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June 14, 2022

Honorable Chairman Jim Himes and Committee Members House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth 5240 O'Neill House Office Building Washington, DC 20024

RE: Cameron County projects which will connect people to economic opportunity

To the distinguished members of The House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before you and share information about Cameron County and the Rio Grande Valley.

I stand before you today making a much-needed request for additional funding and support from the federal government which will propel Cameron County and Rio Grande Valley to new heights. Despite our accomplishments, funding shortfalls have prevented us from addressing three significant issues: drainage infrastructure, access to broadband connectivity and highway infrastructure.

Drainage Infrastructure

The Arroyo Colorado forms part of the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project (LRGFCP); a project under the jurisdiction of the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). There is a serious concern about the Arroyo Colorado being able to convey 21,000 cubic feet of water per second (CFS) without causing devastating flood conditions in Cameron County, in particular to the City of Harlingen, and other surrounding communities. Cameron County needs support from the federal government to fund and create a comprehensive flood mitigation and floodway management plan for the Arroyo Colorado to protect life and property from future flooding disasters.

Built under a 1932 agreement between the United States and Mexico, the LRGFCP diverts floodwaters from the Rio Grande River into the interior floodways of the United States. The Arroyo Colorado stretches from the divisor dike at the junction in Mercedes, TX and flows east / southeast to the Laguna Madre near the Gulf of Mexico. In its course of fifty-two miles, the Arroyo Colorado serves as part of a storm water management system to communities in Cameron and Hidalgo counties such as Mercedes, La Feria, Combes, Harlingen, San Benito, Rio Hondo, rural areas, and several drainage and irrigation districts. The population affected by the Arroyo Colorado is well over 120,000. According to a June 2003 USIBWC report, when subjected to floodwaters in October 1958 and September 1967 the LRGFCP's flood conveyance capacity proved to be inadequate. The study notes that growth vegetation in the channel and floodplain and the natural change in the configuration of a meandering body of water had reduced the LRGFCP's conveyance capacity.

Over the past 30 years, the Arroyo Colorado has seen dense vegetation growth, bank erosion, and sedimentation impair its ability to convey storm waters. Flood waters dating back to July 2010 (Hurricane Alex floodwater diversions), June 21, 2018, and June 24, 2019, show record setting water surface elevations in the Arroyo Colorado at 24.22 ft., 23.98 ft., and 22.67 ft., respectively. These water surface elevations are being caused by flood water flows in the range of 5,226 (CFS) to 5,509 (CFS). Storm water from the Arroyo Colorado will start to back up into the City of Harlingen's storm sewer system and cause flooding once the water surface elevation in the Arroyo reaches 23.02 ft.

Rural areas throughout Cameron County, and most notably the areas in and surrounding the City of Harlingen, continue to realize local flooding issues with each major rain event. In accordance to how USIBWC manages the LRGFCP, 21,000 (CFS) is programmed to be diverted into the Arroyo Colorado. The current condition of the Arroyo Colorado poses a serious risk not only to the City of Harlingen but to all other communities that depend on the Arroyo Colorado as a means of discharging its storm water. For this reason, over the past several years the City of Harlingen has urged the leadership at USIBWC to update their hydraulic study of the Arroyo Colorado, identify and develop capital improvement projects that mitigate flows in the Arroyo and reconfigure the LRGFCP to divert a larger amount of flow to the north Floodway and reduce the Arroyo's flows.

Cameron County believes it is imperative to gather the necessary data related to the Arroyo Colorado and North Main Drain to develop an action plan to protect life and property from future flooding disasters. A detailed survey of both the entire stretch of the Arroyo Colorado and the North Main Drain is a critical component in determining the current capacity of both waterways. We ask for the necessary funding to assist the IBWC in conducting the field survey of both. This will not only help to determine the current capacity of both waterways but will also provide critical information toward the goal of developing a long-term course of action to improve drainage in the Rio Grande Valley and reduce flooding risk.

Broadband Connectivity

Cameron County understands that providing quality internet connectivity to our residents allows access to better health care, improves education, and stimulates economic growth. We come before you today to request funding to help Cameron County eliminate the digital divide and offer much needed internet connectivity to a largely underserved and low-income population.

Cameron County, like all communities, continues to deal with the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to latest information from BroadbandUSA, approximately 30% of households within Cameron County do not have access to internet services. Additionally, many of the households that have access are limited to upload/download speeds as low as 55.95/8.85 Mbps.

To bridge the digital divide, Cameron County has taken proactive measures to increase internet connectivity in underserved areas by funding broadband projects with ARPA dollars, applying for Broadband Infrastructure Program grants and partnering with local businesses to provide quality and consistent internet access. Despite Cameron County's proactive efforts, numerous residents remain without access to quality internet access at home, many of which are students.

As Cameron County looks for future funding opportunities with respect to broadband internet services, we have issued an RFQ to develop a broadband access study and expansion plan. Cameron County is funding the broadband access study and expansion plan to show potential funding sources that we have skin in the game and hopefully position Cameron County at the top of the list when competing for state and federal funding. Cameron County's goal is to bring internet connectivity that will meet state guidelines of 100/100 Mbps to all underserved communities in Cameron County. From a financial standpoint, this will be a monumental task for Cameron County, and we will need partners like the state and federal government to make funding this much needed project a reality.

Recent broadband initiatives funded in whole or supported by Cameron County:

Lozano Broadband Deployment Project

- Project Lead Commissioner David Garza
- Vendor Gigabit Communications LLC.
- Location Lozano, TX.
- Total Cost \$70,000.00 (ARPA)
- Approved August 31, 2021

Arroyo City Broadband Deployment Project

- Project Lead Commissioner David Garza
- Vendor Gigabit Communications LLC.
- Location Arroyo City, TX.
- Total Cost \$430,000.00 (ARPA)
- Approved September 21, 2021

Precinct 4 Underserved Communities

- Project Lead Commissioner Gus Ruiz
- Grant NTIA-Broadband Infrastructure Program
- Vendor (WISP) Wi-fi R-US
- Location Rural communities along the U.S. Hwy 281 in Precinct 4
- Status Pending NTIA Grant approval

SpaceX StarLink Deployment Project

- Project Lead Commissioner Sofia Benavides
- Vendor Starlink (SpaceX)
- Location Bob Clark Social Services,
 Benavides Park, and Public Works Pct. 1
- Total Cost \$0.00 for initial 24 months
- Approved February 1, 2022
- Deployed March 4, 2022

Needs Related to Highway Infrastructure

Cameron County is requesting financial support and a partner in the federal government to complete two major projects for the infrastructure of Cameron County and all of South Texas.

I 69E Project – Cameron County and the Rio Grande Valley are the largest metropolitan area in the United States without an interstate corridor. An interstate corridor is a critical component to be able to lure industry to our region. The Port of Brownsville needs to have an interstate corridor to its entrance to be able to attract industry to the Port. We have one remaining gap to complete, before we accomplish that. A completed interstate corridor will complement the Space X and LNG projects as well as other new projects. Funding needed to complete projects in Cameron and Kennedy Counties along the U.S. 77/I69E Corridor is \$600 million. This is a huge priority for Cameron County and the Rio Grande Valley. The last twenty years we have spent a great deal of time advocating at the state and federal level for construction dollars to be able to complete the projects along the U.S. 77 and U.S. 281 corridors. The U.S. 77 corridor is environmentally cleared and the right of way is in place along with most of the engineering and design. The remaining projects are shovel ready and receiving the needed funding for these projects would ensure that we could go right into the construction phase for the remaining projects. Too many decades have gone by without us being able to take advantage of the economic opportunities that having an interstate system could present to us.

SH 550 Gap II Project - The SH 550 Gap 2 is the final Gap Project in the completion of the SH 550/I 169 from I69E to the Port of Brownsville. There are several segments signed as I 169 already. The SH 550 Gap 2 Project limits are from 0.2 miles south of FM 1847 to 1.13 miles east of Union Pacific Railroad. The project has completed the environmental, right-of-way and utility relocation phase, and now requires the updating of existing design plans to the most current interstate standards. Engineering Plans will be updated by December 2022. The project requires a twin bridge structure over the UPRR rail line. When completed Interstate 169 will connect the Port of Brownsville to I69E. This is a significant infrastructure improvement for the City of Brownsville and the Port of Brownsville. As the Port of Brownsville continues to lure industry from the energy, space and other sectors, having an interstate is crucial. The RGVMPO and the CCRMA have allocated construction funds for this project. The project has \$17 million available in funding for construction through the RGVMPO and the letting date is 2023. This project is extremely crucial to the Port of Brownsville since it will provide an Interstate Corridor onto the

Port of Brownsville. The Port needs the interstate connectivity in order to compete against other deep-water ports. We must be given a high priority on our interstate corridors by TxDOT and the federal government so that we may position ourselves to take advantage of economic opportunities.

It is hard for rural projects to compete for competitive grant funding on the same metrics as urban projects. For example, population and traffic counts are not comparable to numbers in urban areas. However, completing infrastructure in rural communities provides local benefits (economic growth, connectivity, safety) while also providing relief for other congested interstates and improving freight movement. We need to revise the criteria for competitive grants so that one size (urban criteria) are not used for all project evaluations.

The 90% guaranteed federal share to build an interstate is no longer available. That leaves states like Texas with the primary responsibility to build interstates that will have significant national benefit in addition to the local/state benefits.

Texas has been working on building I-69 for over a quarter century. Each year that it takes to complete the project increases the cost. Furthermore, due to financial constraints only very small project segments (ie. a few miles) can be advanced at a time. Efficiencies could be gained if longer segments could be advanced with a multi-year federal commitment – similar to the New Start transit program.

As a region with some of the best beaches along the gulf coast, ample room for growth and a ripe workforce, we come before you today in hopes that our discussion here will turn the spotlight on the Rio Grande Valley and Cameron County. We have lost a great deal of economic opportunities over the last four decades without an interstate system. We need your help in bringing an interstate system into the Rio Grande Valley a reality. If you were not aware of all the great and unique things the Cameron County has to offer, I personally invite you to visit any opportunity to you have. I will be sure to roll the red carpet out for you and take you on a tour of both greatness and untapped potential.

I look forward to your positive response and future correspondence.

Sincerely,

David A. Garza

Cameron County Commissioner, Pct. 3

Paint al Daza





GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ASSETS

- OVER 90,000 ACRES OF PROTECTED LAND
- THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY HAS RECORDED OVER 500 SPECIES OF BIRDS
- 130 BUTTERFLY SPECIES RECORDED AT LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
- OPPORTUNITIES FOR BI-NATIONAL CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM
- WORLD CLASS BIRDWATCHING, INCLUDING APLOMADO FALCON, RED-CROWNED PARROT, AND OVER A DOZEN OTHER BIRD SPECIES FOUND NOWHERE ELSE IN THE UNITED STATES
- BARRIER ISLANDS AND BEACHES, PROVIDING HABITAT TO SEA TURTLES AND BROWN PELICANS
- ONE OF THE ONLY POPULATIONS OF OCELOTS IN THE UNITED STATES

ACTIONS TO SUPPORT A NATURE-BASED ECONOMY

- CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND DEDICATE
 FUNDING TO SUPPORT INVESTMENTS IN NATURAL
 AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION AND
 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE
- FOCUS MITIGATION INVESTMENTS FOR ROAD AND PIPELINE PROJECTS INTO PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL TREASURES
- EXPAND THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE VISION TO THE ENTIRE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY
- SUPPORT COMMUNITY ADOPTION OF THE CAMERON COUNTY GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE VISION AND THE ACTION PLAN
- EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ON THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, AND OCELOTS
- ESTABLISH A COORDINATED MARKETING
 PROGRAM TO PROMOTE CAMERON COUNTY
 AS A PREMIER ECOTOURISM DESTINATION



PRESERVING AND LINKING OUR NATURAL & CULTURAL TREASURES

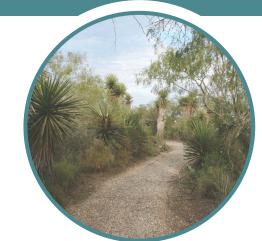
PROMOTING ECOTOURISM AND ACTIVE RECREATION FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE VISION WAS SUPPORTED BY OVER 40 STAKEHOLDERS IN CAMERON COUNTY AND THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY REGION. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT:

HTTP://WWW.CONSERVATIONFUND.ORG/PROJECTS/GREEN-INFRASTRUCTURE-VISION-FOR-CAMERON-COUNTY-TEXAS







STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE VISION

PROTECT KEY INHOLDINGS AND ADDITIONS TO OUR NATIONAL TREASURES

- LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE
 REFUGE / BAHIA GRANDE
- 2 LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
- 3 PALO ALTO BATTLEFIELD NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK
- 4) SOUTH PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

HIGHLIGHT AND LINK ANCHOR NATURAL AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

- 5 BOCA CHICA BEACH STATE PARK
- 6 BROWNSVILLE RESACA RESTORATIONS
- 7 HARLINGEN ARROYO COLORADO WORLD BIRDING CENTER
- 8 HUGH RAMSEY STATE PARK
- 9 LA FERIA NATURE CENTER
- 10 RESACA DE LA PALMA WORLD BIRDING CENTER
- 11 SABAL PALM SANCTUARY
- 12 SOUTH PADRE ISLAND WORLD BIRDING CENTER
- 13 TEXAS TROPICAL TRAIL SCENIC BYWAY

IMPLEMENT THE ACTIVE PLAN CATALYST PROJECTS

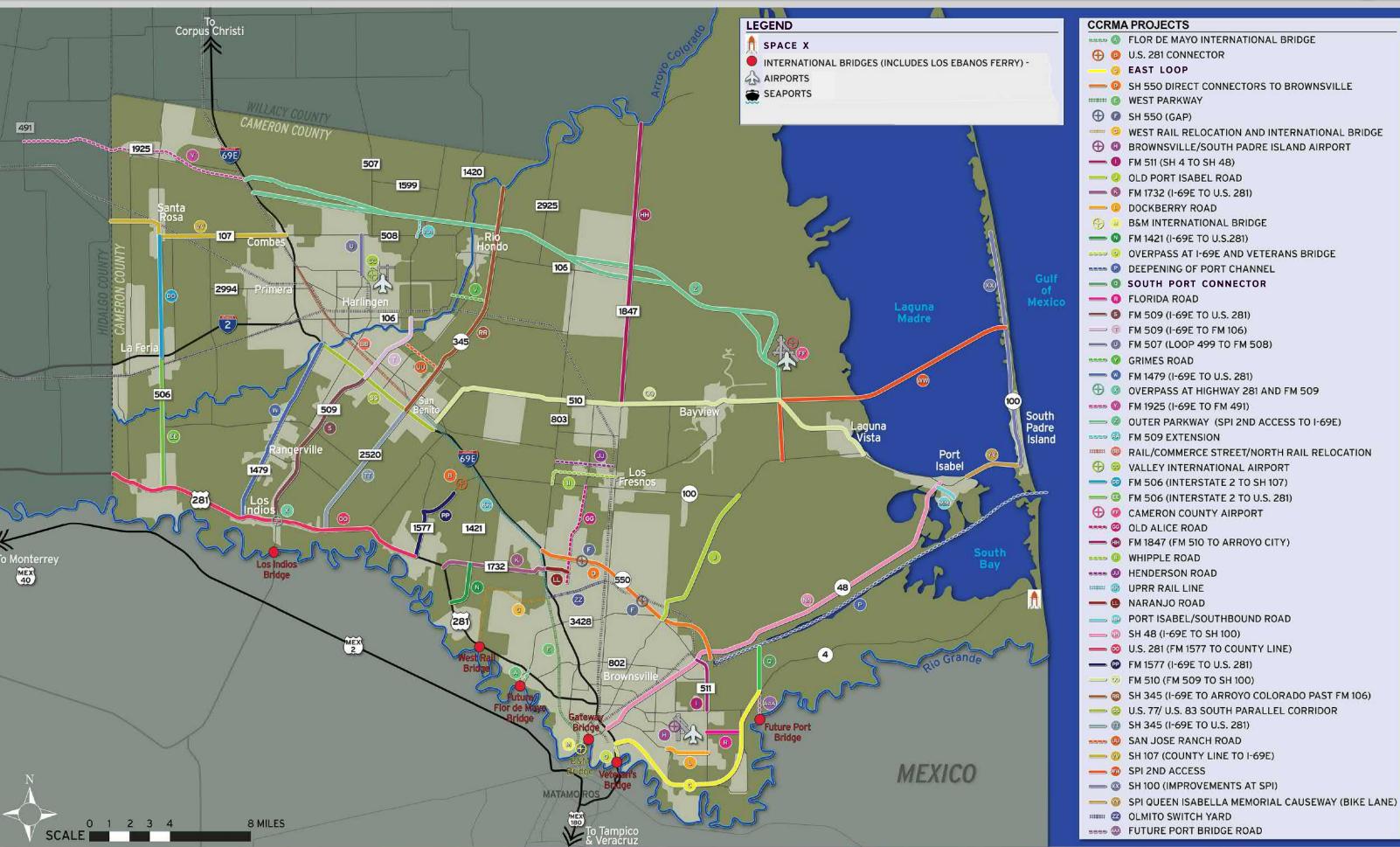
(75 MILES OF HIKE-BIKE AND PADDLING TRAILS)

- (14) ARROYO COLORADO PADDLING TRAIL
- 15 ARROYO-RESACA MULTI-USE TRAIL (HARLINGEN TO SAN BENITO)
- 16 BATTLEFIELD EXTENSION MULTI-USE TRAIL TO LOS FRESNOS
- 17 LAGUNA MADRE U.S. BICYCLE ROUTE 55
- 18 PALO ALTO TO BAHIA GRANDE MULTI-USE TRAIL
- 19 SOUTH PADRE ISLAND MULTI-USE TRAIL



SYSTEM MAP

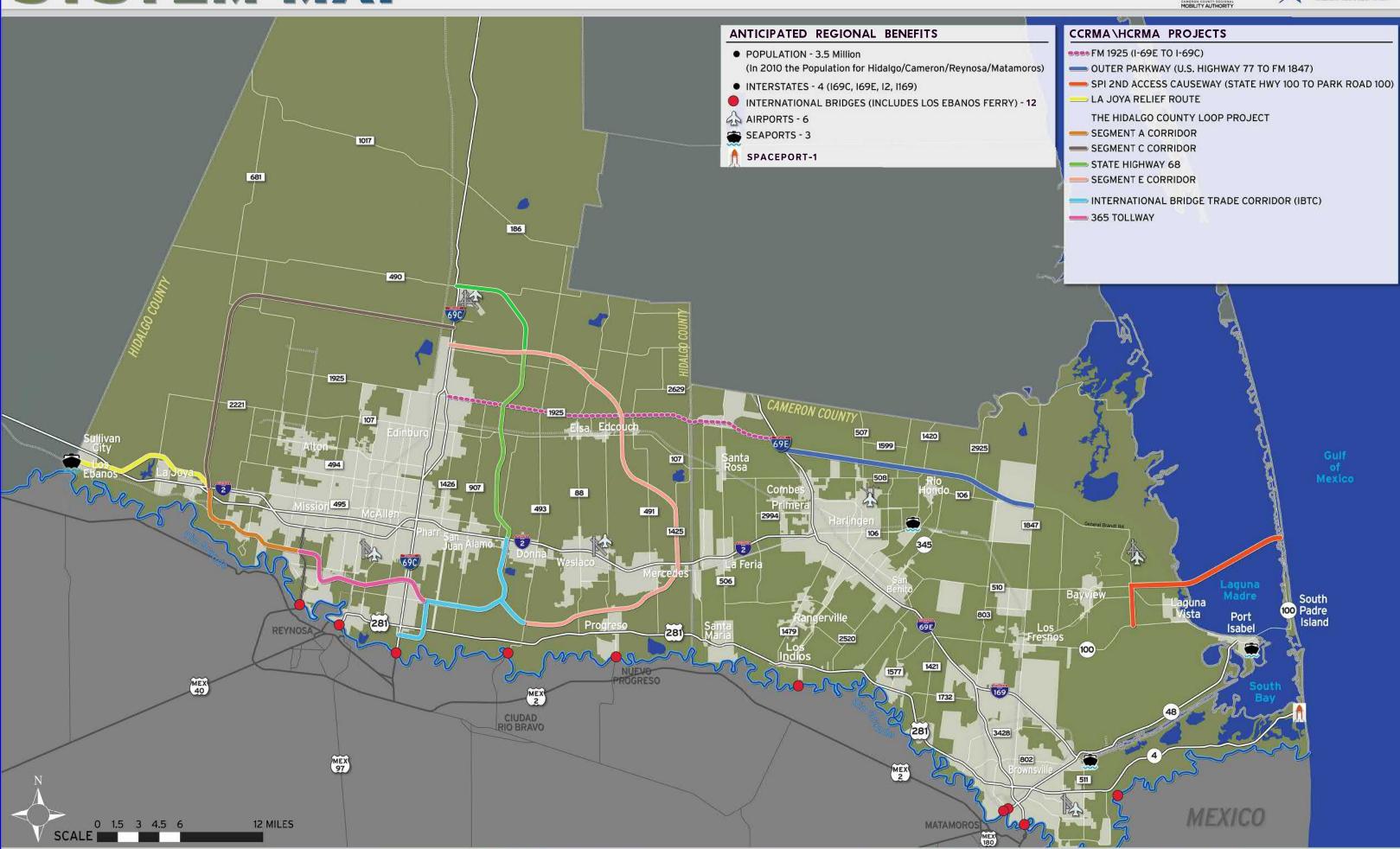




SYSTEM MAP







CCRMA Project List

Since our creation in 2004, the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA) has made significant progress to find new and innovative solutions to reduce congestion, improve connectivity, and facilitate economic development within Cameron County. The CCRMA works with the numerous cities in Cameron County and its neighbor to the South, the State of Tamaulipas, to improve mobility at a much more rapid pace. The CCRMA also works very closely with the Texas Department of Transportation on several ongoing projects in Cameron County. The CCRMA has the authority to undertake projects related to highways, rail, air, and seaport.

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
South Port Connector (SPC)	The Southern Connection to the Port of Brownsville. The new location roadway connects to SH 4 and consists of 2-12 ft lanes with 12 ft shoulders.	\$27.0 Million
West Rail Trail Project	The project creates a 6.5-mile-long pedestrian and bicycle mobility corridor through the City of Brownsville.	\$8.0 Million
South Parallel Corridor Phase II	The 2nd phase of the South Parallel Corridor project is from FM 509 to FM 2520.	\$10.0 Million
Transportation Projects (Under Construction) Subtotal		\$45.0 Million

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS (SHOVEL READY)		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
SH 550 Gap II Project	The SH 550 Gap 2 is the final Gap Project in the completion of the SH 550/I 169 from I69E to the Port of Brownsville. The SH 550 Gap 2 Project limits are from 0.2 miles south of FM 1847 to 1.13 miles east of Union Pacific Railroad. This will provide the Port of Brownsville and Interstate highway to their main entrance.	\$21 Million



Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Old Alice Road Project	Currently, Old Alice Road consists of sections that are unpaved and paved. The proposed improvements are to reconstruct and widen the existing roadway to provide for a paved four lane urban roadway with shoulders and sidewalks within the existing right-of-way. The 5-mile road project will provide connectivity to the Cities of Brownsville and Los Fresnos.	\$17.75 Million
Transportation Projects (Shovel Ready) Subtotal		\$38.75 Million

PORT PROJECTS (SHOVEL READY)		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Veterans International Bridge Primary Lane Expansion Project	The Veterans International Bridge is a partnership between Cameron County and the City of Brownsville. Interstate 69E starts at the Veterans International Bridge and this project would facilitate the movement of passenger vehicles between Brownsville and Matamoros. The project construction plans are complete and approved by GSA, CBP and TxDOT. Letting April 27, 2022.	\$15 Million
Port Projects (Shove	el Ready) Subtotal	\$15 Million

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS (UNDER DESIGN)		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
U.S. 77/I-69E Project	This collaborative multi-county project will extend existing U.S. 77 from Corpus Christi to Brownsville to Interstate standards. This potential project is under consideration as a multi-modal Corridor.	\$269 Million
East Loop Project	The East Loop Project consists of a 10-mile-long segment with the construction of a four to six-lane roadway from SH 4 to 169E (U.S. 77/83) and the Veterans International Bridge at Los Tomates.	\$100 Million



Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
FM 509 Project	FM 509 will be constructed to add new four lane divided highway from FM 508/FM 509 intersection to FM 1579. The Project will be approximately 3 miles.	
Mountain Bike Trail	Enhancements to existing mountain bike trail at the Pedro "Pete" Benavides County Park, Cameron County Texas.	
Isla Blanca Toll Booths	Toll booth for Cameron County Beach Access.	\$.3 Million
West Blvd Roadway Project	As a component of the 6.5-mile West Rail Trail project, the roadway project proposes to create a 2-mile urban roadway section that would also accommodate pedestrian and bicycle mobility corridor through the City of Brownsville.	\$6 Million
Transportation Proje	ects (Under Design) Subtotal	\$383.4 Million

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS (PLANNING STAGES)		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
SPI 2nd Access Project	The Second Access Project will include a bridge approximately 8 miles long to South Padre Island will involve a second crossing on a new location to South Padre Island to provide a much-needed alternate route from the island to the mainland, as well as facilitate evacuation of South Padre in the event of a hurricane or other natural disaster.	\$500 Million
Outer Parkway Project	The Outer Parkway Project is approximately 21.5 miles long and includes the construction of a new four lane tolled divided highway from I69E (U.S. 77) near the North Cameron County Line to FM 1847.	\$200 Million
Commerce Street Project	CCRMA has been working with Cameron County, the City of Harlingen, and Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) to install a new track connection to align the UPRR Harlingen Subdivision track at Jefferson Street directly across Commerce Street to connect to the UPRR Brownsville Subdivision. This new connection would result in the retirement of approximately 1.7 miles of the Harlingen Subdivision between U.S. 77 Sunshine Strip and Jefferson Avenue, which includes removal of seven (7) at-grade road crossings at Adams Avenue,	\$6 Million
3		

Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
	Washington Avenue, Lela Street, Ona Street, Orange Heights Road, Markowsky Avenue, and Commerce Street south of U.S. 77 Sunshine Strip.	
I-69 Connector	The interim facility would consist of a Super 2 highway with 2–12-foot travel lanes in each direction with an additional lane built to one side of the facility at alternate locations for directional passing lanes with a 300' ROW footprint for future transportation needs. The ultimate facility (which will be considered at a future date) would consist of an urban freeway with 2–12-foot travel lanes in each direction with a center barrier and 2–12-foot lane frontage roads with 4' inside and 10' outside shoulders.	\$495 Million
Morrison Road Project	This is a new location road from FM 1847 to FM 511. When complete, Morrison Road will go from FM 3248 to FM 511. This project will provide connectivity to a large retail area in Brownsville and reduce congestion on several major roads.	\$17 Million
Whipple Road Project	This road will be improved from FM 1847 to FM 1575. The right-of-way is in place to do the necessary improvements.	
281 Connector Project	The 281 Connector Project is approximately 7.5 miles long and includes the construction of a four-lane divided highway from U.S. 281 to 169E (U.S. 77/83).	\$140 Million
Dana Road	This road will be improved from FM 802 to FM 3248. The right-of-way is in place to do the necessary improvements. Includes a small bridge structure.	
South Parallel Corridor III	The 3rd and final phase of the South Parallel Corridor project is proposed from FM 2520 to FM 1577.	\$10 Million
Transportation Projects (Planning Stages) Subtotal		\$1.394 Billion

PORT PROJECTS (PLANNING STAGES)		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Flor de Mayo International Bridge	New Port of Entry located at Flor de Mayo will provide access to US 281 and MEX 2, allowing travelers to avoid congested urban areas on both sides on the US/Mexico border.	\$40 Million



Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Port Projects (Pla	nning Stages) Subtotal	\$40 Million

TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS		
Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Cameron County International Bridges	Electronic Toll Collection System.	\$1.8 Million
Cameron County Coastal Parks	Electronic Toll Collection System.	\$1.8 Million
Cameron County Parks	Wi-Fi Connectivity.	\$.5 Million
Technology Projects Subtotal		\$4.1 Million

ESTIMATED TOTAL PROJECT COSTS – ALL TYPES	\$1,920,250,000
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Drainage Needs – Area Map

