

Transportation

In November 1996 the 1996-2016 Rio Grande Valley Mobility Plan was adopted by the Hidalgo, Brownsville, and Harlingen/San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO'S) and presented it to the Texas Department of Transportation for implementation. The Mobility Plan provides for the maximum amount of mobility for the residents and visitors within the urbanized areas of the Rioplex. It recognizes the importance of adequate links to destinations outside the area, especially international. This is important to Texas and the nation as a whole because:

U.S.-Mexico trade grew from \$60 billion in 1991 to \$332 billion in 2006, a 453% increase. Texas-Mexico trade during the same period grew from \$28 billion to \$178.7 billion, a 538% increase.

In 2007 the Rioplex Ports of Entry accounted for \$17 billion or 15% of the U.S. total. This is more trade than Arizona and New Mexico combined (7%), and even California itself (14%). And this was accomplished without an Interstate highway.

In 2007, 30 million vehicles (non-commercial transits) crossed the Texas-Mexico border through the Rioplex Ports of Entry. In terms of total crossings in the Rioplex, the number was 40,721,194 in 2007.

The Rio Grande Valley experienced a 168% increase in retail trade (\$4.1 billion to \$11 billion) between 1990 and 2006. Nearly 100% of all retail goods sold in the Rio Grande Valley is transported over land by cargo trucks using the existing highway network. Only Houston, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Arlington, Austin and San Antonio have more retail trade than the Rio Grande Valley.

Future Highway Development

Clearly the highway infrastructure in the Rio Grande Valley is being utilized to an extent far greater than anyone ever anticipated. In 1999, Congress passed the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). This landmark legislation will have profound effects on the nation over the next years. Among its provisions are sections dealing with the establishment of Interstate 69 (I-69), a vital new link connecting all three NAFTA partners which must pass through what some have called the "neck of the hourglass." The natural meeting place of the Americas is the narrowest point in the hourglass:

The Rio Grande Valley Rioplex

The extension of I-69 from the Rioplex to its current terminus at Indianapolis will greatly enhance trade between the NAFTA partners. It will link two-thirds of the population of both the U.S. and Mexico at this strategic geographic location. It will stimulate the already dynamic growth of the Rioplex, what promises to be the new center of international trade and commerce in this hemisphere.

Future Interstate 69 Route



In September 1999 TxDOT announced a bold increase in border infrastructure. Its plan included the expenditures on NAFTA-related border projects of \$1.8 billion, up from \$761 million already approved. The report recommends increasing this share of funds for the Rio Grande Valley from \$290 million to \$730 million. Much of these increased dollars are necessary to bring Valley highways to Interstate standards and to prepare the Valley for eventual connection with the future Interstate 69. “Future Interstate corridors” signs have been installed on US 281 and US 77 signaling recognition by TxDOT that these two highways will become future legs of Interstate 69.

Bridge Crossings

Two-way traffic across the International Bridges in the Rio Grande Valley handled more than 35.6 million cars and cargo trucks in 2006 as compared to 15.9 million in Laredo.

The City of McAllen has owned and operated the international bridge at Hidalgo/Reynosa since 1960. On a typical day, two-way traffic will consist of 26,000 vehicles (non-commercial transits) and over 10,000 pedestrians. The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, located four miles east of the Hidalgo/Reynosa crossing, opened in January 1995. Two-way traffic is currently 13,694 cars and trucks per day. The trend is clear. At the present rate of growth, a third international bridge will be needed in the near future. On July 27, 1999, President Clinton issued the long awaited Presidential Permit for the proposed Anzalduas International Crossing. While this crossing is not likely to be operational until March 2009, the approval of the permit is viewed as a positive step into the next millennium.

The figure below presents the historical trends of vehicular and cargo traffic across the three international bridges in Hidalgo County (Hidalgo, Pharr, and Progreso). The tripling of cargo traffic and doubling of vehicular traffic in a few years is convincing evidence of a growing cross-border market.

Border Crossing*						
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2008
Vehicle Crossing***						
Northbound	9,700,601	8,716,430	8,782,304	8,495,437	6,236,408	7,486,349
Southbound	9,340,846	8,400,718	8,347,306	8,161,998	8,044,622	7,428,582
Total	19,041,447	17,117,148	17,129,610	16,657,435	14,281,030	14,914,931
Pedestrian Crossing***						
Northbound	2,931,510	2,944,263	2,868,457	2,915,271	2,362,536	3,013,881
Southbound	2,547,111	2,575,248	2,658,716	2,625,526	2,849,979	2,558,180
Total	5,478,621	5,519,511	5,527,173	5,540,797	5,212,515	5,572,061
Truck Crossing****						
Northbound	414,168	425,635	477,415	507,696	489,358	520,440
Southbound	328,193	354,031	416,190	435,954	444,652	495,114
Total	742,361	779,666	893,605	943,650	934,010	1,015,554

*Includes McAllen, Pharr and Progreso bridges where applicable

***Does not include 2 to 6 axle commercial trucks

****Includes only 2 to 6 loaded and unloaded commercial vehicles

Source: Texas A&M International University, Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development 2008

Air Transportation

McAllen has emerged as a regional air transportation center serving the 10th fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States. Frequent daily flights between McAllen-Miller International Airport and major airline transportation hubs in Dallas and Houston provide easy access to any destination in the world. American and Continental serve the airport with 737 and DC-9 equipment. Continental Airlines offers about eight daily flights to Houston's Bush Intercontinental, and American has four daily flights to Dallas-Fort Worth International. Together they link McAllen to more than 200 major destinations with only one intermediate stop. There are several air charter services, aircraft maintenance and two FBO's - McCreery Aviation and MFE International-serving the McAllen area.

McAllen Airline Activity						
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2008
McAllen International Airport (MFE)	278,697	284,567	317,806	368,492	407,143	385,586

Source: McAllen-Miller International Airport

Expressways

Expressway 83 is the Rio Grande Valley's primary artery. The U.S. Congress designated it as a segment of the future Interstate 69 in 1995. Its conversion to Interstate is underway. Highway signs declaring US 281 and US 77 as future legs of I-69, have been erected by the Texas Department of Transportation.

Motor Freight Lines

Eighteen common-carrier truck lines operate daily schedules out of Hidalgo County.

Buses

In 1997 Greyhound Bus Co. and Valley Transit Co. (VTC) merged to form a single operating company. VTC has served the Rio Grande Valley for nearly 70 years. VTC services the Valley cities from its McAllen and Harlingen transit centers. It also provides service to all parts of the U.S.

In addition, VTC is a major transit link between McAllen and Reynosa, Mexico. VTC has more than 600,000 passengers into and out of McAllen's downtown each year. There are four Mexican-owned bus lines serving the McAllen area. They include Tamaulipas/Noreste Bus Company, Autotransportes CD Mantes, Autobus Turismos Management and ADO Management.

In addition, the City of McAllen began local transit services in June 1997 with the creation of the McAllen Express (ME). ME has seven routes serving 60% of the McAllen population from the McAllen downtown area. ME operates six days a week, 12 hours per day. The fare is \$1.00 for adults and \$.50 for children, seniors and handicapped. Rio Transit, a regional rural transit provider that connects other Hidalgo County cities and rural communities, is also in operation. The new Central Station transit terminal located downtown accommodates ME and the other local, national and international carriers. It opened in 2000. It is the hub of regional transportation services in the Rio Grande Valley, providing services to nearly one million passengers annually.

Railroads Rio Valley Switching Co. maintains daily freight service out of Hidalgo County. It started operating in March 1993. Rio Valley Switching Co. has 49 miles of track, running from Harlingen to Mission and a branch to the McAllen Foreign-Trade Zone. Rail service in Mexico aboard Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico, the national railway company, includes a passenger train serving Matamoros and Reynosa, Mexico, and continuing to Monterrey, Mexico. Same-day connections to Mexico City can be easily made in Monterrey.