

RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM
USIBWC Headquarters
El Paso, Texas
January 11, 2018
*** Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Reclamation
Yvonne Curry, American Society of Civil Engineers
Suleiman Masoud, Del Rio Engineering, El Paso Association of Builders Board of Directors
Travis Johnson, Attorney
Conrad Keyes, Jr. Chair, Paso del Norte Watershed Council, New Mexico State University Emeritus

U.S. Section, International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) Staff in attendance:

Jose Nuñez, Principal Engineer
Dr. Padinare Unnikrishna, Chief, Engineering Services Division
Betsabe Diaz, Master Planning Office
Luis Hernandez, O&M Division
Jose Luis Sierra, Supervisory Facilities Operation Specialist
Flavio Apodaca, Supervisor – Engineering Tech
Aaron Haynes, Safety and Security Chief
David Madrid, Tractor Operator
Sally Spener, Foreign Affairs Officer
Lori Kuczmanski, Public Affairs Officer

Mexican Section:

Alejandro Velazquez

Members of the public in attendance:

John Douglas, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Woody Irving, Bureau of Reclamation
Delbert Humberson, U.S. Geological Survey
Earl F. Burkholder, Retired teacher New Mexico State University, and Global Cogo, Inc.
Jennifer Wright, Texas Dept. of Transportation
Josiah Heyman, University of Texas at El Paso
Joel Mora, Arcadis
Jose Unzueta, City of El Paso
Rene Romo, Senator Tom Udall's Office
Robert Kimpel, Hudspeth Farmers
Karen Ray, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Brad Kirksey, Freese and Nichols, Inc.
Jeremy Wyndham, Jacobs Engineering Group
Zack Libbin, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Zhuping Sheng, Texas A & M AgriLife
John Day, Doña Ana County Sheriff's Dept.
Richard Teschner, Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition & Friends of the Rio Bosque
Karl Rimkus, City of El Paso-Air Quality
Al Melero, City of El Paso-Air Quality
Shelby Montgomery, KVIA, ABC 7

Jerry Najera, KVIA, ABC 7
John Irizarry, Bureau of Reclamation
Gus Sanchez, Texas Depart. of Transportation
Miguel Teran, El Paso County Water Improvement District #1
Carlos Rincon, EPA

Welcoming Remarks:

At 6:30 PM, Citizens Forum Co-Chair Jose Nuñez convened the meeting. He welcomed the group, introduced board members and allowed the audience to introduce themselves.

The first presentation was announced, the Donipahn Drive Corridor Plan.

Presentation One – Doniphan Drive Corridor Plan – Jeremy Wyndham, P.E., Project Manager, Jacobs Engineering Group

Mr. Wyndham gave a brief background on the construction of the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP) in the 1930s and 1940s as a water delivery and flood control project, covering 106 river miles from Percha Dam, New Mexico to American Dam in El Paso, Texas. Doniphan Drive is generally parallel to the Rio Grande.

He stated a feasibility study is being undertaken for the Doniphan Drive Corridor Plan—there are several more steps before anything will be built. The purpose of the Doniphan Drive Corridor Plan is to create a plan that will document the community’s future vision in regard to transportation and development for Doniphan Drive beginning in 2016 through 2040. One of the things they are doing with the overall plan is to look at improvements that can be done short term, medium term, and long term. When they first went out to the public, the public was asked what their visions were for the corridor, what their concerns were, and what they would like to see improved. The top four things they heard were to address the flooding problem on Doniphan Drive, improve safety on Doniphan Drive with lighting and reducing the conflicting vehicular movements, address congestion problems such as turn lanes, and making it a multi-mode corridor by adding sidewalks with crosswalks to include adding bike lanes, improve the bus stops, and enhance transit services.

The engineering firm went back out to the public looking at different alternatives they had developed along the corridor, and they heard the same four top things were a priority in the corridor—safety, flooding, congestion and multi-mode transportation.

Connections to the community was also important, improving landscaping and signage along the corridor giving it a sense of place and making sure we address the development of possibilities along the corridor.

Mr. Wyndham said they asked the public what the needs were along the corridor, and they got a lot of feedback from the stakeholders and the public. They developed and screened several alternatives along the corridor and came up with three major alternatives:

A: minimalistic alternative—address the traffic and safety concerns by not doing a whole lot in terms of items such as significant landscape work.

B: Alternative B was somewhat in the middle. It added a shared use path for biking along the corridor

C: This was the most aggressive alternative in terms of separate bike lanes on the street, as well as shared path off the street, walking paths, wide medians.

The engineering firm went out to the public again and they heard back regarding the alternatives. The public wanted to minimize right-of-way acquisitions but still provide safety improvements and address the traffic concerns and drainage concerns. The public also liked the shared use path largely because there's an existing path along the Rio Grande and there's a desire to make that a loop using Doniphan Drive as a circulator back.

The decision was made to have an alternative plan that does minimize right-of-way acquisition. It provides for bicycles to use the street, but there is a shared used path, a sidewalk on the east side of the road and the pedestrians can also use the shared path with bicycles on the west side of the road. A varying buffer between the sidewalk and the right-of-way line was decided upon, and parking was another thing the engineering firm looked at, specifically to minimize parking along Doniphan Drive.

He presented conceptual drawings of a 4-lane section from the Texas/New Mexico state line to Los Mochis Dr and Borderland Road to Redd Road:

It is proposed to put in a median and have a median that is depressed; that is how this is being handling right now, to include the drainage concerns. Right now, there is concrete all the way across. If a depressed median and some depressed buffers on the sides of the road are constructed, that would capture some of that water and reduce the flooding. There is lighting down the center of the road, 4-lanes, a sidewalk on the east side and a shared use path on the west side.

There is a segment near the southern end of the corridor, between Redd Road and Sunland Park that from a traffic standpoint needs six lanes. This is on slide #10. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDot) portion, which is between Redd Road and Country Club Road, is similar to the four-lane section, except it has an extra lane in each direction.

At the southern end of the corridor there will be a 4-lane road because the traffic has been pulled off at Sunland Park.

In terms of drainage improvements, through our subconsultant and a parallel consultant that was doing some work, Omega Engineers and Moreno Cardenas Engineering, they looked at several different flood events and frequencies. They looked at existing conditions, existing problems, and at the improvements being proposed on the roadway side of things. Omega did the TxDot portion of the corridor and Moreno Cardenas Engineering did the southernmost portion of the corridor.

Challenges in the Doniphan Drive Corridor from a drainage standpoint—it's right in the middle of the Franklin Mountains and the Rio Grande, so all the water is coming towards Doniphan Drive. With the water comes a lot of sediment and the sediment clogs up the drainage culverts and channels and that causes flooding. BNSF Railroad provides a barrier on the downstream side of the path of the water. All of these things lead towards the flooding on Doniphan Drive. Also, because of the proximity of the Rio Grande we have a very high-water table.

Solutions:

Looking more globally at the drainage coming off the Franklin Mountains, it can be intercepted at upstream dams, that can help the flooding in the Doniphan area. Some of the recommendations/proposed solutions are:

- Maintenance of the culverts and channels to clear the sediment out on a regular basis
- Minimize or resolve obstruction caused by BNSF Railroad

-Along Doniphan Drive, some of the recommendations have already been discussed (depressed medians to capture water, depressed buffer on west side of the road to capture water running off the road, and working with BNSF on getting additional outfalls with IBWC underneath their railroads.

In the southern portion of the corridor it has two storm water systems that go to two different pump stations that pump the water to the same outfall which then goes to the Rio Grande.

There are recommendations for detention ponds which will add to storage which will allow the water to flow through the system in a more measured manner.

What's next?

There will be a public meeting series which is an open house format. It will be held Monday, January 22, 2018 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Lincoln Middle School — Gymnasium, 500 Mulberry Ave, El Paso, Texas 79932 and another meeting on Tuesday, January 23 at Canutillo High School – Cafeteria, 6675 S Desert Blvd., El Paso, TX 79932 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Questions and Answers:

Q: The drainage system on the depressed areas is water harvesting—there is no storm water drain going anywhere?

A: Not in the northern portion. It is storing the water.

Comment: On the upper reach, we (IBWC) is working with TxDot, the City of El Paso, and the County to try to upgrade the drainage system we have in that location.

Jose Nuñez, USIBWC: We want culverts on Doniphan that go underneath the railroad to convey stormwater flow to the Rio Grande.

The concern that people have is that once the river is full, if there is nothing done on the interior drainage (drainage from the landside of the flood control levee), once we close the gates on the culverts through the levee as required by FEMA criteria so the river doesn't overflow into the community, the water from the land side has nowhere to go. We are working with the county and the city—the city has plans to build retention basins closer to the mountains to capture some of that water.

Q: What are the rest of the steps and the schedule for construction, and part of this is city funded and state funded?

A: We developed an overall plan and we've broken it down into short, medium, and long-range projects, such as: taking a 4-lane section that is currently a 5-lane section with a dirt berm line and taking out the turn lane; reconstructing curbs and the buffers and the depressed median in one of the 4-lane sections that could be an independent project. A 6-lane section could be an independent project, putting lighting down the median could be an independent project. We've identified 16 or 17 different projects. We've categorized them into short, medium, and long-term projects. The short-term projects will have very little impact on the community so the environmental and NEPA process would be very minimal. Those projects are in the 1-5-year range. The medium projects—those are in the 5-10-year range, and the projects where there is significant right of way acquisition like in the 6-lane area would have a more significant NEPA process plus the acquisition process and those projects would be on the 10-year range. We've been working with various cities along the corridor throughout this project. They will all be

involved in this process and are working together-- the City of El Paso, Anthony, and the Village of Vinton.

Presentation two – Border West Expressway, Jennifer Wright, Public Information Officer, El Paso District, Texas Department of Transportation

The Border West Expressway project is a \$650 million project, something we have never seen in this part of the state. It started in April of 2018 and will should be completed in the Spring of 2019. We have about 16 more months to go on this project. Loop 375 is Transmountain in the Northeast and Woodrow Bean, then it's Joe Battle, so depending on where you are in town it has a different name. This project is completing the Loop 375 if you count the few miles that it is running on I-10.

She presented a series of slides illustrating various aspects of the project.

Slide 3 shows bridge 17 which is a mile long and is above the USIBWC's Rio Grande flood control levee.

Slide 4: This is at Sunland Park and Anapra, and we now have access to this ramp. The Border West Expressway's long-term closure of Paisano Drive, also known as US 85, has affected I-10 by re-scheduling some of its work activities to take advantage of the Border West Expressway's closures of Paisano Drive (US85). Although it will not be possible for the *GO 10* project to complete all work in this area by the Border West Expressway's target completion timeframe of Fall 2018, both projects will be able to be accelerated with the downtime of Paisano Drive (US 85) greatly reduced.

Slide 5: This area will be opened by Easter (April 2018), and will take you in and out of downtown. You can get on and off Border Highway from here.

Video:

Jennifer Wright narrated a video showing what the Border West Expressway will look like and how it will function once completed.

Starting by Buena Vista Community. For the McNutt Bridge, including I-10, there will be 14 lanes of traffic when this is completed. This project has 5.6 miles of tolled lanes. McNutt will be one lane in each direction when it's completed, Paisano will maintain 2 lanes in each direction. Paisano is the same way it was but there will be some refurbishment of certain areas.

At the Executive Center Boulevard intersection, you will be able to get off and go to I-10 or vice versa. One bridge being built along I-10 are the bridges that interact with the railroad. There are 2 class railroad lines and the Expressway is being built over them. That is part of the reason this project is behind the original schedule was because they had no idea it would be so onerous to deal with the railroads and find times when it could work (due to safety) on the railroad.

Shown are cars entering the collector-distributor lanes which are designed for high-speed traffic. The purpose is to collect and distribute vehicles in a safe and more efficient manner. The collector-distributor (CD) lanes are beneficial for a few reasons:

1. The need for drivers to make lane changes on the interstate is reduced.
2. Movements such as weaving and passing are shifted to the CD lanes and away from main lines
3. Travel on main lines of the interstate becomes ideal for long-distance motorists, such as truckers and cross-city commuters
4. Drivers who need to enter and exit often will be relegated to the CD lanes, safely separated from the motorists who want to bypass the Westside

Traffic alerts are posted on social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) and are updated regularly. Messages are sent out to employers and we hope you will forward the information to your staff. You can also find updates and traffic alerts on the news. For more information, visit: <http://go10elpaso.com/en/traffic-construction-updates.html>

Presentation three—Rincon WHEN: Water, Habitat, Energy Nexus, Zack Libbin, District Engineer, Elephant Butte Irrigation District

There are 90,640 water righted acres in Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) New Mexico.

The project impacts 2,200 water-righted acres. It is a project in Rincon, New Mexico. Water is diverted at Percha Dam, goes through canals to Rincon Canal, which is 30 miles downstream of Percha Dam. The intent is to improve water delivery to the users in that area and conserve water for the whole district.

Selden Drain in slide 4 is near Radium Springs. They widened the drain, which improved habitat. This is a multi-objective project:

Flood control to protect the neighborhoods.

Water supply is improved through stormwater capture and infiltration.

Habitat is improved because the topography and vegetation create riparian meadow and forest zones.

Water quality benefits because the project mitigates E. Coli bacteria loading.

There is also a research and education component with partners from the New Mexico Environment Department and Boy Scouts of America.

And an Eagle Scout project on Memorial Day weekend 2015 turned the project into a community park with a trail and picnic table.

The Cottonwoods and Willows did well when watered at this site.

Slide 5 shows the Diez Lagos project near Sunland Park, which is a multi-objective project with flood control, water supply, habitat, water quality, and research/education components as with the Selden Drain area. At Diez Lagos, they widened the drain, ponded water, and improved habitat.

Slide 6 is information on the WHEN project. It is a project that was started in 2016. The project has been a success since then. \$808,557 has come from federal funding (a grant from the Bureau of Reclamation), \$100,000 cash donation from a farmer (Bill Halsell) who donated the money for the pumps, and land was donated, about 7 ½ acres so we could work on the arroyo. The Elephant Butte Irrigation District also provided \$712,196 cost share. The total project budget is \$1,810,953.

The water nexus is described on slide 7: The pipe is 12,830 feet of the tail end of the Rincon Lateral which is a 48” corrugated metal pipe. This eliminates seepage and evaporation in this stretch and improves delivery timing and head pressure.

The supplemental Diversion at Wasteway 18 improved the timing of delivery. We added 2 pumps by Wasteway 18. The pipeline and pump improved head pressure in that area

The project included widening Rincon Drain to better manage stormwater. Drain widening creates a pond for habitat as well as increased capacity to retain stormwater flows. It creates 21 acres of habitat including 4.5 acres suitable for the endangered southwest willow flycatcher. Solar panels offset energy used for pumps. There was also improved metering. There is a weblink to the data: <https://onerain.ebid-nm.org> There was a 10% improvement in irrigation efficiency. Overall, the WHEN project is conserving several thousand acre-feet of water per year by reducing the farm delivery requirement and seepage and conveyance losses.

Question: Is the area suitable for recreation?

Libbin: No, there is no public access.

Question: Can it be used for mitigation?

Libbin: It was not done for that purpose. They are “doing the right thing.”

Questions and comments:

Travis Johnson expressed his appreciation for everything IBWC has done for the community.

Jose Nuñez, USIBWC, mentioned there had been fires at the USIBWC’s habitat restoration sites, complaints about after-hours partying and all-terrain vehicles on USIBWC lands. USIBWC is working with the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Office to address this.

John Day from the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Department stated his office is working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the USIBWC that would allow the community to use the area when appropriate and to take enforcement action when appropriate.

Nuñez: USIBWC allows recreational use but vehicles harm the levee and the river channel.

It was announced that Principal Engineer Carlos Peña, Citizens Forum Co-Chair, has transferred to the San Diego Field Office to spearhead implementation of Minute 320 related to the Tijuana River.

Suggested Future Agenda Items:

GO 10 presentations from the Texas Department of Transportation about I-10 construction on the west side.

The board should send suggestions for agenda items to Public Affairs Officer Lori Kuczmanski.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 12 at 6:30 p.m. at Las Cruces City Hall.

7:45 meeting adjourned.

*Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum Meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.