abilene District Engineer, said that he likes the idea of doing environmental in large segments, but it needs to be started early since it takes a lot of time to get through this process.

Mr. Speed said you can accelerate some portions where you have existing projects in progress. Most of these will require authorization through UTP, but it will likely be a piecemeal process. Mr. Johnson added that you cannot get too far ahead with the environmental process because you do not want to jump environmental out too early where TxDOT may get stalled before construction funding is ready. He discussed a Lamesa project as an example. That project was environmentally ready, but later defunded. Now TxDOT must start over. Mr. Johnson also noted that right of way, utility adjustments, and construction impacts are also key considerations in the project development process. Mr. Warren concurred.

Ms. Mays said project development would be a piecemeal process. She asked Roger Beall, Deputy Director for the TPP Division, for his input.

Mr. Beall said yes, there are lots of ways to do this. You can look at a longer corridor and get environmental approved and pull out smaller projects as funding becomes available. A disadvantage to that approach is that by evaluating a large area for environmental impacts, you will not be able to move forward with project development on some portions. This is how we have approached the development of the I-69 system in Texas. There is not a “one size fits all” approach. The key is funding. Without a dedicated source of funding, projects along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor will have to compete statewide for funding with all of TxDOT’s other projects.

Mayor Gunter said we do not want to dig deeper into this conversation because we are spinning our wheels if we are talking short-, mid-, and long-term since we do not have a dedicated source of funding. Ms. Mays said we are trying to set expectations for long after this study is submitted.

Ms. Mays said we will improve the readability of maps and graphics per Mayor Gunter’s comments. Policy recommendations were reviewed next. Mayor Gunter asked to move “TxDOT to submit a proposal requesting interstate designation” to be the first bulleted item when presented in the report. Judge Carter agreed with Mayor Gunter’s comment regarding moving the “requesting interstate designation” as the first bullet. Recommended projects should meet interstate standards so that they do not have to be upgraded later. Mr. John Medina of Big Spring said he thinks the designation is important. Do not deviate too far from HB 1079.

Mayor Pope asked for other input. None was offered.

Ms. Mays asked for any other policy recommendations that the committee would like to add.

Mayor Pope asked Joe Kiely if he had any other comments. Mr. Kiely said he thought everything had been covered. This brings all the ideas that came out of the Segment Committees and puts them in one place.

Mayor Pope asked if anyone else had comments. None were offered.

## Next Steps

Ms. Mays said this concludes the discussion on the draft chapters. We are working on all the chapters and we will get them to the Advisory Committee for review prior to the August Advisory Committee meeting. TxDOT is facilitating the preparation of the Advisory Committee report, but the

ownership of the report is with the Advisory Committee. If the committee members have not already done so, please read the Segment Committee reports to understand where information and recommendations came from.

Mayor Pope said thank you to TxDOT and the consultants for working hard. He asked the committee members to make sure to take time to review the draft Advisory Committee report chapters when they are provided and “let’s get it right”. He said as much as he would love for the Advisory Committee to meet in person on August 20, it is hard to see that we will be doing anything other than virtual given the pandemic situation.

Ms. Mays said that staff cannot travel beyond district lines. She said that the August 20 Advisory Committee will be a virtual meeting.

Mr. Medina said he appreciates TxDOT and that on August 5<sup>th</sup> they are having a ribbon cutting for opening of the US 87 relief route in Big Spring (invitation only) and is excited about TxDOT improving roads. Mayor Pope said it was great news that the western portion of the bypass will be completed.

The next Advisory Committee meeting is August 20, 2020 from 8 a.m. until noon and will be held virtually.

Mayor Pope asked for any last comments. No comments were provided. He thanked everyone for their time and efforts and said, “let’s finish the race”.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

#### Action Items

- Chapter 2 of the Advisory Committee report: remove the comparison to interstate
- Send draft report chapters to the Advisory Committee for review prior to its August 20 meeting.