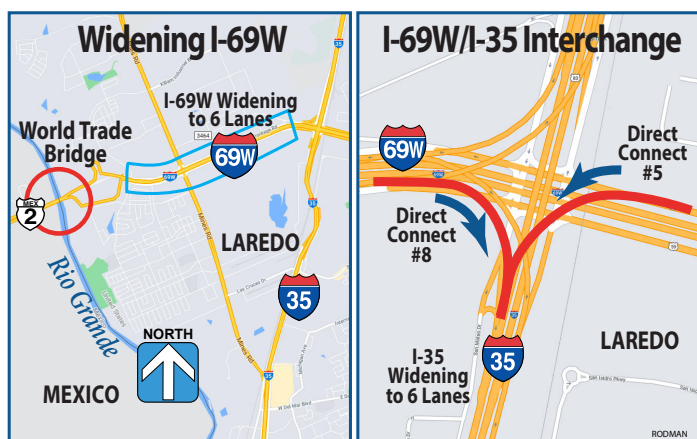


January 11, 2021

❑ **TEXAS LEGISLATURE** – The 2021 session of the Texas Legislature starts this week with few certainties except that a budget will be hammered out and that the redistricting process will commence. The Alliance and other transportation advocates will be seeking to defend current highway funding. Putting a fee on alternative fuel vehicles and perhaps making adjustments to motor fuel taxes are among the possible transportation related topics lawmakers will debate this year.

❑ **I-69 AUSTIN DAY** – In lieu of our traditional visit to the Capitol early in the session, the Alliance is in the process of planning a modified I-69 Day with a series of virtual meetings with members of the Legislature and staffers over a period of several days. We are working on dates in mid-February and will keep you updated.



❑ **I-69W LAREDO PROJECTS** – Work begins this month on two key freight capacity expansion projects in Laredo. The first is a \$14 million project to add a third lane in each direction to 1.8 miles of I-69W between Laredo's busy World Trade Bridge and I-35. In 2019 this section of roadway had average daily traffic of 37,000 vehicles, mostly commercial trucks. The bridge handles more than 60% of all truck traffic between Texas and Mexico.



The second project will add two more direct connectors (#5 & #8) between I-69W and I-35, both southbound. They are part of \$115 million project that includes widening a portion of I-35 in the vicinity of where the direct connectors will land heading toward downtown Laredo. Both projects are being expedited to take advantage of temporary Covid-related reduced traffic volumes. Three direct connects are already in place and the final three will be programmed in the future.

❑ **WASHINGTON** – With the transition to a new administration and Congress there is increased discussion in DC of infrastructure funding. Reauthorization of federal transportation authorities were to expire last September but Congress approved a one-year extension of those authorities to enable more time to develop the necessary legislation. The House had approved a large transportation and infrastructure bill, but the Senate did not consider a bill, thus requiring the one-year extension. This is not the first time this has happened, based mainly on the difficulty to provide the necessary funding for a multi-year highway bill. President-elect Biden and the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee chairman have called for prompt action on a new transportation bill. Funding that bill remains a challenge, so a new authorization may have to wait on a new tax bill.

The latest Covid relief bill included \$10 billion for state DOT's to help bridge pandemic-related funding shortfalls. The recently approved FY 2021 Omnibus Appropriations bill includes \$49 billion for the Federal Highway Administration, \$1 billion for BUILD grants and \$2 billion for discretionary highway programs.

❑ **NUECES COUNTY PROJECT** – In December the Transportation Commission awarded a \$7.7 million project to construct US 77 freeway ramps at Bishop. This is part of the 23-mile section of US 77 from Robstown through Kingsville that will be completed to interstate standard in the next 2 years.

❑ **BEAUMONT DISTRICT** - Chad Bohne is the new district engineer for the TxDOT Beaumont District. The district includes a portion of US 59 in Liberty County plus several significant I-69 feeders including US 69 and US 96. Bohne served previously as planning director and then as deputy district engineer for the Bryan District.



❑ **ALVAREZ HONORED** – The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials has awarded Pharr District Engineer **Pete Alvarez** its top planning award for his work on the successful creation of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization. The RGV-MPO resulted from the merger of three smaller MPOs and covers all of Hidalgo and Cameron Counties.

❑ **PHARR INTERNATIONAL BRIDGE** – The City of Pharr has received a federal permit allowing the addition of a parallel bridge at the Texas-Mexico border. The expansion will allow for complete separation of commercial traffic. The bridge entrance is 8 miles south of the I-69C/I-2 interchange which is currently being expanded.

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