



## Far West Texas El Paso Regional Transportation Coordination Committee (WTEP)

### MINUTES - Meeting is in-person and Virtual – August 24, 2023 @ 3pm

- I. Meeting Called to Order Victor Reta, WTEP Board Chairperson
- II. Steering Committee Members – 2023
  - A. Officers
    1. Chairperson Victor Reta, City of Socorro
    2. Vice Chair Yvette Lugo, Area Agency on Aging
    3. Secretary Mary Nuñez, Big Bend Community Action Committee
  - B. Steering Committee
    1. Lourdes Torres New México Family Services
    2. David Armijo South Central Regional Transit District
    3. Claudia Garcia El Paso Sun Metro
    4. Xavier Bañales Amistad
    5. Vacant

**Attendance:** Lourdes Torres-NMFS, Luis Enrique Chew-Volar CIL, David Armijo-SCRTD, Alfredo Gonzalez-TXDOT, Diana Rodriguez-City of Socorro, George Hinostroza-EPMPPO, Harrison Plourde-EPMPPO, Lorenzo Lopez-Workforce Solutions Borderplex, Mary Nunez-BBCAC. Claudia K. Garcia-Sun Metro, Ellen Smyth-Sun Metro, Daniel Marquez-EP County.

- III. Welcoming Comments / Introductions Victor Reta welcomed the members.
- IV. Approval of Minutes of meeting on May 25, 2023

**Motion:** Claudia Garcia; Seconded by: Victor Reta

- V. Business items
  - A. Presentation regarding new entity, El Paso Area Transportation Services (EPATS). Since the Council of Governments (COG) is the fiscal agent and Annette Gutierrez is ED of COG, Ms. Gutierrez will present an overview of ETAPS whose board of directors include: El Paso County, Village of Vinton, City of San Elizario, and Horizon City.

The presentation done by Daniel Marquez included general information regarding the LGC-Local Government Corporation which was formally Incorporated in 2021 by the Texas Secretary of the State. The first meeting of the LGC took place in 2022. The ultimate goal of the LGC is to provide a good transportation service to the community through various municipalities and hopefully assist Sun Metro with the day-to-day operation. The main goal of course is to eliminate any transit barriers between different entities such as Sun Metro and the County of El Paso, and now the LGC. The goal is to have a seamless transportation network to help all the community members countywide. To date there are several core members: City of Horizon, Village of Vinton, San Elizario, and El Paso County, with the goal to implement short, medium, and long-term goals included in the El Paso County feasibility study. The new fiscal year numbers are being finalized for FY2024. Some of the goals have been to establish the LGC, establish and secure a legal representative of the LGC, and also secure a company that will be assisting to run the LGC, have their own logo and utilizing the established structure left by EP County. The LGC hired the Rio Grande Council of Governments to help with the day-to-day operations. The COG will be helping to obtain funding from all those municipalities and later be able to hire services depending on the needs of the LGC.

**Xavier Banales:** Is the LGC the entity that will be receiving funding and subcontracting the services, the County of El Paso has a fixed route system, correct? Clarification is needed on how that interfaces.

**Daniel Marquez:** EP County already has a contract with First Transit, which is a transit provider. The LGC is maintaining the contract between EP County and First Transit until the LGC is ready to terminate the contract and subcontract the services with someone else or the same company.

At this time Daniel Marquez shared a power point presentation to further provide details regarding the LGC.

Daniel Marquez continued to state that the LGC is still coordinating to have additional members added to the LGC, currently coordinating with the town of Clint as we are with Anthony. The City of Socorro opted not to be a part of the LGC, and that decision is respected. We continue to be grateful for the support from TX DOT and from the MPO.

**Victor Reta:** What is Sun Metro's role with the LGC?

**Daniel Marquez:** There is a representative from Sun Metro who shares his professional experience and knowledge, they don't have an actual vote, but just provide recommendations on decisions the LGC wants to make. For example, recently we have an executed agreement with Sun Metro where after many years the LGC will be allowed to utilize some of the passenger shelters that they have within the jurisdiction for transfers from one service to another one. These are small steps we are taking on the proper coordination with Sun Metro and hopefully in the future we will be able to execute more agreements with them.

**Victor Reta:** So, they are a consultant but not voting members, correct?

**Daniel Marquez/Ellen Smyth:** Yes, for help.

**Xavier Banales:** So, the municipalities that participate, those who do not want to be a part of the board, do they still continue to receive services? Is there an expectation that if you don't participate and pay a certain amount towards the entity, towards the LGC, is there an issue of not having services provided to them?

**Daniel Marquez:** It is not something that we can fully disclose at this moment, because it will be a decision of all the members from the LGC but it was something that the LGC was already considering, as this was going to be one of the consequences of a municipality not wanting to participate in the LGC, there would be some consideration from the LGC to the current services provided to that area. It would be only fair for those municipalities who are participating with the contribution on the decision making to have a say on the provision of services to those areas. These are hard decisions.

**Victor Reta:** I can confirm that the City of Socorro received a letter stating that if there was no participation in the LGC that was something that could happen, so we were made aware of any potential issues. So if any other municipality has that question, they were willing to work with us, but that was something they did let us know.

**Xavier Banales:** And Alfredo with TX DOT is on the line, Alfredo, does that pose any kind of issue with TX DOT as far as not providing services to certain geographic areas of the county?

**Alfredo Gonzalez:** We have had a number of discussions in the past, as far as I know, most of that area has coverage now. You are talking about EP County Rural Transit services. So, there invariably may be some gaps, but it all boils down to the local decision making. Our role is to, if there are identified gaps, as well as the regional planning, to have local coordination efforts which may help with those needs.

**Daniel Marquez:** That is something that the LGC was made to add, that they will be involved, coordinating to have a special session for any decision making regarding making changes to any areas, won't be something that will happen immediately. We need to coordinate with the Texas Transportation Institute to provide the recommendations with an actual study, something we can justify with paper to have the proper documentation because we are still going to seek funding to continue the day-to-day operation. Therefore, this won't happen immediately, but maybe in the first few months of next year.

**Alfredo Gonzalez:** So, my question would be, what is the anticipated change in service or what is it that could potentially happen?

**Daniel Marquez:** It will not be immediately, but we are going to have a vote on the LGC in the next board meeting to decide how we are going to move forward if for example it is decided that we are going to minimize service in that region of El Paso, then we will coordinate with TTI to provide a scope of work and do a study as to how it would be the best way to move forward. That takes a lot of coordination and at least 6-8 months.

**Xavier Banales:** Will the vehicles that are owned by the County be transitioned to the LGC since the LGC will function as the Rural Transit District?

**Daniel Marquez:** Yes, actually as I mentioned all equipment, infrastructure as I mentioned everything that was the County is now considered LGC. Of course, the County is still going to maintain some of those buses, at least on paper, for example, some of those buses were acquired through a TX DOT grant and the County is still in charge of those agreements. But eventually they will transition to the LGC once the new branding is completed.

**Xavier Banales:** So, their next Board Meeting is open to the public, in case any of you want to participate and sit in and hear the presentations, that is available to do so right?

**Daniel Marquez:** Yes, there will be an invitation sent out to everyone and there will also be the opportunity to attend in person or by TEAMS. There will be a special meeting in September and a

regular meeting in October. As soon as the dates are confirmed we will send an invite to Celia Garcia so she can share it with all participants for WTEP.

- B. Report re presentations to policy entities per Goal IV, Operating Objective 4. *“Inform Policy makers about WTEP events and activities through presentations at board meetings (City Council, Commissioners Court, MPO, COG, etc.)”.* **(Goal IV - Objective 1)**

Presentations made to date:

1. County Commissioners - El Paso County
2. City Council – City of Socorro
3. TxDOT Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
4. El Paso Transportation Council
5. City of Socorro
6. SC Regional Transit (NM)
7. Rio Grande Council of Governments (COG)
8. Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee on July 12, 2023

**Xavier Banales:** Celia and I have been providing presentations, we have approximately 130 people that have heard the presentations, mostly upper-level management, and policy makers. We still need to present it to El Paso City Council which will be coordinated.

**Victor Reta:** Thank you, Celia, and Mr. Banales, for reaching that goal, it definitely takes a lot of work and a lot of time to travel to the different areas.

- C. Follow-up Re: Question by EP County regarding reduction of Pollution

**Celia Garcia:** We did reach out to several entities in this group, thank you for responding to our request, EPMPO shared some resources. Mr. Banales and I are putting together a response regarding the information we received. We are still sifting through that and will provide more detail in the next meeting.

- D. El Paso Area Transportation Services, LGC – New Entity serving El Paso County – was already covered earlier by Daniel Marquez.

- E. Video regarding WTEP – Updates? **(Goal IV - Objective 1)**

**Victor Reta:** Did have a lot of change over in staff, but we have started the effort and have a foundation for the video. This video will target all of our entities and the main purpose is to showcase services and really put names and faces to the services that are available. Yesterday, the AAA Ms. Yvette Lugo did a fantastic job in coordinating the Senior Expo and I think it is very important that we continue to have the conversation about available services, especially post pandemic, there are many people that are unaware of the services we have to offer. So, the City of Socorro is very committed to reaching out to everyone and making sure that their services and their agencies are represented in this video. We are hoping to have this on the WTEP website and also give everyone a link to post on social media or have on their website. So if any of you have a date that you think is best for shooting the video, please send me an email, it is attached to the invitation that Celia sent out, and if you don't have it you can have

Celia connect you with my office. Diana Rodriguez, currently on our call, is our videographer. She will be visiting you and filming you and getting some great shots for this video that we will hopefully have produced for October 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Xavier Banales:** That is a big undertaking so thank you to the City of Socorro for taking that and taking the lead on this.

F. Status re implementation of the 2022 -2026 Regional Plan (**Goal I – Objective 2**)

**Celia Garcia:** Just to remind everyone that all the work you do individually within your own region and agency contributes to the work of the regional plan. We recently submitted a quarterly report with some updates on different things that have been done. You all have seen the presentation, and information and efforts such as the video, website updates, goes into the completion of the report. Plan was to review detailed items, but we do have a full agenda and therefore will move on to the next item and discuss in a future meeting. I will send out the template for the last report to receive your feedback in order not to miss your information.

G. Status - Letters of Participation (**Goal I – Objective 3**)

**Celia Garcia:** I encourage all of you to complete the letter, I sent out the templates individually with your previous copy for reference. Please submit them as soon as possible as they are utilized for funding opportunities, etc.

H. Upcoming funding opportunities

**Xavier Banales:** This is a standing item that we put in here because of the lead time that is involved in RFP's that are released whether it is through the County, City, TX DOT, or EPMPO. So, if any of those entities have any dates or information they can share now. For example, EPMPO, or TXDOT.

**George Hinostroza:** We are still processing two years of awards, therefore in 2024 we will start putting out a request for applications and will announce the process.

**Celia Garcia:** If I may share with you, and TX DOT is on the line if Alfredo would like to jump in after me, there was a proposal released for 5310 funding through TX DOT, and Amistad applied, but TX DOT identified the potential for duplication and overlap in services. With Alfredo's guidance, we all got together and identified that through EP County, they reported their intent to provide para-transit service and demand response to begin in January of 2024. They reported they would release an RFP in March or April for those services. We are collaborating to identify how we can avoid an overlap in service. Amistad provides para-transit service currently and does curb-to-curb going to person's homes and taking them directly to their appointment. EP County will be picking them up and transporting them to a transfer station to access Sun Metro services. The clients Amistad serves are very fragile and therefore we have identified a niche, to avoid duplication.

**Alfredo Gonzalez:** You covered the information pretty well, the County will be providing complimentary para-transit service, and we will be moving forward with 5310 contracts coming your way and continue working to avoid that overlap.

**Xavier Banales:** It is my understanding that EPMPO releases RFP's that address the metropolitan area of El Paso, whereas the TX DOT funding addresses rural areas, or outside of El Paso.

**Alfredo Gonzalez:** Right, you are correct in a sense, but there are projects that we do within the urban area that serves this very specific group. That group of folks is not restricted to rural areas but also is in the urban areas. You are correct, the EPMPO gets funding directly from the FTA for mostly urban area, but TXDOT has oversight and manages those not restricted to just urban or rural, but specific to projects who are eligible to provide services for seniors and persons with disabilities. And if I can add, any 5310-funding administered through the MPO requires a match. TX DOT awards MPO TDC's to cover the match. Therefore, if you have 5310 funds through the MPO, they can apply for TDC's to cover your match.

I. WTEP's Website - **(Goal IV - Objective 1)**

**Kristina Pena:** So, for everyone who hasn't seen the website, you may go to [projectamistad.org](http://projectamistad.org) and the WTEP will be on the corner, and you'll be automatically redirected to the WTEP page. The video discussed earlier will sit on the home page. As we mentioned earlier, we need your letters again, your original letters are on the website currently, new ones will be uploaded, and it will change with those updates. If you all vote on a new brand, then there will be a turnaround of about 3 weeks prior to everything being updated.

J. New brand image: **(Goal 4 – Objective 1 & 5)**. WTEP's brand image needs to change. The committee has been known as WTEP since 2010ish, but it is time to rebrand the committee. Options discussed at the Steering committee meeting include:

- Transportation Regional Planning Committee TRPC
- Regional Transportation Committee RTC
- Transportation Regional Coordinating Committee TRCC

**Celia Garcia:** With this item, you remember on our May meeting, we brought up the time to rebrand. Thank you to all who responded to which name you thought was more appropriate. There were 7-8 who voted with only two voting for the last option. The rest voted RTC. The second option is the current winner, we want to open this for discussion prior to fully voting for the finalized name. I want to thank Lourdes who shared a bit more than was required, she shared a potential brand image (opened the email).

**Xavier Banales:** This is not just to do it, there is a reason to do it, because it is very important that we include the important agencies that are a part of this committee within the New Mexico area covering Dona Ana County who provide services across state lines. That is why we didn't want to continue with the current name of only West Texas El Paso.

**Victor Reta:** Maybe we can include a New Mexico component.

**Harrison Plourde:** I understand RTC is more to the point, and the logo is definitely nice, but will there be a geographic reference, this looks a bit generic.

**Xavier Banales:** Yes, a reference to Dona Ana County and Southern New Mexico. You are right, the RTC can be in any other state,

**Victor Reta:** We can also include that information on the website, include a map reference, or something like the mountains. Also, are there any conflicting google searches? What we can do now is agree to have staff investigate the RTC to see the potential, and report back at the next meeting for final

consideration and action. Just to make sure it is feasible on the webpage, and address the concerns that Harrison brought up and adjust the logo to represent the service region.

**Ellen Smyth:** RTC stands for many different things. There is also a lot of LGC, there may need to be a change to that as well.

**Xavier Banales/Victor Reta:** So, it does need a little polishing before the final stage. So we will need to keep researching and working on it.

**Celia Garcia:** It may be very hard to find.

**Harrison Plourde:** Yes, it would be better to make it more identifiable. Add a word in front.

**Victor Reta:** We will keep thinking about it and working on it.

K. Other Business Items- None reported.

L. Announcements and major events by member agencies (**Goal I – Objective 4**) – no major events reported.

VI. Next WTEP Meetings

**Victor Reta:** Our next meetings which will take place here at Amistad will be on October 26 and November 30. Celia will send out the invites.

October 26, 2023

November 30, 2023

**Motion to Adjourn:** Victor Reta motioned; Xavier Banales seconded.

VII. Adjourned – 4:18pm.