

Webb County-City of Laredo Regional Mobility Authority Strategic Plan 2015

Introduction

The importance of effective and efficient transportation infrastructure is a highly-regarded concern of governmental entities, transportation officials, business owners and residents within the Webb County-City of Laredo – Mexico border region. Texas is a major gateway for trade between the United States, Mexico and countries south. Even while it appears that the existing ports of entry along the Texas-Mexico border have become somewhat congested the Petitioners recognize that congestion and the resulting inefficiencies that continued growth have on the existing transportation infrastructure within Webb County and the City of Laredo quickly outpaces local, state and federal efforts to keep the region's transportation infrastructure well maintained and with sufficient capacity to provide efficient mobility.

The WCCL-RMA encompasses one of the nation's fastest growing Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA). Traffic data from the 2010-2035 Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Laredo Urban Transportation Study Transportation Plan, as far back as December 1999 indicates that 2035-Build and No-Build will provide only level of service (LOS) E and F for the majority of roadway facilities in Webb County and the City of Laredo. The population of Webb County and the City of Laredo continues to grow at an accelerated rate. The 2010 Census population for Webb County was measured to be 250,304 and the population is expected to be 418,332 by 2030 as projected by the Texas Water Development Board (<http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/>). TxDOT's own "One-Stop Demographic Data Analysis Tool" indicates the 2030 population is expected to be 437,726. Therefore, improvements to transportation infrastructure within Webb County and the City of Laredo are vital to meet the demands resulting from this growth.

The formation of the Webb – Laredo RMA will allow an entity, under local control but working in cooperation with TxDOT, to develop road projects and provide support to other transportation improvement in the region which otherwise might depend solely on state or federal funding. Thus, badly needed transportation infrastructure can be delivered to the region more quickly than would be the case without a regional mobility authority. The Webb – Laredo RMA will benefit the State by relieving TxDOT of the burden of constructing certain transportation projects some of which are set forth in the following sections

The Webb County-City of Laredo Regional Mobility Authority (WCCL-RMA) is authorized by the Texas Legislature under the Transportation Code. Formed in 2014, the WCCL-RMA represents the Legislature's vision to give local communities greater flexibility to develop and implement innovative transportation programs. With the support and guidance of Webb

County and the City of Laredo, the WCCL-RMA is evolving into a vibrant, agile, highly effective organization.

Benefits

The projects described in this strategic plan are important links to the border infrastructure within the City of Laredo and Webb County. The WCCL-RMA projects will benefit the ports of entry, governmental entities, transportation officials, import and export business, and commercial establishments in the community in general by having increased local control over projects and a more direct impact on transportation planning decisions. The region will also have the opportunity to benefit from any surplus revenues generated by the WCCL-RMA that may be used for other transportation projects in the region.

The traveling public will benefit by an improved system of roadways in the region which can be delivered sooner than would be possible under traditional methods of transportation funding and project development. Easing the traffic congestion which plagues the area encompassed by the WCCL-RMA will also enhance safety, air quality while decreasing travel time, and generally improving the quality of life of citizens of the region.

MOBILITY 2030 - The Strategic Plan Mission and Core Ideology

Mission Statement:

The Webb County – City of Laredo RMA exists through a cooperative coalition of State, County, City and Private efforts with its sights on providing alternative solutions for securing financing resources that will be utilized in improving, facilitating, and constructing transportation and related projects that will improve the flow of traffic, commerce and quality of life for the citizens of Webb County.

Core Ideology:

The WCCL-RMA's core ideology describes our consistent identity that transcends all changes related to our relevant environment. Our core ideology consists of two notions:

- Core purpose (our reason for being) and
- Core values (the essential and enduring principles that guide our organization).

Core Purpose:

Be a provider of reliable high quality regional mobility services in Webb County.

Core Values:

- Integrity is demonstrated by honest communication, transparent transactions, ethical decisions and forthright behavior.

- Demonstrated Accountability in fiscal responsibility, commitment to our customers and constituents and collaboration with local and regional partners. Demonstrated Credibility will be an earned reputation for fairness, dependability and dedication to public service.
- Innovation is demonstrated in visionary leadership, entrepreneurial spirit and tolerance for honest mistakes.

Positioning for 2030

Laredo is consistently one of the communities in the United States that has experienced tremendous growth in the past decades. There is no expectation that the vibrant Laredo/Webb County economy that is based on international trade will change anytime soon. The international ports of entry at Laredo are the number one inland port and the third of all ports in the U.S. This is due to this community's location on IH 35 and Highway 2, the Mexican interstate highway counterpart. This level of international trade presents unique challenges in relation to the roadway infrastructure due to the large percentage of trucks on the major streets and roadways. In addition to the IH 35 traffic, Laredo is designated as the western terminus of I-69 as it is developed over the next decades. Upgrading the I-69W corridor in and into Laredo will continue to be the primary objective of the WCCL-RMA.

In fact, the Webb County / Laredo area population is projected to grow from approximately 225,000 to 450,000 by 2030. With this level of sustained growth, the region has to anticipate, plan and implement a wide-range of integrated transportation solutions to ensure that our community retains and improves the quality of life currently enjoyed. Mobility is a key component for the region's future. In addition, it is important to recognize that mobility in general is facing a major transformation in the next 20 years. Not only will there be more people to serve, but every aspect of moving people and goods will change. An increasing percentage of the population will be retired and on fixed incomes. The gas tax, the primary source of funding for transportation, will continue to diminish. There will be tougher air quality requirements, and stricter environmental standards to comply. These are a few examples of factors the WCCL-RMA must consider in developing a long-term mobility strategy.

To frame this Strategic Plan, the WCCL-RMA desires to articulate an envisioned future that conveys a concrete, yet unrealized vision for the region's mobility by the year 2030. It consists of our positioning statement, which represents a clear and compelling catalyst that serves as a focal point for our effort, the intersection of what we are passionate about, what we do best and how we can marshal the resources to accomplish the vision. It also includes a visualization of what the year 2030 will be like when the vision is achieved.

Positioning Statement. The WCCL-RMA will be the driving force for significant improvement and sustainable mobility in Laredo and Webb County through the year 2030.

Visualization. What does 2030 mobility look like?

The following are descriptive statements of how the world could be different for key stakeholders as a result of the WCCL-RMA attaining its vision. These descriptions are classified by the WCCL-RMA's four strategic initiatives.

Economic Vitality

- Local businesses recognize greater efficiency and profitability due to greater reliability of the transportation network.
- South Texans benefit from a financially sustainable transportation system, which provides increased resources to meet mobility needs.
- Emergency services realize reduced response times and increase the health and welfare of Central Texas citizens.
- Travelers benefit from increased safety as they travel through South Texas.
- Drivers' benefit from reduced auto insurance rates directly attributed to less congestion, greater mobility and safety. Drivers benefit from reliable travel times, less congestion and greater mobility and safety.
- Citizens of south Texas enjoy a greatly enhanced quality of life as a result of certainty of travel times due to an improved roadway system.
- South Texans enjoy greater access to a wide range of transportation modes.

Innovation

- Transportation infrastructure users benefit from pioneering and innovative financing mechanisms.
- Implementing new technology and social media increases transportation choices, improves decision making and drives efficiency.
- Nationwide toll system interoperability improves mobility across the country.
- Residents of South Texas benefit from more efficient government services as a result of a collaborative and cooperative "business model."
- All individuals and organizations that interact with the WCCL-RMA and its contractors receive a prompt, courteous and forthright response that exceeds expectations.

Sustainability

- The environment is protected through sustainable air and water quality initiatives and the proactive mitigation of congestion.
- Residents of South Texas benefit from the WCCL-RMA's use of sustainable materials and construction methods.
- Residents and businesses of South Texas have affordable choices for mobility due to financially sustainable construction and maintenance of facilities.

The 2015 Strategic Plan

The following represents the WCCL-RMA's proposed long-term goals and objectives for the next five years. Set in context of four major strategic initiatives, achievement of these goals will move the WCCL-RMA towards realization of its purpose and vision.

Initiative: Economic Vitality

A strong, reliable and efficient mobility network is a significant component to a successful regional economy. Residents and businesses alike will benefit with new opportunities for economic expansion while improving mobility in the area.

Goal: Develop projects and programs that support federal, state, regional and local economic development strategies.

- Objective: Adopt a process to evaluate projects based on their relative value in providing greater mobility given available resources.
- Objective: Develop programs that ensure consistent and predictable travel times.
- Objective: Develop transportation project priorities based on current and future housing and employment centers.

Goal: Lead regional efforts to increase transportation capacity and reliability particularly in congested areas and desired development zones.

- Objective: Develop transportation project priorities based on current and future housing, employment and international trade centers.
- Objective: Adopt an objective and transparent process to evaluate projects based on their relative value in providing greater mobility given the limited availability of resources.
- Objective: Develop programs that ensure consistent and predictable travel times.

Goal: Partner with regional entities to facilitate economic development initiatives driven by mobility and transportation.

- Objective: Continue involvement in regional planning activities with community partners.

Initiative: Regional Integration

The Webb County-City of Laredo RMA will benefit from greater access to a regionally integrated network of transportation modes that provide safe, reliable, efficient and affordable travel.

Goal: Advocate and/or develop reliable, efficient modes of regional multimodal transportation options.

- Objective: Develop a planning and financing process that results in the creation of a short and long-range Capital Improvement Program.
- Objective: Be on the forefront of utilizing existing and emerging technologies so as to implement more efficient modes of transportation to provide greater mobility options.

Goal: Provide highly reliable and appropriately maintained regional roadway network.

- Objective: Design and construct transportation facilities that provide for reliability and safety.
- Objective: Develop and implement reliable and efficient maintenance strategies that continue to protect the initial investment.
- Objective: Facilitate driver roadside assistance programs that preserve existing capacity.
- Objective: Identify opportunities and efficiencies to develop a consistent and seamless toll road network in Webb County Texas.
- Objective: Manage the transportation capacity available in the region through the use of technology including dynamic tolling and mobile applications.

Initiative: Innovation

The WCCL-RMA is a solution-oriented, regional transportation leader and service provider that fosters a high level of trust from the public, elected officials and users of the transportation system through its innovative practices, transparent processes and open communication.

Goal: Advocate for increased transportation management and funding options.

- Objective: Work closely with elected officials to educate and enact legislation that ensures flexible options to achieve regional mobility, including funding mechanisms and efficient construction methods.
- Objective: Explore and utilize public private partnership (P3) opportunities.
- Objective: Lead efforts to increase all levels of funding for regional mobility.
- Objective: Support and facilitate the start-up and success of Regional Mobility Authority's across the state.

Goal: Implement the most efficient and cost effective management of transportation facilities in South Texas while providing the best possible customer experience.

- Objective: Explore expansion of toll tag inter-operability and toll tag uses.
- Objective: Effectively increase use of technology to support traffic management.
- Objective: Maintain leadership in utilizing innovative and industry best practices.
- Objective: Preserve and maintain system assets to ensure long-term financial sustainability of the system

Goal: Enhance the customer experience through effective WCCL-RMA communication and accessibility.

- Objective: Proactively outreach to the community and engage the public in regional transportation issues.
- Objective: Enhance WCCL-RMA's financial and operations reporting.
- Objective: Develop and implement exceptional customer service practices and procedures.

Initiative: Sustainability

Central Texans will experience a better quality of life due resulting from to the Mobility Authority's planning, implementation, operations and maintenance of transportation facilities using use of efficient and environmentally sustainable methods.

Goal: Define, use and advocate for environmentally sound design and construction methods for WCCL-RMA projects.

- Objective: Identify and implement innovative techniques to encourage sustainable, cost effective design.
- Objective: Encourage and increase scientific advancements of material usage.
- Objective: Consider innovative land use and mitigation options.

Goal: Build, and maintain and operate assets for long-term preservation and reliability.

- Objective: Identify opportunities for and encourage increased use of sustainable materials and innovative environmentally responsible construction methods on all projects.
- Objective: Develop methods to analyze costs from a long-term sustainability perspective.
- Objective: Identify and implement strategies to increase efficiency of roadway, traffic and toll operations.

Goal: Increase public awareness of environmental benefits related to improved mobility systems.

- Objective: Include Advocate and promote environmental benefits in all presentations and communications regarding WCCL-RMA activities.
- Objective: Highlight Promote WCCL-RMA's sustainability achievements.

WCCL-RMA Project Updates

Past TxDOT – Laredo District efforts, with the full cooperation of Webb County, the City of Laredo and the Laredo MPO, began early planning and conceptual studies to upgrade Loop 20 as it was then. For instance, in 2005-06 the Laredo District prepared the final designs to implement a 7.25-mile southern extension of Loop 20 (locally known as Cuatro Vientos Road) and the SH 359 Interchange, which started construction in 2010 and were opened to traffic in 2011 and 2013 respectively.

- The Mobility Authority's first project, constructing the US 59 (Loop 20) Mainlanes over IH 35/Union-Pacific Railroad Project, is slated to go to bid letting in August 2016. The WCCL-RMA will sponsor the funding for this project using approximately \$40 Million of the Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) funds assigned to the WCCL-RMA by Webb County and the City of Laredo. This project will be constructed to urban interstate design standards and will integrate with the existing section of I-69W to the west of the project and the McPherson Road and International Boulevard interchange projects to the east. This project is anticipated to be opened to traffic within two years after construction starts.
- In partnership with TxDOT and Webb County, the studies on the upgrade of US 59 (Loop 20) from International Boulevard to the intersection of US 59 coming into Laredo are proceeding. It is anticipated that the Webb County sponsored schematic design and preliminary environmental studies are proceeding for completion in late 2015. A preliminary funding plan is being developed by TxDOT that will be the basis of the final funding plan to be used to acquire the needed right-of-way and to construct the project in phases. It is anticipated that the environmental clearance will be obtained approximately one year after the completion of the funding plan. After the environmental clearance is

obtained, right-of-way acquisitions will begin and the development of the plans, specification and estimates will be developed for each of the project phases.

- Other projects further south on Loop 20 that are under long-term consideration by the WCCL-RMA include:
 - The new location roadway extension of Loop 20 to US 83 or to the entrance of the proposed International Bridge V to be located south of the Rio Bravo township that is south of Laredo. This is a currently unscheduled project.
 - The construction of interchanges at the four arterial street intersections with Loop 20 between SH 359 and Mangana-Hein Road. These are currently unscheduled projects.
- Upgrading US 59 from the Laredo city limits to the Duval County line to I-69W design standards. This is a currently unscheduled project.
- The construction or upgrade to a four-lane divided roadway with frontage road of the Green Ranch (Hachar Road) Parkway between IH 35 and FM 1472. Webb County and the City of Laredo are working with the primary landowners and are anticipated to acquire the necessary rights-of-way and construct the initial lanes.
- The construction of the Laredo Outer Loop which would act as a bypass relief route around the eastern side of Laredo. This project would extend from approximately the Toll 255 roadway to Loop 20/US 83 at a point that leads to the future Laredo International Bridge V which would be constructed by others. This is a currently unscheduled, long-term project.

To build on our previous success and continue to plan strategically for the region's mobility future, the following strategic plan represents the WCCL-RMA's long-term vision, initiatives, goals and objectives as it continues to evolve as a leading regional mobility provider in the State.

Project Funding Tools

It is recognized that a variety of funding tools will need to be utilized for the WCCL-RMA and its local and state partners (Webb County, the City of Laredo, TxDOT and FHWA) to meet the goal of upgrading the Laredo and Webb County roadways in a timely manner. It is the objective of the WCCL-RMA to fully investigate these funding tools which are discussed below.

- "Traditional" funding – These federal and state funds will be utilized as much and as efficiently as possible with the objective of using local funding to leverage these funds as much as possible.
- Vehicle Registration Funds (VRF) – The \$20 VRF payments have been collected by Webb County for every vehicle registered in the County starting in 2014. To compliment these funds, TxDOT has committed to match at least the first five years

of the VRF collections. Approximately \$1.1 Million was collected in 2014 vehicle registrations; approximately this amount is anticipated for the next four years.

- Transportation Re-Investment Zone funds – The City of Laredo is on a path to develop a TRZ analysis that will lead to a dedication of a portion of the property taxes collected within a zone surrounding a transportation project (i.e. the US 59/Loop 20/I-69W Upgrade). This dedication of property tax funds to transportation uses will not change the amount of taxes paid by property owners but will allow for an acceleration of much needed transportation projects that will improve the quality of life in the TRZ area.
- Other City Funding – The City of Laredo has identified approximately \$89 Million that could be used by the WCCL-RMA for transportation uses.
- “Indirect Tolling” – State law allows for what is a “pass-through” payment agreement with TxDOT where a governmental entity would finance and build a transportation project on the state roadway system with repayments by TxDOT based on traffic levels over a specified timeframe. Currently, this program is not active; however, the WCCL-RMA would investigate the use of this program if it is re-activated by the State and TxDOT.
- Direct Tolling – Tolling funds paid for by drivers for the use of an improved roadway would be an option to consider by the WCCL-RMA after a full review of the pertinent factors, a determination of its viability and after public outreach is conducted.

Other WCCL-RMA Commitments

The WCCL-RMA is committed to operating in a straight forward and transparent manner in developing and funding transportation projects in Laredo and Webb County. As part of this commitment, the WCCL-RMA will fulfill all environmental requirements with a comprehensive public outreach program. As such, the WCCL-RMA will adopt and begin implementing a set of standard operating procedures that will cover all facets of the WCCL-RMA’s operations.

As such, the Webb County – City of Laredo Regional Mobility Authority is committed to improving roadway system in our community for the citizens of Webb County, the south Texas region, the state of Texas, the United States as well as for our counterparts and partners in Mexico.

End-notes:

Measures of success or desired results:

- Positive customer surveys, increased employment and an increased job base that matches population growth.
- Less congestion as measured by average commute times and time saved.
- Appraised property value changes
- Zoning changes
- Decreased response times for emergency services
- Decreased number of accidents and injuries/fatalities
- Roadside assistance measures, number of projects constructed, environment and energy savings and positive impacts to long-term maintenance cost
- Legislative success, funding options developed, projects started and completed in scheduled timeframes, awards and recognitions, customer satisfaction