

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

**Wednesday, January 15, 2025 – 1:30 PM**

**Presiding: Chair Commissioner Ellie Torres (Hidalgo County Pct. 4)**

**I) Call to Order**

Chair Hidalgo County Commissioner Ellie Torres 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:**

<b>Members Present:</b>	
<b>Entity</b>	<b>Individual</b>
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. Com. David A. Garza (Alternate) - PRESENT
City of McAllen	Mayor Javier Villalobos (Designee) 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) – PRESENT Asst. City Manager Juan Pablo “JP” Terrazas (Alternate) - PRESENT
City of Harlingen	Mayor Norma Sepulveda (Designee) City Manager Gabriel Gonzalez (Alternate) - PRESENT
City of Pharr	Mayor Ambrosio “Amos” Hernandez (Designee) Maria Rangel (Proxy) - PRESENT
Starr County	Judge Eloy Vera (Designee) Reyna Guerra (Proxy) - PRESENT
City of San Benito	Mayor Ricardo “Rick” Guerra (Designee) – PRESENT Fred Sandoval (Alternate)
Cameron County RMA	Frank Parker, Jr. (Designee) Arturo A. Nelson (Alternate) – PRESENT
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) - PRESENT
<b>EX-OFFICIO</b>	
LRGVDC	Manuel Cruz
<b>Others Present:</b>	
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 December 12, 2024.

**Reyna Guerra from Starr County made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Rex A. Costley from TxDOT Pharr District. The item was unanimously approved.**

## **B. Discussion and Action on RGVMPO Policy Board Executive Committee**

Chair Commissioner Ellie Torres provided an overview of the proposed Executive Committee, highlighting its roles and responsibilities. She emphasized that this committee would enable a structured approach to policy review and operational improvements. She also noted that similar committees exist within other Boards and function effectively. Chair Torres added that the committee would convene as needed, depending on the scope and urgency of the issues requiring attention. She stated that to establish this committee formally, amendments to the existing RGVMPO Bylaws would be necessary. These amendments would define the committee's structure, responsibilities, and procedural guidelines. She added that the committee would convene as needed, depending on the scope and urgency of the issues requiring attention.

Mr. Medina provided insight into how other MPOs structure their executive committees, explaining that they act as a decision-filtering body before recommendations reach the policy board. He emphasized the importance of ensuring technical recommendations aligned with federal and state regulations before final approval.

Chair Torres sought clarification on whether the committee's formation was being approved immediately or if appointments would be determined later. Medina confirmed that while the committee's establishment was under review, the selection of members would occur later. He also noted that examples of other MPO executive committees and their bylaws would be provided, along with legal input, before finalizing the necessary amendments to the Policy Board's bylaws.

David Garza questioned whether forming the executive committee was a necessity or simply a procedural requirement. Michael Medina explained that the committee was needed based on discussions with federal partners during a recent review. He highlighted the importance of having policies and procedures in place to guide project development and ensure eligibility under federal requirements. Medina also referenced his previous experience with another MPO, where such a committee proved beneficial.

Frank Parker inquired about the number of members and attendance expectations. Medina responded that some MPOs maintain a standing meeting schedule but only convene when necessary. He added that some executive committees consist of five or seven members who represent the Policy Board and contribute to discussions regarding federal and state compliance as well as operational needs.

Pedro Alvarez emphasized the importance of the committee's size, citing a previous hiring process where a five-member committee facilitated thorough discussions and allowed input from other Policy Board members. He suggested that having a five- to seven-member committee would ensure diverse representation while keeping the Policy Board informed. Mr. Alvarez also noted that the executive committee's role is to provide perspectives and recommendations, with final decisions resting with the Policy Board.

Mr. Medina provided insight into how other MPOs structure their executive committees, explaining that they act as a decision-filtering body before recommendations reach the policy board. He emphasized the importance of ensuring technical recommendations aligned with federal and state regulations before final approval.

**A motion was made by Pedro Alvarez from TxDOT to establish the RGVMPO Policy Board Executive Committee. The motion was seconded by Reyna Guerra from Starr County.**

## **C. RGVMPO 2025 Transportation Policy Board Meeting Calendar – Request for Approval**

Chair Commissioner Ellie Torres introduced the RGVMPO 2025 meeting calendar, explaining that approval of this calendar will allow staff to Communicate the meeting dates to the public via the website, secure the meeting room for all scheduled meetings and publish important meeting dates, including those related to Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) revisions.

Luis Diaz added that included in the packet are the dates for the upcoming Policy Board meetings for 2025. He stated that if there is any discussion or conflicts, they should be disclosed at this time. If no conflicts exist, the board should approve the dates as presented.

Pedro Alvarez raised a discussion point regarding a requested date change. He mentioned that TxDOT is required to submit UTP categories by the first Friday of December each year. To align with this requirement and avoid the need for a special meeting, he proposed moving the December 17th meeting to December 3rd. This change would ensure that the Policy Board's approval aligns with such a submission deadline.

Michael Medina emphasized the importance of finalizing the calendar with all significant dates highlighted. He noted that the Policy Board needs to act on key dates, such as TIP amendments that go to the STIP at the state level. He also suggested coordinating with the Pharr District to identify any internal deadlines to ensure they are captured in the final calendar.

**A motion to approve the RGVMPPO 2025 Transportation Policy Board Meeting Calendar, with the proposed amendment to move the December meeting to December 3rd, was made by Reyna Guerra from Starr County and seconded by board member David Garza from Cameron County. The motion was approved unanimously.**

**D. Discussion and Action to recommend the approval of the RGVMPPO to participate in the FY2025 Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Partnership.**

Chair Commissioner Ellie Torres introduced the agenda item, explaining that this action would allow RGVMPPO to participate in flexing unspent Category 7 (CAT 7) funds into other funding categories rather than returning the funds to the federal government.

Luis Diaz explained that the STBG Partnership is a recurring initiative aimed at ensuring federal funds allocated to the MPO are fully utilized before they lapse. The \$24.35 million in funds will be directed to selected categories (1, 4, 11, and 12) within MPO boundaries without affecting programmed projects or causing delays. The partnership allows RGVMPPO to collaborate with TxDOT and federal partners to optimize the use of these funds.

Ellie Torres sought clarification on whether the STBG Partnership serves as a safeguard to prevent funds from lapsing, to which Luis Diaz confirmed that it does.

Pedro Alvarez emphasized that the partnership does not impact Category 7 funds but instead provides TxDOT an opportunity to collaborate with federal partners without altering the allocation of those funds.

**A motion was made by Michelle Rivera from the City of McAllen and seconded by Mayor Ricardo Guerra from the City of San Benito. The motion passed.**

**E. Amendment to the contract with Alliance Transportation Group (ATG) to include Task 8**

Chair Commissioner Ellie Torres introduced the proposed amendment to the existing contract with Alliance Transportation Group (ATG) to include Task 8. This amendment is necessary to incorporate recommendations outlined in the recent federal review before the adoption of the new Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) in December.

Fernando Cantu presented the contract amendment, explaining that this would be the second amendment to the contract. The amendment extends the contract and adds Task 8, which includes 8 tasks derived from 20 federal recommendations. Due to the tight timeline for MTP development by December, issuing an RFP for a new vendor would delay the process by at least three months. To avoid this delay, the contract with ATG is being extended. The requested amendment amount is \$127,802.01.

David Garza inquired about procurement issues. Fernando Cantu clarified that there are none, as the contract remains valid until December and can be amended as needed.

Michelle Rivera asked if there was a 25% cap on amendments. Fernando Cantu stated that he found no such limitation in procurement bylaws.

Michael Medina noted that TxDOT confirmed the MPO could proceed with amendments at the board's discretion. However, he emphasized that the best practices suggest soliciting RFPs for new work to ensure fairness in federal processes.

Chair Ellie Torres confirmed that the amendment addresses 8 of the 20 recommendations, specifically 1, 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, 16, and 19.

David Garza highlighted that county and city-level contracts often have caps on increases before requiring procurement and recommended obtaining written confirmation from TxDOT.

**A motion was made by David A. Garza from Cameron County to approve the amendment to the contract with Alliance Transportation Group (ATG) to include Task 8. The motion was seconded by Ramiro Garza Jr. from the City of Edinburg.**

## **V) PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS**

### **A. February 2025 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Revision Cycle**

Chair Ellie Torres formally announced the commencement of the February 2025 STIP revision cycle. This process allows the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to request any project changes to be included in the state's short-range plan. The next opportunity for revisions will be in May 2025.

Rodolfo Zamora provided an update on the February 2025 STIP revision cycle, noting that the MPO is awaiting federal approval of the November 2024 revisions. Once approved, an announcement will be made to the board and advisory committee. He also highlighted the start of the public involvement process, expected by the end of next week, as a federal requirement for amendments to STIP, TIP, or the long-range plan (2045 MTP).

Chair Ellie Torres informed the board that she has requested Mr. Medina to provide a cheat sheet of important dates and deadlines. This would serve as a quick reference to help board members and stakeholders stay informed and organized throughout the year with MPO's important dates.

### **No other questions or comments**

### **B. Announcement of Planning (PL) Project Call (Unified Planning Work Program) UPWP Task 5**

Chair Ellie Torres stated that this announcement formally initiates the call for special studies under the MPO. She recommended directing staff to cap project nominations at \$330,000, which would allow for the funding of up to six special studies.

Luis Diaz officially announced the opening of the call for planning projects. He outlined that a total of \$77,000 has been allocated under Task 5, the PL portion of the UPWP budget add that an additional \$1.9 million is available. Mr. Diaz added that based on the available funds, the board has the discretion to allocate \$330,000 per project, allowing for up to six projects. The deadline for submissions is **February 6**. All project nominations must be submitted by the end of that day.

Michael Medina commented that he would send a communication to the Policy Board along with the TAC members, making himself available about a week or two before the deadline to assist with project submissions. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that submitted projects meet the definition of regional significance and align with the intent of a study. He also noted the distinction between a study and project development, highlighting opportunities to develop studies that could support future project development.

David Garza asked whether the \$330,000 cap would be a firm limit or if special circumstances would allow for a higher allocation, such as a project costing \$450,000. Michael Medina responded that projects exceeding the cap could be considered if they meet regional significance. Such projects would be reviewed by TAC and the Policy Board, which would determine their merit relative to funding availability. While the cap was set to allow multiple studies, Medina acknowledged the possibility of exceptional cases and emphasized the need for clear policies and community engagement in the submission process. He emphasized the importance of having multiple studies but acknowledged that particularly strong submissions might request the full \$2 million available. In such cases, TAC and the Policy Board would evaluate the merit of the project relative to its funding request. He also noted that while there is no strict selection process, the executive committee could help establish policies to guide these decisions. Medina highlighted the importance of transparency and engagement with the community in project submissions, ensuring clarity on the rules and expectations for funding.

Chair Ellie Torres added that it would be possible for two projects, each costing \$150,000, to be combined.

David Garza inquired if the funding cap was a set amount, to which Michael Medina responded that it was not, but it was recommended.

Frank Parker suggested that a regional project needed in the valley is a rail intermodal facility. He explained that such a facility would involve yards where flat cars arrive with containers—either domestic or international—for distribution throughout the valley. He noted that while it might take a long time for the Port of Brownsville to see containerships, such a project would enhance the region's competitiveness and benefit local industries. He emphasized that this type of project aligns with the MPO's goals. Michael Medina, Ellie Torres, Frank Parker, David Garza and Robert Lozano agreed that this was an effort requiring collaboration from every entity and the MPO, as it is a regional project that would benefit everyone. He noted that while the Port of Brownsville is unlikely to see containerships soon, such a project would enhance the region's competitiveness and benefit everyone in the valley.

#### **No other questions or comments**

### **C. Update on Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Rule Surface Transportation Program Metro Mobility (STP MM) Category 7 carryover**

Chair Torres introduced the announcement regarding the carryover amount affected by the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) rule. She informed the Board that this update occurs annually unless the Board takes proactive measures to ensure that projects are let as programmed in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and that any monetary amounts remain below the 200% threshold.

Luis Diaz provided an in-depth update on the TAC rule related to the Surface Transportation Program Metro Mobility (STP MM) Category 7 carryover. Key points discussed included:

- The Texas Administrative Code rule was enacted in January of the previous year by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Commission.
- The rule impacts the amount of carryover an MPO holds in Category 7, requiring it to remain within the 200% threshold.
- Any carryover exceeding the 200% threshold is removed from the MPO's Category 2 and transferred to Category 11 District Discretionary, which funds safety programs within the region.
- A table was presented on-screen, detailing the financial impacts of the TAC rule on the MPO.

Luis closed his presentation by informing the board that the MPO has taken a proactive approach by forming a TAC subcommittee. The subcommittee's primary goal is to review current projects within the TIP to identify potential projects for FY 2026 that can be let and utilize more funds, thereby preventing carryover in the future.

Pedro Alvarez added that the goal is to minimize regional risk by ensuring efficient utilization of Category 7 funding, as it is being closely tracked. If Category 7 funding exceeds the 200% threshold, Category 2 dollars—critical for mobility projects—risk being reallocated to safety projects. While safety remains the number one priority, there are many mobility projects in the region that currently lack funding. Several entities have requested roadway upgrades, but the current capacity in Category 2 is insufficient. Therefore, it is crucial to utilize Category 7 funds efficiently to prevent these reallocations.

Mayor Ramiro Garza emphasized the importance of consistently tracking projects, questioning whether the monitoring occurs monthly or quarterly. He noted that delays are often due to factors beyond local or state control and that some projects require unique evaluations. Using Edinburg as an example, he highlighted how capital projects are reviewed throughout the year as part of the city's budget process. He inquired about additional steps the MPO could take to ensure efficient fund utilization and maximize impact.

Michael Medina outlined the MPO's plan to assess and accelerate projects using Category 7 funds. This includes distributing eligibility guidelines, utilizing mapping tools, evaluating project readiness, and ensuring local entities prepare the required matching funds. The objective is to program projects by May and advance them for letting in FY 2026.

Frank Parker inquired about the flexibility of matching fund requirements, questioning whether local entities could apply incremental spending on preliminary work toward their overall match obligation to accelerate project timelines. Michael Medina acknowledged the potential for in-kind contributions and emphasized the need for projects to be included in the MTP and TIP to secure a CSJ. He stated that the MPO would evaluate necessary amendments to streamline project readiness and ensure timely programming.

Chair Ellie Torres inquired whether a Project Readiness Committee had been officially established. She acknowledged that some reporting has been provided but noted that updates have primarily been categorized as "in progress."

Michael Medina confirmed that reports are being made and proposed a pilot program to clarify project readiness requirements. He emphasized the need to assess whether projects in the TIP are truly ready for letting. He highlighted the impact of unlet projects on carryover and stated that the MPO will report quarterly on TIP progress, aiming to reduce excess carryover and improve project readiness.

Pedro Alvarez and Robert Lozano discussed and agreed on the importance of collaboration to bring beneficial projects to the region.

#### **No other questions or comments**

#### **D. Transportation Management Area (TMA) Federal Certification Review Update**

Chair Ellie Torres announced the Board's receipt of the recommendations and commendations from the recent TMA Federal Certification Review. She emphasized the significance of these findings for the continued development and compliance of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO).

Luis Diaz's presentation focused on the RGVMPO initial recommendations and commendations received from the Transportation Management Area (TMA) Federal Review conducted on December 5-6, 2024. The review assessed RGVMPO's metropolitan transportation planning process for compliance with federal requirements. It took place on December 5-6, 2024, at the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) in Weslaco, Texas. The last TMA certification review was completed in December 2020. In May 2021, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a letter certifying the RGVMPO as substantially compliant with federal regulations (USC 134(k) and 49 USC 1607). Luis Diaz informed that the list of commendations and recommendations is included within the packet for review. Michael Medina noted that a timeframe for addressing the comments would be provided once the final report is received.

Chair Ellie Torres emphasized that the recommendations and commendations were included in the agenda packet for review.

#### **No other questions or comments**

## **E. TJKM Transportation Consultants – Safe Street for All (SS4A) Comprehensive Plan Midway Project Status**

Chair Ellie Torres introduced the agenda item, providing the Board with an update on the development of the Safe Street for All (SS4A) Comprehensive Plan Midway Project.

TJKM team reviewed the attached presentation included within the agenda packet, highlighting details about the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO) development of a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan.

- The plan is part of the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) initiative.
- The plan focuses on improving road safety in Starr County, Hidalgo County, the City of Harlingen, and the City of Brownsville.
- The update covers the plan's progress, stakeholder engagement, and next steps.
- SS4A Grant Funding: The RGVMPO received a grant from the SS4A program to develop the region's first Comprehensive Safety Action Plan.
- Focus on Hidalgo County and Pilot Locations: With over 50% of the population residing in Hidalgo County, the plan specifically addresses safety needs in this area. It also identifies key countermeasures and potential pilot locations (Starr County, Hidalgo County, City of Harlingen, and City of Brownsville) for future implementation.
- Current Efforts: Data collection and analysis activities, Identification of key safety issues and countermeasures and development of the plan's framework and components.

Melany Rodriguez provided insights into the relevance of this project to the MPO, explaining that the SS4A plan findings will be instrumental for the implementation grant. She noted that whatever is discovered through this SS4A plan can be incorporated into the planning process for the City of Brownsville, City of Harlingen, Starr County, and Hidalgo County.

Michael Medina added that projects identified in MPO planning documentation or a comprehensive plan are more likely to receive federal grant funding. He emphasized that having this project memorialized in a document strengthens the MPO's ability to pursue future grants.

David Garza inquired about the project completion timeline, and Melany Rodriguez confirmed it is expected to finish by March.

### **No other questions or comments**

## **F. Alliance Transportation Group (ATG) Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Update**

Chair Ellie Torres introduced the agenda item regarding the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update. She informed the board that this announcement would provide an update on the plan development schedule.

Ben Magallon from the Alliance Transportation Group presented an update on the development of the 2050 MTP. He highlighted the progress made at the halfway point of the contract and provided insights into key milestones achieved so far. Mr. Magallon updated the board on the current agenda including the project deliverables, Public and stakeholder engagement, project listings, congestion management process, performance-based planning, multi-modal and intermodal planning, and timeline and next steps.

Frank Parker raised a question regarding environmental monitoring. He noted that last year it was determined that one of the environmental monitors is located on the west side of Brownsville by the International Bridge and picks up all the southeast wind from Matamoros, Mexico. He suggested that one recommendation could be to move the monitors north of Brownsville to capture more of the rural area's environmental conditions. In response, Ben Magallon acknowledged the concern and stated that while some factors are beyond their control, they do their best to address them. He mentioned that they would discuss the feasibility of including such a recommendation with their APA partners.

Pedro Alvarez asked a question regarding the travel demand model as part of the process. He inquired about the expected completion timeline. Ben Magallon responded that the contract was amended to assist staff in reviewing the travel demand inputs being developed. He stated that the timeline remains on schedule despite TxDOT having a statewide contract freeze. The last update indicated that the travel demand model was still on track for completion by March or April of 2025. He emphasized that this model would be a key factor in scoring projects and would play a major role in the final evaluation process. Pedro Alvarez agreed, noting that the model would help identify high-priority roadways to ensure collaboration in delivering necessary projects.

**No questions or comments**

**G. Announcement State Transportation Alternatives Project Call**

Pedro Alvarez provided detailed information about State Transportation Alternatives Project Call. TxDOT hosts workshops to inform local governments (LGs) about their upcoming Transportation Alternatives project call process. The workshops will provide guidance on project call requirements and answer questions. Mr. Alvarez provided workshop Information such as in person and virtual options.

**No questions or comments**

**H. 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 questions or comments.**

**I. Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) Project Status Report**

Ruben Alfaro and Ramon Navarro provided updates on projects with the Hidalgo County RMA. (Detailed information within the agenda packet.)

**No questions or comments.**

**J. Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) Project Status Report**

Eric Davila provided updates on projects with the Cameron County RMA. (Detailed information within the agenda packet.)

**No questions or comments.**

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

**ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business to come before the RGVMPO TPB Members, Chair Ellie Torres called the meeting adjourned at 2:43pm.*

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_

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