

November 10, 2003

Mr. Joseph Moravec
Commissioner Public Buildings Service
General Services Administration
Room 6344
18th and F Streets, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Commissioner Moravec:

The County of El Paso over the last several years has been working diligently to obtain the necessary approvals and commitments to build a new international bridge in the southeastern corner of the County. This new bridge will be the Tornillo-Guadalupe New International Bridge. This modern facility will allow for the faster flow of cars, trucks, cargo, and people between the United States and Mexico. The bridge will provide the needed infrastructure for the continued growth in people and economic development downriver from the cities of El Paso and Juarez. The bridge will allow for the rapid and efficient processing and inspection of people, cars, trucks, and cargo by the inspectors of the Department of Homeland Security and other Federal agencies, and will allow the removal of the existing out of date bridge at the nearby Fabens crossing.

The County is aware that the international nature of a bridge of this type requires the necessary involvement of Federal and State agencies in both the United States and Mexico. A successful bridge involves a coordinated international effort in order to be sure that the bridge and the related infrastructure in both countries are constructed in a timely manner. The permitting process requires not only approvals and Federal permits, but also the commitment of Federal, State and Local funds for roads, facilities and personnel.

El Paso County for several years has worked closely with Federal and State agencies to secure the necessary approvals, commitments and funding necessary for the Tornillo-Guadalupe New International Bridge. The County has met with Federal agencies including GSA, the Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security in the preparation of their application for a Presidential Permit for an international bridge. They have also coordinated with the Texas Department of Transportation in the process of obtaining permission from the State of Texas to submit the application for the Presidential Permit. They have worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the International Boundary and Water Commission, other Federal agencies, and the State of Texas in the preparation of their environmental assessment.

On the international front, El Paso County has worked extensively with the State of Chihuahua and Mexico's Federal agencies to secure the necessary commitments for the new international bridge. In a diplomatic note of May 2, 2002, Mexico expressed support for the project. Governor Patricio Martinez Garcia of the State of Chihuahua stated his support for the project in a letter of May 2002. The State of Chihuahua is committed to the project and the construction of the necessary roads leading to the new international bridge.

The County has the funding necessary for the land, roads and international bridge. They have completed the traffic and related financial studies that will allow them to sell bonds in order to build the bridge.

The result of this intensive planning and activity by El Paso County is a project that is on the fast track to construction.

The State of Texas on March 27, 2003, after an intensive months long process of analyzing the County's proposal for a new international bridge, authorized the County to move forward with the application for a Presidential Permit to the Department of State.

On April 14, 2003 the County submitted their Presidential Permit Application to the Department of State. To date all but one agency has responded to the application. In many cases the agencies have no comments. Among those that do have comments, the County of El Paso has, or will be submitting written responses that meet the agencies' concerns. The result is that approval of the Presidential Permit is expected at the latest by the end of year, and may occur sooner.

The County is in the process of acquiring all the land necessary for the bridge, border facilities, and roads. They expect to complete land acquisition by the end of 2003.

The design of the road connecting the bridge to IH 10 is 100 percent complete, with a bid advertisement anticipated by the end of 2003.

The County has \$12 million set aside for the construction of the roads and land acquisition. Construction activities for Phase One of the roadway between State Highway 20 and the future port of entry is expected to start by the beginning of 2004, with completion in the fall.

In a letter of March 13, 2003 Coastal Securities of San Antonio, financial advisor to the County of El Paso, stated, based on the traffic and financial analysis conducted by the County, that: "It is our belief that based upon the anticipated traffic flow, this project will appropriately cash flow and provide for the timely amortization of debt necessary for construction."

The expectation of the County of El Paso is that the transmittal of the final diplomatic notes that will allow start of construction of the Tornillo-Guadalupe International Bridge will occur in the first months of 2004. The design of the international bridge will be completed, both in English and in Spanish by this time, allowing construction to commence shortly thereafter.

The County of El Paso, both in its application for the Presidential Permit and in discussions with GSA, is committed to gifting to GSA the 100 acres needed for a new border station.

GSA support for the funding of the design and construction of the new border station at Tornillo-Guadalupe is imperative for this project to move forward. Without the availability of such funding it may be necessary to resort to temporary border station facilities. These have been required in the past in El Paso at the Ysleta International Bridge and have not been a satisfactory solution.

I therefore urge GSA to support funding for design and construction for the Tornillo-Guadalupe International Bridge. I will work with you in order to secure funding.

Sincerely,

Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress