

**Meeting of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization  
RGVMPO POLICY BOARD MEETING**

**Wednesday, September 25, 2024 – 1:30 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Presiding 1:32pm – 2:06pm: Chairman Commissioner David Fuentes (Hidalgo County)**

**Presiding 2:06pm – 3:11pm: Vice Chairman Mayor John Cowen (City of Brownsville)**

**I) Call to Order**

Chairman Hidalgo County Commissioner David L. Fuentes called the Transportation Policy Board meeting to order at 1:32 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:**

<b>Members Present:</b>	
<b>Entity</b>	<b>Individual</b>
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. - PRESENT Com. Sofia C. Benavides
City of McAllen	Mayor Javier Villalobos (Designee) Assistant City Manager Michelle Rivera (Proxy) - 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) Gabriel Gonzalez (Alternate) – PRESENT
City of Pharr	Mayor Ambrosio “Amos” Hernandez (Designee) Commissioner Daniel Chavez (Alternate) - PRESENT
Starr County	Judge Eloy Vera (Designee) Reyna Guerra (Proxy) - PRESENT
City of San Benito	Mayor Ricardo “Rick” Guerra (Designee) Tom Goodman (Proxy) – PRESENT
Cameron County RMA	Frank Parker, Jr. (Designee) - PRESENT Arturo A. Nelson (Alternate)
Hidalgo County RMA	S. David Deanda Jr. (Designee) Ruben Alfaro (Proxy) – PRESENT
Valley Metro	Tom Logan (Designee) - PRESENT Nancy Sanchez (Alternate)
TxDOT Pharr District	Pedro “Pete” Alvarez (Designee) - PRESENT Rex A. Costley (Alternate) - PRESENT
<b>EX-OFFICIO</b>	
LRGVDC	Manuel Cruz
<b>Others Present:</b>	
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 August 28, 2024.

**Motion to approve correction by Pedro “Pete” Alvarez from TxDOT. Approval was seconded by Mayor John Cowen from the City of Brownsville. The item was unanimously approved.**

#### B. Executive Session

I. Personnel Matters Pursuant to Section 551-074 (1) to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer or employee.

RE: Interim Executive Director and Executive Director

Motion to move on to executive session by Pedro “Pete” Alvarez from TxDOT, motion was seconded by Mayor Ramiro Garza Jr. from the City of Edinburg.

II. Reconvene into an Open Session at 2:01pm.

- As a member of the hiring committee and as a Policy Board member Commissioner David L. Fuentes made a motion to appoint Michael Medina as the new RGVMPO Executive Director with an annual salary of \$180,000. The motion was seconded by Frank Parker Jr. from Cameron County. Motion carried without further discussion.
- Chairman David Fuentes introduced Michael Medina to the board. Mr. Medina joined the meeting virtually. Chairman Fuentes thanked Mr. Medina for joining. Mr. Medina expressed his gratitude for the opportunity and stated that he is looking forward to collaborating with everyone once a starting date is confirmed.
- Chairman David Fuentes Jr. expressed his gratitude to the board, particularly acknowledging Luis Diaz for his leadership and dedication in managing the RGVMPO during the executive director hiring process.
- Chairman Fuentes then proposed a motion to appoint Luis Diaz to the newly created position of Director I, effective upon the new Executive Director's arrival. The proposed salary for this position is \$100,000. The motion was seconded by Pedro “Pete” Alvarez from TxDOT. Motion carried without further discussion.

At 2:06pm Chairman Fuentes announced the meeting would move on to the next agenda item. He then informed the board that he needed to depart from the meeting due to a prior commitment.

He assured the board that Hidalgo County would continue to be represented by his alternate commissioner, Ellie Torres. Vice Chairman Mayor John Cowen would preside over the remainder of the meeting.

#### V) PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS

A. **Discussion on the FY 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) November 2024 Revision Cycle**

Rodolfo Zamora noted that the TIP is currently under revision and a 30-day public involvement process is underway.

Mr. Zamora reminded the board that the public involvement period for the November Revision Cycle will run from September 9th to October 9th, 2024. MPO staff will conduct both in-person and online/social media outreach.

Materials Available: An announcement flyer, timeline for the revision cycle, and links to short-range planning tables (TIP) and long-range planning tables (MTP) were included in the meeting packet for board member review. Mr. Zamora requested that board members review the current program and submit any requests for revisions by October 1, 2024.

Mr. Zamora also reminded the board that every two years, MPOs and Departments of Transportation prepare a new TIP with supporting materials, including those related to federal compliance, performance measures, resolutions, and programming tables for both TIP & MTP years. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and Transportation Policy Board (TPB) members will be asked to act on the proposed planning table revisions during the scheduled October meetings.

Mr. Zamora concluded by stating that MPO staff are available to address any questions or concerns from the board regarding the TIP revision process and timeline and more details are included within the agenda packet.

**Informational item, no action required.**

**B. Discussion regarding Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 16 Revisions and Project Readiness Workshop.**

Eva Garcia provided the Transportation Policy Board with information concerning recent revisions to the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 16 and a summary of the Project Readiness Workshop held on September 12, 2024. She presented a synopsis of the revisions to TAC Chapter 16, highlighting the potential impacts on the RGVMPO's operations and funding. Specifically, she noted that Texas Transportation Commission Minute Order (MO) 116630, approved on January 17, 2024, amends the TAC and impacts Transportation Allocation Funding Formulas for the Unified Transportation Program (UTP).

Ms. Garcia stated that the RGVMPO has been meeting regularly with the Finance Division and the Transportation Planning and Programming (TPP) group at TxDOT. She expressed confidence that the RGVMPO would be granted an additional year (fiscal year 2025) to reduce their carryover amount below the two-year threshold. She anticipated a decision from TxDOT within the next two to three months.

Ms. Garcia reviewed the RGVMPO's initial estimate in March 2024, which projected \$25 million in obligations. Due to successful efforts to increase utilization, that estimate was revised to \$60 million by May 2024. However, based on data from August 2, 2024, the actual obligation amount was \$52.24 million, falling short of the estimate but still representing a significant increase from the original projection. The resulting carryover for fiscal year 2024 was \$95.5 million, exceeding the previous estimate of \$87 million.

Ms. Garcia highlighted that the adoption of the new Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) on May 29, 2024, significantly impacted the obligation schedule. The revised TIP includes new phases for projects, such as right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation, which were previously not explicitly accounted for. These changes resulted in an increased obligation estimate of \$113.5 million for fiscal year 2025, a substantial increase from the previous estimate of \$58 million.

Ms. Garcia discussed the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) 24-month letting schedule, noting that while the RGVMPO has projects programmed for fiscal years 2025 and 2026, the proposed let dates often extend into fiscal years 2027 and 2028. She expressed concern about this delay but acknowledged that projects can be let at any time if they are ready.

**Carryover Threshold and Required Obligations:** Ms. Garcia emphasized that to comply with the new TAC Chapter 16 rules and avoid the transfer of funds, the RGVMPO must reduce its carryover to \$66.78 million. This requires obligating a minimum of \$63 million in fiscal year 2025.

**Project List and Federal Project Authorization Agreements (FPAs):** Ms. Garcia reviewed the RGVMPO's project list, noting that it includes both individually listed and grouped projects. She pointed out a new column indicating the FPA execution date and expressed concern over the lack of executed FPAs for several projects, particularly as fiscal year 2025 approaches. She also highlighted the inclusion of right-of-way release dates for upcoming projects.

Ms. Garcia acknowledged that ongoing project changes are anticipated, including the potential division of the Inspiration Roadway project and the pending functional classification of projects totaling \$44 million.

Ms. Garcia addressed questions raised in the previous month's meeting regarding the availability of funding for programming. She explained that, theoretically, if all projects were obligated within their programmed fiscal year, the RGVMPO would face a funding deficit by fiscal year 2027. However, she acknowledged that project delays are common and could impact this projection.

Ms. Garcia concluded by reiterating the dynamic nature of the TIP and the ongoing need for adjustments and updates. She emphasized the importance of continued monitoring and collaboration to ensure compliance with the revised TAC Chapter 16 and optimize the utilization of available funds.

Pedro "Pete" Alvarez (TxDOT) clarified to the point of Ms. Garcia about no money being available; that annual funding allocations would remain stable but emphasized the need to complete projects by 2025-2026 to utilize available funds effectively.

Judge Eddie Trevino Jr. inquired about pending AFAs. Ms. Garcia stressed the importance of timely information from local governments for AFA processing and highlighted the impact of right-of-way and utility acquisition on project timelines and estimates

Assistant City of McAllen Manager Michelle Rivera inquired about regular updates on project progress, suggesting monthly reports. Ms. Garcia explained that the Project Readiness group meets quarterly and that updates are provided throughout the fiscal year. She also noted that various entities, including TxDOT, hold monthly meetings with project sponsors to monitor progress. Ms. Garcia added that the minutes for meetings are available upon request.

Ms. Garcia continued her presentation by discussing the allocation of funds across different project phases and counties. She highlighted that a significant portion of the budget is dedicated to construction and right-of-way acquisition, with Hidalgo County receiving a substantial share for projects within its communities. She also noted that the analysis did not include projects pending functional classification, which account for a significant amount of funding.

Ms. Garcia emphasized the importance of collaboration and teamwork among project sponsors to ensure successful project implementation. She stressed the need for adequate staffing, training, and financial management to support the process.

She then shifted the focus to the broader context of federal requirements and the MPO's planning process. She highlighted the need to align transportation decision-making with national goals, including safety, economic strength, accessibility, and public health. She also emphasized the importance of public participation and incorporating public comments into the project prioritization process.

Ms. Garcia introduced a project scoring framework, and a tool called "decision lens" to facilitate transparent and data-driven project prioritization. She encouraged the board to consider the effectiveness of the current scoring form and the clarity of the prioritization process.

Ms. Garcia concluded with an interactive session with the board using Mentimeter, posing seven questions related to project prioritization.

### **Informational item, no action required.**

### **C. Discussion on Annual RGV Thoroughfare/ROW Plan Amendment Process**

Luis Diaz presented an overview of the annual amendment process for the RGV Thoroughfare/Right-of-Way (ROW) Plan. Mr. Diaz went over some to the key points of the amendment process.

- **Current Amendment Cycle:** The RGVMPO is currently accepting amendments for the 2024 cycle. This process involves recording existing roadway projects and any planned future development.

- **Timeline:**

- September 12, 2024: Amendment process initiated.
- October 8, 2024: Check-in meeting with local governments (LGs) to review progress and submitted amendments.
- December 20, 2024: Deadline for submitting amendments.
- February 2025: Presentation to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Transportation Policy Board for approval.
- March 2025: Submission to County Commissioners Court for final approval.
- April 2025: Recording of all approved amendments.
- August 2025: Commencement of the next amendment cycle.

Mr. Diaz emphasized that the Thoroughfare/ROW Plan amendment process is conducted annually.

Mr. Diaz concluded his presentation by opening the floor for questions from the board regarding the amendment process and timeline

No questions or comments were raised by the committee members.

#### **D. Update on RGVMPPO TMA Planning Certification Process**

Luis Diaz provided an update on the RGVMPPO's Transportation Management Area (TMA) planning certification process, specifically addressing the results of the recent desk audit conducted by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Mr. Diaz highlighted the following takeaways from the process:

- The FHWA reviewed 18 criteria as part of their assessment. The RGVMPPO received positive feedback overall, with only four areas identified for improvement.
- Mr. Diaz highlighted the MPO's active involvement in various state-level committees with TxDOT, which will be reported to the FHWA.
- The MPO will enhance its website with additional visualization tools, such as the crash analysis dashboard and maps of upcoming projects, to address this area.
- Safety Planning and Congestion Management Process: Mr. Diaz confirmed that a new congestion management plan has been compiled and will be presented to the TAC and Policy Board next month.
- MPO Staffing and Training Needs: Mr. Diaz announced the recent hiring of new staff members, including Clara Munoz (Planner) and Haoji He (GIS Specialist), and the upcoming arrival of another GIS specialist on October 14th. He also acknowledged the appointment of Michael Medina as Executive Director. With these additions, the MPO has only one remaining vacancy for a Transportation Planner.
- The official certification review will be held on December 5th and 6th, 2024. A virtual option will be available for remote participants. A roundtable discussion with stakeholders will take place on December 5th at 5:00 PM in the current meeting room.
- The RGVMPPO anticipates receiving a report from the FHWA in 2025 detailing the findings of the certification review and an overall assessment of the MPO's performance.

#### **E. RGVMPPO Contract Updates**

Luis Diaz provided an update on the status of various RGVMPPO contracts.

- *Legal Services:* After unsuccessful negotiations with the initial bidder, the RGVMPPO will now pursue a contract with Casso Law Firm, who offered more competitive hourly rates.
- *Passenger Rail Feasibility Study:* This project will proceed shortly after finalization of legal services.
- *Weslaco Loop Feasibility Study:* This study is underway, examining various alignment options.
- *Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update:* This project is progressing, with a projected completion in October 2025.
- *Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Study:* This federally funded project is advancing smoothly and is expected to conclude in March 2025.

Mr. Diaz concluded his presentation by offering to answer any questions from the board regarding the contract updates, no questions. **Informational item, no action required.**

**F. RGVMPPO Executive Director’s Report and Updates**

Luis Diaz presented a summary of the RGVMPPO's current fiscal year budget status highlighting that the adjusted budget for the fiscal year is \$4,249,042. The total expenditures to date are \$1,468,005, representing 34.57% of the allocated budget. Mr. Diaz added that this spending level is well below the projected expenditure of \$1,947,477 at this point in the fiscal year and that the remaining budget balance is \$478,722.

Mr. Diaz concluded that the RGVMPPO is operating well within its budget for the current fiscal year.

**G. TxDOT Project Status Report**

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

- Hidalgo County
  - FM 676 Westside
  - FM676 Eastside
  - FM 1425
- Cameron County
  - IH 69E Ramp Reversal
  - SH 4 (Concrete Pavement)
- TxDOT Project Design Updates
  - SH 107 Hidalgo and Cameron County
  - FM 3362 / 2061 Hidalgo County

**No other questions or comments. Informational item, no action required.**

**VI) OTHER BUSINESS (OLD OR NEW)**

Next Transportation Policy meeting would be held on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

**ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business to come before the RGVMPPO TPB Members, Vice Chairman Mayor John Cowen called the meeting adjourned at 3:11pm.*

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