



PORTS-TO-PLAINS

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Governor Greg Abbott Signs Texas House Bill 1079

Yesterday, Governor Greg Abbott signed Texas House Bill 1079, which directs Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to conduct a comprehensive study of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor. The study must evaluate the feasibility of, and the costs and logistical matters associated with, improvements that create a four-lane divided highway, which meets interstate highway standards to the extent possible.

This study would detail improvements to extend Interstate 27 both north and south which includes the Ports-to-Plains Corridor north of Amarillo to the Texas-Oklahoma border, to the Texas-New Mexico border, and south of Lubbock to Laredo.

Next, TxDOT will establish an Interstate 27 Advisory Committee which is comprised of the county judge, an elected county official, or the administrator of the county's road department, as designated by the county judge, of each county along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor along with the mayor, city manager, or assistant city manager, as designated by the mayor, of Amarillo, Big Spring, Carrizo Springs, Dalhart, Del Rio, Dumas, Eagle Pass, Eldorado, Lamesa, Laredo, Lubbock, Midland, Odessa, San Angelo, Sonora, Sterling City, Stratford, and Tahoka. The advisory committee would meet at least twice each year on a rotational basis in Lubbock and San Angelo.

Additionally, TxDOT, in conjunction with the Advisory Committee, will establish committees for each geographic segment along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor as determined by TxDOT. The Segment Committees would consist of volunteers who represent municipalities, counties, metropolitan planning organizations, ports, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations including the oil and gas industry, the trucking industry, TxDOT representatives, and any other interested parties.

Each Segment Committee will submit a report by June 30, 2020 to the Advisory Committee providing input for the study conducted by the TxDOT including priority recommendations for improvement and expansion of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor.

TxDOT will also host quarterly public meetings on a rotational basis in Amarillo, Laredo, Lubbock, and San Angelo to gather public feedback on improvements or expansions to the Ports-to-Plains Corridor.

No later than January 1, 2021, TxDOT will submit a report on the results of the study to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the House of Representatives, and presiding officer of each standing committee of the legislature with jurisdiction over transportation matters.

Legislative Support for HB 1079

The leadership and cooperation of the legislators across West Texas who played a part in authoring, sponsoring, and amending this legislative is greatly appreciated by the Alliance. A special thanks to Senator Perry and Representative Price as they shepherded this bill through the legislative process.

The final legislation described above has roots in two bills: HB 1079 authored by Representative Four Price (District 88) with joint authors Representatives Ken King (District 88), John Smithee (District 86) and Drew Springer (District 68), and SB 176 authored by Senator Charles Perry (District 28). HB 1079 was amended by Representative Dustin Burrows (District 82) in the House Transportation Committee combining the extent of the study from each bill. The amended HB 1079 passed the House Transportation Committee on a vote of 9 to 0 and by the House 143 to 1.

In the Senate Transportation Committee, a substitute HB 1079 which included the details of the study described in the previous article was introduced by Senator Perry. Senator Kel Seliger (District 31) was also a co-sponsor. The substitute HB 1079 was approved by the Senate Transportation Committee 7 to 0 and was recommended for the Local Calendar where it was approved by the Senate. With the substitute HB 1079 approved by the Senate, it returned to the House which concurred with the substitute. Then, the bill was signed by Governor Greg Abbott.

Legislative support was provided by the following who testified at House and Senate Transportation Committee Hearing in Austin: City Manager Jared Miller, City of Amarillo; Ports-to-Plains Board Member Milton Pax, Dumas; Deputy City Manager Michelle Bonner, City of Amarillo; Mayor Brenda Gunter, City of San Angelo; Councilman Steve Massengale, City of Lubbock; Mayor Larry McLellan, City of Big Spring; Chairman of Ports-to-Plains Alliance and President/CEO of Lubbock Economic Development Alliance John Osborne, Lubbock; and County Judge Steve Smith, Sutton County and Ports-to-Plains Alliance Board of Directors. While not testifying, the following provided legislative support during the hearings: President John Esparza, Texas Trucking Association; County Commissioner Bill McCay, Lubbock County; President/CEO Carlton Schwab, Texas Economic Development Council; Leticia Van de Putte, Andrade-Van De Putte & Associates (Del Rio); and Mark Vane, Husch Blackwell Strategies (Caterpillar).

Finally, the Alliance is appreciative of the lobby firm, which assisted in moving this bill through the legislature. The Hance Scarborough LLP team, the primary lobbyist for the bill, included Kent Hance, Cheri Huddleston, Robert Floyd, Wes McGuffey, Petrus Wassdorf and Sawyer Burmeister. Ports-to-Plains Board Member Brint Ryan also provided Andrea McWilliams of his company's lobby team in support of the bill.