

Meeting of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

POLICY BOARD MEETING

Thursday, December 12, 2024 – 10:00 AM

MINUTES

Presiding 10:01am – 10:07am: Vice Chairman Mayor John Cowen (City of Brownsville)

Presiding 10:07am – 10:50am: Chair Commissioner Ellie Torres (Hidalgo County Pct. 4)

I) Call to Order

Chairman Hidalgo County Commissioner David L. Fuentes called the Transportation Policy Board meeting to order at 10:01 A.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. Ellie Torres (Chairman) – PRESENT Comm. Everardo Villarreal (Alternate) -
City of Brownsville	Mayor John Cowen (Vice-Chairman) – PRESENT Comm. Pedro Cardenas (Alternate)
Cameron County	Judge Eddie Treviño, Jr. - PRESENT Com. David A. Garza (Alternate)
City of McAllen	Mayor Javier Villalobos (Designee) Eduardo Mendoza (Proxy) - PRESENT
City of Edinburg	Mayor Ramiro Garza (Designee) - PRESENT Comm. Daniel “Dan” Diaz (Alternate)
City of Mission	Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza (Designee) – PRESENT Asst. City Manager Juan Pablo “JP” Terrazas (Alternate) - PRESENT
City of Harlingen	Mayor Norma Sepulveda (Designee) – ABSENT Gabriel Gonzalez (Alternate)
City of Pharr	Mayor Ambrosio “Amos” Hernandez (Designee) Commissioner Daniel Chavez (Alternate) - PRESENT
Starr County	Judge Eloy Vera (Designee) - ABSENT Reyna Guerra (Proxy)
City of San Benito	Mayor Ricardo “Rick” Guerra (Designee) – PRESENT Fred Sandoval (Alternate)
Cameron County RMA	Frank Parker, Jr. (Designee) - PRESENT Arturo A. Nelson (Alternate)
Hidalgo County RMA	Robert L. Lozano (Designee) – PRESENT Ezequiel Reyna Jr. (Alternate)
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 Executive Director	Michael Medina
Caso Law Firm	Jose Caso
RGVMPO Staff	

III) PUBLIC COMMENT

NONE

IV) ACTION & DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Approval of Minute(s). Consideration and Action to Approve the Minutes of September 25, 2024.

Frank Parker, Jr. from Cameron County RMA made a motion to approve the minutes. Approval was seconded by Ramiro Garza from the City of Edinburg. The item was unanimously approved.

B. Special Election to elect a new Chair

Michael Medina stated that in accordance with the bylaws, a special election needs to be called to nominate a new Chair since Commissioner David Fuentes has stepped down. Opened the floor for nominations to the Chair position.

Judge Eddie Treviño raised concerns and questions, noting that the matter was discussed at the last meeting. Clarified that Commissioner Fuentes is not stepping down but being replaced by another member of the Hidalgo County court. Emphasized that the bylaws do not authorize the Executive Director to call for an election unless Hidalgo County explicitly renounces its chairmanship. Expressed dissatisfaction with the agenda item, citing lack of consultation and proper preparation.

Jose Caso (RGVMPO Legal Counsel) provided clarification, acknowledging the conflict between two provisions in the bylaws the two-year rotation between Hidalgo and Cameron counties and the Vice Chair's succession to Chair. Concluded that Commissioner Ellie Torres stepping in as Hidalgo County's representative resolves the issue without the need for an election.

Judge Eddie Treviño asked for clarity on the intent of the meeting—whether Mayor Cowen should continue as Chair or Commissioner Ellie Torres should serve the remainder of the one-year term as Hidalgo County's representative. Highlighted the need to address bylaws ambiguities to avoid future misunderstandings.

City of Edinburg Mayor Ramiro Garza moved to nominate Commissioner Ellie Torres as Chair of RGVMPO. Judge Eddie Treviño seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Transition of Chairmanship

Vice Chair John Cowen announced the motion's approval and invited Commissioner Ellie Torres to assume her role as Chair.

Remarks by Commissioner Ellie Torres

Commissioner Torres thanked the board for the opportunity to serve as Chair. Expressed enthusiasm for working collaboratively across the region to advance RGVMPO's mission and goals. Concluded with a commitment to fostering regional development.

C. Discussion and Action on FY 24-25 Unified Planning Work Program Amendment #4.

Fernando Cantu presented the Fourth Amendment to the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Explained that recent changes by the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) require transit planning dollars to be included in the UPWP.

- The City of McAllen requested two new tasks:
 - Subtask 1.8: Allocation of \$120,000 to fund a new Transit Planner position for McAllen Metro.
 - Subtask 3.9: Identification of a \$500,000 grant for transit-oriented development.
- The MPO requested an additional \$40,000 for Task 3.5 to support performance-based planning, enabling staff to evaluate projects using a performance measure matrix.

Chair Commissioner Torres: Asked for a motion to approve.

A motion was made by Tom Logan from Valley Metro to approve FY 24-25 Unified Planning Work Program Amendment #4. The motion was second by Mayor Norie Gonzalez-Garza from the City of Mission. The motion passed.

D. Discussion and Action on the 2026 UTP – CAT 2 Project List

Pete Alvarez provided an overview of the 2026 UTP (Unified Transportation Program) Category 2 project list. Mr. Alvarez noted that while projects were submitted on December 6th to meet the deadline, final approval is contingent on the MPO Policy Board's decision. Key points included financial constraints due to inflation and prioritization of fully funded projects in 2025 UTP.

Mr. Alvarez explained the "leveling effort" to balance project timelines across fiscal years.

The projects affected by delays or adjustments: (refer to Agenda Packet Item IV.D)

- Projects in blue: Adjusted as part of statewide leveling efforts (e.g., rescheduling into the next fiscal year).
- Projects in red: Reflect cost changes or schedule updates (e.g., SH 495 moved to 2027).

Specific projects removed due to funding constraints:

- FM 1732 (Cameron County) and FM 1925 (Northern Hidalgo County).

Judge Eddie Treviño asked if the UTP remains fluid, allowing for reallocation or adjustments as conditions change. Response by Pete Alvarez: Yes, adjustments are made annually to ensure priorities are met. Discussions with staff are ongoing to reduce estimates and seek additional capacity.

Mayor Ramiro Garza confirmed details about specific projects, including drainage and operational improvements on Business 281 to I-69. Pete Alvarez clarified that funding changes were indicated in black (additional requests) versus red (removed funds).

A motion was made by Pedro “Pete” Alvarez from TxDOT and seconded by Eduardo Mendoza from the City of McAllen. The motion passed.

E. Take possible action on TAC’s recommendation to announce a call for planning studies for inclusion in the FY 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Task 5 Special Studies.

RGVMPO Executive Director Michael Medina informed the Policy Board that there is a remaining balance of approximately \$77,000 in the UPWP Task 5 for special studies.

Mr. Medina also noted that there is an additional \$1.9 million in unprogrammed funds within the current UPWP. He explained that there is a need to identify specific items eligible for Planning and Local (PL) funding in the UPWP. He highlighted the importance of planning studies for certain projects.

Mr. Medina introduced the PEL tool to accelerate projects by investigating environmental constraints early on. He emphasized the benefits of using PEL (Planning and Environmental Linkages) to proactively identify and address environmental issues, potentially saving time and resources during project development.

Mr. Medina shared an example from El Paso, where a PEL study covering 100 square miles identified \$700 million worth of projects, with many now in construction. He clarified that PEL can be used for various projects, including transit and other necessary studies.

Mr. Medina closed his presentation by proposing that, if the Policy Board accepts the TAC recommendation, he would return in January with a timeframe for nominations for planning studies to be included in the FY 2025 UPWP.

No questions were raised by the Policy Board members.

A motion was made by Frank Parker, Jr. from Cameron County RMA and seconded by Tom Logan from Valley Metro. The motion passed.

F. Approval for RGVMPO staff to start coordinating the RGVMPO Policy Board Retreat

Mr. Medina confirmed the established practice of holding an annual retreat for the RGVMPO Policy Board. He highlighted that training has been a key element of past retreats and proposed incorporating training on the "accredited degree process" as a key topic for the retreat. This process outlines how a project is nominated, developed, and ultimately constructed. He suggested including a focus on life cycle cost analysis within the training.

Mr. Medina requested direction from the Policy Board to begin exploring available dates for the retreat and to report back with options.

No questions were raised by the Policy Board members.

A motion was made by Mayor Norie Gonzalez-Garza from the City of Mission and seconded by Mayor John Cowen from the City of Brownsville. The motion passed.

G. Discussion & Approval to direct the RGVMPO Executive Director to provide recommendation on Policy Developments.

Michael Medina asked the board for approval to direct the RGVMPO Executive Director to provide recommendations on policy developments. Mr. Medina presented some observations and recommendations for developing policies to improve the RGVMPO's project development process.

He recommended creating a standardized project request form to facilitate project evaluation and benefit analysis for the long-range plan (MTP).

Mr. Medina also suggested establishing a mechanism for a regular call for projects to create a pool of potential projects for the MPO's consideration. This would allow the MPO to evaluate projects holistically, considering factors beyond just funding eligibility.

He emphasized the need for a robust project tracking system to monitor project progress through various phases (preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition, etc.). This would provide the Policy Board with a clear understanding of project status and potential issues.

Mr. Medina proposed developing a formal project selection process in collaboration with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). He suggested providing quarterly reports to the Policy Board on the status of projects.

Robert Lozano (Hidalgo County RMA) asked if the recommendations imply that these practices are not currently in place. Michael Medina clarified that some mechanisms exist but are often tied to specific funding categories, leading to a siloed approach. He stressed the need to evaluate projects holistically and prioritize their inclusion in the MTP before focusing on funding. He used the example of TASA projects, which are often evaluated solely by their eligibility for that funding category. Mr. Medina explained the importance of prioritizing projects based on their readiness and alignment with the MTP, rather than solely on funding availability. He cautioned against "loading" the TIP with projects ("baked potato" analogy) without ensuring adequate funding, which can lead to project slippage.

Mayor Ramiro Garza asked if the proposed call for projects would be open-ended or occur at specific times, such as the beginning of the fiscal year. Michael Medina explained that a project call could happen at any time, but the typical cycle involves projects moving from the MTP to the TIP. He emphasized the importance of aligning projects with the MTP and UTP (Unified Transportation Program) to ensure their eligibility for funding. He stated that the goal is to establish parameters to accelerate project development.

A motion was made by Robert L. Lozano from Hidalgo County RMA and seconded by Commissioner Daniel Chavez from the City of Pharr. The motion passed.

V) PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS

A. TxDOT Project Status Report

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

- o Hidalgo County
- o Cameron County
- o Starr County

TxDOT Pharr District Staff also provided an update on TxDOT Project Designs. (Detailed information within the agenda packet.)

No other questions or comments.

VI) OTHER BUSINESS (OLD OR NEW)

Robert Lozano inquired about having the RMA's present status reports in the same format as TxDOT. Michael Medina informs us that it is the case, but it only happens on a quarterly basis.

Pete Alvarez and Judge Eddie Trevino seek clarification on having the reports monthly or quarterly.

Chair Commissioner Torres commented on the MPO for doing a great job during the certification process.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the RGVMPPO TPB Members, Chair Ellie Torres called the meeting adjourned at 10:50am.

ATTEST:



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