

# MINUTES

## MEETING OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

12:00 PM WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2022

VIA GLOBAL GOTOMEETING VIDEO CONFERENCE PLATFORM & IN-PERSON  
INITIATED AND CHAIRED FROM  
LRGVDC MAIN CAMPUS - 301 W. RAILROAD STREET, WESLACO, TEXAS  
BUILDING B, KEN JONES EXECUTIVE BOARD ROOM

PRESIDING: JUDGE AURELIO GUERRA, PRESIDENT

President Aurelio Guerra called the meeting to order at 12:06 pm. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared.

President Guerra then moved to item 2 - Consideration and Action to Approve Meeting Minutes (January 26, 2022). *Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of January 26, 2022, as presented. Mayor Rick Guerra seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.*

President Guerra next moved to Item 3: Public Comment and/or Report from Legislative Delegation, there being none he moved to Item 4: Administration. Executive Director Manuel Cruz was recognized to address the following:

### A. Executive Director Report

#### 1. Introduction of New Staff Members

Mr. Cruz informed the Board that three (3) new staff members have recently joined the LRGVDC:

- Ms. Celia Mata, Non CDL Driver for Valley Metro
- Mr. Raudel Gonzalez, Motor Vehicle Technician III for Valley Metro
- Mr. Oscar Colon, CSR III Housing Navigator for Area Agency on Aging.

#### 2. Presentation on COG's/RPC's Survey on Compensation

Mr. Cruz stated that this presentation is in response to a request from Board Members at last month's meeting. The question is, are LRGVDC salaries consistent with those of other Regional Planning Commissions (RPC)/Councils of Government (COG). **He emphasized that each of the 24 COG regions is unique in its own right.** After researching this topic, they found that the current salaries for LRGVDC staff and Executive Director are in alignment with the State Auditor's Office Job Description Index. Mr. Cruz provided detailed information comparing LRGVDC salaries with those of the top five (5) most populated COG regions. Of the 24 regions, the LRGVDC is the fifth largest region in population as noted in the table below:

Reg #	COG Name	Location	# of Counties	Population
4	NCTCOG	Arlington	16	7,400,000
16	HGAC	Houston	13	6,700,000
18	AACOG	San Antonio	13	2,500,000
12	CAPCOG	Austin	10	2,100,000
<b>21</b>	<b>LRGVDC</b>	<b>Weslaco</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1,300,000</b>
8	RGCOG	El Paso	7	1,000,000

Mr. Cruz and Mr. Eddie Reyes, Director of Human Resources, reported the detailed findings from this research to the Board's satisfaction.

Upon conclusion of the presentation, Mayor Rick Salinas asked for clarification on the procedure to evaluate the LRGVDC Executive Director. Mr. Cruz stated that the Executive Committee is tasked with evaluating the Executive Director using an evaluation sheet to guide the process. Over the years this evaluation sheet has been updated as needed, but an official Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is currently not in place. President Guerra, who is a member of the LRGVDC Executive Committee participated in Mr. Cruz' evaluation this year. He has also participated in the evaluations of previous Executive Directors, and he stated that the current method to evaluate the Executive Director's performance has been working out to his, and the other Executive Committee members' satisfaction.

Mayor Salinas asked about amending the LRGVDC Personnel Policy Manual to include a procedure for evaluating the Executive Director. Mr. Cruz stated that a revision would not be needed, but an addition could be included. President Guerra stated that in his opinion the way the Executive Director evaluations have been conducted has been working well. He added that the question at hand is regarding LRGVDC salaries as they compare to other COGs; the evaluation process is a different topic. President Guerra thanked Mr. Cruz and Mr. Reyes for providing this information.

Upon conclusion of Administration items, President Guerra moved to item 5: Department Reports.

#### A. Community & Economic Development

Director Rick Carrera was recognized to address the following:

##### Program Action Item

#### 1. Consideration and Action to Approve Regional Small Cities Coalition (RSCC) Officers for Year 2022

Mr. Carrera informed the Board that at their recent meeting, the RSCC nominated the following officers:

- Chair: Mayor Alma D. Salinas, Sullivan City
- Vice Chair: Commissioner Maria Luisa Gonzalez, City of Lyford
- Secretary: Mr. Ben Medina, City of Rio Hondo

Board approval is needed to finalize these nominations. ***Mayor Rick Salinas made a motion to approve the RSCC officers as presented. Mr. Eleazar Garcia, Jr. seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

#### 2. Consideration and Action to Approve Regional Water Resource Advisory Committee (RWRAC) Nomination for Large City Representative

Mr. Carrera informed the Board that at the February 16, 2022, RWRAC meeting, the committee recommended Mr. Xavier Cervantes, Planning & Development Director for the City of Harlingen, as a Large City representative. A Large City is defined by having a population over 25,000. ***Mayor Chris Boswell made a motion to approve Mr. Xavier Cervantes as a Large City representative to the RWRAC. Councilwoman Norie Garza seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

##### Program Status Reports

Regarding the current reservoir levels, Mr. Carrera noted that they are still below 50% capacity, and asked Mr. Jim Darling for his comments. Mr. Darling suggested that cities look at their water conservation ordinances, because they are triggered based on reservoir capacity.

Mr. Carrera informed the Board that the Community & Economic Development department is stepping up their outreach efforts in light of the recent decrease in COVID-19 active cases. Staff recently conducted public outreach at the Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo on South Padre Island and the Los Fresnos Rodeo, and they look forward to another outreach opportunity by participating in the Keep McAllen Beautiful Arbor Day event on March 6, 2022, where they will have a booth to educate the public about their programs. On February 22, he and staff went to the grand opening and ribbon cutting of the South Texas EcoTourism Center in Laguna Vista. At this event Mr. Carrera and Mr. Cruz had the opportunity to speak with Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Alejandra Castillo along with Jorge Ayala, Regional Director of the EDA about various funding opportunities and several initiatives that will be available soon.

**B. Health & Human Services**

Director Joe Gonzalez was recognized to report on the following:

Area Agency on Aging Program Action Item

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Contractors for Direct Purchase Services Pool

Mr. Gonzalez informed the Board that the Advisory Council recommends approval to add contractors to the Area Agency on Aging’s contractor pool. Case Managers will utilize these contractors to purchase services such as residential repairs, medications, homemaker, and respite for their clients. The list of service providers is as follows:

<i>APPLICANT</i>	<i>SERVICES</i>	<i>RATE</i>
AmeriCare Nursing Services PLLC	Homemaker Incontinence Services • Package includes 160 adult diapers, 120 bed liners, and 2 boxes of hand wipes	AAA: 15.00 AAA: \$300.00
Stay Healthy Home Care Inc	In-Home Caregiver Respite In- Home Homemaker Institutional Caregiver Respite	AAA: \$11.35 AAA: \$12.80 AAA: \$11.35
First Choice Health Care	Respite	AAA: \$13.30
Calvary’s Love Home Care Services	Homemaker	AAA: \$15.00

***Mr. Jim Darling made a motion to approve these contractors for the Direct Purchase Services Pool as recommended by the Advisory Council. Mayor Oscar Montoya seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

Program Status Reports

Upon conclusion of action, Mr. Gonzalez noted that the status report was in the meeting packet for review.

**C. Public Safety**

Program Action Items

Director of Public Safety Randall Snyder was recognized to address the following items:

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Recommendation for Chair and Vice Chair

Mr. Snyder informed the Board that as per HSAC bylaws, annual elections were held for Chair and Vice Chair for FY 2022-23. Mr. Tom Hushen (Cameron County) was re-elected as Chair and Mr. Jeff Johnston (City of McAllen) was elected as Vice Chair. ***Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to***

***approve the HSAC recommendation of Mr. Tom Hushen as Chair and Mr. Jeff Johnston as Vice Chair. Mayor Rick Guerra seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

2. Consideration and Action to Approve Resolution for FY 2022-23 Homeland Security Grants Funding

Mr. Snyder stated that as part of the Public Safety Office's Homeland Security Grants Division (HSGD) grants guidelines, applications must include a resolution that contains information such as authorization by its governing body for the submission of an application. The LRGVDC Homeland Security program will apply for the Non-profit Security Grant. ***Mr. Jim Darling made a motion to approve the resolution for FY 2022-23 Homeland Security Grants Funding as presented. Councilwoman Norie Garza seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

3. Consideration and Action to Approve Entering into Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Texas Statewide Interoperability Communications Plan

Mr. Snyder informed the Board that this MOU establishes permissions and guidelines for use of interoperability or mutual aid radio channels by: local government jurisdictions and their associated emergency response agencies; State agencies in Texas and their associated emergency response organizations, Local agency units in Texas and their associated emergency response organizations, Federal agency local units in Texas and their associated emergency response organizations, Local agency units in Texas and their associated emergency response organizations to use designated Federal interoperability channels, and; Private sector emergency response organizations licensed or otherwise entitled to operate in the Public Safety Pool as defined in Federal Communication Commission Rules, Part 90 (47CFR, subpart B, paragraphs 90.15-90.20).

It imposes certain protocols, procedures, and obligations upon jurisdictions hereby authorized to use state-licensed radio channels held by the Texas Department of Public Safety. This agreement supersedes any other previous versions of the MOU. Agencies under this agreement are required to participate in regional communications planning (generally arranged by a Regional Council of Governments) that provides for Regional radio communications interoperability. This MOU authorizes the use of certain radio frequencies by emergency response organizations as defined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Emergency Communications Division and the Texas Department of Public Safety. ***Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve entering into an MOU for a Texas Statewide Interoperability Communications Plan as presented. Mayor Rick Guerra seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

Program Status Reports

Mr. Snyder stated that the status reports for Public Safety programs and the Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District were available in the meeting packet for review.

D. Transportation

Valley Metro Director Maribel Contreras was recognized to report on the following items:

Program Action Items

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Department's Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy

Ms. Contreras stated that Valley Metro is committed to providing a drug/alcohol-free workplace through enforcement of the regulations issued by the Federal Transit Administration. Section 5.0 SAFETY SENSITIVE POSITIONS of this policy has been updated to reflect the current titles for management, supervisors, and those with professional responsibilities. Any changes to this policy require approval

from the Board of Directors, and the full Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy document was posted on the LRGVDC website for review. **Mayor Rick Guerra made a motion to approve the revisions to the LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Department’s Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy as presented. Mayor Oscar Montoya seconded the motion, and upon a vote, the motion carried unanimously.**

2. Consideration and Action to Approve Revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Department’s Operating Policies & Procedures Manual

Ms. Contreras informed the Board that the Operating Policies & Procedures Manual governs the performance and conduct of all LRGVDC Regional Transit Service employees, including supervisors, dispatchers, customer service representatives, and drivers. The purpose of this manual is to provide a handy reference for employees regarding daily transit operations. A copy of the manual with the recommended revisions noted throughout in red font was made available for review on the LRGVDC website. **Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve the revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Department’s Operating Policies & Procedures Manual as presented. Mr. Jim Darling seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.**

3. Consideration and Action to Approve Implementation of New Fare Structure for Valley Metro Service

Ms. Contreras stated that back in March of 2017, Valley Metro introduced a Fare-free Pilot Program throughout their service area, the program was to last for a period of six months. The benefits to this program were listed as a basic means of mobility for the public good, to promote public transit, improve performance, increase ridership, and potential funding. It was also noted as a source of community bonding and pride to help local communities improve their quality of life. At the end of the six-month pilot program, in August of 2017, with Board approval, the Fare-free Initiative was extended to December 31, 2017.

At the December 6, 2017, Board of Directors Meeting, Valley Metro received approval to extend the system-wide Fare-free program indefinitely. The program was revisited at the December 5, 2018, Board of Directors meeting and Valley Metro requested an indefinite extension to the Fare-free initiative. The main goal in 2018 was to improve performance measures such as: passengers per mile, passengers per hour, overall ridership, bus passenger miles, and service miles. The Fare-free program has been in place since then.

At the August 25, 2021, Board of Directors meeting, Valley Metro requested, and the Board unanimously approved the purchase of new fareboxes along with farebox management software, peripherals, and a vault system for their fleet of busses. This purchase was in preparation for ending the Fare-free program and implementing a new fare structure.

At this time, staff requests Board approval to implement a new Fare Structure for Valley Metro Service to become effective on March 15, 2022. The new structure is needed due to increased costs related to the overall Transit operations including, but not limited to, operating costs, preventative maintenance, fuel, parts, supplies, and equipment. The recommended Fair Structure is as follows:

Valley Metro Regular Fare Structure	
\$2.00	Adults (Regular Fare)
50% Discounted Fares	Elderly (60 +) People with Disabilities, Veterans, Medicare recipients and students with valid ID.
\$1.00	Transfer to another line within the same day – NOT for roundtrips
Free	STC, TSTC, and UTRGV Students with valid ID, Cameron County Workforce with Valid ID or Voucher. Children (under age 7 and must be accompanied by an adult)

<b>20-Ride Pass</b>	
\$20.00	Adults (Regular Fare)
\$10.00	Discounted fares: Elderly (60 +) People with Disabilities, Veterans, Medicare recipients and students with valid ID.
Demand Response – Regular Fare for the following services:	
Demand response service is curb to curb and is also provided to Valley destinations with 24-hour advance reservation. Service is provided in Willacy, Starr, and Zapata Counties.	
\$3.00	City Limits
\$6.00	Within County
\$8.00	One County Over
\$12.00	Two Counties Over
50% Discounted fares	Elderly (60 +) People with Disabilities, Veterans, Medicare recipients and students with valid ID.
\$1.00	Transfers – Transfers to another line within the same day – NOT for roundtrips
FREE	Children under 7, must be accompanied by a paying adult
<b>Daily Pass</b>	
\$6.00	City Limits
\$9.00	Within County
\$12.00	One County Over
\$16.00	Two Counties Over
50% Discounted fares	Elderly (60 +) People with Disabilities, Veterans, Medicare recipients and students with valid ID.
<b>Weekly Pass</b>	
\$30.00	City Limits
\$45.00	Within County
\$60.00	One County Over
\$80.00	Two Counties Over
50% Discounted fares	Elderly (60 +) People with Disabilities, Veterans, Medicare recipients and students with valid ID.

Ms. Contreras added that public meetings were held to get input on the new fare structure and that the new rates will be advertised on all Valley Metro busses as well as their website. Mayor Jorge Ledezma recommended pushing the implementation date back from March 15<sup>th</sup> to 60 days to allow the public plenty of time to be aware, and to prepare for paying bus fares.

Mr. Cruz added that Valley Metro staff has been preparing for the end of the Fare-free program for some time, and that the new fare boxes that were purchased last August have been installed and are ready to go. The Fare-free program has been in place for five years. The Valley Metro system is at the point where inflation and costs have increased, and on top of that, the grant match requirement must be met. Currently there are cities requesting bus routes, but even some of those cities are not providing their contribution, which has not increased in some time. All of these factors have been considered in this request.

Mr. Jim Darling added that Valley Metro has been subsidized by the federal government, which has now ended. Mr. Cruz added that after those subsidies ended, luckily the CARES Act funding became available, and the Valley Metro service qualified to receive some of those funds. Mr. Darling stated that we do not have a choice but to reimplement charging fares, otherwise Valley Metro service will have to be curtailed.

Mr. Cruz added that staff has made a cost comparison with bus fares charged by other COGs such as the Alamo Area Council of Government (AACOG) in San Antonio and other large metropolitan areas. The findings are that Valley Metro has the lowest bus fares in the entire State of Texas.

It was the consensus of the Board that March 15, 2022, was too soon to implement the new fares and recommended that the implementation date be moved to April 1, 2022. Upon conclusion of discussion, **Mayor Rick Salinas amended his motion to approve the new fare structure with the start date of April 1, 2022. Mayor Jorge Ledezma seconded the amended motion, and upon a vote motion carried unanimously.**

4. Consideration and Action to Approve new Fare Structure RGV Metro Express Service

Ms. Contreras stated that at this time, staff requests Board approval of new fare structure for the Valley RGV Metro Express Service to become effective on March 15, 2022. The new structure is needed due to increased costs related to the overall Transit operations including, but not limited to, operating costs, preventative maintenance, fuel, parts, supplies, and equipment. The recommended increased fare structure is as follows:

ID must be presented when boarding bus.

RGV Metro Express Fare Structure	
<del>\$5.00</del> <b>\$10.00</b>	Daily Pass (Unlimited Pass)
<del>\$25.00</del> <b>\$50.00</b>	Weekly Pass
<del>\$100.00</del> <b>\$200.00</b>	Monthly Pass (Unlimited Pass)
<del>\$25.00</del> <b>\$50.00</b>	30-day Pass – Students and Faculty other than UTRGV ID Holders
Free	UTRGV Students and Faculty – must present ID
Free	<b>Up to one (1) child age 2 and under FREE with a paying adult. Children under 7 FREE, must be accompanied by paying adult</b>

Ms. Contreras stated that this fare increase is needed to continue delivering a high level of service and that partners are providing a local match. But even with the local match, additional funds are needed to continue the current level of service. She stated that a series of public meetings were held to inform the public about the new fare structure for the RGV Metro Express service. For this service, Valley Metro works in partnership with McAllen Metro, B-Metro, South Padre Island, the City of Harlingen, and the City of Edinburg. But even with the amount of local match provided by these partners, additional funds are needed from these fares in order to continue providing the current level of service.

Mr. Cruz added that the RGV Metro Express has always had fares for its service, except for the first year when this service was funded 100% by TxDOT and it was fare free. TxDOT provided funding for this project for one year only while working to establish a sustainability funding plan. UTRGV, Brownsville, and McAllen provided a local match for this service, and recently Harlingen and Edinburg became partners. Mr. Darling observed that with the expansion of partners comes an increase in cost to provide the service. Mr. Cruz acknowledged that this is a concern because there have been requests for bus service from other cities. He added that Valley Metro has a committee in place who reviews these requests, and they will be mindful that adding cities adds more stops along the route; and the more stops on the route, the word “Express” no longer applies.

Mayor Rick Salinas asked about also extending the target date for the RGV Metro Express fare increase from March 15, 2022, to April 1, 2022, Ms. Contreras agreed that this extended start date would be fine.

***Mayor Rick Salinas made a motion to approve the RGV Metro Express Service fare increases as presented with the implementation date of April 1, 2022. Mayor Jorge Ledezma seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

Program Status Reports

Ms. Contreras gave the ridership report which was also provided in the meeting packet; she noted that January Ridership was down due to schools being closed during their winter break.

RGVMPO Status Report

RGVMPO Assistant Director Luis Diaz was recognized and informed the Board that staff was in the process of collecting amendment updates from local governments throughout the region for their 4-year plan and 25-year plan. The amendments are being collected all the way from Starr County to South Padre Island. All the amendments are being reported and staff is also preparing to score projects for the 4-year plan to determine which ones will be included in the plan.

President Guerra stated that one of the biggest accomplishments the Rio Grande Valley has made is in merging the Brownsville MPO, the Harlingen-San Benito MPO, and the Hidalgo County MPO into the Rio Grande Valley MPO; and he asked Mr. Diaz if we are already seeing the benefits of having one regional MPO. Mr. Diaz responded in the affirmative and stated that having the one RGVMPO has provided the opportunity to do more region-wide projects, as opposed to projects that are locally driven. As a larger area, the RGVMPO has been able to request funds for longer corridors and longer types of facilities.

Item 6. – New or Unfinished Business

Mr. Cruz encouraged those present to visit the new South Texas EcoTourism Center on their way to the Island and reminded everyone that there is no charge to enter. He stated that it is an impressive facility that is good for the community. He added that according to Assistant Secretary Castillo, there will be more funding available through the EDA in the near future and staff plans to engage with different communities to bring more projects like this to the area.

Item 7. - Adjourn.

There being no further business to come before the Board, President Guerra adjourned the meeting at 1:16 pm.

  
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Judge Aurelio Guerra, President

ATTEST:

  
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Deborah Morales, Recording Secretary