

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

12:00PM Wednesday September 24, 2025

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

PRESIDING: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:05 p.m. a quorum was attained.

Present: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Judge Aurelio Guerra, Willacy County
Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville
Commissioner Pete Garcia, City of Weslaco
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County
Alderwoman Cris Munoz, City of La Villa
Mayor Sylvia Castillo, Sullivan City
Commissioner Ruben Saldana, City of Mercedes
Commissioner Edward Gonzales, City of Raymondville
Mayor Rick Guerra, City of San Benito
Mr. Paul Hernandez, South Texas College
Mr. Luke Lucio, TSTC
Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake
Mr. Oscar Garcia, Member-at-Large
Mr. Andres Chavez, Member-at-Large
Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots Org

Absent :

Mayor Ramiro Garza, City of Edinburg
Mayor Norma Sepulveda, City of Harlingen
Commissioner Joey Lopez, Cameron County
Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna
Mayor Alejandro Flores, City of Los Fresnos
Mayor Javier Villalobos, City of McAllen
Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez City of Pharr
Commissioner Marco Villegas, City of San Juan
Ms. Veronica Gonzalez, UTRGV
Mr. Ron Mills, Willacy Co. Nav. Dist.
Mr. Jim Darling, Member-at-Large

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item#2

Item #2: Consideration and ACTION for approval of August 24, 2025, meeting minutes. ***Mayor Sylvia Castillo made a motion to approve the minutes for August 27, 2025, meeting, Luke Lucio seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.***

Item #3: Public Comment – No public Comment

Item #4: Administration - Mr. Cruz then took a moment to introduce the attorneys who were present for the first time. Ms. Rebecca Hayward from Denton & Navarro introduced herself and Ms. Paloma Flores to the board, assuring everyone that they are available to assist and answer any questions as needed.

B. Executive Directors Report. Mr. Cruz announced all new hires and promotions for the month of September. Mr. Cruz then moved on to updates on Regional News, Funding Opportunities, training and Legislation. First, he stated that as some of you may know, we attended the Texas Association of Regional Councils (TARC) quarterly training and meetings at the beginning of September. During that event, we received an important update regarding a request that all Councils of Governments (COGs) had submitted to the Texas Broadband Development Office.

TARC has been awarded \$8.7 million, which will be distributed among all the COGs in Texas. Each COG is expected to receive approximately \$107,000 annually for the next three years. These funds are specifically designated for the planning and implementation of broadband-related projects identified in each region's broadband plan. We anticipate beginning this initiative in January. At present, TARC staff are working with the Broadband Development Office to finalize the agreements. The funding will be released through an application process, but it will be limited to the COGs. Once we submit our application, we expect to receive the annual allocation of \$107,000. Our regional broadband plan has already been finalized, so our next step will be to review it and identify projects that align with Community and Economic Development goals—whether they are in the planning phase or ready for implementation.

The second item mentioned was regarding the Texas Municipal League (TML). On Thursday, September 11, representatives from TML visited and provided an overview of legislation passed during the most recent session. In your packet, you'll find a handout with a link to the TML website, which includes a comprehensive list of the bills addressed this session. To put it in perspective, there were over 9,000 bills introduced this session, with only one fraction ultimately being adopted and signed into law. One key point that TML emphasized was the new requirement for audits. Any agency receiving \$700,000 or more in funding will be required to conduct an annual audit. Additionally, all cities—regardless of size—will now be required to undergo an annual audit under one of the new bills. This is especially important for smaller cities that may not have conducted audits in the past. TML is offering support to small cities that lack the budget or experience to perform these audits. Contact details are included in the report, and you're also welcome to reach out to me directly—Mr. Cruz stated that he can connect everyone with the appropriate representative at TML. Audits are becoming increasingly important, particularly as they may become a prerequisite for future grant funding, including funding related to flood infrastructure. An audit may also be required when proposing a tax increase, so it's critical that all cities, especially smaller ones, prepare accordingly.

Lastly, I've also included a list of current grant opportunities for cities and counties in the handout. I encourage you to review them and apply for any that are a good fit.

No further question or comments, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item #5.

Item #5 Department Reports

A. Community & Economic Development

1. Consideration and ACTION to authorize entry into an Interlocal Agreement with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) for the provision of translation services. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to authorize entry into an Interlocal Agreement with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) for the provision of Translation services. Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***
2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Resolution for the FY 2026-2027 Regional Solid Waste Grants Program application. The LRGVDC shall submit the signed resolution with the LRGVDC COG Application. ***Mayor Sylvia Castillo made a motion to approve Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Resolution for the FY 2026-2027 Regional Solid Waste Grants Program application. LRGVDC shall submit the signed resolution with LRGVDC COG Application. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***
3. Consideration and ACTION to approve a Tire Resolution to accept the Regional Tire Ordinance as suggested in the Tire Study 2022 Scrap Tire Management and Available Alternatives in Texas LRGVDC Region. ***Troy Allen made a motion to approve the Tire Resolution to accept the Regional Tire Ordinance as suggested in the Tire Study 2022 Scrap Tire Management and Available Alternatives in Texas LRGVDC Region. Paul Hernandez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Program Status Reports: Ms. Melisa Gonzalez just wanted to give a quick update on the results of one of our most exciting initiatives this year, our tire recycling event!

For the first time, our Council of Governments partnered with a company to recycle tires instead of sending them to the landfill. I'm proud to report that 99% of the tires collected were successfully recycled, with only a fraction being shredded and sent to landfill.

Here are the numbers:

- **28 entities** participated in the event
- **49,730 tires** were collected
- **49,611 tires** were recycled
- Only **119 tires** ended up shredded and sent to landfill

The only reason those 119 tires went to landfill is that we didn't have enough to fill the final truckload to Laredo for shredding transport. This is something we're already planning to improve for next year.

TCEQ was extremely excited about these results. Their only question was: "*Did solid waste funds cover this?*" and the answer is a proud yes, 100% funded through our solid waste program. TCEQ also confirmed that we may be the only Council of Governments in Texas to achieve such a high recycling rate for tires. This success wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration between Valerie and Candice at UTW, the team at Republic, and Penny at UTW. Thanks to their efforts, we achieved an impressive recycling milestone. In fact, our SWAC (Solid Waste Advisory Committee) has already approved of \$75,000 for next year's tire disposal, and they've also given me the flexibility to reallocate additional funds if needed—just as we did this year. For context, we spent about \$100,000 this year on tire disposal, but for a 99% recycling rate, I believe it was well worth it. Looking ahead, I'm hoping to work with UTW to produce a video that

showcases how the recycled tires are being used—a great way to educate and inspire others to follow our lead.

No further questions Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to next item.

B. Health and Human Services

Ms. Margarita Lopez had no action items on the agenda for this meeting.

Program Status Reports: Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC)

Ms. Margarita Lopez mentioned that she was pleased to report that for fiscal year 2024–2025, they closed the year with less than \$20 unspent. That's a major achievement considering the funding delays and restrictions we faced. Thanks to our finance department and the strategic planning we put in place, we managed our budget exceptionally well despite the challenges.

Looking ahead to FY 2025–2026, we've already been awarded nearly \$250,000, and I'm happy to report that our ADRC services have continued without interruption.

We're also starting early planning for our annual Veterans Fest, and I'll be bringing more updates on that in October. Additionally, we're continuing to expand services and resources for caregivers in our community, with more updates to come soon.

Area Agency on Aging:

Our Ombudsman Program underwent an in-person audit in August—the first of its kind for our agency. Despite the uncertainty at the time about whether services would continue, our leadership team stayed focused and strong. During the exit interview, we received multiple exceeds expectations comments and overall positive feedback. We're now waiting for the final written report, but the preliminary outcome looks very favorable. As many of you know, there have been significant changes to Medicare and Medicaid, and we are already seeing an increase in demand for support. In preparation for this year's Open Enrollment season in October, we increased our Benefit Counselors from two to six. All are now fully trained and recertified to handle the upcoming surge in service needs.

State & System-Wide Updates:

At the state level, FY 2026 funding appears stable, with figures like FY 2025. We plan to implement the same successful strategies used last year to ensure we make the most of every dollar and remain fully prepared for any challenges.

From our recent Texas TARC meeting, we learned that a major system transition is already underway. Currently, AAAs across the state use WellSky as our case management system. However, effective immediately, we are beginning training on the new platform, PeerPlace. The full transition is expected to be complete by February 2026, which clearly indicates that the state's transition plan is well in motion.

Additionally, HHS has submitted the State Plan on Aging for 2026–2029 for federal review, another strong signal that long-term planning is progressing as expected. We're closely monitoring these developments to ensure we're fully informed and nothing catches us off guard.

Advocacy & Gratitude:

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude on behalf of our aging community and all Area Agencies on Aging. Your continued advocacy has made a real impact. The support, especially from Mr. Cruz and others who've taken the time to write letters and engage with leadership, has not gone unnoticed. We've seen clear signs—through media coverage, official plans, and documents—that our aging community is finally being recognized as a priority.

C. Public Safety Criminal Justice and Homeland Security

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Recommendation of Appointment of newly elected committee member for the next two (2) years. Mr. Merla added the following: The positions of Chair, Vice Chair, and Parliamentarian—highlighted in red—require board action and approval. ***Paul Hernandez made a motion to approve the Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Recommendation of Appointment of newly elected member for the next two (2) years. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***
2. Consideration and ACTION to approve the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) Recommendation on Appointment of newly elected Committee Members for the next two (2) years. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Criminal Justice Advisory committee (CJAC) recommendation on Appointment of newly elected committee Members for the next two (2) years. Mr. Andres Chavez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Program Status Reports: Mr. Cesar Merla provided a brief update on the 2nd Annual Listo RGV Conference, noting that it was arrival day at the island and that he was looking forward to seeing everyone there.

C.2 LRGV Academy Program Mr. Javier Solis had no action items on the agenda for the month of September.

Program Status Reports: We are currently attending the TCOLE Conference in McAllen as part of our contractual obligations to maintain compliance with our program requirements. While here, we are actively networking with several law enforcement agencies and academies from across the state.

For this month's departmental report, I'd like to start by sharing some exciting news. We have successfully renewed our contract with the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE), securing our status as a licensed training provider through the year 2031. This means the LRGV Police Academy will continue serving our region for many years to come.

Over the past month, the LRGV Academy staff has been finalizing background investigations for the upcoming 231st Weslaco Police Department Police Academy, which is scheduled to begin next Friday, October 3, 2025. We have received over 70 applications for this class. As you know, we've raised the standards for admission to the Academy in our continued effort to develop higher-caliber officers who are better prepared to serve our communities.

In addition to the upcoming academy, we are proud to announce that LRGV Academy will serve as the lead reporting agency for TCOLE credit hours at both the Listo RGV Conference and the 911 District Wellness Seminar. We've been working closely with our partners at the LRGVDC to ensure that all law enforcement personnel attending these events receive proper credit for their training hours.

We are also in the process of finalizing our fall in-service training calendar. We're expanding our offerings to include more advanced and intermediate-level courses, giving locally certified officers greater opportunities to advance in their careers. The full calendar will be posted as soon as it's finalized.

Meanwhile, Mr. Javier Solis mentioned that the current 229th and 230th academies, which are Weslaco's part-time academy and the Río Grande Police Academy, are both in their final week of training. These cadets will be attempting their TCOLE licensing exams in the coming weeks.

Mr. Javier Solis also stated that he would like to make an important announcement: The LRGV Academy currently has two vacancies on our Advisory Board. Currently seeking law enforcement chief administrators

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to represent Willacy and Cameron Counties. Applications are now being accepted, and we plan to present all candidates to the Advisory Board in November for nomination and election. Interested individuals should contact us at the Academy to submit their applications.

Finally, for the month, we successfully conducted seven in-service training courses with a total of 69 students, accounting for 356 contact hours.

C.3 Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District Program Updates

No action items today—just a brief report.

Program Status Reports: Our GIS division is currently conducting its annual planning meeting. This meeting focuses on aligning with the district's strategic goals and reviewing key statistics, including the total number of address points created and overall production within the district. I'll go into more detail on those statistics shortly. Additionally, we've completed several address tickets, contributing to improved service and data accuracy for our communities.

IT Division:

Our IT team has been busy with system audits and recently completed the installation of two new recorders. These systems are essential for capturing 911 calls and text communications. We replace this equipment every five years, and this cycle has now been completed successfully. This upgrade is a significant benefit to our public safety departments, and we're pleased to have it fully operational.

Community Engagement:

We want to remind everyone that we are here to support your communities across our district, which includes Hidalgo and Willacy Counties. If you have any community events coming up, please reach out to us. We are happy to participate and provide support.

A special thanks to Mayor Gonzales of Raymondville and Mr. Chavez, who invited us to a community event held on Saturday, August 23rd, focused on addressing needs in the rural areas outside the city limits. Our team worked with residents to assign 64 new addresses, ensuring they are now correctly registered in the 911 system. Reflective address plates were also provided to enhance visibility at night.

We want to commend our team for a great effort, including our Executive Director, Mr. Cruz, who was hands-on helping to make address plates. The event was a big success and well received by the community. We've already received interest in hosting similar events again.

If you're interested in bringing this kind of outreach to your community — especially rural areas — please contact me after the meeting, by phone, or via email. We'd be happy to coordinate and provide support.

Alderwoman Cris Muñoz asked whether this address update initiative could help towns where 911 services struggle to locate addresses.

Mr. Moreno responded: Yes, for areas within Hidalgo and Willacy Counties, we can work directly with your planning departments to assess and assist with these issues.

Commissioner Pete Garcia (Weslaco) inquired if the setup is only for rural areas or if local events are included.

Mr. Moreno clarified: While the addressing services are specific to rural areas (outside city limits), we do participate in various local events to reach the broader public.

Mr. Cruz also noted that our team would be present at Weslaco's National Night Out this coming weekend.

Upcoming Event: Mr. Cruz reminded the board about the Public Safety Wellness Seminar, scheduled for September 30th from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Mission Convention Center. This event will feature two

dynamic speakers, and we will recognize our telecommunicators for their years of service (5, 10, and 15-year milestones), including special honors such as the Sandra Coronado Award and Supervisor of the Year.

While registration is officially closed, board members or interested parties may still attend in person and passes will be available at the door.

D. Valley Metro Transportation

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the updated Seatbelt Policy for LRGVDC Valley Metro. Tom Logan added that this policy is over 10 years old and needs to be updated to ensure compliance with current state and federal laws. A revision is required to bring it up to date. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the updated Seatbelt Policy for The LRGVDC Valley Metro. Commissioner Pete Garcia seconded the motion and upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.***
2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Interlocal Agreement between LRGVDC Valley Metro and the PossAble Dream Foundation. Tom Logan added that The PossAble Dream Foundation is dedicated to improving educational attainment and expanding economic opportunities in South Texas. The foundation operates a public adult charter high school serving learners aged 18 to 50 who have not yet completed their high school education. One of the key challenges identified by their students is access to reliable transportation. To help bridge this gap, the foundation plans to provide monthly transit passes, enabling students to use Valley Metro services, including Metro Express routes. Currently, the foundation operates campuses in Brownsville, Pharr, and Laredo, with plans to expand to additional locations throughout the Rio Grande Valley. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Interlocal Agreement between LRGVDC Valley Metro and the PossAble Dream Foundation. Luke Lucio seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Program Status Reports: Service Report Update

Year-to-date, we have transported approximately 794,000 passengers across our system. We've also participated in eight outreach events, one of the most notable being the Laguna Madre Vet Fest. As a result of that event, we received a request to add additional bus stops along the Harlingen medical route. In response, we're currently working with the City of Harlingen to incorporate two new stops near medical clinics, providing direct access for riders to those facilities.

Additionally, I'd like to provide an update on our rural service expansion. We've extended our demand-response service hours to 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. and successfully launched both the Willacy Express and Zapata Express routes. I'm pleased to report that ridership is steadily increasing across all these services.

We continue to collaborate with local officials to promote awareness and ensure that communities know this transportation options are available and accessible to them.

D.1 RGVMPD Program Status Reports:

Federal Review & MPO Update

Mr. Micheal Medina started off his program status reports by stating that one key item I want to highlight is our recent federal review conducted last year. This review, which takes place every four years, was carried out by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and TxDOT. Following the evaluation, we received several recommendations for improvement.

As we shared with the Policy Board, our intent is to address all federal requirements within an accelerated timeframe—well ahead of the typical three-year window.

Completed Action Items: So far, we've already made significant progress in three major areas.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP): We've developed a two-year UPWP that outlines the MPO's planning activities across the region. This program includes major initiatives and ensures we meet all federal planning documentation requirements.

As part of this effort, the Policy Board approved two special studies in collaboration with the Council of Governments (COG).

A Transit-Oriented Development / Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Study, which we are working on closely with Mr. Cruz and his team.

A Regional Transit Authority Feasibility Study, which aims to explore how to better align and integrate transit services throughout the Valley.

Additionally, we're developing a region-wide transit modeling tool called T-BEST. This will be available to all transit providers, including those offering demand-response services, and will significantly enhance regional transit planning.

Public Participation Program (PPP):

The Policy Board also approved the updated Public Participation Program. This is a vital document that outlines how the MPO engages with the public and ensures transparency in our processes. It's unique that any revisions to this document require a 45-day public comment period, compared to the 30-day period required for other plans.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):

This is our long-range transportation plan, covering a minimum 20-year horizon. The MTP is supported by:

A 10-Year Plan, which must be financially constrained

A 4-Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which outlines the first four years of funding and projects within the 10-year plan

These documents together form the foundation of our regional transportation investment strategy.

New Project Submission Requirements

To streamline federal project requests through the MPO, the Policy Board adopted a new set of requirements:

- **A Project Request Form** must be submitted
- **A Project Schedule** detailing timelines and milestones
- **A Financial Summary**, including local match commitments
- **A Resolution of Support** from the sponsoring agency's governing body

These components ensure that all project requests are comprehensive and ready for integration into the planning process. The information feeds into a Project Readiness Report, a key tool used by both the Technical Committee and the Policy Board to assess the status and feasibility of proposed projects.

For example, Mr. Medina Mentioned recently they carried over \$102 million from FY23 through FY25. Thanks to the Project Readiness Report, we were able to program all that funding within a single fiscal year, a significant achievement that would have been difficult without a structured process in place.

Moving forward, Mr. Medina stated that all projects presented to the Policy Board for federal assistance will be required to follow this new process and utilize the readiness report template. This approach ensures greater transparency, accountability, and alignment with federal expectations, ultimately helping us better serve the region.

Item #7: Adjourn: There being no further business to come before the board, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to adjourn at 12:51 pm


President, Norie Gonzalez Garza

ATTEST:


Liza Alaro, Recording Secretary