



IMPROVING MORE THAN JUST ROADS

Press Release

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Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority Executive Director, Pete Sepulveda, Jr. recently attended the Better Border for a Better America Conference which took place on September 20th-21st in El Paso, TX. Mr. Sepulveda was invited to speak at the conference which focuses on improving connectivity and efficient mobility across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Mr. Sepulveda did an outstanding job in presenting Cameron County's International Bridges and projects that showcase the efforts Cameron County has made to invest in infrastructure, technology, and operations.

Mr. Sepulveda spoke about projects such as SH 550 Gap 2, which would complete the entire SH 550 project that will become an interstate and will be signed as I-169. This new 10-mile interstate would help facilitate key economic development by creating access through a previously undeveloped area and would directly connect the Port of Brownsville to the interstate system.

The East Loop Project, which serves the international bridge system in Brownsville as well as the Port of Brownsville, which exports, and imports over 6.3 million metric tons of steel petroleum, machinery ores and other international trade exports to our Mexico partners. The project, is an international bridge trade corridor which has been on the county's priority list for decades, is important because it will get overweight commercial trucks out of the densely populated portion of Brownsville from the Veterans bridge to the Port of Brownsville. The East Loop Project will create the East Loop Overweight Corridor for trucks traveling from Mexico and the Veterans International Bridge at Los Tomates to the Port of Brownsville and will reduce congestion on I-69 and State Highway 48.

The Veterans International Bridge at the Los Tomates Donation Acceptance Program Project, which is currently under construction, through a formal partnership between U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the General Services Administration (GSA), Cameron County, TX, and the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA). Once completed with the construction of four new lanes and new infrastructure, this project will decrease wait times at the port of entry for passenger vehicles. Additionally, Cameron County has installed the Grab-350 Integrated Vehicle Barrier System technology at Veterans International Bridge which will help stop stolen vehicles fleeing from the United States into Mexico as well as illegal weapons and cash.

The Gateway International Bridge Land Port of Entry Modernization and Expansion Project, which will include replacing the entirety of its structure, including expanding vehicle and pedestrian capacity. These improvements will improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety, all while accommodating the region's growing population and South Texas's cross-border travelers. GSA is investing \$200M on this project.

Lastly, Mr. Sepulveda spoke about FUEGO tag, Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority's (CCRMA) toll tag. CCRMA launched its own tag on October 21, 2021. This tag is currently used on SH 550 toll road but will soon be interoperable with other state roads, Cameron County Parks, and Cameron County International Bridges. CCRMA and Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) approved an Interlocal Agreement on July 18, 2023, to begin working on the implementation of CCRMA's FUEGO tag on all HCTRA toll road lanes. Once implemented, regional and international drivers will be able to travel seamlessly between Cameron County and Harris County. The goal is for FUEGO to become the regional and international tag that provides the convenience and efficiency for travelers to access state roads, interstates, parks, and international bridges from the interior of Mexico, the U.S.-Mexico Border to the Canadian border and from Colorado to Georgia.

Mr. Sepulveda urged the Federal Highway Administration who oversees the Joint Working Committee (JWC) between the United States and Mexico, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), CBP, GSA, DOT and TxDOT to invite CCRMA and Cameron County to a Joint Working Committee Meeting where CCRMA could introduce their FUEGO tag and introduce a concept to the Mexican Federal Government where FUEGO tag could be interoperable in Mexico as it will be in the United States. Secondly, Mr. Sepulveda proposed that the JWC work with CCRMA and Cameron County to include data in the FUEGO tag such as wait time information along with data from U.S. DOT and DPS on truck inspections. Last week was a chaotic week for border trade and commerce all along the border. CCRMA's FUEGO tag has the potential to be used as a tool to enhance the mobility of trade and travel at our international bridges in the Rio Grande Valley and the entire Southwest border between the United States and Mexico. This would allow a collaborative effort to create a safe and effective transportation for cross-border traffic. Cameron County and the JWC previously worked together on the West Rail Relocation project, which involved relocating the main Union Pacific Railroad lines from downtown Brownsville and Matamoros to a rural area.

Overall, the conference was a success and demonstrated that Cameron County is leading the way through innovative ideas and partnerships to improve the County's economy and make a significant difference in the region.

