



Movilidad del valle

What's New At the MPO?

SUMMER is here and things are not slowing down at the HCMPO! ♦ The HCMPO is hosting a Scenario Planning Workshop to provide assistance in the development of the Land Use Comprehensive Plan. The workshop is a continuation of January's course, Coordinating Land Use and Transportation. ♦ Numerous cities took advantage of nominating projects for the Statewide Transportation Enhancements Program which ended on April 28, 2006.. The HCMPO wishes all entities the best of luck! ♦ The Transit Advisory Panel (TAP) kicked-off the meeting for the Regional Transit Service Planning study. The study's goal is to improve the delivery of transportation services, to generate efficiencies in operation that can lead to increased levels of service, to enhance

customer service/satisfaction and to encourage cooperation and coordination. With guidance from the TAP, the consultant will adapt and expand these goals as appropriate for the LRGV region. ♦ The HCMPO is currently working on the 2035 Forecast Model. The HCMPO is coordinating efforts with the cities and the county to obtain copies of the Water and Sewer Master Plans in order to estimate the number of units per acre. ♦ As a follow up, the HCMPO is adding the final touches to the Texas Metropolitan Mobility Plan (TMMP). ♦ In addition, the HCMPO is glad to welcome aboard Eric Quintana and Luis Bazan. Eric comes to us from the University of Puerto Rico, and Luis comes from the University of Texas Pan American. They will be great assets to the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization. *Welcome Eric and Luis!*

Memorandum of Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a legal document describing an agreement between parties. It is a more formal alternative to a gentleman's agreement, but generally lacks the binding power of a contract. The HCMPO and city of Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico is in the process of having an MOU signed. The HCMPO staff, through the guidance of the Transportation Policy Committee (TPC), has been working to solidify a joint working relationship with the

city of Reynosa. A big *THANK YOU* to the Mexican Consulate for all their assistance and collaborative efforts in preparing the MOU to be signed. The Mayor of Reynosa, the Honorable Lic. Francisco Javier Garcia Cabeza de Vaca, is scheduled to attend the TPC meeting on June 22, 2006 at TxDOT - Conference Center to sign the MOU. Mayor Cabeza de Vaca has been invited to be an ex-officio member of the TPC. The HCMPO is looking forward to working with the City of Reynosa and in strengthening the bond.

Safe Routes to School Program

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program was established in August 2005 as part of the most recent federal transportation re-authorization legislation, SAFETEA-LU. This law provides multi-year funding for the surface transportation programs that guides spending of federal gas tax revenue. Section 1404 of this legislation provides funding (for the first time) for State Departments of Transportation to create and administer SRTS programs which will allow communities to compete for funding for local SRTS projects. What is SRTS? SRTS programs all share one

common goal: to improve the health of kids and the community by making walking and bicycling to school safer, easier and more enjoyable. How does the program work? The program works to assess the safety of school travel routes; make changes such as building crosswalks or adding crossing guards; educate students and drivers about safe travel and encourage walking and biking to school. Some programs expand to promote safe walking and bicycling throughout the community. TxDOT is expecting an SRTS program call to be issued sometime this fall. All entities are encouraged to begin preparing for the program call.

HCMPO

MPO Planning Partners:

- > Alamo, Alton, Donna, Edcouch, Edinburg, Elsa, Granjeno, Hidalgo, Hidalgo County, La Joya, La Villa, McAllen, Mercedes, Mission, Palmhurst, Palmview, Peñitas, Pharr, Progreso, Progreso Lakes, San Juan, Sullivan City, Weslaco and TxDOT
- > Ex-Offio Members: FHWA, FTA, LRGVDC Transit, Fish & Wildlife, McAllen Transit, Rio Grande Valley Partnership, Weslaco Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development of Reynosa, Economic Development of Rio Bravo, Gobierno de Tamaulipas and San Juan Economic Development

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From the Director



**Andrew A. Canon,
HCMPO Director**

Well, the dog days of summer are upon us and it is time for our summer issue of the HCMPO Newsletter. The HCMPO staff has, as always, been very busy with many planning initiatives and ideas. Allow me to also introduce some of our newest staff to the HCMPO, joining us is Luis Bazan. Luis is a new Planner I for the HCMPO. Also joining Luis is Eric Quintana and Eric Peña; both gentlemen will be working in our GIS section as a GIS Specialist. We are very happy to have them aboard. On that note, I also

have to make one sad announcement, the HCMPO will be losing one of its own, Mrs. Srilatha Raavi, GIS Specialist, was recently married and will be departing to join her husband in California. Although we are sad to see her go, we are very happy for her and congratulate her and her husband on their new endeavors.

A great many exciting things in transportation planning have transpired since our last newsletter. One of those items is the new transit study that the HCMPO is undertaking in partnership with the LRGVDC, TxDOT and BUS. This will be a region wide study so that we may identify the “gaps” in transit routes and availability

of service to its riders. All of us involved know that this will be a beneficial tool for all of us as we plan for the future needs of the Lower Rio Grande region.

The HCMPO staff is also preparing the TMMP to be submitted to Austin for the Transportation Commission. The newly updated Mobility plan has identified a gap in funding of 1.23 billion over the next 25 year planning horizon. The HCMPO staff has eagerly been working on innovative financing proposals to address this financial shortfall. Some initiatives include additional bridge tolls as well as proposed hotel taxes that could be captured and used for the mobility needs of Hidalgo County area

Although these are just a few of the items we have all been working on together, there are many, many more initiatives the HCMPO staff is working on. We encourage our readers and their friends and family to become more involved in the planning process with the HCMPO staff so that we may properly address your concerns, questions and ideas for the good of our community. Please contact our office and speak with Maria Champine to learn just how you can become more involved in the planning efforts of Hidalgo County. We also invite you to stay tuned to Time Warner Cable for upcoming commercials and public service announcements from the HCMPO, informing the community of our efforts and inviting everyone to have a voice in the planning strategies.

Hidalgo County 2035 Forecast Model



The HCMPO has successfully completed the 2004 base year model work, and it is now in the process of developing a 2035 forecast model for Hidalgo County. This go around, the HCMPO is diligently working in developing a much more representative and accurate forecast model for the area with the assistance of our Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

The Hidalgo County population has doubled since the last decade, and it is expected to grow at the same pace for the next decade, as well. Just like the population, the roadway needs have also doubled. With the forecast model, being a very effective tool, we should be able to account for the growth and

plan accordingly.

The HCMPO is planning to incorporate the land use component to a greater extent for this forecast model. This includes finding out the acreage for different land use within the HCMPO metropolitan area with the aid of the 2004 aerial photo. This would benefit in determining the areas where to forecast the demographics more effectively, and it will reflect in the model in a furthermore realistic manner.

The HCMPO will be working hard and continuously on the 2035 forecast model incorporating more innovative ideas and inputs in the coming future.

Upcoming Events

June 2006

- 1- Land Use Meeting at HCMPO Office 3:00 PM
- 7- Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting at HCMPO Office 1:30 PM
- 8- Transit Advisory Panel in Pharr 10:00 AM
- 13- TAC Meeting at TxDOT office in Pharr 1:30 PM
- 21- Scenario Planning Workshop in Edinburg 9:00AM
- 22- Policy Meeting at TxDOT Office in Pharr 5:30 PM

July 2006

- 4- Independence Day- Office Closed
- 5- Citizens' Advisory Committee Meeting at HCMPO Office 1:30 PM
- 6- Land Use Meeting at HCMPO Office 1:00 PM
- 11- TAC Meeting at TxDOT office in Pharr 1:30 PM
- 12- TUMP Meeting in Austin
- 27- Policy Meeting at TxDOT Office in Pharr 5:30 PM

August 2006

- 2- Citizens' Advisory Committee Meeting at HCMPO Office 1:30 PM
- 3- Land Use Meeting at HCMPO Office 3:00 PM
- 7-10- Transit Summit in Arlington, TX
- 8- TAC Meeting at TxDOT office in Pharr 1:30 PM
- 24- Policy Meeting at TxDOT Office in Pharr 5:30 PM
- 26-30- NADO Meeting in Reno, Nevada

HCMPO Policy Committee Member Spotlight

Mayor Leo "Polo" Palacios, Jr., Mayor of the city of Pharr, is currently the Chairman of the HCMPO's Transportation Policy Committee (TPC). Mayor Palacios was born and raised in the city of Pharr. He served in the Air Force from January 1953 through January 1957. He attended A&M University and graduated from Pan American University in 1980 where he received his Bachelor of Science in Social Work. He continued his education at Sam Houston University in Huntsville, TX and graduated with a degree in Alcohol Prevention and Probation.

Mayor Palacios has served his community as an elected official for the last twenty-one years. He was first elected as a city commissioner in 1985, and was inspired by business people and administrators - who asked him to run for mayor - since he knew the city well and knew the city's goals. He became Mayor in 2002 and recently began his

second term. Mayor Palacios wanted to serve the community now that he is retired and has the time to dedicate his full attention to the city's needs. He aspires to improve the quality of life for the city of Pharr and as he said, "help the people help themselves".

As Chairman of the TPC, his goals are to accomplish and complete projects in their entirety. He would like to see traffic move quicker and promote economic development in order to create employment opportunities, as well as find a way of stretching the money to complete the projects that are in dire need.



Mayor Leo "Polo" Palacios, Jr.,
City of Pharr

HCMPO Staff Spotlight

The HCMPO staff is honored and pleased to write about this month's Spotlight Person. Mary Escalona, Administrative Assistant, has been with the HCMPO for two and half years. She is a native of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and resides in San Juan, Texas. Growing up, Mary and her family would migrate to the northern states, making the state of Michigan her second home. She graduated from McAllen Memorial in 1995, and is now attending South Texas College (STC) with the intentions of earning an Associate of Applied Science In

Business Management and a second Associate of Applied Science In Office Management by the year 2008. Throughout the years, Mary has acquired extensive experience in Administration and Human Resources. Mary's primary duties include assuring that the Director's day to day activities are scheduled and met as well as assisting staff with travel plans and general assistance as needed. "Mary is a valued employee and resource to the HCMPO. Not much in our office would ever move forward without her input and

assistance" states Andrew Canon, Director of the HCMPO. As she advances in her career, she enjoys participating in training courses / workshops so she can enhance her professional background. In addition, she is also a member of the National Association of Executive Secretaries.



Mary Escalona,
Administrative Assistant

Scenario Planning: Seeing is Believing



Scenario planning. What is it and how does it work? Scenario planning, simply put, is a technique used in the planning business to depict a vision for future developments. It has been an escalating trend among metropolitan planning organizations across the nation in recent

years and it has evolved into somewhat of a need for seeing the "big picture" come alive.

With growing questions and concerns about future possibilities or outcomes, community planners are now longing for answers that show and tell a story instead of leaving it up to the imagination. Scenario planning can take study information and transform it into a possible reality, if the methodology is properly implemented.

Deriving from backgrounds such as military strategies, business applications and alternatives analysis, scenario planning didn't suddenly appear from out of nowhere. Certain aspects of the technique have been practiced

over the years, and in 2003-2004 a survey was conducted with the help of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) and the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations in order to identify a threshold for defining the technique that is used today.

Certain criterion applies to determine if scenario planning is viable, criterion such as whether land use is included as a variable and whether there are two or more alternatives or scenarios for each project. In addition, six areas of interest - motivation for the study, the nature of the scenarios, the evaluation process, evaluation results, public involvement and

resulting actions - need to be in place in order for scenario planning to be effective, but more importantly believable.

In essence, scenario planning is a way to foresee the future. It is "strategic imagination in motion" and it is as real as it gets, at least for now. With future tweaking and perfection of this exciting technique, along with technological advances, there's no telling how far it will go. Needless to say, scenario planning is rapidly growing and becoming more popular among planners nationwide. Scenario planning, with all it encompasses, is the next level of planning the future.



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

The City of Alton, Texas

The HCMPO is incorporating a little history of the cities within the Hidalgo County metropolitan area in our newsletter, so everyone can experience a taste of the *Lower Rio Grande Valley*. The City of Alton, Texas is four miles north of Mission on State Highway 107 in Hidalgo County. The city originated as a stop on the San Benito and Rio Grande Valley Railway in 1911 when the population of the community was fifty. Railroad officials named the city after the Alton Railroad that had been founded by citizens of Alton, Illinois. In the late 1920s, the Alton Independent School District was formed. The small, six-grade Alton school was later consolidated with the Mission Consolidated Independent School District. A grade school operated in the community in 1990, when Alton was a bedroom community for McAllen. In 1990, the population of the City was 3,069 and in 2000, according to the

U.S. Census, the population was 4,384. The community voted to incorporate on April 10, 1978. Today, Alton is one of the fastest growing small communities in the region. There are now over 2,200 water accounts in the city which indicate the present population to be approximately 8,000 residents. This figure is consistent with the figure used by demographic experts at the University of Texas San Antonio who study the annual population of the region. This phenomenal growth is attributed to the residential growth in the area. In the last 15 months, eleven subdivisions, which consist of over 1,100 lots have been developed, or are in the process of being developed. In addition, in the last year 173 lots have been voluntarily annexed. We fully expect that by 2010, the city will have a population of 10,000 with a strong possibility that it may be closer to 11,500. On another positive note, on



May 13, 2006, the residents of the city approved the first ever charter for the City of Alton. This process will allow the city to grow at a faster pace since its ETJ area is also heavily populated. When one considers the combined population of the city and ETJ areas, one can easily conclude that the City of Alton is well on its way to becoming one of the premier medium sized communities in the region. Who would have thought that in 1990 when the population was just over 3,000 that the population would triple or maybe even quadruple by 2010.