

Meeting of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

RGVMPO POLICY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, April 24, 2024 – 1:30 PM

MINUTES

Presiding: Chairman Commissioner David L. Fuentes (Hidalgo County)

I) Call to Order

Chairman Commissioner David L. Fuentes called the Transportation Policy Board meeting to order at 1:30 P.M., and a quorum was established. The Meeting was held in person with members present.

II) Roll Call

RGVMPO Transportation Policy Board Representatives in attendance were as follows:

| Members Present: | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Entity | Individual |
| Hidalgo County | Comm. David L. Fuentes (Chairman) – PRESENT Comm. Everardo Villarreal (Proxy) - |
| City of Brownsville | Mayor John Cowen (Vice-Chairman) – PRESENT Helen Ramirez (Proxy) |
| Cameron County | Judge Eddie Treviño, Jr. Com. Sofia C. Benavides - PRESENT |
| City of McAllen | Mayor Javier Villalobos (Designee) City Manager Roy Rodriguez (Alternate) - PRESENT |
| City of Edinburg | Mayor Ramiro Garza (Designee) - PRESENT Comm. Daniel “Dan” Diaz (Alternate) |
| City of Mission | Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza (Designee) Asst. City Manager Juan Pablo “JP” Terrazas (Alternate) - PRESENT |
| City of Harlingen | Mayor Norma Sepulveda (Designee) - PRESENT Gabriel Gonzalez (Alternate) |
| City of Pharr | Mayor Ambrosio “Amos” Hernandez (Designee) - ABSENT Ruben Alfaro (Proxy) |
| Starr County | Judge Eloy Vera (Designee) Reyna Guerra Proxy – PRESENT |
| City of San Benito | Mayor Ricardo “Rick” Guerra (Designee) – PRESENT Manuel De La Rosa (Alternate) |
| Cameron County RMA | Frank Parker, Jr. (Designee) PRESENT Arturo A. Nelson (Alternate) |
| Hidalgo County RMA | S. David Deanda Jr. (Designee) Ramon Navarro, V. (Proxy) - PRESENT |
| Valley Metro | Tom Logan (Designee) - PRESENT Nancy Sanchez (Alternate) |
| TxDOT Pharr District | Pedro “Pete” Alvarez (Designee) - PRESENT Rex A. Costley (Alternate) |
| | |
| EX-OFFICIO | |
| LRGVDC | Manuel Cruz |
| | |
| Others Present: | |
| RGVMPO | Luis Diaz |
| RGVMPO | Staff |

III) PUBLIC COMMENT

NONE

IV) ACTION & DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Approval of Minute(s).

Consideration and Action to Approve the Minutes of March 27, 2024.

No corrections were noted to the minutes of March 27, 2024. Motion to approve by Mayor Ricardo Guerra from the City of San Benito and it was seconded approved by Tom Logan from Valley Metro. The item was unanimously approved.

B. Discussion and Action on Weslaco Loop – RFP Subcommittee Score

Fernando Cantu presented the results of the Weslaco Loop corridor study RFP process. He informed the board that two applicants, ETSI and TEDSI, were evaluated by a subcommittee. ETSI received a score of 92.6, while TEDSI received a score of 85.9. Following the evaluation, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) unanimously recommended proceeding with ETSI as the selected firm for the project.

Chairman David L. Fuentes confirmed with Fernando that TAC's unanimous recommendation and voiced his approval for selecting ETSI.

A motion was made by Frank Parker (Cameron County RMA) to officially approve ETSI as the firm to conduct the Weslaco Loop corridor study. The motion was seconded by Daniel Chavez (City of Pharr). Chairman David L. Fuentes confirmed that the TAC unanimously approved ETSI. Motion passed.

C. Consideration and Possible Action regarding Category 7 Utilization & Carryover

Eva Garcia began the presentation by highlighting the importance of understanding Category 7 Utilization and Carryover. She reiterated that the Texas Transportation Commission had passed Minute Order 116630 on January 17th, amending two sections in the Texas Administrative Code. These amendments impact the Unified Transportation Program and the transportation allocation funding formulas.

Key Points:

Texas Administrative Code Amendments:

- Category 2 funding is for priority projects determined by the MPO.
- Annual review of Category 5 and Category 7 carryover to address potential underutilization of funding.

If an MPO in Texas carries over more than 200% of its Category 7 allocation, TxDOT can reduce the MPO's Category 2 carryover and transfer that amount to the district's Category 11 for safety projects.

Current Fiscal Year Allocations:

- Fiscal Year 2024 allocation: \$32.74 million.
- Fiscal Year 2023 carryover: \$115 million.
- Revised allocation: \$147.74 million.
- Scheduled to obligate: \$25.14 million, leaving a remaining allocation of \$122.6 million.
- Carryover threshold is 200% of the allocation, meaning anything over \$65.48 million is at risk.

Past Utilization Rates:

- Historically low utilization rates, with the current rate at 17%.
- Comparisons of past fiscal year allocations, carryovers, and utilization rates highlighted the need for increased utilization and decreased carryover.

Chairman David L. Fuentes asked if the data pertained solely to Category 7. Eva Garcia confirmed it was just Category 7 and clarified the figures include all phases, not just construction.

Chairman David L. Fuentes questioned the methodology behind the reported utilized amounts. Eva Garcia explained the figures are based on the Federal Project Authorization Agreement (FPAA), covering the entire project cost, not just monthly billings.

Pete R. Alvarez clarified that funds are initially state funds, reimbursed by the federal government later. He also mentioned the importance of prioritizing Right of Way (ROW) acquisitions and progressing through project phases to ensure full utilization of funds. And that utilization of funds is recorded phase-wise, impacting the ability to request additional funding.

Eva Garcia also detailed the ongoing assessments and strategic planning to increase utilization and decrease carryover. She highlighted improvements made by advancing certain projects, reducing the risk of fund transfer. She reiterated the importance of continued collaboration with TxDOT, district partners, and project managers to stay under the 200% carryover threshold by fiscal year 2026.

Frank Parker Jr.: Inquired about the location and handling of funds. Pete R. Alvarez: Confirmed funds are part of a reimbursement process, initially utilized by TxDOT and then reimbursed by the federal government.

Chairman David L. Fuentes suggested no immediate action is required unless there are strong opinions to the contrary.

No action taken.

D. Discussion and Action Approval of Federal Functional Classification request of SL 195 Projects Phase I and Phase II

Luis Diaz presented two requests from TxDOT for federal functional classification of State Loop 195 projects in Starr County: Phase I: FM 3167 to FM 755 (map on page 170 of packet). Phase II: FM 649 to FM 3167 (map on page 184 of packet) Both projects are intended to serve as a relief route between Rio Grande City and Roma and are being requested as rural principal arterials. The MPO will follow the standard procedure for FC requests, starting with assembling the packet and submitting it through the appropriate channels (Pharr TxDOT district, TPP, FHWA).

A motion was made by Pete Alvarez (TxDOT) to approve the re-programming of funds. The motion was seconded by Reyna Guerra. The motion passed unanimously.

E. ESRI User Conference – Out of State Travel request

Luis Diaz requested approval for out-of-state travel for three GIS staff members (Miguel Arispe, Fernando Cantu, and Alma Provencio) to attend the ESRI annual conference in San Diego, California.

Luis added that the conference will cover new GIS processes and software advancements relevant to the MPO's work. The staff members will be able to implement these advancements upon their return, improving the MPO's GIS capabilities.

A motion was made by Reyna Guerra (Starr County) to approve the out-of-state travel request. The motion was seconded by Ramon Navarro (Hidalgo County RMA). The motion passed unanimously.

V) PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS

A. Presentation and Discussion regarding Active Transportation Media Awareness Campaigns (Education and Encouragement)

Eva Garcia presented on active transportation media awareness campaigns as part of the December 2020 Active Transportation Plan's education and encouragement initiatives. The presentation highlighted resources from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, League of American Bicyclists, and American Hiking Society for promoting National Bike Month and Trails Day. Eva discussed the importance of tracking physical activity, time spent outdoors, and economic benefits resulting from trail usage.

Eva Garcia focused on making existing data accessible online, developing story maps for marketing trails, and the possibility of hiring a media specialist to enhance communication efforts. The goal is to promote the use of trails and encourage active transportation through various initiatives, including customizable templates, graphics, events, and educational webinars.

There were no questions from the board members.

B. Update on RGVMPO Executive Director Selection Process

Manuel Cruz began by outlining the timeline and process of the executive director hiring, which started last year with the formation of a hiring committee consisting of Commissioner Fuentes, Judge Trevino, Mayor Garza from Edinburg, Pete from TxDOT, and Mayor Cowen. The application period was extended to March 31st, resulting in a total of 12 applicants. Mr. Cruz explained that approval was sought from TxDOT and FHWA to use RGVMPO funds to hire a recruiting firm for the selection process. On April 8th, preliminary verbal approval was received, and written approval is pending. Additionally, as of April 18th, approval for the procurement process is awaited. Chairman Fuentes expressed gratitude for the efforts and emphasized the importance of a thorough process to attract high-quality applicants. He requested Cruz to keep the board updated on the progress and anticipated approval.

Manuel Cruz confirmed no immediate action is required and assured the board of continued updates.

C. RGVMPO Executive Director’s Report and Updates

Luis Diaz began by providing a brief overview of the budget status, noting that the expenditure is well within the allocated budget. He stated that \$697,690 has been expended so far, out of the budgeted amount of \$1,062,260.

Diaz also informed the board about his upcoming absence due to personal reasons. He shared that he and his wife are expecting their third son, with an anticipated delivery date of May 7th. As a result, he will be intermittently absent throughout the month of May. He will not be able to attend the Technical Advisory Committee meeting but assured that the agenda is being prepared, and arrangements are in place to ensure continuity during his absence. Diaz expressed his intention to return in time for the next Policy Board meeting in the following month.

Chairman Fuentes thanked Diaz for the update and wished him well with his family matters.

D. TxDOT Project Status Report

TxDOT Pharr Area Staff provided updates on the following projects. Detailed information within the agenda packet.

- FM 1015 (North & South)
- FM 676
- IH-69E Ramp Reversal
- SH107
- BUS 77
- FM 2556 Drainage Structures

VI) OTHER BUSINESS (OLD OR NEW)

none

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the RGVMPO TPB Members, Chairman Commissioner David L. Fuentes called the meeting adjourned at 2:21pm.

ATTEST:



**RGVMPO POLICY COMMITTEE
 (TPB) VICE CHAIRMAN**