



# **Texas Freight Advisory Committee Meeting #45**

**8 a.m. to noon December 17, 2025**

**In-Person Meeting at McAllen Convention Center**

Room 103, 700 Convention Center Blvd. McAllen, TX 78501

## **COMMITTEE ATTENDEES**

- Judge Ed Emmett – Chair, Rice University, Attended
- Candice Armenoff, Port Houston, Absent
- Ken Becker, Owner-Operator Independent, Drivers Association (OOIDA), Attended
- Adriana Cruz, Office of the Governor, Absent
- John Esparza, Texas Trucking Association, Absent
- Joey Evans, TNW Corporation, Attended
- Laura Freeland, Southern Dallas County Inland Port Transportation Management Association, Attended
- Teclo Garcia, Mission Economic Development Corporation, Attended
- Lauren Garduno, Ports-to-Plains Alliance, Attended
- Brenda Gunter, Ports-To-Plains Alliance, Absent
- Nicholas Konen, Hillwood, Alliance Texas, Attended
- Miriam Kotkowski, TECMA Transportation Services, Absent
- Charlie Leal, Texas Farm Bureau, Attended
- Robert MacDonald, Texas Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (TEMPO), Attended
- Ryan Martin, LDR Partners, Attended
- Tiffany Melvin, North American Strategy for Competitiveness, Attended
- Lindsay Mullins, BNSF Railway, Absent
- Dr. Rolando Ortiz, Killam Development, Ltd., Attended
- Steven Schar, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Attended
- Clint Schelbitzki, Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), Attended
- Gerry Schwebel, International Bank of Commerce, Attended
- Sean Stibich, Port of Victoria, Absent
- Isaac J. Tawil, City Manager of McAllen/ representing McAllen Economic Development Group, Attended
- Matt Woodruff, Kirby Corporation, Attended

Total Count of Committee Present (includes proxy members): 17

## **Texas Transportation Commission**

- Commissioner Alvin New (virtual)
- Commissioner Alejandro "Alex" G. Meade III

## **TxDOT**

- Pete Alvarez
- Amanda Austin
- Andrew A. Canon
- Leah Casey
- Emily Clisby, Office of Commissioner Alvin New (virtual)
- Farideh Dassi
- Kale Driemeier
- Don Franks
- Norma Y. Garza
- Epi Gonzalez
- Humberto "Tito" Gonzalez Jr.
- Tyler Graham
- Rose Guajardo
- Nicole Lawson (virtual)
- David Mass
- Arqa Mast
- Caroline Mays
- Meera Nguyen
- Madeleine Pelton
- Edgar O. Perez
- Dora E. Robles
- Roberto Rodriguez
- Allyson Orr Schmitz
- Sergio Vasquez
- Luis M. Villarreal

## **Agency/Consultant Team**

- Alisha Catalano, HNTB
- Paula Dowell, HNTB
- Eva Esquivel, HNTB
- Jeremy Upchurch, HNTB

## **Host City Officials**

- Juan Olaguibel, Assistant City Manager, City of McAllen
- Daniella Plata, International Relations, City of McAllen

## **Other Attendees**

- Joe Bryan, WSP
- Louis Cutaia, Jacobs
- Eric Davila, Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA)
- Bill Eisele, Texas A&M Transportation Institute
- Juan Carlos Espinosa, Texas A&M Transportation Institute

## **Other Attendees (continued)**

- Joel Garza, Multimodal Transportation, City of Brownsville
- David Garcia, Real Strategic Solutions
- Klarissa Gonzalez, Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO)
- Belén Guerrero, Mission Economic Development Corporation
- Brian Hill, Maritime Administration
- Marc Hoecker, WSP
- Ian Kilgour, HNTB Corporation
- Bruce Mann, RCR Rail Company
- Jorge Martinez, HNTB Corporation
- Michael Medina, Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO)
- Stephanie Mendiola, Mission Economic Development Corporation
- Tyson Moeller, Texas City Terminal Railway
- Curtis Morgan, Texas A&M Transportation Institute
- Don Rodman, I-69 Alliance/I-14 Coalition
- Candace Rodriguez, Mission Economic Development Corporation
- Melany Rodriguez, Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO)
- Claudia Salinas, Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO)
- Hannah Santiago, Cambridge Systematics
- Other Attendees (continued)
- Steve Taylor, Rio Grande Guardian
- Jason Wallis, Texas A&M Transportation Institute
- Lizzie Welch, WSP
- Rudy Zamora, Jr. Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO)

## **TxFAC Welcome, Call to Order, Safety Minute and New Business**

Tyler Graham opened the 45<sup>th</sup> Texas Freight Advisory Committee (TxFAC) meeting with a Safety Minute message highlighting the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) #EndTheStreak campaign. A reminder to reinforce seatbelts, maintain speed discipline and DUI avoidance was reiterated.

## **TxFAC Welcome, Call to Order, Safety Minute and New Business (continued)**

Commissioner Alejandro “Alex” G. Meade III, Texas Transportation Commission, thanked the City of McAllen for hosting and recognized City Manager Isaac Tawil for hosting the committee. He underscored the economic value contributed by all regions of Texas and the committee’s role in keeping the state among the world’s largest economies.

Commissioner Alvin New, Texas Transportation Commission, expanded on safety, noting that Texas is trending back toward pre-COVID fatality levels and urging members to influence friends and family to make safe driving choices (seatbelts, safe speeds, and arranging sober rides) during the final weeks of 2025. He commended TxFAC Chair Judge Ed Emmett on his leadership and thanked him for his years of service and work on public transportation.

Caroline Mays, senior director of planning and modal programs at TxDOT, highlighted TxFAC’s influence beyond Texas. She noted that peers abroad—including planners in New Zealand—are looking to emulate the committee’s model and encouraged members to stay engaged as work begins on the 2027 Texas Freight Mobility Plan. She thanked Judge Emmett for his leadership and his support of the committee “since day one”.

Judge Ed Emmett, chair, reflected on the committee’s evolution since its founding in 2013, crediting the collaborative model and ongoing support from the Texas Transportation Commission saying freight remains critical to the state’s economy, even though it often receives limited attention in electoral politics. Judge Emmett noted that “freight doesn’t vote,” but its impact on economic growth and infrastructure is significant. He said he was not disappearing from transportation that he would now be focusing on fuels of the future in his work.

## Member Updates Roundtable

Members reported on federal funding and interstate projects where coalitions are pursuing dedicated federal funding for future interstate corridors (I-69, I-14, I-27, I-11, I-73) through under-utilized discretionary grants, aiming for a multi-year construction and planning program.

Barge and maritime operation members cited steady barge business supporting refineries and petrochemical supply chains and flagged the Brazos River floodgates as a vulnerability affecting intracoastal flows between Houston and Corpus Christi.

In the Rio Grande Valley, I-69, a 7.1-mile stretch north of SH 186 is under construction to full interstate standards, with expected benefits for cargo capacity, especially in Pharr.

Texas Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) are advancing safety action plans and Safe System Plans that feed freight-relevant projects into the Unified Transportation Program (UTP) to prioritize investments that improve safety and connectivity. Multiple members reported continued growth in intermodal operations tied to long-standing collaboration with TxDOT and MPO partners.

Union Pacific detailed operational gains from relocating crew changes off the Eagle Pass bridge into the U.S. for improved safety and throughput.

Appreciation was expressed for TxDOT's grade separation program and briefed the proposed UP-Norfolk Southern merger is subject to Surface Transportation Board (STB) review, positioning end-to-end benefits east of the Mississippi.

Short lines emphasized the need for a grant program to strengthen first-/last-mile connectivity.

Agricultural representatives cautioned about the New World screwworm's potential reemergence, which could severely impact livestock, wildlife, and supply chains amid historically low cattle inventory. Members flagged

## **Member Updates Roundtable (continued)**

record-low water supplies and concerns related to the 1944 U.S.–Mexico water treaty. Reported recent losses included substantial crop impacts and continued attrition among farmers and ranchers, underscoring the importance of coordinated biosecurity and water-management actions.

Other member topics included United States-Mexico-Canada-Agreement (USMCA) up for review in 2026 with timing aligning with the FIFA World Cup games in North America. Monthly calls are being organized with partner organizations holding key stakes in trade. Truck driver shortages were dispelled as a myth, but training needs were emphasized for those with limited English skills.

Don Franks, rail division director at TxDOT, updated the members on the grade separation program, their efforts to write a program for short line grants, and their daily freight inspection activities of all rail disciplines.

## **Freight Plan Update**

TxDOT staff reported on the 2027 Texas Freight Mobility Plan, outlining a four-year update cycle and a commitment to exceeding federal requirements. The plan focuses on investment strategies, digital infrastructure, and performance metrics. Members participated in live polling to refine six draft goals and their objectives surrounding safety, system performance, resilience, security, investment prioritization, and stewardship.

Questions included:

- Rank the Goals and Objectives by priority for the Texas Freight Mobility Plan.
- How well do the draft objectives under “Move Texas Freight Safely” address the safety concerns you see in your region or sector?

## 2027 Freight Plan Update (continued)

- Which objective under the “Optimize Freight System Performance” for you think will have the greatest impact on improving freight mobility in Texas?
- What are the biggest barriers to achieving the goal of “Deliver an Agile Freight Network” in Texas?
- Which security concern is most pressing for Texas freight?
- Which objective under the “Prioritize the Most Impactful Investments” do you believe will have the greatest positive impact on Texas freight mobility?
- How confident are you that the draft goals and objectives support responsible stewardship of natural resources while maintaining freight efficiency?
- Are there any objectives missing from the draft you feel should be included to address Texas’s freight challenges?

Early staff reviews of trends, disruptors and opportunities span energy, agriculture, manufacturing, trade/distribution, e-commerce, and digital tech (AI, data systems), with emphasis on Texas’s manufacturing scale and multimodal dependence.

A stakeholder engagement plan outlined featured in person- meetings at key freight hubs with hybrid options discussed as methods of increasing participation. Mays asked members to leverage their professional networks to broaden participation among local governments, Economic Development Corporations (EDC), legislative staff, and trade organizations.

## **Border Transportation Master Plan Update**

Sergio Vasquez, TxDOT's border program manager, presented an update on the Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan (BTMP). The plan, adopted in 2021, generated 22 policies, 153 programs, and 661 projects, with 57 completed, \$1.75 billion under construction, and \$36 billion fully funded.

Vasquez said the update will address post-pandemic trends, USMCA-related changes, and increased transportation demand. The study area includes a 60--mile border band, covering 34 ports of entry (28 vehicular, 5 rail, 1 pedestrian currently operational). Six binational working groups have been formed to guide stakeholder engagement, and more than 400 people attended the first round of meetings. Technology was identified as a top priority across regions.

Vasquez clarified that Texas funds do not build infrastructure in Mexico; projects across the boundary are the responsibility of Mexican entities.

## **Roundabout and Alternative Intersection Design Update**

Amanda Austin, roundabout and alternative intersection design (RAID) lead of TxDOT's Design Division, discussed the agency's innovative intersection program, emphasizing the safety benefits of roundabouts and reduced-conflict U-turns. Austin cited data showing roundabouts can reduce fatal crashes by up to 90 percent and serious injuries by 82 percent at single-lane sites. R-CUTs were reported to cut conflict points dramatically, with serious and fatal accident reductions of 63 percent.

Austin described operational and resilience benefits, including continuous traffic flow, preserved function during power outages, and the ability to handle substantial volumes before grade separation is warranted. TxDOT is training



## **Roundabout and Alternative Intersection Design Update (continued)**

designers statewide and developing driver education, establishing Commercial Driver License (CDL) training partnerships, and has proposed a “Roundabout Rodeo” to demonstrate paths for trucks, farm equipment, and oversize loads.

Members recommended early engagement with agriculture groups, such as the Farm Bureau, and coordination with railroads, including Union Pacific. Project-specific design was emphasized to accommodate wide farm equipment and freight operations. Austin was recently recognized with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) President’s Award for her work.

TxDOT’s innovative intersection program continues to expand use of roundabouts and reduced-conflict U-turns (R-CUTs) to reduce fatal and serious crashes and maintain operations during power outages. Training and driver education—especially for CDL drivers and operators of wide farm equipment—are being scaled statewide.

## **Anzalduas Bridge Project Update**

City of McAllen officials reported that the Anzalduas Bridge, built in 2010 for passenger vehicles, is nearing full commercial operations. New inspection systems are designed to expedite cargo crossings, and local leaders advocated direct connectors between FM 396 and Interstate 2 to separate commercial and passenger traffic and accommodate anticipated growth. A multi-city resolution supports TxDOT consideration, development, and construction of the connectors.

## **Election of Chair and Remarks**

Gerry Schwebel, executive vice president at IBC Bank, was elected chair of TxFAC, succeeding Judge Emmett. The committee deferred the selection of a vice chair to its next meeting, emphasizing balanced geographic representation. Commissioners New and Meade delivered remarks to outgoing Chair Emmett and presented a formal resolution and a Texas Capitol flag to Judge Emmett in recognition of his leadership and contributions to Texas transportation policy.

## **2026 TxFAC Meeting Dates**

Staff presented best-fit dates, those selected to avoid known conflicts, for the proposed 2026 meeting dates. The intent is to place on calendars promptly to hold dates early for planning was confirmed by members.

## **Adjourn**

Newly elected committee chair Schwebel thanked everyone for their support, expressed gratitude to Emmett, recognized TxDOT staff, and praised Texas before adjourning the meeting.