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Eduardo Calvo, AICP

Executive Director

September 15, 2020

The Honorable Terry Canales, Chair
House Committee on Transportation
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

RE: Response to Interim Charge 4

Dear Chair Canales,

The purpose of this letter is to provide comments on the importance of the ports of entry along the international border between the State of Texas and Mexico and the need to fund improvements to the local infrastructure and operations. It is expected that the movement of goods and people across the border will experience accelerated growth in the next 30 years. The current infrastructure is not adequate to handle current traffic levels efficiently and will be a bottleneck in the future that will have severe negative impacts to the economies of the border communities, the State of Texas and the United States. The Transportation Policy Board of the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization recognizes that this is a major challenge facing all border communities and supports the efforts to make the cross-border movement of goods and people more efficient today and in the future.

As you may know, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is completing the Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan this year and will present it to the Texas Legislature next year. The Border Trade Advisory Committee (BTAC), chaired by Texas Secretary of State Ruth Hughes, is operating as a steering committee for the plan. As a member of BTAC, I have participated actively in the discussions and review of the documents that are being produced, and have voiced the strong concerns that we have in our border community of Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. Specific numbers from the study are not included in this letter, given that it is still in draft form, but the message is clear: the activity in the southern border has a major and direct impact to the economies of the State of Texas and the United States, with thousands of jobs depending directly on it. Improving the efficiency in the flow of goods and people will allow us to capitalize on the tremendous opportunities that we will have in the next years.

Some of the improvements that need to be analyzed and implemented quickly can be classified as follows:

- Physical infrastructure leading to the border crossings on both sides of the border: multimodal access to and from the crossings needs. Specifically for El Paso, Interstate Highway 10 (I-10) is of critical importance to cross-border movement of people and goods. All of the crossings in the region connect to I-10 and it is vital to have the sufficient capacity and reliability on it to ensure smooth flows. The El Paso MPO has identified four priority projects in the region that are along I-10 or support the I-10 corridor that are currently unfunded
- Added capacity to the crossings: new crossings or expansion of existing ones,

- Technological advances that can lead to pre-inspection programs at the point of origins for trucks or quicker inspections at the crossing point,
- Avoid double inspection (federal and state) of trucks entering through the State of Texas, and
- Provide dedicated funding for the border region projects. The Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) program provided valuable federal assistance but it was discontinued when MAP-21 was adopted in 2012.

Some of the challenges that need to be addressed include the fact that the activity in the international border is highly regulated by the federal government. We understand that it is difficult to strike a perfect balance between national security concerns and efficient cross-border movements. Events in the last few years, specifically the migrant crisis in the Spring of 2019 and the current COVID-19 pandemic, have had severe negative consequences on the border communities. Both have limited the legitimate movement of goods and people across the border. Decisions made in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City are made without considering the negative consequences on our border communities and we hope that the Texas Legislature realizes this and assists the border communities to have relief.

The efficient movement of goods and people across the international border will have a major positive impact to our communities but also at the state and national level. Dedicated funding is critical and we hope that the Legislature realizes this and acts during the 2021 session.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and are available to have additional conversations about them. We also look forward to a successful legislative session in January 2021.

Respectfully submitted,



Eduardo Calvo, AICP
Executive Director

Cc: Mayor Dee Margo, Chair Transportation Policy Board
State Representative Lina Ortega, Vice-Chair Transportation Policy Board

