

MINUTES OF THE SENATE TRANSPORTATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Senator Ben Vidricksen at 9:05 a.m. on March 3, 1999 in Room 254-E of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Committee staff present: Bruce Kinzie, Revisor of Statutes
Marian F. Holeman, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Max Zimmerman, Liberal, Kansas
Carlos Ramirez, Mayor, El Paso, Texas

Others attending: See attached sheet

Briefing on Highway 54 project

Mayor Ramirez described the I-35 bottleneck caused by the tremendous demands made on this heavily traveled interstate and the primary reason to focus on development of Highway 54 in order to relieve this congestion. He discussed the enhanced trade benefits resulting from NAFTA, describing the "river of trade" that flows through El Paso for a worldwide market. Transportation is the greatest asset we have in economic development and this Midwest corridor is vital to continued growth. Highway 54 happens to be the most convenient route. Trucks traveling through Liberal and Wichita on their way to Kansas City would save at least 500 miles each way. Funds invested in this development will pay huge dividends.

Mayor Ramirez advised that even if I-35 were double decked it still would not solve the traffic bottleneck on that highway. The market is tremendous and making a route that is convenient for trucks could even be a toll road and it would still save money for the trucking industry. This needs to be looked at as an investment for the State of Kansas. This will insure the delivery of goods and services in the most efficient manner possible. They view this as a national transportation priority corridor in the best interests of Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas. Also, in the best interests of all communities along the route as this develops industry along the corridor.

Rod Gillard, Head of the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization and Mayor Ramirez presented slides to visually depict the areas under discussion. They advised that for cars and light trucks use the "Bridge of the Americas" is free, but there is a toll for trucks crossing the bridge, both ways. The State of Texas is looking into the issue of toll roads. A state infra-structure bank has been formed which allows monies to be borrowed from this bank to build toll roads. This development will present more and more opportunities in the future. In Mayor Ramirez opinion, if Kansas were to put in this highway which would saves truckers 1,000 miles, it could be paid for by tolls. The ability to travel more quickly would also save money for the truckers. A balance can be worked out to equally serve the needs of the trucking industry as well as serve the needs of local communities (Attachment 1)

Mr. Zimmerman, thanked the Committee for the opportunity to make this presentation and expressed his community's continued support for this effort. Bernie Koch advised of the Kansas connection to Mexico through the Hill Dog Food plants located down this corridor in Mexico.

Minutes - approval of

Senator Salmans moved to approve the minutes of February 9, 10, and 11, 1999. Senator Jordan seconded the motion. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 4, 1999.

Outline of Mayor Ramirez
Presentation
March 3, 1999

City of El Paso, Texas - Population 600,000 - 15th Largest city in U.S.
County of El Paso - Population 200,000
Ciudad, Juarez, Mexico - Population 1.3 Million - 4th Largest city in Mexico

1. Mayor Carlos Ramirez of El Paso, Texas, the largest metropolitan area on the U.S.-Mexico border, will present testimony in support of the U.S. Highway 54 - Southwest Passage Initiative for Regional and Interstate Transportation (S.P.I.R.I.T.) proposal. The mayor will discuss the importance of solidifying a multi-state partnership in order to create a major international trade corridor.
2. The mayor will highlight several facts and figures that highlight the potential that the S.P.I.R.I.T. proposal has in terms of creating new jobs, providing redevelopment opportunities, improving quality of life while accommodating the truck traffic that the Southwest and Midwest are experiencing due to the increasing trade with Mexico.
3. The mayor will present El Paso's vision for the future of international trade and how the S.P.I.R.I.T. proposal is an integral part of that plan.

SUPPORTING FACTS & FIGURES:

- * Since NAFTA was implemented in 1994, total two-way trade through Texas ports has grown 56%.
- * In 1997, total U.S. trade with Mexico accounted for approximately 11% or, \$176 billion, of the total U.S. trade to all countries.
- * Eleven of the 27 U.S.-Mexico port-of-entries are in Texas, including the top two - Laredo and El Paso. Their combined trade with Mexico equaled \$101.8 billion in 1997 and represented 75% of the total trade at the border.
- * In 1997, El Paso, handled 17.7% share of the total U.S.-Mexico trade, or \$24.2 billion (\$10.1 billion in exports and \$14.1 billion in imports).
- * Ciudad Juarez is home to approximately 276 twin plants or maquilas. These maquilas employ over 214,000 workers, the most of any city in Mexico.
- * Between 1968 and 1997 northbound freight traffic increased 800% (65,074 trucks in 1968 - 586,707 trucks in 1997).
- * Between 1989 and 1997 the Customs Value for General Imports across the El Paso District increased from \$5.4 Billion to \$15.3 Billion.
- * In the U.S., 80% of all trade with Mexico moves by truck. In El Paso, approximately 96% of all trade is handled by trucks.

PRESS RELEASE

Purpose of the US Highway 54 Conference (S.P.I.R.I.T.):

- * US Highway 54 is the most traveled 2-lane highway in the United States. This highway is a favorite route for truckers and motorists because it reduces the travel distance from El Paso, Texas to Wichita, Kansas by 120 miles each way. The purpose of the April meeting is to bring together high ranking federal, state, county, and local officials from a multi-state (Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Kansas) region to promote the upgrading of US Highway 54 from two lanes to four lanes from El Paso, Texas to Wichita, Kansas.
- * To provide a setting in which high ranking federal, state, county, local, and Mexican officials in the region can dialogue, coordinate and develop transportation strategies consistent with the goals and criteria described in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).
- * To educate federal, state, county, local, and Mexican officials on the importance of working together to develop a highway network that encourages regional, national, and international connectivity.
- * To develop public awareness on the importance that widening U.S. Highway 54 will have in relieving congestion along Texas' major transportation corridors such as Interstate Highways 10, 25, 35 and 40.

We plan to invite the Secretaries of Transportation from New Mexico (Pete Rahn), Kansas (Dean Carlson), Texas (Charles Heald) and Oklahoma (Neal McCaleb) to speak at this very important conference. This is probably the first time in history that these four transportation executives will be brought together to promote the intrastate, interstate and international benefits of a transportation project like U.S. Highway 54.