

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

April 3, 2020, 8:00 a.m.

WebEx*

**Note: WebEx was required due to COVID-19 shelter in place orders*

Attendees

Segment Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Mayor Luis Sifuentes	City of Eagle Pass	Not present
Sid Cauthorn	Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Present via WebEx
Miguel Conchas	Laredo Chamber of Commerce	Present via WebEx
Anna De La Garza	Eagle Pass International Bridge System	Not Present
Liliana Flores	Del Rio Port of Entry	Present via WebEx
Nick Gallegos	Middle Rio Grande Development Council	Not Present
Melissa Huddleston	Laredo Motor Carriers Association	Not Present
Blanca Larson	Del Rio Chamber of Commerce	Not Present
Morris Libson	Eagle Pass Business and Economic Development Council	Not Present
Yvette Limon	Laredo International Bridge System	Not Present
Mayor Bruno Lozano	City of Del Rio	Present via WebEx
Sandra Martinez	Eagle Pass Chamber of Commerce	Not Present
Leo Martinez	Del Rio Economic Development Corporation	Not Present
Margie Montez	Del Rio International Bridge	Not Present
Judge Lewis G. Owens, Jr.	Val Verde County	Not Present
Judge Francisco G. Ponce	Dimmit County	Not Present
Mayor Pete Saenz	City of Laredo	Present via WebEx
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
Kirby Snideman	Laredo Urban Transportation Study (Metropolitan Planning Organization)	Not Present
Judge Tano E. Tijerina	Webb County	Present via WebEx

Raul S. Villareal	Laredo Licensed U.S. Customs Brokers Association, Inc.	Not Present
Advisory Committee Leadership		
Mayor Dan Pope, Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Chairman	City of Lubbock	Present via WebEx
Judge Stephen Smith, Ports-to-Plains Advisory Committee Vice Chairman	Sutton County	Not Present

Elected Officials

Marshal Hoak State Senator Flores Office

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays	Terry Martinez
Commissioner Alvin New	Sherry Pifer
Roger Beall	Jose Emilio Ramos
Loretta Brown	Roberto Rodriguez, III
Blake Calvert	David Salazar
Emily Clisby	Peter Smith
Gabriel De Ochoa	Akila Thamizharasan
Krista Jeacopello	Trent Thomas
Steve Linhart	

Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver	Sean Wray	Garver
Susan Chavez	Garver	Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Michele Lopez	Garver	Robert Ryan	Blanton & Associates
Tracy Michel	Garver		

Other Attendees

Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough
Joe Kiely	Port-to-Plains Alliance
Matt Wojnowski	City of Del Rio

Welcome

The Chair of Segment Committee #3 and City of Del Rio Mayor Bruno Lozano, called the meeting to order and took roll call.

Advisory Committee Chair and City of Lubbock Mayor Dan Pope welcomed Committee Members and said this was the third day in a row for meetings. He noted there were other things on everyone’s mind, particularly community leaders who are responding to changing needs and thanked everyone for being on the call. He said there have been a couple things that may look a little different since the Committee last met. One large change was after the last set of meetings, it was decided to focus

on a full interstate. TxDOT was the first to bring this to attention, and it was discussed with him as well as Texas Transportation Commissioner Alvin New and TxDOT leadership. He said it was a much simpler process and was a positive change. He reminded members it was less than 90 days out to when the Segment Committee reports are due, so we need to focus on Chapter 3 and 4 today. He said late Monday, we saw the economic numbers and those need some more work and we need to simplify them, so we will be pushing that discussion to May. We will also talk cost data today. These new costs are good numbers that are bottom up and include utilities and right-of-way, and the team will talk about how they came up with those numbers. We feel it is a much more accurate and robust study. It's more money, but it's something we need to understand and move forward to make recommendations.

Mayor Lozano thanked everyone for being online with so much going on, but this is something they needed to push forward and to have some good news communities can look forward to.

Peter Smith, TxDOT Transportation Planning and Program Director, said he wanted to echo both Mayor's expression of gratitude. He said this was a difficult time, and he appreciated everyone in attendance and thanked them in advance for their recommendations. He also thanked the team for the work they've done.

Recap of Previous Segment Committee Meeting

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Freight, Trade and Connectivity Section Director, explained the changes in the alternatives studied. She discussed the different analysis scenarios and mentioned that the original scenarios are now revised to include baseline (no build) and interstate highway scenario.

Ms. Mays and Mayor Lozano provided a recap of the February 3rd Segment Committee meeting in Laredo. At that meeting, the Committee reviewed forecasted conditions, planned and programmed projects, identification of gaps, preliminary corridor feasibility analysis, and a review of Chapters 1 and 2. Ms. Mays and Mayor Lozano gave a brief recap of each of those agenda items, highlighting the overview of findings for each topic. Ms. Mays explained the report chapter outline had changed. Nothing was lost, but the chapters were streamlined to avoid redundancy and repetition. Mayor Lozano emphasized there was a connectivity to ports of entry in Segment #3 and this segment would be working with agencies, ports of entry and U.S. Border Patrol. Ms. Mays continued with where the Segment Committee was in terms of the scope and schedule of the study.

Determination of Areas Preferable and Suitable for Interstate Design

Akila Thamizharasan, TxDOT Corridor Planning Branch Manager, started the presentation by reviewing a cross section of an interstate with frontage roads and one without frontage roads. She described the differences between those two options. Next, she explained federal guidance on interstate designation. There are three methods to obtain interstate designation.

Rachel Lunceford with the consultant team provided more detail about each method. Under Method 1, existing Segment #3 corridor outside of existing I-35 does not meet interstate standards and is not eligible for interstate designation by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). Next, she discussed the six criteria that corridors need to meet under Method 2 to be designated as a future interstate facility. For Method 2, the existing Segment #3 corridor, with the exception of I-35,

will need to meet criteria 1 through 6 and be subject to TxDOT and FHWA approval. Method 3 will involve a Congressional act to designate the corridor as an interstate facility.

Mayor Lozano asked if they could pursue Methods 2 and 3 simultaneously if we do get Congressional support from our representatives.

Roger Beall, TxDOT Deputy Director of Transportation Planning and Programming said if you have a Congressional act as future interstate, the criteria are that you must connect it to an existing interstate and meet other standards. With Method 2, if you don't have that Congressional act, the criteria must be met.

Mr. Smith said the question was more of if you can pursue both at the same time, and when one becomes successful, you can go with that.

Mr. Beall said yes, Methods 2 and 3 are exclusive of each other and can be pursued simultaneously.

Ms. Mays said the committee can recommend both, including Method 3. There is less TxDOT involvement with Method 3, but facts that TxDOT provides can be used.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

Ms. Lunceford continued the presentation by discussing cost estimates. She explained the costs are in 2020 dollars, a new software system (Concept Station) was used, it assumes a 75-mile per hour design speed, it uses TxDOT bids from each district for labor and prices, and it does not include costs for improvements to existing I-27. The estimates assume relief routes and include two estimates, one for frontage roads throughout the entire segment, and one for frontage roads in cities and towns. These estimates also include utilities and right-of-way at a high level.

Next, Ms. Lunceford reviewed the differences between the 2015 Initial Assessment report and the current study.

The cost estimate for the entire corridor as interstate with frontage roads is \$27.886 billion and \$18.857 billion for interstate with frontage roads in urban areas only. The Segment #3 cost estimate is \$8.023 billion for interstate with frontage roads in urban and rural areas and \$5.259 billion for interstate with frontage roads only in urban areas.

David Salazar, District Engineer from TxDOT Laredo, said the estimates look great, but if you break up Segment #3, from I-35 to Eagle Pass where you leave out frontage roads, there are some future planned projects for 4-lane divided highways with conventional funding, so it could help off-set the cost. He said between Eagle Pass and Del Rio, Carrizo Springs and Eagle Pass, there is a need for frontage roads in rural areas, especially between Eagle Pass and Del Rio. Having the model of frontage roads only in communities may not work. North of Del Rio, there could be no frontage roads, there is not much out there, and the terrain is rugged.

Ms. Mays said those were great points, and they would be relying on the TxDOT districts to give a reality check. She said they have insight to where frontage roads are needed whether they are rural or urban areas.

Mayor Lozano said it was an excellent point, given the amount of traffic going back and forth between Eagle Pass and Del Rio. There would be other small communities near Eagle Pass that would be highly impacted if no frontage roads were included.

Ms. Lunceford said these cost estimates consider planned and programmed projects.

Lastly, Ms. Lunceford provided a cost comparison of Segment #3 per mile cost to the I-69 Implementation Strategy and the I-35 Statewide Corridor Plan.

Mayor Pope said there was a lot of discussion about cost comparisons yesterday and asked Ms. Lunceford to describe it.

Ms. Lunceford said when the numbers were first coming in, they were significantly different than the 2015 study. They wanted to see how the cost estimates compared with other studies. However, there are differences in methodologies and assumptions. For example, I-69 was done prior to the software system (Concept Station) and in more urban areas. Since they had more time for those studies, they could go in and reuse infrastructure. They also may have frontage roads which could add cost.

Commissioner New said that it was good re-cap and explanation. He said another bullet item should be added to the presentation under I-69 to explain there are mainly rural areas left to improve and the costs are for that remaining work to be completed. He said It would give a better idea of what I-69 really did cost.

Mayor Pope agreed with Commissioner New. He said he was skeptical of the I-35 number and that they were too low. He said he realized there are stretches of I-35 that are rural, but not as many anymore. He doesn't think it draws an accurate comparison.

Mayor Lozano agreed with Mayor Pope. He also was skeptical of the I-35 numbers.

Commissioner New said it was just a sniff test, and they accept that, so the slide just needs to be cleaned up.

Ms. Mays said for the frontage roads, TxDOT will revise those numbers for Chapter 4 to include some frontage roads as Mr. Salazar mentioned that are necessary in rural areas.

Mayor Lozano agreed and said they would add that portion to the map for recommendations.

Preliminary Committee Recommendations

Ms. Mays started the discussion of Committee recommendations. She provided a brief overview of important data for the Committee to consider from the forecasted data including population

demographics, freight, traffic, and safety. She also reviewed recommendations from the previous meetings.

Robert Ryan with the consultant team used an interactive map to capture the Committee's preliminary recommendations. The Committee decided to create a sub-committee to make specific recommendations along the corridor. Mayor Lozano and Judge Tijerina will put together names for the sub-committee by the end of the following week.

As members were making recommendations, there were also three Mentimeter questions asked.

The questions are as follows:

Mentimeter Question #1: What added capacity improvements and locally preferred routes would you recommend from Sutton/Edwards County Line to Del Rio?

No responses.

Mentimeter Question #2: What added capacity improvements and locally preferred routes would you recommend from Del Rio to Carrizo Springs?

No responses.

Mentimeter Question #3: What safety/operational improvement would you recommend?

No responses.

Funding Sources

Susan Chavez of the consultant team reviewed funding sources. Funding sources include federal state, local, and public/private funds. Private funding may include County Energy Transportation Reinvestment Zone and public/private partnerships.

Sid Cauthorn, Ports-to-Plains Alliance, asked if the two trillion-dollar proposal recently announced was included.

Ms. Mays said that proposal would be included in the federal aid program. She asked Mr. Salazar to discuss UTP funding sources.

Mr. Salazar said they have been using Category 1 and 4 for Super-2 Highways. The majority is Category 1 through 12. He then discussed some specific projects and what funding was being used for each.

Ms. Mays noted funding from Rider 11B (Border Infrastructure Rider) and the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program are unique to Segment #3 due to trade. There is an advantage in Segment #3 for that. There are different funding sources for each Segment.

Review and Discussion of Report Chapters 3 and 4

Ms. Mays reviewed changes made to the Segment Committee Report outline before asking committee members for comments and questions on draft Chapters 3 (Forecasted Conditions) and 4 (Corridor Feasibility Analysis).

Ms. Mays extended the deadline for committee members to provide comments to TxDOT on the two draft chapters to April 10, 2020. All comments that were received during the meeting and by the April 10th deadline will be added to a comment matrix to ensure each was addressed.

Comments on Chapters 3&4 from Segment #3 Meeting

Comment	Commenter
Chapter 3 Comments	
Emphasize accessibility and mobility to Ports of Entry within Segment #3 and how it makes this segment unique.	Mayor Lozano
Add information about infrastructure improvements and how it affects Mexican side, Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Del Rio and stress that they need to compete and cooperate at the same time.	Commissioner New
Chapter 4 Comments	
None	-

Mayor Lozano asked the Committee members to send their comments to Caroline by April 10th.

Open Discussion

Ms. Mays asked what should be emphasized in the economic development analysis for Segment #3. She asked what they see as economic development impacts if this segment was upgraded to interstate standards.

Mayor Pope said it's about trade, not only coming to Texas and the U.S. but also how we get goods to Mexico. An interstate in the segment is likely going to have the most profound effect on the economy. It's about jobs and commerce and everything we talked about.

Mr. Cauthorn agreed and said it's not only going to impact the segment, but the entire state and the alignment all the way to Denver.

Mayor Lozano said locally, we'll be seeing an influx of imports and exports in addition to what they are already seeing. It would be a positive economic impact, focusing on factors of global trade, trade with Mexico, and what that means for the entire Ports-to-Plains Corridor. Texas is just a part of the entire picture.

Ms. Mays commented that the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement will help facilitate the movement of that trade.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is proposed to be held Monday, May 11 by WebEx.

Mayor Pope said thank you to everyone for participating and he was thankful for staff and consultants. He thanked Commissioner New for joining and Mayor Lozano and Judge Tijerina for their leadership. He said we are making progress, and it's a long process, but we're going about it the correct way. Thanks for sticking with it.

Commissioner New said bless you all and thank you for being servants and leaders. He wished everyone well.

Mayor Lozano thanked everyone for being on, especially with so much going on. He thanked them for their efforts and said they would press on.

The meeting adjourned at 11:07 a.m.

Action Items:

- Mayor Lozano and Judge Tijerina will put together a sub-committee list to develop specific recommendations and send to Caroline.
- TxDOT will revise the cost estimates for the frontage roads in rural areas.
- The TxDOT and consultant team will work with the districts and subcommittee to detail recommendations.
- Committee members will send all written comments to TxDOT by April 10, 2020.
- The next Segment Committee Meeting will be held on Monday, May 11, 2020.