

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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Transportation & Homeland Security
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In 1962, Pub. L. No. 87-525 authorized the construction of an international bridge across the Rio Grande to join Heath Canyon in Texas with the village of La Linda, Coahuila, Mexico, for the purpose of transporting refined ore into the United States from nearby mills in Mexico and to one day facilitate the movement of tourists interested in visiting the Sierra del Carmen mountain areas across from Big Bend National Park. Since the bridge was constructed, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has, without interruption, maintained Farm-to-Market Road 2627 as a paved two-lane highway for a 28-mile stretch connecting the bridge to United States Highway 385, which leads from that junction southward to Big Bend National Park and northward 40 miles to Marathon and United States Highway 90. La Linda Bridge, also known as the Hallie Stillwell Memorial Bridge, is still in place and is in good repair but cannot be crossed by vehicles or pedestrians because of barriers and the placement of "no trespassing" signs at the bridge since 1997 pursuant to orders issued by the governments of the United States of America and the United Mexican States. The La Linda international crossing is the only bridge structure in place and the only point of entry authorized by public law between the United States ports of entry at Presidio and Del Rio, a distance of 385 miles.

The owners of the United States section of the international bridge at La Linda wish the bridge to be reopened and operated as a legal border crossing. Local residents, wildlife and conservation groups, outfitters, guides, and hospitality providers who recognize the unique attractions of the Big Bend-Maderas del Carmen mountain desert corridor wish to see the planned growth of a conservation-minded tourism economy but are unable to proceed if the La Linda crossing is not functioning. The safety of tourists wishing to enjoy the area, the binational scientific cooperation called for under existing international agreements, and the security and public safety of communities and citizens on both sides of the international border would be enhanced by a functioning border crossing at La Linda.

Over the past six years the State of Coahuila and the Commissioners Court of Brewster County, represented by the Big Bend Border Council and joined by a coalition of local residents and the Big Bend National Park Superintendent, have repeatedly requested that the United States Department of State (State Department) and the Mexican Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores take the necessary actions to have the bridge and border crossing at La Linda reopened by the United States and Mexican federal governments. The Binational Bridges and Border Crossings working group, composed of United States and Mexican federal authorities responsible for authorizing international ports of entry and required inspections along the international boundary, is convened semiannually by the State Department and the Mexican Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores and will meet in the coming months to consider action on either reopening the bridge at La Linda or ordering its removal.

In furtherance of meeting preconditions for reopening the bridge set forth by the State Department, an agreement on consolidation of ownership into a single entity with the capacity to maintain and operate an international bridge has been reached between the owners of the United States section of the bridge. It is in the economic, cultural, and security interests of the State of Texas and the homeland security interest of the United States of America to have a functioning border-crossing station under the management and control of trained and equipped law enforcement and public safety officials in the extensive area known as the Big Bend.

RESOLVED

That the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby express its support and encouragement for the reopening of the bridge and border crossing at La Linda to accommodate trade and tourism between Texas and Coahuila, Mexico, and to better protect residents of both countries and secure the protection of our nation from threats that might be associated with the illegal crossing of individuals or materials with a lethal intent.

That the legislature hereby urge the governor and the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office, TxDOT, the Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the secretary of state, the Department of Public Safety, the General Land Office, the Texas Historical Commission, and other appropriate state agencies to render encouragement and assistance to Brewster County and the owners of the La Linda bridge in their efforts to reopen the bridge and to assume a role as a stakeholder in planning cooperative conservation and tourism initiatives across the Big Bend-Maderas del Carmen area.

That the legislature hereby urge representatives of TPWD and TxDOT to meet at the earliest possible time with representatives of the owners of the United States section of the La Linda bridge, of Brewster County, and of Big Bend National Park to review the status of the bridge and, as they may deem appropriate, recommend formation of an ad hoc liaison committee to offer advice and facilitation to Brewster County and the owners of the La Linda bridge on the future of the bridge and plans for cross-border tourism and conservation.

That the legislature hereby call upon the United States Department of State to communicate the interest of the State of Texas in this matter to the government of the United Mexican States and to all other parties participating in decisions relating to either reopening or removing the bridge at La Linda.

That the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to all the members of the Texas delegation to the United States Congress and to the United States secretary of state and the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, United Mexican States.