

Chapter 15: International Bridges in Hidalgo County

The HCMPO currently has three existing international bridges: McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge, Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge and Progreso-Nuevo Progreso International Bridge. There is also an old existing structure known as the Las Ebanos International ferry crossing. This is a hand drawn ferry operating on either border crossing on the Rio Grande River. This ferry is more of a tourist attraction than a economically viable crossing. The ferry was constructed of wood and could accommodate a maximum of two vehicles or one large vehicle until the mid 80s when it was reconstructed out of steel and can now accommodate up to three vehicles.



McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge

The City of Hidalgo sits on the bank of the Rio Grande River separating Texas from Mexico. The McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge connects the two cities, McAllen on the Texas border and Reynosa on the Mexico border, and it is one of the busiest border crossings. The McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa area has established itself as a leading industrial border location center. This bridge serves to facilitate trade between Mexico and United States.

Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge

The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge is a modern, state-of-art facility that opened in 1994. The bridge is 3.1 mile long and is elevated to protect surrounding wetlands and farmlands. It was built to relieve congestion on the McAllen/Hidalgo-Reynosa Bridge specifically commercial traffic congestion that negatively impacts the downtown area of Reynosa. Access to the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge is provided directly from US 281 in the United States. In Mexico, there is a direct connector road from the Pharr-Reynosa international bridge to Mexico's highway 2, which connects Reynosa to Matamoros and provides access to the Reynosa airport. These roads allow traffic using the Pharr-

Reynosa International Bridge to bypass the heavily urbanized areas of McAllen, Hidalgo and Reynosa.

Progreso – Nuevo Progreso International Bridge

Nuevo Progreso is the Mexican border town known to locals as Las Flores; this small town has become the prime Mexican shopping destination for visitors in the Rio Grande Valley. This quaint little town caters to the tourists by offering shops and restaurants that make a day of shopping and dining a great Mexican experience. The Progreso-Nuevo Progreso International Bridge is a two-lane toll bridge connecting Nuevo Progreso in Mexico with the towns of Progreso and Progreso Lakes in the United States. The bridge located in the downtown area of Nuevo Progreso and is approximately 20 miles downstream of the McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge.

There are two bridges that have been proposed for international crossings into Mexico: Anzalduas International Bridge and Donna/Rio Bravo International Bridge.

Anzalduas International Bridge



The City of Mission had first master-planned an international bridge project on both sides of the border, which was approved in 1999. The highly anticipated Anzalduas International Bridge is under construction. Ground broke officially on June 12, 2007 and will be completed in June 2009. The bridge will have two southbound and northbound lanes and a pedestrian crossing. It will be 2.7 miles long and will cross a flood plain, wooded area, canal and the Rio Grande River. It will be located 3 miles up to the Rio Grande River from the Hidalgo-Reynosa Bridge on Steward Road in Mission, just southwest of McAllen. The crossing will connect at a loop road to the Texas Farm-to-Market Roads 494 and 1016 near Granjeno. The U.S. side of the bridge is expected to cost nearly \$80 million, and will be paid for by the federal government, from the International Bridge Board (cities of Hidalgo, McAllen and Mission) and the Texas Department of Transportation. The city of McAllen plans to earn back its \$28,5 million investment through bridge tolls. The bridge will connect the South McAllen and Mission

international trade areas to the west end of Reynosa, where many maquiladoras and other cross-border businesses are located. This will help to facilitate just-in-time delivery, allowing companies to keep inventory costs down, progress trade with Monterrey, (because it is a quicker and safer route), and it will be the most efficient way for business traffic from northern Mexico to reach the United States. The bridge is also expected to create hundreds of new jobs, and provide the vision of increase economic expansion, improved commercial and industrial development, better infrastructure and enhanced quality of life. The Anzalduas International Bridge will also lead to the future I-69 in the United States, and it will have four lanes in each direction. This would surely help both countries in establishing new connections to major trade areas crossing the bridges in the Valley. Under the diplomatic note issued by the U.S. State Department, Anzalduas can't serve tractor-trailers until 2015 or until traffic on the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, the only commercial bridge in the McAllen area, reaches 15,000 northbound trucks a week. The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge is expected to reach capacity in the very near future for there is a road project which is roughly 150-mile highway under construction between San Luis Potosi and Ciudad Victoria that local proponents say could draw more commercial traffic to the Rio Grande Valley, and the Mexican Department of Bridges and Roads is expecting to have the road finished in 2009. Trucks instead of passing through Laredo on their way from Mexico City to Houston, they can save between 2 and 2 ½ hours by taking highway to Victoria and continuing north to McAllen or Brownsville.

Donna-Rio Bravo International Bridge

The Donna-Rio Bravo International Bridge has a long history that dates back 29 years. In 1979, the City of Donna was issued a presidential permit to construct, maintain and operate a bridge across the Rio Grande River. Due to lack of financial resources, the project never got off the ground. In 1993, the city began the necessary engineering studies to construct the bridge. Progress, however, remained slow and the project again stalled.

In 2002, the Cities of Donna and Mercedes negotiated a partnership to jointly undertake the engineering studies and construction project. The Donna-Mercedes International Bridge Corporation completed the majority of the engineering studies, which were approved by U.S. and Mexican agencies. Nevertheless, the partnership ended following elections.

The City of Donna decided to move forward anyway, and created the Donna International Bridge Corporation to complete the remaining engineering plans and bring the project closer to construction. In 2005, the Corporation received environmental clearance and a U.S. Coast Guard permit allowing the project to be constructed by U.S. Customs.

The bridge proposed is to be built near U.S Highway 281 and Farm-To-Market Road 493. This bridge would promote direct economic growth for the area of Donna-Weslaco-Mercedes in Texas and the Rio Bravo region in Mexico and also support the economic development between here and San Antonio. The main purpose of developing this bridge is to provide access to commercial traffic. This would mitigate environmental issues, such as pollution created by traffic congestion by providing an efficient crossing for uninterrupted route.

In order to efficiently improve the transportation system, the HCMPO is planning in establishing communication once again with the Mayors of the cities of Reynosa and Rio Bravo from Mexico, and coordinate efforts with the Secretaria de Comercio y Transporte from Mexico. Working together, both the metropolitan area and Mexico, can be prepared for an increase in economic expansion and efficiently improve and create the best transportation system possible for the region and at the same time improve the quality of life.

Coordinated Border Infrastructure Program

The Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) program, Section(s) 1101(a)(11) 1303 of SAFETEA-LU, was setup to improve the safe movement of motor vehicles at or across the land border between the U.S. and Canada and the land border between the U.S. and Mexico. This program replaces the TEA-21 CBI discretionary program which ended in FY 2005. Funds are distributed to among border states by formula based on factors related to the movement of people and goods through the land border ports of entry within the boundaries of the State as follows:

- 20% based on number of incoming commercial trucks
- 30% number of incoming personal motor vehicles and buses
- 25% based on weight of incoming cargo by commercial trucks
- 25% based on number of land border ports of entry

The revised CBI program envisions special oversight by the FHWA Division Office involved. The State must provide appropriate documentation describing the eligibility of each project approved for funding under this border program. All projects approved for funding in this program must meet the intent of the legislation and have a clear and direct connection to cross-border movement of vehicles. To be eligible for CBI funding a project must improve and facilitate/expedite cross-border motor vehicle and cargo movements. States may use funds in a border region, defined as any portion of a border State within 100 miles of an international land border with Canada or Mexico, for the following types of improvements to facilitate/expedite cross border motor vehicle and cargo movements:

- Improvements to existing transportation and supporting infrastructure;
- Construction of highways and related safety and safety enforcement facilities related to international trade;
- Operational improvements, including those related to electronic data interchange and use of telecommunications;
- Modifications to regulatory procedures;
- International coordination of transportation planning, programming, and border operation with Canada and Mexico.

Projects in Canada or Mexico – a border State may use these funds to construct a project in Canada or Mexico if the project directly and predominantly facilitates cross-border vehicle and cargo movement at an international port of entry in the border region of the State. Canada/Mexico must assure that the project will be constructed to standards equivalent to those in the US, and be maintained and used over the useful life of the facility only for the purpose for which the funds were allocated.

The Federal share is generally 80%, subject to the sliding scale adjustment. When the funds are used for Interstate project to add high occupancy vehicle or auxiliary lanes, but not other lanes, the Federal share may be 90%, also subject to the sliding scale adjustment. Certain safety improvements listed in 23 USC 120(c) have a Federal share of 100%. Funds are distributed at the discretion of the Secretary of Transportation giving priority to projects that emphasize multimodal planning, including planning for operational improvements that:

- Increase the mobility of people and goods;
- Improve the safety of the transportation system with respect to catastrophic natural disasters or disasters caused by human activity;
- Contribute to the economic vitality of the area in which the project is located

The CBI program is one of the programs that the Hidalgo County MPO and the Mexican government can use to begin transportation planning as a region.