

SUBJECT: Creating a website providing real-time information on cross-border traffic

COMMITTEE: International Relations and Economic Development — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Anchia, Frullo, Blanco, Cain, Larson, Raney, Romero

0 nays

2 absent — Metcalf, Perez

WITNESSES: For — Elizabeth Lippincott, Texas Border Coalition; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Guadalupe Cuellar, City of El Paso; Claudia Russell, El Paso County)

Against — None

On — Rafael Aldrete, Texas A&M Transportation Institute; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Brian Barth, Caroline Mays, and Peter Smith, TxDOT)

DIGEST: HB 260 would require the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to create and maintain, in collaboration with the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, a publicly accessible online portal designed to provide real-time information on motor vehicle movements at ports of entry on the Texas-Mexico border.

The bill also would authorize TxDOT to collaborate on the project with other state, federal, and local governmental entities, and with the government of Mexico and any of its political subdivisions. The agency would be required to develop the portal not later than September 1, 2021.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

SUPPORTERS HB 260 would make cross-border trade and travel more efficient by

SAY: providing commercial vehicles and the traveling public with a resource to make better-informed travel decisions.

Security inspections and increased truck traffic at the Texas-Mexico border create delays that are disruptive and costly to shippers, manufacturers, and, ultimately, consumers. By helping to redress this, HB 260 would bolster economically vital trade between Mexico and Texas.

Although Texas already has a Border Crossing Information System (BCIS) that provides information about expected wait times and crossing times for several important border crossings, this system does not integrate lessons learned from the latest research. In recent years the Texas A&M Transportation Institute has undertaken several research projects that produced analytical tools to more accurately determine wait times, calculate real-time traffic volumes, and estimate travel times from point of origin to the final destination. These research projects have produced useful results on their own, but the Institute has yet to tie together the results with the existing BCIS data and portal.

The web portal created under HB 260 would build on existing technology and integrate new analytics that reflect the latest research, improving on internet resources already provided by BCIS and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. According to the LBB, there would be no significant fiscal impact; any costs associated with implementing the bill could be accommodated within TxDOT's existing federal and state highway planning, construction, and research funds. Because the Texas A&M Transportation Institute already has taken steps to create the web portal and developed analytics tools that could be used in the project, implementation within the two-year timeframe provided for under the bill should be feasible.

OPPONENTS
SAY: HB 260 would require the creation of a web portal that would partly duplicate functions of existing portals maintained by state and federal entities. The bill's language is unclear about whether every port of entry between Texas and Mexico would be monitored by the program.

Installing traffic-monitoring equipment and implementing actionable analytics for every border crossing, including those that are not heavily congested, could impose a financial cost on state agencies and could be challenging to implement within a two-year timeframe.