

# MOVILIDAD

## Del Valle

*Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization*

- ◇ **From the Director's Desk**
- ◇ **Calendar of Events**
- ◇ **International Bridges**
- ◇ **New Laws - Effective Sept. 1, 2009**
- ◇ **Algae for Ethanol**
- ◇ **HCMPO Incident Management Program**
- ◇ **U.S. Census 2010**
- ◇ **Mobility Monitoring**
- ◇ **Scenario Planning**
- ◇ **TIGER Grants**
- ◇ **Falfurrias Overpass**
- ◇ **Cash for Clunkers**
- ◇ **Seamless Connectivity**
- ◇ **Spotlight: City of La Villa**



## From the Director's Desk...



Well, Fall is upon us and the changing season brings with it a changing environment in transportation planning and how we all work together to address these changes and needs. The HCMPO is working to complete our 25 year project forecast, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, with an adoption date of December of this year. This plan will identify many of the needs identified by the HCMPO and our planning partners and will also address how we will financially commit ourselves to many of these much needed improvements. I ask that each citizen take a moment and either contact our office or attend one of our several open public meetings around the county where we will be presenting our findings and seeking public feedback on how we may wish to address our needs. Please review the event calendar contained in this newsletter to see when and where a meeting will be conducted near you.

The HCMPO also held its first public Scenario Planning workshop, and what a success it was! I want to thank all of you who turned out for our midday and evening workshops. I hope it was as enlightening to you as it was to the HCMPO staff. This workshop, as well as future ones, will give citizens an opportunity to see where and how the growth in Hidalgo County may continue as well as address how limited funding will accommodate to the needs of that growth. This is certainly an enlightening exercise for those involved, and I invite everyone to participate in one of our future workshops. Only through your participation can we all succeed together in addressing our demanding transportation needs.

I also invite everyone to become involved with our Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) which meets monthly at the Pharr Chamber of Commerce. It is important for us to have an open dialogue with the community on how the HCMPO is addressing transportation needs and to gain insight from our customers, the citizens of Hidalgo County, on how we may better address concerns and needs. The CAC meets the first Thursday of each month with the exception of December where we hold no meeting.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Canon

### MPO Planning Partners:

> **Alamo, Alton, Donna, Edcouch, Edinburg, Elsa, Granjeno, Hidalgo, Hidalgo County, Hidalgo County RMA, La Joya, La Villa, LRGVDC Transit, McAllen, Mercedes, Mission, Palmhurst, Palmview, Peñitas, Pharr, Progreso, Progreso Lakes, San Juan, Sullivan City, Weslaco and TxDOT**

### > Ex-officio Members:

**FHWA, FTA, Fish & Wildlife, McAllen Transit, Rio Grande Valley Partnership, Weslaco Chamber of Commerce, Gobierno de Tamaulipas and San Juan Economic Development**

## Calendar of Events

- S** 3: Multi Modal Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 1:30 PM  
**E** 3: Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (Pharr Chamber of Commerce) @ 1:30 PM  
**P** 17: Technical Policy Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 5:30 PM  
**T.** 17: Congestion Management Process Training (HCMPO Office) @ 8:00 AM  
 24: Public Meeting for Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (Edinburg) @ 6:00 PM
- 
- O** 1: Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (Pharr Chamber of Commerce) @ 1:30 PM  
**C** 1: Public Meeting for Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (Mission) @ 6:00 PM  
**T.** 6: Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 5:30 PM  
 8: Public Meeting for Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (McAllen) @ 6:00 PM  
 12-16: Public Meeting for Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (HCMPO Office) @ 1:30 PM  
 15: Technical Policy Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 5:30 PM  
 27-30: AMPO Conference (Savannah, Georgia)
- 
- N** 5: Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (Pharr Chamber of Commerce) @ 1:30 PM  
**O** 11: HCMPO Office Closed  
**V.** 26-27: HCMPO Office Closed

## *Coming Soon: Anzalduas International Bridge*

Since the partnering of the United States and Mexico to build the Anzalduas International Bridge, the \$168 million investment promises nothing but economic prosperity for the South Texas region. More good news for the Anzalduas International Bridge came the last week of August when officials announced about \$21 million in federal stimulus money will pay for upgrades along Bryan Road. Bryan Road is the primary access road to the new Anzalduas International Bridge set to open in the near future. Though additional right of way property needs to be acquired for roadway expansion joining up with upgrades already under construction north of the Anzalduas Bridge, the projects are planned to be out for bid by March 2010, and construction to start 2 months thereafter.

The Anzalduas Bridge is located 3 miles up the Rio Grande from the Hidalgo-Reynosa Bridge. The approximately 2.7 mile long connector unites the City of Mission with the western outskirts of Reynosa. The Bridge provides cross border commuters with a pedestrian lane, two southbound and two northbound lanes. Finishing touches to the three year construction project are underway and the Anzalduas Bridge is said to finish by the end of this year. Representatives say that the bridge may possibly begin operations as early as October.

-Jamie Keshav



## *...and then: Donna Rio International Bridge*

Since the City of Donna received the go ahead on the Donna Rio International Bridge with a presidential permit in 1979, plans to construct a bridge have been underway.



Long awaited construction work that began in January 2008 is making significant progress and there are high hopes to open the bridge in the near future. The Donna Rio International Bridge is an eight lane facility connecting the City of Donna to the City of Rio Bravo.

Starting August of this year, the Texas Department of Transportation is also working on a new road to connect the bridge to FM 493. This project is said to cost approximately \$2.2 million and be completed in the next four to five months. With the short time frame on the road project, it will be completed before the Bridge is finished. The Bridge is planned to be completed in February 2010.

## *(Several) New laws have just been put into action!*

Effective September 1, 2009, numerous driving laws were put into place in the State of Texas. Most, if not all these changes may look tough on the outside, but are definitely advantageous as they have been put in place to further increase the safety of users of our transportation systems.



**Every passenger** in the car must now wear a seatbelt. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, HB 537 requires all occupants of a vehicle, regardless of age and where they are seated in a vehicle, to be wearing a seatbelt.

Another change was made regarding child safety restraints. Senate Bill 61 was amended to read that any child under the age of 8 or shorter than 4 feet, 9 inches in height is required to ride in an approved safety seat. Although the law went into effect on September 1, drivers will not be ticketed until June 1, 2010 for this offense.

Children under the age of 5 are also not allowed to ride on motorcycles. The child may be seated in a sidecar attached to the motorcycle.

The much discussed “texting law” that makes it illegal to use cellular phones in an active school zone was also passed. However, tickets will only be issued if cities post a sign outside of the school zone stating the use of cellular phones is prohibited. Drivers may use their cellular phones if the vehicle is stopped or a hands-free device is used.

No fun news for teens! Teens have been given some stringent laws to abide by when receiving their license after September 1, 2009. Those who are under 18 will not be allowed to talk or text on cellular devices until they are legally considered adults (age 18). Teens who received their license before September 1<sup>st</sup> are still restricted from using cellular phones for the first 6 months.

Furthermore, teens under 18 will be required to take a driving skills test to obtain a license. The restriction currently in place regarding the length of the midnight to 5 a.m. curfew and number of passengers in a car has also been extended from six months to one year.

Teen drivers under HB 339, are also required to take 34 hours of total hours of behind-the-wheel driving instruction instead of the 14 that was previously required. This will go into effect May 1, 2010.

Drivers are now no longer able to refuse testing if suspected for driving while intoxicated if they have a previous record of a DWI. Police are now permitted to draw blood on site for these suspected drivers.

Driving with a suspended license or without insurance has now fines up to \$2,000 and 180 days in jail (maximum sentence). If an injury or fatality is caused by a driver who is uninsured or does not have a valid license, a year in jail and a \$4,000 fine can be given.

HB 2012 creates two new punishment enhancements: a Class B misdemeanor if a person drives with a suspended license and without insurance; and a Class A misdemeanor if the person driving without insurance or a valid driver license has an accident and someone is seriously injured or dies as a result of that accident.

Neighborhood Electric Vehicles (NEVs) can now be operated on roads with a speed limit of 45 miles per hour or less. SB 129 allows drivers license holder to operate NEVs without a motorcycle endorsement. The drivers and passengers in NEVs are also not required to wear helmets. SB 129 authorizes neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs) to be operated on roads with a posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour or less. The bill authorizes driver license holders to operate NEVs without having a motorcycle endorsement, clarifies that drivers and passengers in such vehicles are not required to wear helmets and specifies that enclosed three-wheeled vehicles as described in the bill are authorized to operate in preferential lanes.

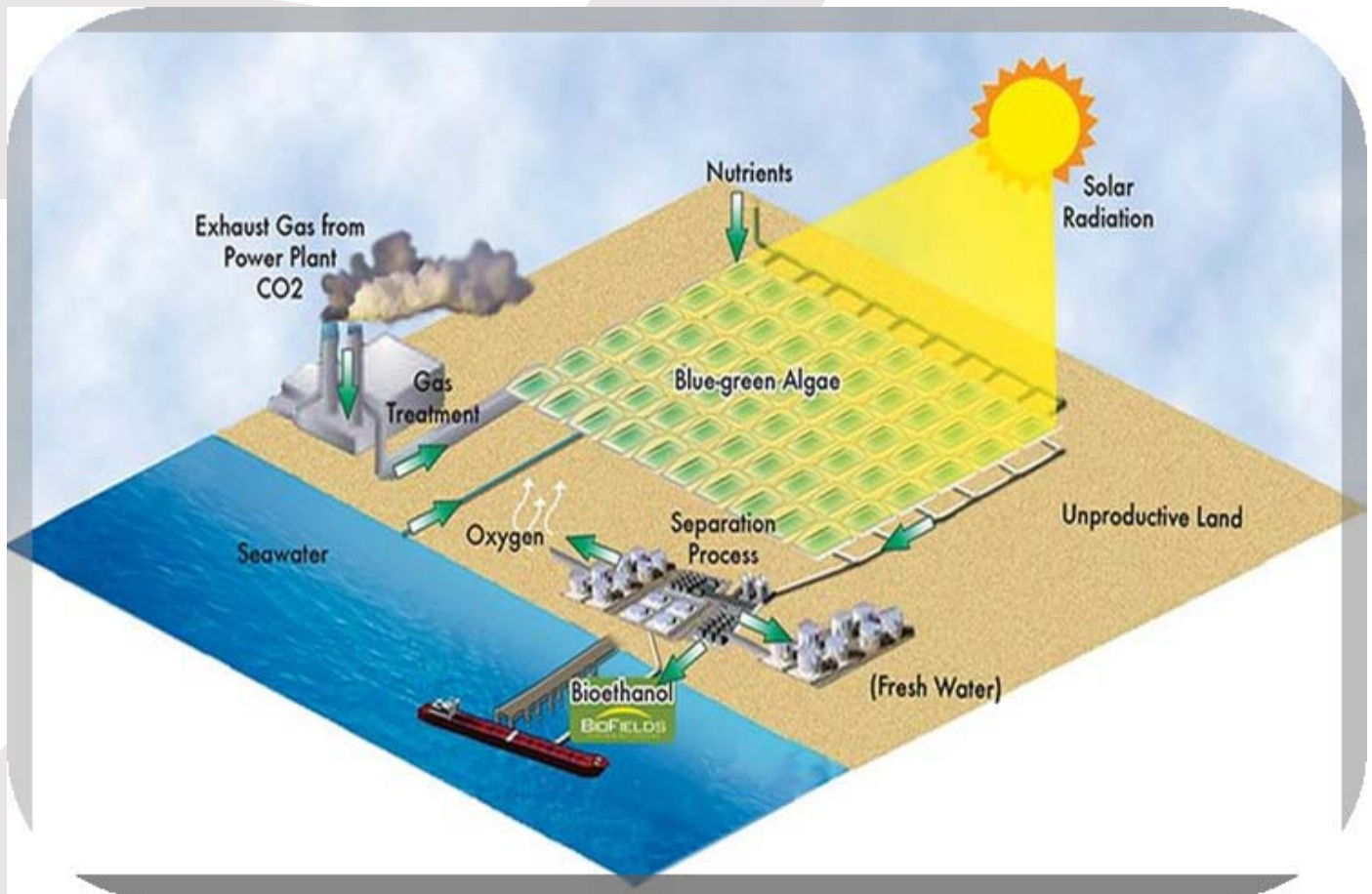
We have powerful cars, cool technology we can't keep our hands off and not enough time in our day. Though it may take a while for us to all remember to buckle up in the back seat, or to not use our cell phones to text a classmate while driving to school, remember that Texas lawmakers are striving to save lives and protect us all. Do your part and make our roads safe for everyone. **-Jamie Keshav**



## Algae...A Tiny Ethanol Factory?

Replacing fossil fuels has become a pressing area of research and a daunting task for many. Researchers from around the world are working to find alternative methods to replace fossil fuels which are limited and becoming scarce as the demands for energy increase. Fossil fuels also have a negative effect on our environment, as they are a culprit in producing carbon dioxide – which corresponds highly with climate change.

A company in Florida, called Algenol, recently partnered with Dow Chemical to build roughly 3,000 bioreactors on the Texas coast south of Houston. The bioreactors that will be built by Algenol can produce oxygen as a byproduct and be used to burn coal more cleanly when fed into power plants. The CO<sub>2</sub> produced by the power plants can be recycled back into bioreactors to help promote algae growth which in turn produces ethanol gas.



The “key” ingredients to Algenol’s process are algae, sunlight, CO<sub>2</sub>, saltwater and desert land. Algenol’s technique is unique from other companies because produces eight times more energy than the energy used to make the algae. Unlike corn based ethanol products that use only slightly more energy than it takes to produce, algae are not grown for food. Algenol’s process does not harvest the algae. Rather, the process is based on a long term growth strategy that requires the continual extraction of ethanol (rather than cooking material to produce alcohol, a more common way ethanol is made.) This extraction method is done by siphoning off the ethanol gas produced by algae using a bioreactor tube, then condensing it to a liquid form.

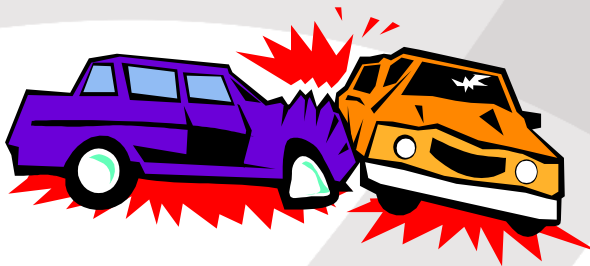
Algenol claims that the process using algae can produce 6,000 US gallons per acre/year compared to 370 US gallons per acre/year produced by growing and fermenting corn, and 890 US gallons per acre/year produced by sugar cane. The company would like to be competitive with gasoline produced from petroleum at refineries but be less expensive than gasoline. Climate experts say the technology of using algae holds promise but it is difficult to say how cost effective the process will be as time progresses. We hope researchers will continue to find intelligent ways to produce ethanol, just like Algenol. The last thing we want is a car with no fuel to feed it!

## *The HCMPO Incident Management Program*

The Incident Management Program (IMP) at the Hidalgo County MPO is working towards identifying problems on major arterial roadways, freeways and other roads around Hidalgo County to effectively reduce the impact of incidents on traffic congestion, the economy of the area, safety and community disruption.

The HCMPO continues to work diligently on the Incident Management Program (IMP) in compliance with SAFETEA-LU. The latest update on incident management which was conveyed using Geographic Information System (GIS) tools, encompassed accident reports for the years 2003-2006.

Incident management information is very valuable because it provides a wide variety of data that can be extracted and presented in a multitude of ways. In the IMP, information has been broken into "hot spots" ranging from 5 to 9 accidents, 10 to 14 accidents, or more than 15 accidents. Using GIS, data is presented and shown on a map where the accidents occurred, how many occurred, and what type of accident (t-bone, rear end, improper pass or turn, failure to yield turning left, head-on collision, or wide/narrow turns) it was. These interactive maps can be viewed by the public by visiting <http://www.hcmppo.org/imp.html>.



Currently, the HCMPO is completing and updating the IMP using accident reports received from 2007 and 2008. Cities will also be given the data collected by the HCMPO in order to implement changes to decrease the number of hot spots in their respective cities, if they deem necessary.

The data collected from the IMP will also aid the HCMPO in ranking projects listed in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) as being a part of the selection criteria.

The Incident Management Program is an on-going program that will be continued by the Hidalgo County MPO. Due to the increasing population in Hidalgo County, it is essential to monitor hot spots around the area and make the necessary changes to allow our communities to travel safely and efficiently.

-Jamie Keshav , Linda de la Fuente, Realnolfo Gonzalez



# United States

### **WHAT? Count**

The census is an official count of everyone residing in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Island Areas.

### **WHO? Everyone**

All residents (all ages, races, ethnic groups, citizens or non-citizens!) of the United States have to be counted

### **WHEN? 2010**

Census occurs every ten years. Census questionnaires will be mailed or delivered to every household in the United States in March 2010.

### **WHERE? All over the United States**

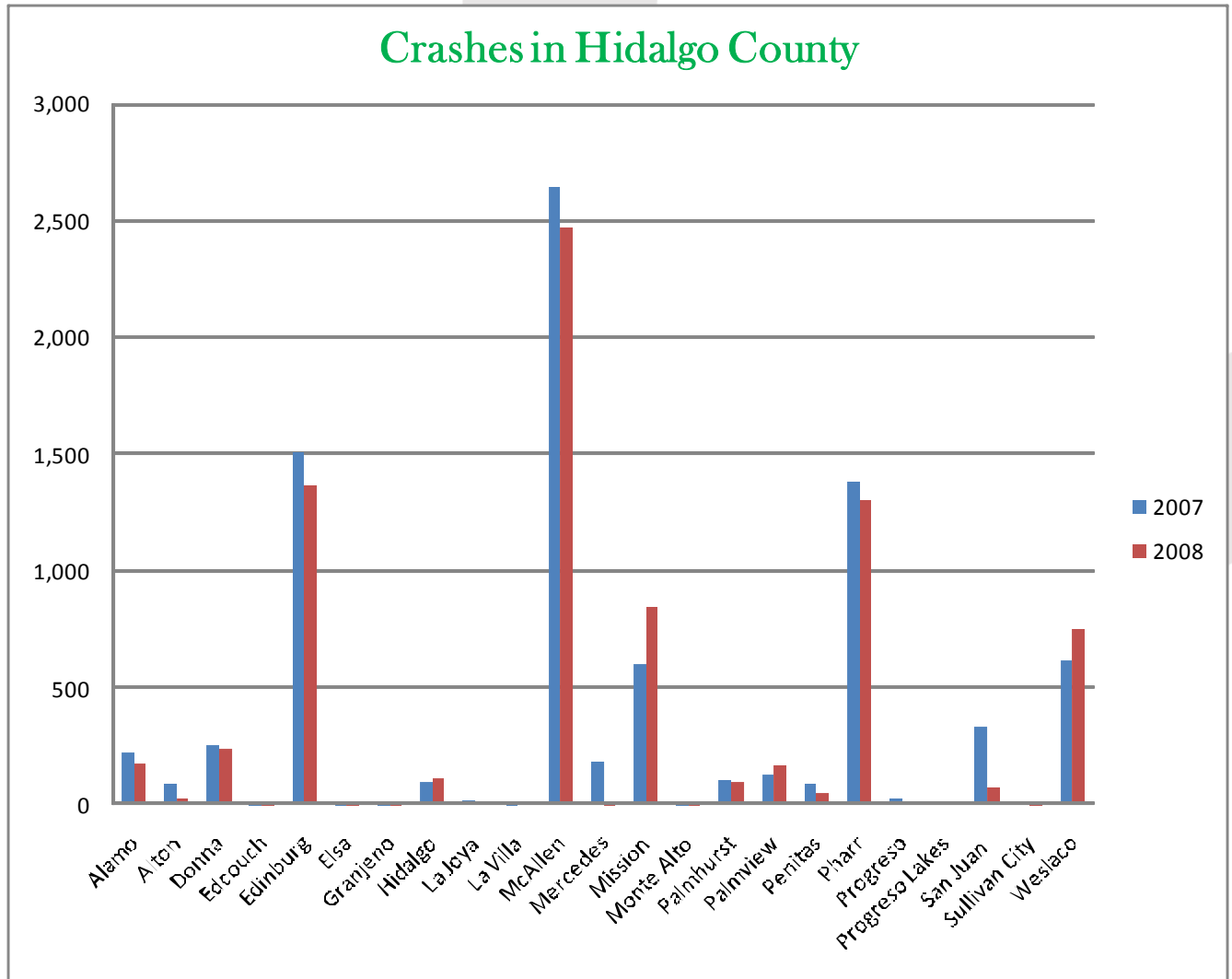
The census counts everyone residing in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Island Areas.

### **WHY? Because it's the law!**

The U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 2) mandates a headcount of everyone residing in the United States. These totals determine each state's Congressional representation and affect funding in your community.

### **HOW? By mail or delivery**

The Census Bureau mails or delivers questionnaires to your house around March (2010). If no response is received, a second form will be delivered. If still no response is received, households will be called or visited by a Census worker.



# Census 2010



A majority of federal grant programs rely heavily on Census data to distribute funds. Therefore, it is important for everyone in a community to participate. The questionnaire confidential, simple to fill out and doesn't take but a few minutes.

**Some major federal programs that are affected are:**

- Medicaid
- Foster Care
- Rehabilitation Services Basic Support
- Child Care and Development Block Grant
- Social Services Block Grant
- Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant
- Adoption Assistance
- Vocational Education Basic Grants

**On a state level, programs and areas that are heavily affected include:**

- Gaming revenue
- Excise tax revenue
- Local road and street accounts
- Rural development fund
- Motor vehicle highway account fund
- Evaluation of enterprise zone applications
- Establishing priorities for community residential facilities

Our area could receive reduced funding if we are undercounted. Please talk to neighbors, co-workers, family and friends, and remind them to fill out their census.

## Mobility Monitoring Workshop

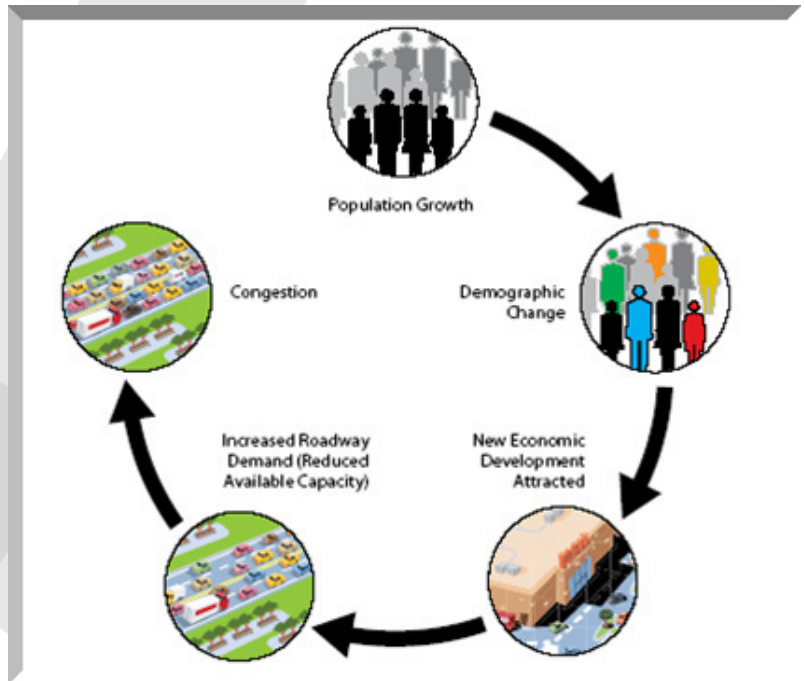
On August 11, 2009, the Texas Transportation Institute instructed a Mobility Monitoring Workshop that aimed at giving transportation professionals an opportunity to learn about congestion trends, developing a monitoring plan, using performance measures and moving forward with improvements in a small-medium sized community. The class was led by Dr. Bill Eisele, a Research Engineer with TTI and Mr. Bill Frawley, a Research Scientist at TTI.

It is important to monitor mobility in Hidalgo County especially since it is a fast growing metropolitan area. Growth in an area naturally equates to additional congestion issues that vary in duration, extent and intensity. Some factors that bring about mobility issues can arise from rapid development, inadequate roadway capacity, increased truck traffic in a community and inadequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Some distinguishing terms that are used to help understand congestion trends are **mobility**, **congestion** and **reliability**. Mobility is the ability to reach a destination in a satisfactory time due to slow speeds;

congestion is the inability to reach a destination in a satisfactory time due to slow speeds; and reliability is the level of consistency in a transportation service.

When considering mobility performance measurement, it is important to determine a target congestion level for the community or area. Determining the goals and vision of residents realistically and reasonably allows communities to move forward in addressing concerns and improvements. In order for transportation professionals to correct mobility problems in an area, it is important for citizens to speak up. It is our citizens that drive the roads on a daily basis and the ones that have a guiding hand in setting mobility standards for Hidalgo County. **-Jamie Keshav**



## NEPAssist

When planning new roads and highways, it's always important to acknowledge what effects a project will have on the environment. Is it close to a park or wildlife refuge? Will it affect the indigenous species? In addition, new projects must follow NEPA rules and guidelines. NEPA refers to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, a national policy to encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and the environment.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has created an online tool to assist in environmental analysis and review. NEPAssist is a web-based GIS tool allowing users to draw environmental data dynamically from EPA regions' Geographic Information System databases. Not only can NEPAssist provide a preliminary environmental assessment of a project's footprint, it can also help a user with the review process of Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) and Environmental Assessments.

On August 14, Hidalgo County MPO staff attended a NEPAssist video training seminar at the TxDOT Pharr facility. NEPAssist has many functions: the ability to find project locations by address, county or latitude/longitude coordinates, the capability to digitizing a specific project area by point, line, or polygon, the ability to turn off or on different layers of data, and the capability to add in aerial photography. NEPAssist will be an invaluable tool not only for Hidalgo County MPO staff, but for any organization needing information on environmental impact and analysis. **-Brent Cochran**

## In updating the 25 year plan (MTP), a Scenario Planning Workshop was born...

### Planning 25 years ahead poses challenges

Comments 0 | Recommendations 1  
August 20, 2009 8:34 PM

Jared James  
The Monitor

McAlLEN — Loraine Owens was more concerned about how to get from Point A to Point B than worrying about the best spot for her suburban housing.

As other people scratched their heads over where to allow mixed-use development, industrial parks and strip malls, Owens was adding a major highway somewhere south of Expressway 83.

Putting highways, transit routes and trails on the map before determining where the housing development would go wasn't in the directions given before the exercise, but Owens and others at her table didn't see how to place a subdivision without first knowing how to get there.

Owens, a Weslaco resident and childbirth educator, said Rio Grande Valley cities can do the same when planning transportation networks.

"We're going to be viewed by the rest of the world as a megalopolis," she said. "We might as well join hands and figure out how to connect to each other."



**enlarcoe**  
Gabe Hernandez | gabriel@themonitor.com  
Citizens, business owners and real estate agents discuss ideas to improve Hidalgo County on Thursday during an event hosted by the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization at the McAllen Convention Center.

#### Other Articles in this Category

- [Progreso man charged with murder](#)  
1 hour & 15 minutes ago
- [Feds: Cartel turns to radio waves to avoid police detection](#)  
1 hour & 24 minutes ago
- [Mexico catches leading member of La Familia cartel](#)  
12 minutes ago
- [Rep. Cuellar answers questions on health reform](#)  
1 hour & 11 minutes ago
- [Man charged with shooting after dispute heats up](#)

Public involvement and input is essential to the transportation planning process. The intended outcome of involving our community is so that better decisions that accurately reflect the community's mobility and accessibility needs are met.

The HCMPO kicked off the first public meeting for updating the MTP by setting up a Scenario Planning Workshop. Invitees included the public and local officials, engineers, land developers, realtors, and Home Owners Neighborhood Association Groups from around the area. The Public Forum was held on August 20, 2009 at the McAllen Convention Center.

A brief presentation was given to explain the various strategies involved in transportation planning along with the many challenges. The attendees were given an explanation of how the workshop was to work and the different planning scenarios they could use to envision and build Hidalgo County. The meeting was designed to allow participants to plan for the future of our roads and highways, but more importantly, to gather ideas, insight, and input regarding how citizen's see the direction of Hidalgo County

being developed. Policy members and members from the HCMPO Technical Advisory Committee were also present and participated in the workshop. Many served as facilitators' in giving special guidance and insight to citizens.

The consulting firm Kimley-Horn and Associates worked in coordination with the MPO to plan and conduct the workshop, as the firm is conducting the scenario planning for the MTP update.

The workshop also received media attention and was placed in The Monitor, a local newspaper. The article described the workshop and highlighted the challenges faced by Hidalgo County in planning the next 25 years. - **Jamie Keshav**

## Local Cities trying to put a "TIGER" in their tanks

Local cities within Hidalgo County are trying to put a **TIGER Discretionary Grant** in their city's budgets in order to plan for the future growth of Hidalgo County. Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants are for projects ranging from \$20-\$300 million. These funds are for Capital Investments in Surface Transportation Infrastructure under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The selection criteria for TIGER grants were much more intensive than the usual criteria to select projects. Elected officials and city officials worked hard to gather the required documents and complete the necessary activities that will give cities in Hidalgo County a chance to grow and accommodate the future transportation infrastructure needed in our area.



In June of 2009, TxDOT staff began working with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and district offices to solicit nominations for projects. Nationally, \$1.5 billion was available for this program, and Texas, like every other state, may receive between \$0 to \$300 million. There were five cities and one entity that rose to the challenge and submitted potential projects in their efforts to capture a "TIGER" grant.

The following is a list of projects submitted by cities and entities around Hidalgo County and our dedicated leaders that are determined to make a reality:

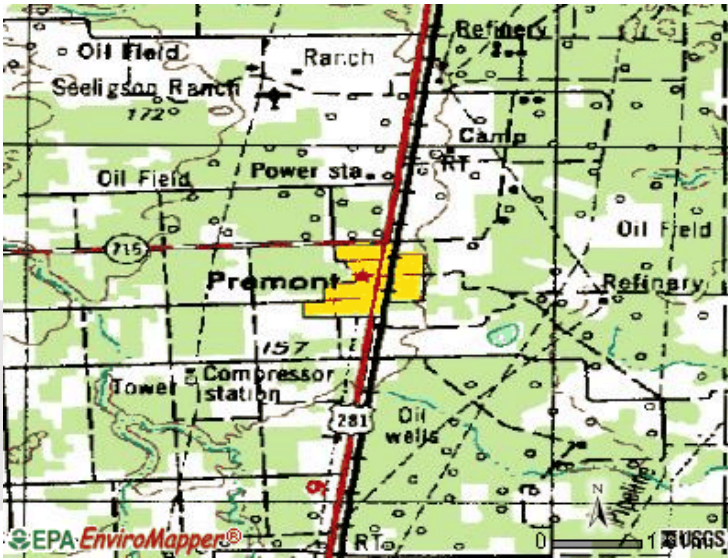
<b>Edinburg</b>	<b>South Texas Int'l Airport/Foreign Trade Zone Developments</b>	<b>\$42 mil</b>
<b>Donna</b>	<b>Int'l Bridge Corridor (FM493) 4 lane facilities/Overpass @US 281 Military</b>	<b>\$48.4 mil</b>
<b>HCRMA</b>	<b>Hidalgo Toll Loop from Anzalduas to US 83</b>	<b>\$300 mil</b>
<b>Pharr</b>	<b>Improvements on Hall Acres, Owassa, Anaya, Bridge, &amp; Rancho Blanco Rds</b>	<b>\$25 mil</b>
<b>McAllen</b>	<b>Regional Multimodal Ctr, Wye, &amp; Rail Crossing Arms (81) joint total</b>	<b>\$32.5 mil</b>
<b>Mission</b>	<b>Add capacity to US 83/6 lane &amp; connectivity to Inspiration Rd</b>	<b>\$20mil</b>

-**Reinaldo Gonzalez**

**Selection for these projects will take place on September 15, 2009.**

**Please support your local politician, attend these meetings, get involved and participate**

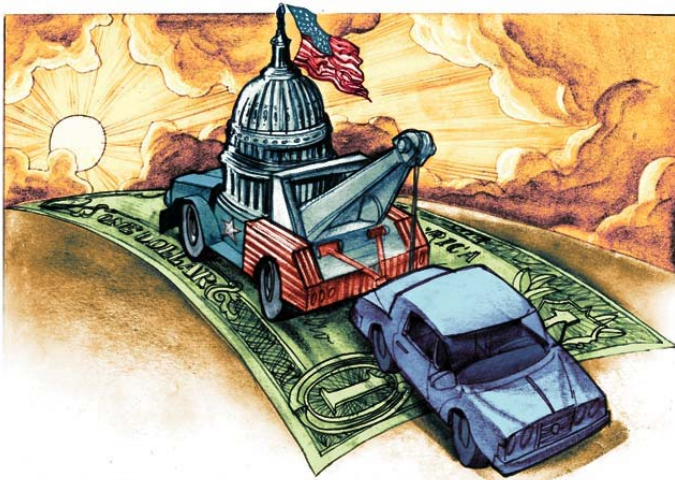
## US 281 Bottlenecks soon to go away...



Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa for District 20 spearheaded a committee composed of local officials and county representatives to take the initiative and lobby for the acquisition of stimulus funds for the US Expressway 281 "Bottleneck" projects. Senator Hinojosa in early February of 2009 began discussions with Hidalgo County Judge JD Salinas and local officials from all interested parties to unite and request funding for this important project. These particular leadership strategies allowed for funding to be awarded towards this project. Freight drivers, tourists, and local traffic to and from San Antonio have experienced bottlenecks and congestion when arriving at the various focal points. According to Oscar Garza, administration for the Office of Senator Hinojosa, those issues would "soon go away". Falfurrias's bottleneck has been in construction since early September and Premont is planning to begin towards mid-September. Ben Bolt's US 281 project has also let and construction is said to begin soon. George West's bottleneck situation will require a merge right avenue, allowing traffic to go to the newly constructed US HWY 59 and then onto Interstate 37. Thanks to the dedicated leaders - soon freight coming or going off US Expressway 281 will "Bottleneck No More". Freight shipments will arrive at their destinations one and a half hours faster, congestion will be reduced at these geographical areas, and fuel consumption will decrease as traffic flows smoothly due to these highway improvements.

-Realnolfo Gonzalez

## Cash for Clunkers



Fuel efficiency is at the forefront of the movement for intelligent energy consumption and sustainability. The Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS), more commonly known as Cash for Clunkers, married the idea of fuel efficiency with stimulus to the economy, boosting car sales by giving car owners incentive to replace fuel inefficient cars with cleaner cars.

Cash for Clunkers ended its tenure as of August 24. People all over the U.S. traded in their "clunkers" (cars, trucks and SUVs less than 25 years old that rated at 18 mpg or less) for more fuel efficient automobiles.

Those that traded in

clunkers received \$3,500 - \$4,500 as rebate credits. The federal stimulus program was initially allocated \$1 billion, but was granted another \$2 billion after such a spectacular response.

Approximately 690,000 "clunkers" were turned in for credit. The average fuel efficiency of cars traded in was reported as 15.8 mpg by the Department of Transportation. -Brent Cochran



## *Connectivity: A Multimodal Approach*

Imagine waking up, packing your lunch, eating breakfast, heading down the sidewalk to the bus stop where the bus picks you up and takes you to work. How about taking your bike on the bus with you so you can head over to the hike and bike trail in Mission for the weekend? Well, at Hidalgo County MPO, plans like the one described above are in the works. As the Valley continues to grow, an important aspect of transportation development is connectivity. Connectivity allows different modes of transportation to link, creating a diverse network structure and extending transportation possibilities in many cases. Specifically, it links sidewalks, transit, and bike routes with each other. To



understand why this is important, imagine a highway with no exits. How would you get your car from your house to the highway? What would you do when you got close to work? Park on the shoulder and walk? It's hard to picture this because automobile connectivity is widely available. However, at the pedestrian level, this is a common issue.

The multimodal plan focuses on connecting sidewalks with bus stops and bike lanes. Walking and bicycling are healthy alternatives that reduce congestion. However, with the rate of development in the Valley, alternatives to driving are lacking. In some areas of the Valley, residents may live near stores, but with no sidewalk or trails available, it may be easier to jump in the car and drive. Other local streets may lack bike lanes, limiting bikers' options for travel, or worse, forcing them into unsafe situations alongside speeding cars. Often suburban areas have no sidewalks or bike lanes. At a national level, studies have shown a decline in walking and bicycling for children attending school. Programs like Safe Routes to School promote building safer street crossings to encourage walking and bicycling.

The importance of connectivity enhances multimodality and increases transportation options to residents. As the Valley expands, the importance of connectivity increases. A livable, walkable community is not only desirable in an aesthetic sense, but it is healthier. One day, after packing your lunch and eating breakfast, jumping in your car and heading to work may be a choice, not a necessity. **-Brent Cochran**

***The Pharr District is hosting a Safe Routes to School Workshop on October 5th, 2009, at the TxDOT Conference Center in Pharr, led by Carol Campa, the state coordinator for Safe Routes to School. For more information, contact Steve Walker at (956) 702-6100.***



Hidalgo County Metropolitan  
Planning Organization  
510 S. Pleasantview Dr.  
Weslaco, Texas 78596

(956) 969-5778  
(956) 969-5821 fax  
www.hcmpto.org

If you wish to be added to our mailing list, please  
contact the MPO office and speak with Maria Champine  
or send an email at [info@hcmpto.org](mailto:info@hcmpto.org)

HCMPO also offers a Spanish edition of this newsletter!

The *City of LA VILLA*, is on the northeast sector of Hidalgo County is located off Farm Road 491, off State Highway 107. It sits on land that was part of the land grant issued to Vicente de Ynojosa by Spain in 1797. By 1800, a community existed in the area and settlement by northern Anglo-Americans started after the railroad arrived in the county. In 1927, the town became a shipping point and post office on the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway. The population was roughly 100 in 1933, and by 1947 grew to 200. As the community began to grow, La Villa ISD was established in 1953 and actually conducted graduation ceremonies from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade to go on to High School. It was only in 1980 when the first High School for La Villa was built.

In the 1950s, La Villa had two churches, one theater, an aircraft repair hanger, three cotton gins, eight locally established businesses, and numerous dwellings. During this era, Mexican nationals and locals were also employed at large to clear the land in the City of La Villa. A major concentration of the population was centered around the Canal De Panchita's. There were more huts, houses, and living quarters on both banks of this main water canal than the actual population for the town. Today, this canal provides water to the Delta Lake, a man-made lake for the depository of water for local farms to irrigate. Canal De Panchita's has also been added to the extension of the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge boundaries due to habitat for the bobcat, ocelot, and the Jaguarondi.

The population of the community increased gradually during the 1960s and 1970s and reached 1,388 in 1990. According to the Census, in 2000 the population was down to 1,305. The latest estimates in July 2008, mark the population of La Villa to be 2,044. Major sources of employment for the City of La Villa are the schools, The Rio Grande Sugar Growers Mill, and the East Hidalgo Detention Center. La Villa is Home to the Fighting Cardinals. **-Realnolfo Gonzalez**

