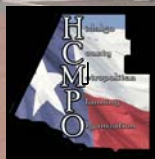


MOVILIDAD

Del Valle

Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization

- **From the Director's Desk**
- **Calendar of Events**
- **2012 Unified Transportation Program**
- **New Texas Administrative Code-Chapter 16**
- **2011 Legislative Session**
- **1st Walk-n-Rolla 2011**
- **Path to Auto-pilot Planning**
- **Hidalgo County Transition Advisory Committee**
- **Valley Metro is Here**
- **How is Transportation Funded? Part II**
- **Spotlight: City of Mercedes**





Andrew A. Canon
Transportation Director

Wow! How time has flown since our last newsletter. The season has changed, holidays have come and gone, and cold weather has set in upon. With the changing season comes changing work tasks for the HCMPO and staff. As we lead into another State Legislative session, transportation is at the forefront of the discussions again. Transportation at the State and Federal level is facing some serious dilemmas. There has been no new transportation bill and MPO's across the nation and all transportation advocates, are operating under another continuing resolution from the federal government. According to some transportation professionals, it is doubtful that we will receive a transportation bill during the first term of President Obama. Congress is taking up other pressing matters and as we grow closer to the election season again, a new transportation bill is doubtful. Congress, as well as our own State Legislature is faced with no easy task on how to address the serious financial shortfall of transportation funding.

On our own state legislature agenda is the reinstatement of CDA's (comprehensive development agreement) which would allow for development of private-public partnerships to address and fund some highly needed projects across the state. There has been a moratorium against CDA's since 2007 and some feel this is a much needed tool needed to be used to fund highly needed and underfunded projects.

As you can see this is just a small portion of the task ahead in the next year as we prepare for any and all legislative tools, state and federal, that may provide additional funding for transportation. The HCMPO staff is eager to begin 2011 with an optimistic view, hopeful that collectively we can all work accordingly to address and solve many of our local transportation needs.

Even though State Legislative session is at the forefront, we are also wrapping up the Thoroughfare Plan Update. All entities have been given the deadline of March 31st, by the HCMPO Transportation Policy Committee (TPC), to submit all supportive documentation for the updates submitted. In the month of April, we will be seeking resolutions of support from the cities and Hidalgo County before the HCMPO TPC takes action on adopting the Thoroughfare Plan. Please keep an eye out for it on our website: www.hcmppo.org.

FEBRUARY

- 01: TIP Cycled Revision
- 01: Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 1:30 pm
- 03: Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (Pharr Chamber of Commerce) @ 1:30 pm
- 09: FY 2012 UTP Public Involvement Meeting in San Antonio @ 4:00 pm
- 17: Transportation Policy Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 5:30 pm
- 25: Web Conference (HCMPO Office) on TAZ Delineation @ 10:00 am—12:00 pm

MARCH

- 01: Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 1:30 pm
- 03: Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (Pharr Chamber of Commerce) @ 1:30 pm
- 17: Transportation Policy Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 5:30 pm

APRIL

- 05: Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 1:30 pm
- 07: Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (Pharr Chamber of Commerce) @ 1:30 pm
- 21: Transportation Policy Committee Meeting (HCMPO Office) @ 5:30 pm

2012 Unified Transportation Program

The Unified Transportation Program (UTP) is a 10-year statewide plan for a transportation project development which incorporates two major components: Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs) developed by each MPO and statewide corridors that provide regional connectivity. The UTP is a listing of projects that are planned thru a Project Selection Process (PSP) to be constructed and/or developed.

There will be regional public meetings for the 2012 UTP as required for adjustments to the program resulting in changes to allocation of funds. One of the changes will be the merging of category 2, TMA funding, & 3, Non-TMA funding, into a NEW category 2, which will break down to 87% funding to TMAs and 13% funding to non-TMAs. The new category 3 will be non-traditionally funded transportation projects such as: Prop 12, Prop 14, PTF, local participation, CDAs, etc. The Texas Transportation Commission is scheduled to take action/approval of the UTP on May 26, 2011.

-Maria

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, Penitas, Pharr, Progreso, Progreso Lakes, San Juan, Sullivan City, Weslaco and TXDOT.

Ex-officio Members:

FHWA, FTA, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, McAllen Express Transit, Rio Grande Valley Partnership, Weslaco Chamber of Commerce, Hidalgo County Commuter Rail District & San Juan Economic Development.

New Texas Administrative Code—Chapter 16

The new Texas Administrative Code (TAC) chapter 16 rules—Planning & Development of Transportation Projects. It developed in response to Sunset Advisory Committee recommendations to Legislature, and on August 26, 2010, it was approved by the Texas Transportation Commission Minute Order 112374, which it simultaneously repealed the provisions for planning & programming in Chapter 15. Chapter 16 incorporates the repealed chapter 15 provisions and expands provisions to include:

- General Provisions: Subchapter B
- Transportation Planning: Subchapter B
- Transportation Programs: Subchapter C (includes new requirements for the UTP)
- Transportation Funding: Subchapter D (includes funding categories and formulas)
- Project and Performance Reporting: Subchapter E

-Maria Champine

2011—Legislative Session

January marks the beginning of the new legislative session – the 82nd in Texas and 112th in the US Congress.

Locally – Hidalgo County has a new State Representative in the 36th District, stretching from Peñitas to Pharr on the south side of the county. Sergio Muñoz Jr. will replace Representative Ismael “Kino” Flores.

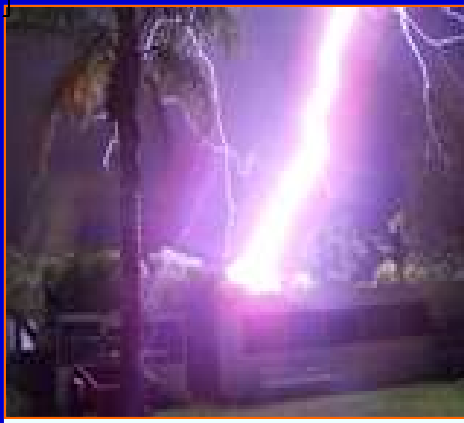
Statewide – early filing for bills started on November 8, 2010. Over 900 bills were submitted in the two months prior to the start of the session. The Hidalgo County MPO will be tracking bills that may affect transportation, funding and general administration of the organization. For more information on these bills email Amanda at ahernandez@hcmpo.org.

Federal – The Transportation & Infrastructure Committee in Washington will have a new chairman starting in January – Representative John Mica of Florida will replace eighteen term chairman James Oberstar of Minnesota. In recent interviews Rep. Mica has stated that a long-term transportation authorization will be a high priority in this session. Since September, 2009 when the transportation authorization, Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act; A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), expired transportation funding has been extended through continuing resolutions. The last continuing resolution was passed by Congress in late December and extends transportation appropriation and authorization as well as other federal programs until March 4, 2011.

Terms to Learn for the legislative session: Appropriation – allows federal agencies to make payments. Authorization – provision that awards funding for a program or agency. Continuing Resolution – when a fiscal year is about to begin and no formal Act is in place, allows federal agencies to continue to operate until Acts are enabled. Session – period when Congress assembles and carries out regular business.

- Amanda Longoria





1ST WALK-N-ROLLA 2011 WALKING & BIKING FESTIVAL STAGED FOR 2011 GENERATES A POWER SURGE AMONG LOCAL BICYCLE ENTHUSIASTISTS

The Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization (HCMPO) is coordinating a Festival for the spring of 2011. This festival is designed to allow for family to get out and walk or bike as a form of exercise. It also provides a window of opportunity to provide awareness to our communities about the several avenues available in getting from one place to another without the use of motorized vehicles and to facilitate promoting a healthier, happier lifestyle. This festival will incorporate several events all tied into one. As we have partnered with the City of Edinburg Chamber of Commerce and their Healthy Living Festival together with a Quadrant Rally at UTPA should provide opportunities for walk-a-thons, family bicycle strolls, and distance bicycle tours to make for an exciting festivity. The event should provide awareness about the benefits of a healthier lifestyle in walking to fight diabetes, obesity and other health problems that can be related to a stagnant lifestyle. The HCMPO and Texas Dept. of Transportation are working together to provide assistance to local municipalities regarding "Safe Routes to Schools" programs. Our children in elementary schools in Hidalgo County are reflecting an 11% rate of diabetes. We can work on several issues with Safe Routes to Schools if we put our minds together and realize what staff at the HCMPO has come to learn. Our children need to walk to school when possible, but they need to feel safe. This small measure would allow for less congestion on our local streets, less fuel wasted, less fuel emissions emitted onto the ozone layer, better quality of air for our region, and a healthier lifestyle for our children. In addition, we hope to provide awareness about the transit system that exists in the counties of Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy for the general public to use as an means to get to work, school, and or medical appointments. Valley Metro out of Weslaco, TX and Metro of McAllen are very excited to announce that effective in January and February of 2011 a new fleet of vehicles will hit the Super Highway with bicycle racks for riders to utilize as they get around on a bicycle. An event of such magnitude has required intense planning in order to develop the positive results that we expected to see. A group of people was formed as an advisory, planning, and collaborative committee, Walk-n-Rolla 2011 Steering Committee (W.R.S.C.). This committee is composed of members from UTPA Police Dept, Office of Wellness & Recreational Sports, Bronc Bicycle Team, Team McAllen Bicycle Club, The Bike Masters of Mission, Bicycle World, Hidalgo County Sheriff's Dept. Valley Metro, McAllen Metro, Ciclistas Urbanos, Parks & Recreation Dept., City of McAllen, Edinburg Chamber of Commerce, Edinburg Environmental Advisory Board, and Sierra Coolcities, Inc. This project has provided the HCMPO an opportunity to meet some of the bicycle clubs and have heard some of their concerns regarding bicycle lanes in their communities, walking and biking trails, and safety for them on the road through redesign of transportation infrastructure to accommodate sustainable communities. The Office of Sustainability, UTPA has been a true supporter for this event and the public awareness that it has generated.



Let's all get involved and utilize this surge of energy to make a difference in our communities. Let's contribute when we can, participate by getting involved with the event, and by attending meetings that require public involvement as we plan for your future. Come and join us for this fun filled day!

-Rudy Gonzalez



Healthier Lifestyles Awareness
Walking & Bicycle Tours
April 9, 2011—Market Square—
Edinburg, TX & UTPA Quadrant Rally
Contact: Rudy Gonzalez -969-5778



Path to Auto-pilot PLANNING



Planning has long bore the brunt of short-sightedness and buckled under the pressures of industry conglomerates. Consequently, we are facing the direst ill-effects now. The main problem lies in the stark disconnect between Land Use and Transportation policies. Not that the planning fraternity overlooked it completely but, the political and corporate lobbyists over-ruled such strategies for pure personal gain.

If you look close enough, everything has a breaking point. And so does the current planning practices. Historically, urban population growth is on the rise and we are at that point where majority live in urban areas. Urbanization is spreading to no bounds. Small towns

change into cities and cities into metropolis in less than two to three decades. One should not be surprised if McAllen-Edinburg-Mission region outgrows itself into an area similar to Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos region in the next 30 years. Healthy growth rate, increased border trade and relatively younger age slabs all point to it.

In hindsight, some methods which may ensure a sound sustainable growth environment for Hidalgo County are: a common county-wide zoning code; urban growth boundary for cities; push for mixed use development; conserving agricultural land; improving and providing better public transit facility; invest in sidewalks or bike paths etc.

The Scenario Planning exercise rightfully picks the vibe of the County, residents and decision makers alike. The Scenario Plan reiterated the need for a **Hybrid** model of development which respects the existing pattern and builds upon the existing assets for a more sustainable community. One way of fixing the alarming urban sprawl is to adopt/enforce a County Zoning Code coupled with a flexible urban growth boundary for the future with prime emphasis on in-fill development, redevelopment, mixed-use development, TODs etc.

Land Use (LU) and Transportation are in-separable, cohesive areas for sustainable and sound development. Policies which aim at the integration of both LU and Transportation are key for a balanced growth of any region and more so, for emerging regions like Hidalgo County (HC). Since, HC like the rest of the country has had funding cutbacks, we need to look to maximize our existing resources and control development patterns.



USA and Europe share the same level of development but, the land use/zoning policies are completely opposite. Europe's inclination and will to focus on public transit over auto travel has given them a renewed impetus to grow.

Just as our human body comprises a circulatory system/ neural system; similarly we can envision urban areas with different commercial/ highway corridors. The dynamic nature of population and their unlimited choices or preferences makes it difficult to plan for the future. But, the path to auto-pilot planning can only be achieved through a holistic approach which is pro-people, devoid of influence from selfish windfalls, and with the sole objective of a balanced sustainable growth. This is the need of the hour and it is only possible if we act now together.

-Sooraz Patro

Scenario Plan projects Hidalgo County Population :: 1.65 million @ 4.5 % annual growth by the year 2035

As of July 2009, USCB Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos MSA population estimate is 1.71 million

<http://www.hcmpo.org/files/Studies/ScenarioPlanning.pdf>

The Strategic Recommendations Report from Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia's Transition Advisory Committees was released on January 1, 2011. The report is a comprehensive review of the top needs that will assist the County Commissioners Court to prioritize them with the limited funds that are available. The recommendations cover the following topics: Economic Development, Transportation, Drainage, Appraisals, and Indigent Health Care. This article will broach the recommendations for Transportation.

The goal for transportation is to move people, goods and services effectively and safely in Hidalgo County by having a centralized county road and bridge department, a comprehensive transportation plan, and to have U.S. 281 and U.S. Expressway 83 interstate ready. The centralized county road and bridge department will concentrate on major transportation corridors while road maintenance is managed by the precincts. The County commissioners will have to adopt an all in compassing transportation plan that integrates planning efforts with other transportation agencies like the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization, Regional Mobility Authority, TXDOT and the Federal Government to bring an interstate to Hidalgo County.

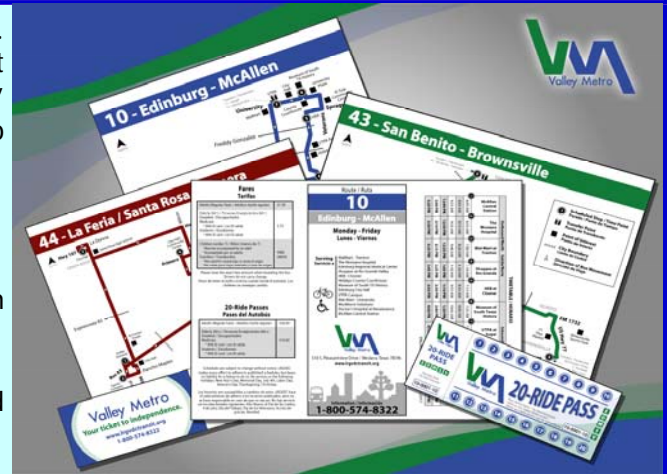
-Fred Villarreal



Valley Metro Is Here!

Say goodbye to Rio Metro, Rio Transit, and Harlingen Express. Starting in January 2011, the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council's Transit Department is now known simply as "Valley Metro." In the upcoming weeks, we will be experiencing many upgrades to our service, including:

- * Changing route names to accurately reflect areas of service,
- * Updating the look of our bus schedules,
- * Introducing new vehicles with a new design and equipped with bike racks,
- * Introducing a new frequent rider pass program, and
- * Introducing new communications tools, such as a revamped website and a newsletter.



The goal is to provide a unified look and brand name to avoid passenger confusion and improve service to customers. This is part of a larger effort by Valley Metro to improve service efficiency and effectiveness. It's part of a larger trend with the new Director Tom Logan, who joined Valley Metro in October, hopes will attract more passengers. "So far this year we have increased our efficiency and effectiveness ratios by about 50% over last year. This is a great trend, but we have a lot of work yet to do – we want to improve our image, work more closely with our project partners to develop projects, expand our service, and keep searching for local funds to provide the service that people need."

Valley Metro's vision for the future is captured by its new slogan, "Your Ticket to Independence". The slogan is customer centered and reflects the fact that every passenger deserves the best service possible, whether it's a clean vehicle, a route that runs on time, or maps that are easy to read. Moreover, the new brand is consistent with Valley Metro's goal of expanding its service throughout the Valley. "I see Valley Metro as a truly regional agency—serving travelers throughout the entire area with many different service options like commuter routes, vanpool service, and express routes as the only regional transit entity in the area, we see it as our responsibility to expand to meet the needs of people in the entire area, to really be that ticket to independence."

- Tom Logan & Rodney Gomez

How is Transportation Funded? Part II

As we mentioned in the previous newsletter, the federal and state gas tax has funded transportation needs since the early 1900's. In this section we are going to briefly look at the history of the gas tax in Texas thru the last 87 years.

- ⇒ In 1923 the 38th Legislature in Texas authorizes the state's first gas tax at 1¢ per gallon
- ⇒ In March 1927 the Texas Legislature increases the gas tax to 3¢ per gallon, and in September 1928 it is reduced to 2¢ per gallon
- ⇒ In 1929 the Texas Legislature increases the gas tax to 4¢ per gallon
- ⇒ In 1955 the Texas Legislature increases the gas tax to 5¢ per gallon
- ⇒ In 1984 the Texas Legislature increases the gas tax to 10¢ per gallon
- ⇒ In 1987 the Texas Legislature increases the gas tax to 15¢ per gallon
- ⇒ In 1991 the Texas Legislature increases the gas tax to 20¢ per gallon



Being that the existing federal gas tax is 18.4¢ per gallon, this means that every time we go to the pump to buy gas we are paying a total gas tax per gallon of 38.4¢, 20¢ state and 18.4¢ federal. Considering that the average gas price per gallon right now is about \$2.83, 38.4¢ would represent about 13.57% in gas taxes.

The bad news is that due to better technology translating into better mileage, and the fact that the price of gas keeps on going up as the gas tax stays flat at 38.4¢ per gallon, transportation is receiving less and less funding every year with more and more vehicles and wear on the roads. This is the reason why several state governments are looking at indexing the gas tax. Indexing means bringing the value of the gas tax to an amount that reflects the rate of inflation since it was last increased, for Texas this would be 1991.

- Linda de la Fuente



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If you wish to be added to our mailing list, please contact the MPO office and speak with **Maria Champine** or send an e-mail at **info@hcmpto.org**

HCMPO also offers a *Spanish* edition of this newsletter.

The City of Mercedes



The City of Mercedes is in the Rio Grande Valley on U.S. Highway 83 in the southeastern part of Hidalgo County. The site was first settled by ranchers in the late 1770s and was part of the Llano Grande Spanish land grant issued on May 29, 1790, to Juan José Ynojosa de Ballí. During the 1850s it was the location of the Anacuitas ranch, owned by Ramón and Manuel Cavazos. Apparently by the beginning of the 1900s, it was replaced by the Fuste Ranch, which was owned by the Cavazos family, alleged heirs of Ynojosa de Ballí. Lon C. Hill, Jr., a local land promoter and developer, bought 45,000 acres extending sixteen miles from the Rio Grande and including the site of what is now Mercedes. He later sold his company to the American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company. The town went thru different name changes until it was finally named what is named now, Mercedes. Some sources assert that the town was named in honor of the wife of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz. In 1904, Mercedes became the first town on the Same Fordyce Branch of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway, it was nicknamed the Southeast of the Branch.

In 1907, the grape culture was introduced to the areas, followed by large-scale production of citrus fruits and truck crops. That year the first hotel in the town was also opened followed by a school, lumberyard, feed store, livery stable, and a weekly newspaper, the *Enterprise*. In the 1920s, border incursions and unrest caused by the Mexican Revolution required a military presence on the border and Camp Mercedes and Camp Llano Grande were laid out – just outside the Mercedes city limits. The two camps had a combined population of 15,000 soldiers. On September 17, 1952, Mercedes and Weslaco businessmen organized the B&P Bridge Company and awarded a construction contract for a new international bridge, and by then, Mercedes had a population of 10,065 and 252 businesses. During the 1960s, Mercedes was a center for cotton, vegetable, and livestock marketing and processing. During the 1980s, Mercedes was best known for its annual Rio Grande Valley Stock Show and for the large number of nationally renowned boot makers located there.

Mercedes is now the home to the largest factory outlet mall in the Rio Grande Valley with approximately 140 stores, and according to the 2000 Census, Mercedes has a population of 13,649.

-Maria Champine

