“Join me, join us, and become a part of change. We need you, get engaged, and let’s build on our strength, and make the people stronger, better, healthier, more connected, more prosperous. If we build each other up, ladies and gentlemen, who can be against us? We all win!”

I am Pete Saenz, Mayor of the great City of Laredo, Texas. I am proud to represent a community that is at the crossroads of many pressing topics that impact our nation’s economy, culture and society. You will find Laredo’s perspective on current critical issues inclusive of USMCA, immigration, and border security and more, contained in our Federal Legislative Agenda.

Our community, located in South Texas on the U.S/Mexico border, has a long-standing tradition of creating bi-lateral connections, bridging two cities, two cultures and two nations. I can assure you that we will remain true to this character.

I invite you to visit our community and learn more about Laredo.

Que viva Laredo!
City of Laredo Council Members

Rudy Gonzalez, Jr.  
District I

Vidal Rodriguez  
District II

Mercurio Martinez, III  
District III

Alberto Torres, Jr.  
District IV

Nelly Vielma  
District V

Dr. Marte A. Martinez  
District VI

George J. Altgelt  
District VII

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# Table of Contents

## Environment
- Rio Grande Basin – Chacon Creek Legislative Authorization & Next Phase Funding ........................................ 6
- Funding for the Rio Grande River Low Water Weir Project ................................................................. 9
- Support for Mechanical and Biological Removal of Invasive Carrizo Cane Along Rio Grande .................... 12

## Health
- Laboratory Response Network Certification .................................................................................. 14
- U.S./Mexico Border Region Federal Designation for Public Health Border Security .................... 17
- Substance Abuse (Opioid Prevention and Treatment) and Mental Health Programs ....................... 19
- Services for the Aging ...................................................................................................................... 22
- Chronic Disease Prevention ............................................................................................................. 24
- Workforce Development: Health Care Professions and Public Health ............................................ 26

## Quality of Life
- HUD Entitlement Programs: CDBG & HOME Funding Maintenance or Increase ....................... 28
- Increased Funding for Operation Crackdown ............................................................................... 30
- Opportunity Zones: A Measure to Add and/or Exchange Designated Census Tracts .................. 32
- Relating to the Importance of Funding to Support and Promote Arts Programs ............................ 34
- Relating to the Importance of Funding to Support After-School Programs ........................................ 36
- Relating to the Importance of Workforce Development in the Fields of Computer Coding and Avionics .......................................................... 38

## Public Safety
- Body-Worn Camera Program ........................................................................................................ 39
- Operation Stonegarden Funding .................................................................................................. 40
- Homeland Security Grant Programs - South Texas Region ......................................................... 42
- COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) Hiring Program .................................................. 44
- Relating to the First Step Act .......................................................................................................... 46

## Transportation
- Modernization of the Laredo International Airport ........................................................................ 47
- Construction of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Facilities .............................................. 49
- Section 482 Donation Acceptance Authority Proposal Evaluation Procedures & Criteria Framework .......................................................... 51
Table of Contents

• Revenue Vehicle Replacement Needs for Aging Transit Fleet .................................................. 53
• Funding Support for New Maintenance and Operations Facility ........................................... 55
• Loop 20 (Future IH 69W) Upgrade to Interstate Standards .................................................. 57
• Grade Separation Opportunities ............................................................................................ 59
• Widening of I-35 ..................................................................................................................... 61
• River Road Along the Rio Grande ........................................................................................... 63
• Transportation Funding Formulas ............................................................................................ 64

Policy

• Ratification of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) .............................. 66
• Comprehensive Immigration Reform ......................................................................................... 67
• Virtual Wall/Bulkhead: Preferred Means to Enhance Border Security ................................... 70
Rio Grande Basin – Chacon Creek Legislative Authorization & Next Phase Funding

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo seeks congressional authorization to complete the Chacon Creek study undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the purpose of providing flood control, natural habitat conservation and linear park development.

Background
Chacon Creek is a tremendous natural resource for Laredo with economic, recreational and educational potential, but a history of neglect, and illegal dumping of materials and debris mask this potential. Carter & Burgess, a strategic consulting firm, prepared a multi-objective master plan, which defined the creek’s 100-year floodplain, proposed targeted channel improvements to relieve flooding and maintain the overall natural character of the waterway, and incorporate passive/active recreation facilities. Rather than build a 200-foot-wide concrete channel over the entire 4.5 miles of the corridor, as was suggested in a previous study, Carter & Burgess proposed targeted terraced channel enlargements over a much shorter distance – less than 4,000 feet. This action would accentuate green spaces, preserve the creek’s natural course, and minimize impact on wildlife and wetlands, while providing the most cost effective flood mitigation. These channel improvements require the removal of approximately 50 homes located in the 100-year flood plain. However, upon completion of the proposed improvements, the reduction in 100-year floodplain elevation will remove approximately 250 homes from the floodplain. Workshops and public hearings were conducted and helped answer citizens’ questions about the master plan and other issues, while including the public in the design process.

The project would provide flood risk management, ecosystem restoration and recreational amenities to Chacon Creek in the eastern part of the City of Laredo, Texas. The flood risk management component of the project will consist of the permanent evacuation of 73 residential structures along Chacon Creek. The vacated flood risk management lands will be used for recreational amenities. The ecosystem restoration component will include 16.75 acres of wetland restoration and 401 acres of riparian restoration. The project provides $539,000 in annual flood risk management benefits, $1,049,800 in recreational benefits, and an increase in 248 average annual habitat units. The overall benefit-cost ratio is 1.35 at 2.75% percent and 0.70 at 7 percent.

The project is fully supported by the local sponsor because Chacon Creek is the last unaltered tributary to the Rio Grande within the city limits of Laredo and has tremendous potential to be a valuable environmental, recreational and educational amenity for the area and the region.
The proposal also addressed leisure and cleanup issues. Laredo city leaders envision the creek offering recreational, educational and economic opportunities. A multi-objective approach would create “people spaces,” while developing amenities, such as a hike and bike trail system and perhaps, a regional park. The plan emphasizes ecosystem restoration, transforming a once-abandoned area littered with tires, barrels and pallets into a year-round attraction for citizens and visitors. In addition, the plan recommends park benches be placed along the routes, creating natural habitat zones to study and admire indigenous vegetation. Similarly, the Chacon Creek Project includes enhancing existing babbling brooks and preserving acres of native plants and trees. Developing this natural treasure would generate hundreds of acres of new recreational and educational parklands. Moreover, it would yield important by-products, such as eliminating illegal dumpsites, improving water quality and drawing attention to the city’s natural resources.

An Independent External Peer Review (IEPR) occurred in early FY 2011 on a near-completed draft report. The Corps’ Fort Worth District was addressing IEPR comments and preparing the report for public review and comment when work was suspended due to lack of a study authority. Routine schedule maintenance occurred for the remainder of FY 2011 and through FY 2012.

As part of Section 7001 of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014) it requires the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to publish a notice in the Federal Register to request proposals from non-federal interests for proposed feasibility studies and proposed modifications to authorized USACE water resources development projects or feasibility studies. The City of Laredo had previously submitted the Chacon Creek Feasibility Study reauthorization proposals to the Army Corps of Engineers in December 1, 2014. However, the project lacked authority and although the Fort Worth District and Corps Headquarters had worked with the sponsor’s Congressional delegation to secure a study authority, the project remained unauthorized. In order to resolve this issue, the City of Laredo, through Section 203 of WRRDA 2014, hired Tetra Tech to complete the feasibility study at the City’s expense. The City submitted the complete Feasibility Study to the U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Army – Civil Works (USASA-CW) for review in August of 2018. The report has been reviewed and found to be feasible by the USASA-CW and has been forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for clearance for Congressional action.

**Solution**

The City is seeking inclusion of the project for construction funding in the next Water Resources Development Bill.

**Target Agency**

Army Corps of Engineers
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Funding for the Rio Grande River Low Water Weir Project

Situation Assessment
In order to meet the water availability and quality requirements for the next 100 years, the City of Laredo in cooperation with the International Boundary and Water Commission completed the feasibility of constructing a Low Water Weir on the Rio Grande River. Two proposed locations were identified: one approximately one mile upstream from the World Trade Bridge in the northwest section of the City and the other, 2.8 miles upstream of the World Trade Bridge. This project will also provide the generation of electrical power, as well as, flood control benefits for the community. Federal funding is currently being sought to fund the development of this project.

Background
Article 5 of the 1944 Water Treaty between the United States and Mexico allows for construction of a third dam on the Rio Grande River/Rio Bravo. The third dam was identified to be constructed between Falcon and Amistad Dams. This Low Water Weir Project will provide an environmental improvement along the border, improve the raw water quality, serve as a security barrier and provide additional water supply to the City of Laredo and Webb County. It will also provide flood control benefits from downstream of the proposed project to upstream of Falcon Dam.

If such a low water weir was considered for the production and sale of hydro-electric power, then the revenue created would be advantageous to project financing. The study determined that it was feasible to produce hydropower at a rate that would be beneficial to both, the City of Laredo and the City of Nuevo Laredo, Tamps., Mexico.

Work Completed to Date:
- USGS maps of the Rio Grande River were obtained for some 20 miles both upstream and downstream of the proposed weir site.
- Flow data was obtained from the IBWC.
- The profile of the river was reviewed.
- Flows were developed from 1976 to 1993 using the Laredo gauge data. This data was analyzed by a range of distribution methodologies and an acceptable minimum flow number was established. Maximum day flows were reviewed, especially with regard to the height of water over the weir in instances of extreme flow conditions.
- The maximum flow water height was established to determine that there would be no interference with bridges. This set the preliminary height of the weir which was used for the preliminary calculations of available hydropower generation.
The Preliminary Engineering Feasibility Study was completed in July 2010 at a cost of $294,000.00. Also, an addendum was issued to the final report in November 4, 2014 to include the flood benefits of the proposed weir project.

The location of the two proposed sites are upstream of the World Trade Bridge. The height of the weir is between 30 to 40 feet. The proposed elevations will generate enough power to pay for the cost of construction reasonably within the 25 year life of the power generating equipment. The lake created by a weir of this modest height will be approximately nine miles long and flood few areas outside of the existing river floodplain on the U.S. side where the river banks are not so steep. The weir height will also be established to permit the maximum flood flow over the weir so that the top water level will not cause serious flooding up the river banks.

This project is designed to allow the waters of the Rio Grande River to flow over it once the weir is full. The storage capacity is estimated to be 20,000 to 30,000 acre feet depending on the height of the weir and could be obtained from purchasing irrigation water from an Irrigation District of the Lower Rio Grande River. This project will also assist the process of water treatment by allowing the suspended solids to settle and therefore decrease the turbidity of the water.

A conservatively low sale price for the power has been applied, and the result is that the power plant should be able to provide revenue of approximately $2,000,000 per annum after an allowance for operation and maintenance has been deducted.

The addendum report has identified three different (44, 65 or 85 foot) weir options to allow a daily flow of 2,419 cfs, which is the median flow during spring season as established in the final report.
**Solution**

To fully realize the potential of the project, the City of Laredo needs federal funds to perform the following:

1. Final Feasibility Study & Schematics  --------------------- $2,500,000.00
2. Presidential Permit -------------------------------------------- $3,000,000.00
3. Hydroelectric Power Permit  -------------------------------- $3,500,000.00
4. Preliminary Design ------------------------------------------- $2,200,000.00
5. Final Design  -------------------------------------------------- $2,750,000.00

**Target Agencies**

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers  
U.S. Coast Guard  
Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department  
U.S. Department of State

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Support for Mechanical and Biological Removal of Invasive Carrizo Cane Along the Rio Grande

Situation Assessment
The highly invasive carrizo cane (Arundo donax) along the Rio Grande and its tributaries poses issues for border security, control of cattle fever ticks, water quantity supply and creates serious issues for communities that depend on the Rio Grande for water. The City of Laredo is interested in continuing in partnering with federal agencies such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to utilize biological and mechanical means to reduce the biomass of this invasive cane species (Arundo donax) along the Rio Grande to ensure that the river has adequate water supplies for our region and that this natural barrier continue to be leveraged as a secure area along the southern U.S. border.

Background
Arundo donax, known as, giant reed or carrizo cane, is an exotic and invasive biological control agent weed of riparian habitats in the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico. Arundo dominates these habitats which leads to: loss of biodiversity; stream bank erosion; fire hazards; increased costs for chemical or mechanical control along irrigation canals and transportation corridors. Other ills include the reduction of access and visibility of the international border for law enforcement personnel, increased risk of cattle fever tick incursion. It further competes for water resources in an arid region where these resources are critical to the environment, agriculture and urban users. This invasive giant reed is listed as a noxious weed by the Texas Department of Agriculture and also appears on the Invasive Plant Atlas of the United States. Biological control, using insect agents from the native range of Arundo in Europe may be the best option for long-term and widespread management. Three biological control agents (Arundo wasp, Arundo scale, and the Arundo leafminer) have been released and established in the United States and Mexico.

Additionally, mechanical topping of the Arundo has been integrated with the biological agents to suppress the growth of Arundo. This technique has been studied and implemented by the USDA along 558 miles of the Rio Grande, where a reduction of 2.5 million tons of cane biomass was observed (a reduction of 22%). This resulted in the conservation of approximately 6,000 acre feet of water per year.

By expanding these efforts, the region stands to increase the conservation of water, thus, ensuring those acre feet of water can be available for distribution to the inhabitants of the region for consumption, ranching, and agriculture. The proposed action will enhance the lives of our City’s 265,000 residents and help ensure Laredo’s future economic success, which is contingent on having a healthy and plentiful water source.
Target Agencies
United States Department of Agriculture; Department of Homeland Security; U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Laboratory Response Network Certification

Situation Assessment
Rapid laboratory detection along the United States/Mexico Border is paramount to homeland and health security. Early intervention, disease control, detection and prevention especially for health and bio-security make everyone safer. Currently local laboratory capacity is not adequate to detect all hazards, emerging-novel conditions, and bioterrorism acts. The Laredo Health Department currently maintains a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Biosafety Laboratory Level III (BSL III); but needs a Laboratory Response Network (LRN) certification by the State of Texas. This certification will facilitate Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) approval to reduce the risk of foodborne threats.

Background
Laredo, is the largest inland port and the third largest customs district in the U.S. and is a prime target for potential health and security threats. Approximately, 16,000 trucks cross daily through Laredo’s commercial ports of entry. As prompted by new and continuing trade agreements and opportunities with the countries of Mexico, Central and South America, China, and Europe, trade and population is expected to grow another 10-15%. Laredo’s daily population grows to over 1 million, as impacted by visitors who reside in surrounding rural communities and counties and work in Laredo as well as visitors from our sister city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, MX. Notably, at the most recent State of the Border address, the Chief of Customs and Border Patrol stated that the Laredo sector has apprehended individuals from 140 different countries. These conditions present daily health security concerns and threat of current, emerging, and new diseases including Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERs), H1N1, Ebola and other highly infectious diseases, Dengue and West Nile Virus, Botulism, Ricin, Multi Drug Resistant Tuberculosis, Zika and the Chikungunya Virus. Anyone of these could pose a serious health threat and/or serve as a bioterrorist attack.

City staff have had several discussions with CDC and DSHS with both agreeing that Laredo should have a full capacity BSL III and an LRN. Commissioner of Health for Texas, Dr. John Hellerstedt has agreed that if funding was made available he would approve the LRN designation for Laredo. Since 2007 the BSL III was built with CDC and Texas approval specifications and has been ready for the LRN designation. The CDC has certified our BSL III for over 8 years and we are approved for select agents. Other than moderate to high complexity testing certification by CLIA (which we are getting) we are ready for approval of the LRN. Our funding request for the first full year is $481,500 for the LRN operations, necessary additional equipment, reagents, a laboratory LRN pathologist on contract, microbiologist, medical lab technician and a public health technician to conduct surveillance, detection, intervention, risk analysis, response planning and training. Subsequent yearly funding request is $431,420. Resources needed are as follows:
Personnel ($223,000)
Medical Laboratory Technician to conduct laboratory analysis and testing, as well maintain equipment $65,000
Microbiologist to conduct lab bench work, cellular analysis and testing $75,000
Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Technician to conduct surveillance detection, planning and training $65,000
Consultant Physician (pathologist) for high complexity testing $18,000

Operations ($258,500)
Equipment $147,600
Purchase and or update nuclsense easy mass system, camera security system, and computers and radios
Supplies and reference testing $36,400
Maintenance of equipment for autoclaves, camera system, perken, Elmer victor3, freezers and air filters $40,600
Inspection and certification $18,280
Travel for training and certification updates $15,620

Anticipated YR II
Personnel $231,920
Equipment $88,600
Supplies/Ref $36,400
Maintenance $40,600
Inspection/certification $18,280
Proficiency testing
Training and Continuing Education $15,620

Total YR II $431,420

Target Agencies
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
Office of the Secretary Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Texas Department of State Health Services
United States Food and Drug Administration
Health

Department of Agriculture (USDA)
United States Health and Human Services (Office of Global Affairs, Office of the Americas)
National Institute of Health (NIH)

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U.S./Mexico Border Region Federal Designation for Public Health Border Security

**Situation Assessment**

The City seeks to establish a federally designated US/Mexico Border Public Health Fund to address core public health services and public health emergency preparedness response. This is especially important since current funding for the region continues to be level funded, reduced or eliminated for surveillance, core public health services (immunizations, food safety), and chronic disease prevention. In particular, the Public Health Prevention Fund (PHPF), the Public Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHS), Early Warning Infectious Disease Surveillance (EWIDS), Tuberculosis Control and HIV Prevention funds have been greatly reduced or eliminated. This affects the US/Mexico border’s health security and public health and emerging disease control response to current, emerging, and new and highly infectious public health threats.

**Background**

The City continues to face new public health threats, specifically, potential yellow fever and malaria due to the high influx of international travel and migrants. Equally detrimental is the Zika Virus and its potential birth defects that put all of us on alert. The U.S./Mexico Border’s actions in regard to disease control, chronic disease prevention, surveillance and detection, and containment play an important role in helping to maintain the spread of disease and ensuring the safety and well-being of the entire country. To meet these health care challenges, both infrastructure and human resources are critically needed. No longer can communities like Laredo provide routine public health services that state and/or federal partners should, but cannot respond to. This is especially true among communities with large health disparities and given the continued threat of infectious foodborne, vector-borne, and emerging diseases. The H1N1 and now Zika experience gave us an opportunity to assess our capabilities.

Immediate and sustained public health services are warranted on the U.S./Mexico border to respond to bi-national and international bio-security threats. Because disease does not respect borders, Public Health Emergency Response at the border equates to preparedness, response and health security for the nation.

**Solution**

Current, new and emerging public health challenges requires adequate surveillance, technical expertise for detection, treatment and testing with better laboratory capacity, rapid real time health informatics and interoperable communication. Surveillance as through EWIDS is essential. Funding and resources should be based on need, contingency services, and response and not on population formulas. Direct funding is urgently warranted and should be designated for the US/Mexico Border for disease control, prevention
and public health emergency preparedness activities:

1. Maintain surveillance, detection, disease control, food safety/enforcement services and environmental health services that will be accomplished by appropriate staff (epidemiologist, sanitarians and senior laboratory). These persons will evaluate, monitor, investigate, enforce, test and take preventive and disease control measures on communicable diseases (in particular Tuberculosis, HIV, vaccine preventable), all public health threats, zoonotic, vector borne (Chikungunya V) and food borne disease as well other emerging and new highly infectious disease threats that pose a health security threat. Also, maintain Zika support efforts both through the CDC supported border maternity epidemiology and the CMS supported efforts.

2. Maintain a database on interoperable communications and health informatics.

3. Maintain border health security by enhancing US/Mexico border health security services and partnerships for epidemiology, surveillance, public health risk reduction, communication and testing especially as we face emerging, new and highly infectious disease threats along with other co-morbidities. Continue prevention and detection training (i.e. infectious disease, disease detection and chronic disease management) in collaboration and coordination with local and binational partners. These public health emergency response activities will ensure rapid communication, intervention, mitigation and prevention of all hazard threats.

Solution
Establish a U.S. /Mexico Border Public Health Fund to better address border health security, infrastructure and personnel, surveillance and laboratory capacity.

Target Agencies
Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) -Centers for Children, Public Health Preparedness, Chronic Disease, Tuberculosis and HIV
Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) – Office of Global Affairs, Office of the Americas Office of Policy and Planning, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Division of International Health Security
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Department of Homeland Security
United States Food and Drug Administration

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Substance Abuse (Opioid Prevention and Treatment) and Mental Health Programs

**Situation Assessment**

Laredo and other US/Mexico border communities face serious behavioral health, substance use and co-morbidity challenges that merit behavioral health screening, treatment and preventive care as well detox treatment and rehabilitation. This is more critical with the Opioid crisis. Insufficient behavioral health care professionals, lack of facilities and lack of treatment accentuate the problem.

**Background**

**Behavioral Health:** As our population ages, the level of wellness in the community and lack of access to care and to early and preventive care poses a challenge requiring innovative services such as integrated behavioral health in primary care. In addition, counseling services, psychosocial assessment, and chronic disease prevention are needed to address adolescent health, women’s health, aging and co-occurring disorders. Yet we remain underserved for specialty providers and trained health support staff. On the United States/Mexico border, issues are compounded by socio-economic conditions and lack of early preventive and primary care as well as limited behavioral health services.

With growing stress and substance abuse crisis among families and communities and the increase of co-morbidities (recreational and illegal drug use, Hepatitis B and C, HIV, adolescent pregnancy, domestic violence and diabetes to mention a few) both acute and preventive, behavioral health and substance use care is needed in the outpatient and institutional care setting. Furthermore, cultural, gender and stigma issues along our border area serve as barriers that also impact services. Finally, opioids and other drugs are relatively accessible and are easily obtained and used adding to the epidemic.

Specific behavioral health and substance abuse screening and other services essential for Laredo and other US/Mexico border communities include: 1) behavioral health care, both preventive and treatment, 2) current adolescent health care especially for sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, HIV, and violence, 3) women’s health and domestic violence and wellness, especially against obesity and diabetes, 4) substance use, and 5) care facilities for both acute and long term care but more importantly for detox, transitional, preventive care, screening and rehabilitation services.

**Substance Use/Opioids Addiction:** Over the last five (5) years, Laredo has had the following deaths due to over dose:

- 190 total to date, 175 due to opioids.
- Of these, two were children (a baby less than one year and a 6 year old).
• 7 were < 19 years of age.
• Ages ranged from less than one (1) year of age to 66 years old.
• Most were either on heroin or cocaine (some on both which are antagonists) and also on pre-
scribed medication.

Solutions
1. Integrate/collocate behavioral health and substance abuse screening, counseling, treatment and preven-
tion services into routine primary care services along with Disease Self Management (DSM) such as the
Healthy Living/Viviendo Mejor model from Laredo.
2. Seek resources to address prevention, detox, treatment and rehabilitation services in Laredo especially
for opioids. The City currently does not have a detox and rehabilitation in-patient facility for youth,
women and men. Law enforcement daily encounters many persons who may be suffering a chemical
dependency or mental health crisis that merits medical attention. The creation of a secure section in local
hospitals without appropriate detox facilities will greatly assist in making available the appropriate med-
cal care and support services and relieve law enforcement the burden of placing these persons under police
custody and further allow officers to return to their urgent and needed duties.
3. Support pilot projects on the US/Mexico Border (Laredo) to fully integrate behavioral health and sub-
stance abuse services within public health and primary care wellness services (including using telemedi-
cine) in a culturally appropriate manner.
   • Conduct a stigma reduction and awareness promotion campaign on opioid use prevention and
   reduction in partnership with local media, universities and the City of Laredo Drug and Alcohol
   Commission through a city/county wide task force.
   • Train families of persons with addiction, members of the general public, first responders, doctors
   and addiction providers on the use of naloxone spray.
   • Train doctors and addiction providers on prescription responsibility.
   • Train first responders especially EMS and Police on recognizing OD as well as map OD concen-
   trations areas to better focus prevention and treatment.
   • Team with mental health authority and other local partners to enhance an OD crisis management
   task force.
   • Develop a medical assistance treatment (MAT) and training program for buprenorphine waiver
   use by local providers and the health department.
4. Work with stakeholders and providers on enhancing and expanding services (City of Laredo has devel-
oped a Commission on Alcohol and Drug Use).

Target Agencies
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) United States Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
US/Mexico Border Health Commission
National Institute of Health (NIH), National Institute on Drug Abuse

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Services for the Aging

Situation Assessment
Laredo has a younger population than the State of Texas and nation; however, the City’s elderly population continues to grow. In fact, Laredo is home to one of the largest group of persons 75 years and older, including a centurion population. It is imperative that the City develop and maintain the infrastructure, data, and services to provide for the proper care and support of its elderly. We are excited about collaborating with the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio on a clinical module for care.

Background
The population for Laredo is over 260,000 of which 12.7% are elderly. It is anticipated that within the next 2-3 years, the City’s 65 years and older population will reach over 15% of our total population. Much of the city’s health care efforts to date have been directed to women and children but we now have to develop our infrastructure and services for the aging. The concern lies in that Laredo remains a medically underserved area and lacks neurologists, psychiatrists, and geriatric practitioners in family medicine, nutrition, oral hygiene, rehabilitation, injury prevention, chronic disease management, behavioral health and social support services. Additionally we do not have enough data on chronic disease degeneration for Mexican Americans residing in Southwest/South Texas and US/Mexico Border communities, especially in regard to dementia, Alzheimer’s and heart disease.

The need for chronic disease management cannot be overstated. An estimated 16.5% of adults who reside within the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS) Region 11 have diabetes, which is significantly higher than the state rate of 11.0%. Unfortunately, these numbers pale in comparison to Laredo’s rate of 18.5%. In addition, 74.7% of adults in Region 11 were found to be overweight or obese in 2014, which is also significantly higher than the state rate of 67.8%. TDSHS estimated the risk of dying from diabetes was overall 38% higher in the region and specifically 32% higher for men and 43% higher for women in comparison to state statistics. Equally noteworthy, hospitalizations due to diabetes are higher for men as well as for persons between the ages of 45-64 and 65-74 in the region as compared to the state.

Moreover, we need to plan to meet infrastructure needs supporting wellness and physical activity for the elderly, and the availability of rehabilitation and short and long-term care facilities.

Potential Solutions And Progress
The City of Laredo is working with its local council of governments to plan and develop wellness and care services for the aging. We have developed a partnership with the University of Texas Health San Antonio on heart disease, dementia, Alzheimer’s and other degenerative diseases in Laredo. We currently have a
grant application to the Administration for Community Living and hope to initiate a disease self-management evidenced base foundation to improve and sustain the health and care of older adults.

**Target Agencies**
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Aging
Administration for Community Living
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
National Institute of Health (NIH)

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Chronic Disease Prevention (Obesity and Diabetes)

Situation Assessment
Reduction of risks for chronic diseases is critically important in order to reduce and prevent the current epidemic in the United States. Critical target areas are obesity, diabetes, hypertension, renal disease and cancer, which can be addressed through early detection, preventive care, behavioral health and integrated disease self-management (DSM) coupled with community disease self-management. This is especially important to address the most vulnerable and most at risk –persons living along the US/Mexico Border. Early intervention is imperative.

Background
In Laredo (and other US/Mexico Border communities), obesity is an epidemic: 78.2% of males and 72.2% of females and 30% of primary school children are overweight. In Laredo, there exists a disproportion rate of Diabetes Mellitus (DM) of 18.45% with approximately 60 persons dying each year. An estimated 54% of deaths in women is due to cardiovascular disease. More than 30% of pregnant women in Laredo have gestational diabetes and noted has been a 10% rise in hypertension and pregnancy in women under twenty-five (25) years of age. This stressor during pregnancy can also affect the newborn. Furthermore, Mexican-American children in particular are at increased risk for developing early adult onset diabetes. The National Center for Health Statistics reported that Mexican-American children are about twice as likely to be obese than other groups and the proportion of obese children in the 6-11 years of age group continues to increase since 1999. Finally the US/Mexico Border population is aging, increasing the risk to develop unmanageable chronic diseases. The economic challenge that faces our community due to the chronic effects of diabetes and hypertension is the most perilous threat to the future of our population’s health. Malnutrition, inadequate access to affordable and accessible healthier foods, and lack of both exercise and early access to care and screening services add to the complexity of the obesity issue.

Potential Solutions
1. Fund WIC Healthy Learning Center Pilot Programs to address obesity through the implementation of a Bienestar Early Childhood curriculum, healthier eating and exercise.
2. Fund WIC pilots that incentive person for choosing healthier activities and foods.
3. Implement an incentive SNAP pilot in Laredo to promote healthier food choices.
4. Change the SNAP policy to only allow nutritious foods and mandate nutrition and wellness education upon entitlement similar to WIC.
5. Implement the NIH evidenced based Bienestar School Based Health Program in public schools.
6. Provide support for family focused and community oriented Disease Self-Management (DSM) to address diabetes, physical activity, smoking cessation, cholesterol and high blood pressure on
the US/Mexico border using the Laredo Health Department Healthy Living/Viviendo Mejor Model coupled with evidence-based curriculum.

7. Provide access to healthier and affordable foods and incentivize grocers and merchants that promote healthier foods especially in high risk and low-income neighborhoods, inclusive of community gardens, community agriculture and local food pantries.

8. Develop policy to integrate DSM and Behavioral Health into primary care.

9. Implement a Health Information Exchange to enhance chronic disease care coordination among healthcare organizations and providers.


11. Promote urban planning that enhances walking and hike and bike trail accessibility.

**Solution**

City staff have discussed WIC and SNAP pilots with past Undersecretaries for enhanced food and nutrition services. The pilots would specifically incentivize SNAP and WIC participants to make healthier food choices as well as WIC participants to choose to breastfeed, providing additional benefits.

**Target Agencies**

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
United States Health and Human Services (Office of Global Affairs, Office of the Americas) Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Institute of Health (NIH)
US Department of Education (school-based programs) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services

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Workforce Development: Healthcare Professions and Public Health

Situation Assessment
Laredo remains a Health Professions Shortage Area (HPSA) and a Medically Underserved Area (MUA), which serves as a barrier to healthcare access, early detection, improved continuum of care and health care costs reduction. The City of Laredo has targeted several economic development efforts and incentives to address this, and in particular, the City of Laredo Health Department (CLHD) has made it a priority to enhance health professions development.

Background
In Laredo (and other US/Mexico Border communities), both infrastructure and human resources are needed especially, primary care physicians, nurses, dentists and mental health providers, as well as medical assistants, laboratory personnel and hospital allied health. Laredo has attempted to meet this need through innovative operational changes, multidisciplinary staff responsibilities and through strategic local and regional partnerships with local hospitals, providers, schools, universities and the Texas Workforce Commission. Further, the CLHD has increased collaboration with local area schools and universities and beyond, for health, vocational and summer programs, and currently serves as an internship and practicum site for the following programs:

- Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) – Nursing, Nurse Practitioner, Laboratory, Counseling, Speech and Language Pathology (SLP), and Business Management
- Laredo College (LC) – Nursing, Medical Assistant, and Information Technology (IT)
- South Texas Training – Medical Assistant Program
- Health Career Institute of Laredo – Medical Assistant Program
- Texas A&M University Kingsville (TAMUK) – Social Work and Dietetic Program
- University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) – Social Work
- Texas State University – Social Work and Department of Health and Human Performance
- United ISD (United South HS and LBJ HS) – Phlebotomy and Health Science Program
- Laredo ISD (Cigarroa HS) – Phlebotomy and Health Science Program
- Harmony Science Academy – Health Science Internship
- Walden University School of Nursing - Nurse Practitioner Internship
- University of South Alabama School of Nursing (Family Nurse Practitioner Internship)
- Coalition for Apprenticeship Partners in Economic Development (CAPEd) – High School Students in Health Professions
- Workforce Solutions of South Texas – Summer Earn and Learn Program
• Workforce Solutions of South Texas – Teacher Externship Summer Program
• Workforce Solutions of South Texas – Cyber Security (Information Technology) Internship
• Workforce Solutions of South Texas – Adolescent Collaborative Team (Laredo ACT) Youth Coalition
• School of Osteopathic Medicine, Incarnate Word University, San Antonio Texas
• University of Texas at San Antonio Health Science Center
• Texas A&M International University, efforts to initiate Laredo’s first Public Health Program

Finally, several staff, including CLHD’s Director, Associate Director, Clinicians, Epidemiologist, nurses and laboratory personnel serve as adjunct faculty or advisories to the various health professions schools, and programs.

Progress
The City of Laredo continues to partner with schools, universities, clinics, hospitals and the local Department of Labor Workforce Development to serve as a site for enhanced internships, rotations, mentorships and training through interactive health care services, practicums and teaching actions.

Solution
The City is seeking to further collaborate with local entities to improve the health services profession pipeline, but will need additional resources for a director of internships and health profession development to ensure a quality dedicated continuum of services, outreach services and stipends for students.

Target Agencies
United States Department of Labor (USDOL)
United States Department of Education (USDOE)
Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA)
National Institute of Health (NIH)
Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services

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Situation Assessment
On the national level, both the Community Development Block Grant and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program Grant have faced cuts in funding over the last several years. The City of Laredo cannot overstate the importance of funding both of these programs at greater amounts. A continued reduction of funds would have a devastating effect on the low to moderate-income citizens of this community and throughout the nation.

Background
Since 1975, the City of Laredo, Texas has received Community Development Block Grant Funds, which have been directed towards activities that benefit low to moderate-income persons. In addition, these funds have been utilized to finance infrastructure improvements, water/sewer/drainage improvements, sidewalks, rehabilitation of the City’s older housing stock, the construction and enhancement of recreational parks/facilities, construction of police substations, code enforcement activities and graffiti removal, demolition of substandard units, and for the provision of public services.

Despite these improvements, the City remains in dire need of funding in order to continue to assist its impoverished community residents. The U.S. Census 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates indicated that the median income for households in the City of Laredo was $41,302 as compared to $57,051 for the State of Texas, and $57,652 for the nation. The Community Survey also indicates that 30.6% of individuals live in poverty.

In turn, the City’s HOME program funds have been directed towards homeownership assistance, construction of rental units, and provision of tenant based rental assistance. The creation of affordable housing is crucial to the low and moderate income residents in the community. This is especially true of struggling families who have lost their homes due to foreclosure. There are simply not enough safe, decent, and affordable homes available for this population.

Solution
The Community Development Block Grant Program and the HOME Program must continue at their present or at increased levels of funding, thereby allowing cities to continue to provide much needed help to their communities. We are requesting that legislators vote against any proposed cuts in CDBG and HOME funds.
Target Agency
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

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Increased Funding for OPERATION CRACKDOWN  
(Texas Army National Guard/U.S. Border Patrol)

**Situation Assessment**

For the past 5 years (2014-2018), the City of Laredo has participated in the Texas Joint Counterdrug (CD) Operation Crackdown. The purpose of the Texas Joint Counterdrug (CD) Operation Crackdown is to revitalize neighborhoods by making certain property available for development, while simultaneously eliminating structures that have been proven by law enforcement to be used by gangs, illicit drug-related, and associated violent activity.

**Background**

In the past 5 years, this mission has demolished a total of 154 structures in the City of Laredo and assisted the City with cost savings of approximately $1,540,000. As a result, the City has successfully experienced the revitalization of different neighborhoods exemplified through the creation of a neighborhood park, a beautiful two-story home and the opening of a new business. This program provides a true benefit to the community.

**Partners:**

- U.S. Border Patrol
- Texas Army National Guard
- City of Laredo (Multiple departments)
- Texas Joint Counterdrug Task Force
- Laredo Police Dept.

**Solution**

The Texas Army National Guard is limited in the number of missions that are approved on a yearly basis. The City understands that the National Guard faces constraints related to the amount of funding available and the amount of personnel that these missions involve. The City strongly encourages the federal government to provide the necessary funding and resources to conduct additional missions. The City of Laredo believes in the positive impact that these missions have had in our community and hopes to continue this partnership on an annual basis given the funding support.

**Target Agency**

National Guard Bureau  
U. S. Border Patrol
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Opportunity Zones: A Measure to Add and/or Exchange Designated Census Tracts

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo is seeking the passage of legislative or administrative action that allows local governments to add new census tracts, or otherwise exchange census tracts from those currently designated in an effort to spur economic development and job creation in low-income community census tracts with the greatest potential for investment and economic development.

Background
Opportunities Zones were added to the tax code by the Tax Cuts and Job Act of December 2017. An Opportunity Zone is an economically-distressed community area where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. Localities qualify as Opportunity Zones if they have been nominated for that designation by the state and that nomination has been certified by the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury via its delegation of authority to the Internal Revenue Service.

The purpose of the Opportunity Zone is to incentivize and spur economic development and job creation in distressed communities. In March 2018, the City of Laredo submitted a request to the Texas Governor’s Office to consider and include 17 “low income community” census tracts within its municipality, where it deemed the Opportunity Zone had the most potential for economic development while complementing local incentive programs and zones, and where it would be of greatest benefit to communities.

In Webb County, where the City of Laredo is located, a total of 4 census tracts were nominated by the Texas Governor’s Office. Three of those are within the City of Laredo.

The City of Laredo deems that certain census tracts that were submitted for nomination to the Texas Governor’s Office but were not nominated by the Texas Governor’s to the U.S. Department of Treasury provide greater opportunity for investment and economic development than those that were nominated and designated. The City of Laredo seeks the opportunity to add or exchange census tracts designated by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Solution
It is proposed that through legislative or administrative action, Congress or the Department of Treasury provide a process to allow local governments to add or exchange currently designated qualifying census tracts under the Opportunity Zone program.
Quality of Life

**Target Agency**
Department of Treasury

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Relating to the Importance of Funding to Support and Promote Arts Programs

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo sees their Arts & Culture programs as highly valuable to the City and community alike. Along with the various museums, libraries and the Planetarium, the City is able to showcase the unique quality of life within their community. Using the arts to promote cultural, social and economic value allows the City to develop organically.

Background
Currently, the City of Laredo uses funding from their Hotel Occupancy tax to generate a Mural Arts Grant Program that focuses on promoting economic development by increasing tourism, business and tax revenues, and property values. The City also uses the Laredo Center for the Arts to host artistic and cultural events that further promotes economic development and showcases the unique qualities Laredo has to offer tourists, among other similar programs. Funding dedicated for the Mural Arts Grants Program is finite as the City calls for Laredo artists to submit mural proposals the City believes will help generate tourism revenue. The Fine Arts & Culture Commission states that the murals will aid in the beautification of Laredo and promote community pride as well. The City also promotes their Arts & Culture programs through the Washington’s Birthday Celebration, which is the largest annual celebration of its kind and draws in approximately 400,000 attendees.

Solution
The City of Laredo seeks to identify and make future funding available to promote the Arts & Culture programs to expand their current economic development stream. Promoting the Arts not only enhances quality of life for citizens but also attracts industries that are interested in relocation or expansion because such companies place great emphasis on a healthy cultural climate. Past surveys conducted by the Joint Legislative Committee on Cultural Affairs show 99% of the chief executive officers who were questioned stated that the availability of cultural activities in an area is an important consideration in choosing a new location. Therefore, the promotion of arts and cultural activities play a large role in promoting job growth, quality of life and overall economic development.

Target Agency
National Endowment for the Arts
National Endowment for the Humanities
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Relating to the Importance of Funding to Support After-School Programs

**Situation Assessment**

The City of Laredo views after-school programs as an incredibly valuable and necessary opportunity to provide youth development and enrichment experiences in the arts and other fields of learning. After-school programs provide a secure and supervised place for children to learn and grow while their parents are working. Effective after-school programs bring a wide range of benefits to youth, families and communities. They can boost academic performance, reduce risky behaviors, promote physical health, and provide a safe, structured environment for the children of working parents. Without these programs, opportunities are limited for children to enroll in art and other enrichment classes, especially for those children living in poverty.

**Background**

Currently the City of Laredo has a handful of federal and state compensatory programs that provide childcare for latch key children and similar classes of children. A latch key child is a child who spends time alone at their home without adult supervision, especially after school. A study published by The Science Publishing Group shows latch key children are more susceptible to emotional and behavioral problems, depression and suicide, crime and delinquency, learning difficulties, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and school attendance issues to name a few. Furthermore, many of these children have limited access to experience classes in art and other enrichment subjects because they are currently living in poverty or low-income homes and at risk of missing additional learning experiences while being subject to circumstances out of their control.

**Solution**

The City of Laredo seeks to identify and make future funding available to enable after-school programs. Without these programs, children miss out on much needed opportunities for a safe place to learn, grow, and develop their passions for the arts and other fields of learning while their parents are at work. According to youth.gov, participation in after school programs has resulted in higher reading and math grades, improved class behavior, reduced drug use, and a healthier dietary and exercise lifestyle. These after-school programs would help to mitigate the consequences of latch key children mentioned above. The children that will benefit from these programs are the future leaders of Laredo and of Texas. Therefore, it is imperative that we cultivate and invest in the success of these children’s futures through these programs.

**Target Agency**

Afterschool Alliance
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Relating to the Importance of Workforce Development in the Fields of Computer Coding and Avionics

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo sees training programs in the fields of computer coding and avionics as significant assets for the City as well as its members. These programs provide opportunities for individuals to gain skilled labor in fields necessary for the City of Laredo. We believe skilled labor is imperative to decrease poverty levels. Laredo is one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. and there are vast computer coding and avionics career opportunities. Therefore, training programs in these fields serve to promote economic growth and individual success.

Background
The workforce of Laredo is abundant, productive and bilingual making the City an outstanding business location. With a 2017 estimated population of 260,654 the Laredo workforce is one of the fastest growing in the U.S. The City of Laredo’s labor force is approximately 114,487 with a 4.3% unemployment rate. In turn, recent studies show that there were as many as 7 million job openings in 2015 in occupations that required coding skills. They also found that programming jobs overall are growing 12% faster than the market average. Therefore, the City of Laredo has the potential to further increase job creation in computer coding and avionics by focusing on workforce development in these fields through expedited certificate and degree programming that tailors’ citizens towards skilled labor opportunities.

Solution
The City of Laredo seeks to identify and support future opportunities to further develop the workforce in fields of computer coding and avionics as a means to focus on skilled labor opportunities while also addressing City unemployment issues. By developing public-private partnerships, the City will be able to introduce private sector technology and innovation while also providing better public services through improved efficiency. Utilizing private-public partnerships as a way of developing local private sector opportunities through computer coding and avionics will allow more skilled labor work opportunities and overall allow citizens to achieve a better quality of life.

Target Agency
U.S. Department of Labor

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Body-Worn Camera Program

**Situation**
The Office of the Governor Criminal Justice Division is currently offering this program to municipal governments or counties who operate municipal police departments or county sheriff’s departments that employ officers who are engaged in traffic or highway patrol, otherwise regularly detain or stop motor vehicles, or are primary responders to calls for assistance from the public. Grant funds are restricted to the cost of body-worn cameras, digital video storage, and retrieval systems or services.

**Background**
Distrust between local communities and law enforcement agencies is at an all-time high, and body cameras have significantly improved the transparency that is needed for public trust. Grant funding would be used to purchase body-worn cameras and digital video storage to equip officers who are regularly engaged in traffic patrol, detain or stop motor vehicles, and respond directly to calls for assistance from the public. State and local police departments are to match 20 percent of federal government funding.

**Solution**
The Laredo Police Department, city government and the community has greatly benefited from this program. Last year the City was awarded funding to provide fifteen (15) body worn cameras to its officers. LPD has a police strength of 514 and proposes to equip 359 officers, which represent boots on the ground. For this reason, the City continues to seek funding through this grant. If awarded, it would give LPD the advantage of having more readily available camera angles to help in investigations involving deadly use of force; offer a unique perspective from the office’s point of view, present various, and dependable alternate views of the officer’s immediate threat and reaction; and ultimately assist in diffusing public doubts of police actions. The city would provide funding for the 20 percent match required.

**Target Agency**
Department of Justice

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Operation Stonegarden Funding

Situation
Laredo Police Department’s participation in OPERATION STONEGARDEN with U.S. Border Patrol will consist of three operational areas, which will focus on prevention of urban assimilation by smugglers, varied interdiction enforcement actions, and surveillance and detection operations in the Laredo jurisdiction. The affected urban areas include those areas immediately adjacent to the Rio Grande River frontage/banks that smugglers of illegal contraband and human smugglers transition into in order to avoid detection and apprehension. These same urban areas with river frontage also correspond to United States Border Patrol areas of responsibility. The areas for interdiction include: 1) all major highway ingress and egress arteries, 2) the commercial (bus) transportation hubs located in the downtown area, and 3) the four ports of entry that exist in Laredo. Additionally, surveillance and detection operations will concentrate on local hotels/motels that are frequently used to conduct illicit activities. The objective of these coordinated efforts will be to target all criminal activities involving illegal narcotics and human trafficking, illegal drug proceeds, illegal weapons possession/transportation, and stolen vehicles and property. Enforcement efforts will also target individuals who are fugitives from justice.

Background
Laredo, situated on the banks of the Rio Grande River, has four ports of entry (POE) and is identified as the largest inland port in the U.S. Cross border traffic through Laredo’s ports of entry, is a source for criminal activity into and out of the country. The major concerns of northbound traffic center on drug and human smuggling. Southbound traffic concerns center on undeclared illicit drug proceeds, stolen vehicles, stolen property, and weapons destined for Mexico and wanted persons seeking refuge in Mexico. While the POE’s are focus points for criminal activity, there are approximately 60 miles of porous border open to criminal transgressions in the Laredo, Webb County area. The Laredo corridor remains a primary smuggling route for illicit drug and human smuggling. Cartel-generated violence, transnational gang activity and local drug related violence continue to affect Laredo. Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO’s), Money Laundering Organizations (MLO’s) and Human Smuggling Organizations (HSO’s) operate extensively throughout the Laredo area of responsibility.

Solution
Law enforcement partnerships between federal, state and local entities are critical to securing our nation’s border. Grant funding through Operation Stonegarden (OPSG) will be utilized by local units of government to target border-related crime. Utilizing an all-threats approach, CBP, Border Patrol, state and local law enforcement agencies will exercise their unique jurisdictional capabilities in order to collaboratively address border security issues. Grant funding from Operation Stonegarden will help increase capability
levels by using these funds towards operations that will target, disrupt, dismantle, and defeat criminal organizations in the Texas border.

**Target Agency**
Department of Homeland Security

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Homeland Security Grant Programs - South Texas Region

Situation
The City of Laredo is seeking legislative support to allocate additional funding to the South Texas Development Council (STDC) Region for the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP)-Law Enforcement Prevention Activities Program (LETPA). The LETPA encompasses specifically 25% of the regional SHSP allocation. As of recently, counties/cities within the STDC region apply under SHSP and then the Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) prioritizes them based on category. Last year, of 9 applications submitted for the region, only 4 projects were funded. Additional funding allocated to the region gives the City of Laredo a greater chance of being awarded a grant to enable the Laredo Police Department to replace unreliable vehicles and purchase other much needed bomb equipment.

Background
Presently the South Texas Development Council (STDC) region has only one explosive disposal unit, situated in Laredo, TX, consisting of four members (two teams) and four bomb vehicles for the entire region. The unit serves as a regional response team and supports, via a task force, the ATF Laredo office. The goal of this unit is to deter and disrupt threats of terrorists attack at the earliest point possible. This involves responding to countless reports of suspicious devices, packages, and cargo while working with other local, state, and federal agencies. This Explosive Disposal Unit currently augments the region’s ability to prevent incident(s) within multiple jurisdictions in the area of responsibility.

Currently, the Laredo Police Department capability levels include 4 bomb vehicles to cover an area that encompasses 6,720 sq. miles and a population over 330,590 and in Laredo alone, 4 ports of entry (spans). Two of these four units were purchased with 2004-2005 SHSP-LEAP grant funding more than a decade ago. Due to limited funding, only one of these units is presently being replaced with state funding, and the other bomb units require constant upkeep and repairs to maintain adequate reliability.

Solution
If more funding is allocated to our region (STDC) the capability gap concerning equipment will be addressed. Our goal is to have safe and reliable equipment to be able to prevent and protect against terrorist attacks in the metropolitan areas in the South Texas region. In order to maintain and accomplish our objective of preventing terrorist attacks, the issue of not having the reliable equipment available must be addressed. Funding from SHSP-LETPA will provide us with the support and resources to continue to be able to accomplish said objective.
Target Agency
Homeland Security Grant Program

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COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) Hiring Program

Situation
The Laredo Police Department embraces and operates with the COPS philosophy. Every effort is made to have patrol officers assigned to the same geographic areas for a specific time period to help officers familiarize themselves with the community and learn the current trends and crime patterns of their assigned beats. Continuous education and field implementation are vital to an officer’s daily mindset in regard to community oriented policing. Additionally, reinforcement leads patrol officers to seek the community’s involvement and participation as part of his/her investigative toolset in solving and deterring crime. The community’s involvement in fighting crime gives them a sense of legitimacy that their concerns are valued and that their voices are heard by the police. This greatly assists in breaking down barriers of uncertainty and public mistrust of the police, which, unfortunately, is all too common in police/community relations throughout the United States.

Background
The City of Laredo has a population of over 260,000 plus a daily influx of approximately 30,000 from Mexico. The city is situated in Webb County, the sixth largest and tenth poorest county in Texas (out of 254 counties). Laredo, Texas, is located on the north bank of the Rio Grande abutting approximately 26 miles of riverfront across from Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Four international ports of entry (POE’s), an international rail crossing, an international airport and twenty-seven industrial parks make Laredo, Texas, the largest inland port in the U.S. LPD at present has 471 sworn officers and 73 non-sworn personnel. LPD struggles to maintain a ratio of 1.9 officers for every 1,000 inhabitants. The national average is 2.4 officers for 1,000 inhabitants.

Historically, Laredo has been a highly favored operational area for Transnational Criminal Organizations to operate. The close proximity to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, the population density, and the extensive transportation networks leading to the interior immediately north of the border make Laredo a consistent lucrative target. Border-related crime represents an all-threat environment in that drug/human smuggling, the primary criminal activity, often results in cross-border criminal organizations and individuals undertaking secondary and frequently, tertiary criminal activities that involve a wider range of crimes such as kidnappings, assaults, murders, money laundering, cross-border weapons trafficking, etc. These criminal activities, when undertaken in the U.S., constitute a threat to homeland security and an increase in border violence, subsequently triggering involvement by local law enforcement.

The City of Laredo, unfortunately, has had to contend with the spillover of Mexican violence. The majority of the violent crimes and homicides that occur in Laredo have a direct nexus to Mexican TCO’s.
Additionally, the violence has created a mass exodus of Mexican immigration, both legal and illegal into the United States through the Laredo area, which creates a high recidivism rate of previously deported offenders. LPD realizes the negative impact this not only has on the Laredo community but its far-reaching implications into the United States. With Laredo being a strategic location on the United States/Mexico border, LPD realizes its law enforcement responsibility is not only to suppress and prevent violent crime in its community. LPD also carries the responsibility of homeland security to keep violence and the threat of Transnational Criminal Organizations from reaching deep into the United States.

Our city continues to grow at a rapid pace and demand for services continually overwhelms our patrol division. Funding is needed in order to supplement patrol operations and address the specific issues of border violence, illegal immigration and homeland security which the LPD uniquely contends with daily.

Solution
The Laredo Police Department, city government and the community have embraced Community-Oriented Policing. The City of Laredo has greatly benefitted from past support from the U.S. Department of Justice and COPS funding. The Laredo Police Department has made the most effective use of COPS strategies and funding. As such, continued support, both local and federal, is essential for the continued success of our community-policing philosophy. Although the national economic crises affects everyone, it is imperative that DOJ offer creative ways to help finance law enforcement services that will help maintain and support a strong stance not only on crime in general but with committed emphasis on border security and seriously stemming border violence, without overly taxing border communities. The continued award of DOJ/COPS grants to the City of Laredo Police Department to hire additional police officers will allow the Department to redeploy personnel and resources to target issues that affect the homeland such as border security, illegal immigration and gun violence. Most importantly is the fact that the augmentation of personnel at such a critical time in terms of economy and security greatly assists in safeguarding our community and nation’s safety. Our community is greatly appreciative of the diligent regard DOJ/COPS afforded our concerns regarding border and homeland security issues. Without the COPS funding opportunities that have been awarded to the City of Laredo, the City would not have had the ability to lower its crime rate.

Target Agency
Department of Justice
COPS Hiring Program

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Relating to the First Step Act

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo applauds Congress and President Trump for signing into law the First Step Act, which reformed criminal justice by calling for the reduction of mandatory sentences, grants judges greater discretion regarding the term of sentences and calls for the implementation of rehabilitation services and training to assist prisoners as they assimilate into society upon release. However, the City is concerned the criminal justice reform legislation will negatively impact the community of Laredo by not providing long-term allocated funding for this Fiscal Year to finance rehabilitative services and similar programs.

Background
The Congressional Budget Office estimates that approximately 53,000 of the 181,000 inmates currently imprisoned in the federal system in the U.S. would be affected over the next 10 years, by the First Step Act. Though the First Step Act offers incentives for inmates to participate in “life-changing” classes and programming that would better prepare them for life after release, while also focusing on reducing recidivism by offering vocational training, academic classes and substance abuse treatment. Currently as written, the bill will not help fund these programs with state or city jails and prisons, which account for the majority of the country’s prison population. Coupled with the fact that the U.S. has the world’s highest total prison population with over 2.1 million people incarcerated shows that by failing to address funding issues, local municipalities will struggle to follow the law as they release prisoners over the next decade.

Solution
The City of Laredo seeks to note their concerns with federal funding related to the First Step Act while also noting that the legislation is approved by Democrats and Republicans for its reformative stance. Though the legislation is the first of its kind to take a step forward regarding cutting down non-violent criminal incarceration, the First Step Act fails to allocate necessary funding for this fiscal year and may unintentionally cripple local municipalities across the country. The City of Laredo is home to hundreds of inmates but is thoroughly concerned regarding assimilation issues and rehabilitative services for released prisoners when the City will struggle to allocate proper funding to support the First Step Act.

Target Agency
U.S. Department of Justice

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Modernization of the Laredo International Airport (LRD), Texas

Assessment

Modernization (Capital Improvements) of the Laredo International Airport (LRD) is vital to the City of Laredo, region and nation. The airport adds value to international trade and is strategically located to add global significance. Airport capital improvements are making this airport and region more competitive in terms of international trade opportunities and help to favor economic expansion and job growth.

Background

The Laredo International Airport (LRD), Texas is an important cargo hub; consequently, there exists a continued need to enhance safety, security, and capacity in support of the U.S. trade industries. Port Laredo is the No. 1 inland port in the nation and the 2nd largest overall U.S. port of entry behind Port of Los Angeles, CA surpassing Chicago and N.Y. with over $214.7 billion in trade and representing a 7.4% increase over the previous year.

The Laredo International Airport (LRD):

- Has increased air traffic operations in the last 5 years.
- Ranked 5th in the State in 2017 in terms of cargo activity, surpassing Austin, Texas and El Paso, Texas. Industries represented in terms of air cargo include auto parts, automotive electronics, electrical, and aerospace with auto parts being the No. 1 commodity.
- Ranked 42nd in the nation, having moved up 11 spots in 2017 as supported by a 37% increase in air cargo. An additional increase of 13% is expected to have occurred in 2018.
- Has U.S. Customs (CBP) on site 24/7 processing.
- Invested $3.2 million in the construction of an onsite Federal Inspection Services facility (FIS) that houses both U.S. Customs and Mexico Customs under one roof.
- Is the only airport in the U.S. with Mexico Customs agents on-site 24/7 to pre-Inspect southbound air cargo activities.

Laredo International Airport (LRD) continues to work closely with the Texas Airports District Office (ADO) in Fort Worth, Texas to develop and implement LRD’s Airport Capital Improvement Plan (ACIP). Currently, LRD is working on Rehabilitation (Full-Depth) of Cargo Apron, Phases 11 and 12 as funded by AIP Grants and LRD’s local match. Also, currently under design is the Rehabilitation (Full-Depth) of Cargo Apron, Phase 13. The Texas ADO has supported Laredo International Airport (LRD) over the years with AIP funding to complete this critical rehabilitation project. The current cargo apron is 60 years old. Notably, the Pavement Condition Index (PCI) ranges from very poor to failure.
In addition to the unprecedented air cargo growth, the Laredo International Airport (LRD) is working with the Department of Homeland Security and General Services Administration for proposed construction of new multi hangar facilities and relocation of CBP Air and Marine. The current hangar location is approximately 14,000 sq. ft. and does not have additional land space necessary for expansion. Extreme overcrowded conditions have resulted in “hangar rash” causing damage to helicopters. CBP Air and Marine is requesting construction of modernized permanent facilities consisting of approximately a 20-acre lot for storage hangar, maintenance hangar, and an administrative building. These facilities would support approximately five (5) AS-350 helicopters, four (4) EC-120 aircraft, rotary wing aircraft, maintenance shops, operations, support equipment, offices, and pilot work areas.

The City of Laredo seeks FAA’s approval to extend the operational hours of the Contract Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) at the Laredo International Airport (LRD) to 24 hours seven days a week. Robinson Aviation (RVA), Inc. operates LRD’s Contract ATCT. This facility is currently open Monday through Sunday from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight. Current staffing consists of one supervisor and five (5) controllers. An additional 42 hours per week is needed to maintain a 24/7 operations at this airport.

The City of Laredo, has received multiple requests from trade industries to operate LRD’s ATCT at 24/7. In December 2018, auto manufacturer, Ford and various cargo airlines requested that Laredo’s ATCT be open 24/7 in order for their manufacturing plants to operate at peak and/or maximum efficiencies. The additional hours are of national interest due to TIME-CRITICAL deliveries for expanding U. S. trade industries. Additionally, operating the Laredo ATCT at 24/7 will significantly enhance safety, efficiency, security, capacity and aviation related activities.

**Solution**

The City of Laredo, Texas respectfully requests that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) extend the operational hours of the Contract Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) at the Laredo International Airport (LRD) from 18 hours to 24 hours daily.

**Target Agencies**
The Federal Aviation Administration

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Construction of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Facilities

Situation Assessment
The current U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine office and hangar facilities located at the Laredo International Airport were built in 1995. The vast changes in aeronautics, trade, technology and similar over the last 20 years means that the facilities no longer conform to current Air and Marine operational requirements. The CBP Air and Marine is requesting construction of modernized permanent facilities. These facilities would support approximately five (5) AS-350 helicopters, four (4) EC-120 aircraft, rotary wing aircraft, maintenance shops, operations, support equipment, offices, and pilot work areas.

Background
Laredo, Texas is an important cargo hub, and there exists a continued need to enhance safety, security, and support of the U.S. trade industry. Port Laredo is the No. 1 inland port in the nation and the 2nd largest overall U.S. port of entry behind Port of Los Angeles, CA surpassing Chicago and N.Y. with over $214.7 billion in trade, representing a 7.4% increase over the previous year.

The Laredo International Airport (LRD);
- Has increased air traffic operations significantly during the past five (5) years.
- Is ranked 5th in the State of Texas in 2017 in terms of air cargo activity, surpassing the cities of Austin and El Paso.
- Is ranked 42nd in the nation in 2017, up 11 spots from the previous year due to a 37% increase in cargo. Air cargo is expected to have increased an additional 13% in 2018.
- Has U.S. Customs (CBP) on site 24/7 processing.

Air and Marine has subleased facilities at the Laredo International Airport for many years. This sublease contract is scheduled to expire on July of the year 2020. The current hangar location is approximately 14,000 sq. ft. and does not have additional land space necessary for expansion. Extreme overcrowded conditions have resulted in “hangar rash” causing damage to helicopters. This is due to fixed equipment or objects being within 10’ of aircraft. As an alternative, other similar locations were offered to Air and Marine for temporary relief, but the agency has determined a much larger and single site is more suitable and effective.

Due to the increases in air cargo activity at the Laredo International Airport, public ramp aprons are crowded with large cargo aircraft. Therefore, an alternative flight line location detached from cargo activity, including exclusive hangar and apron space, would be optimal to avoid disruption or delays of critical mission launch operations.
Solution

The City of Laredo continues to work hand in hand with the expertise of Department of Homeland Security Facilities Management and Engineering (FM&E), U.S. Customs and Border Protection and General Services Administration to plan, construct, and develop an approximately 20-acre tract of land located at the Laredo International Airport to provide the necessary hangars, maintenance facilities, offices, apron, and taxiway connectors. These facilities would be similar to the existing station at Yuma, Arizona which is able to accommodate the increasing requirements of CBP Air and Marine.

Construction of facilities will be developed through a partnership agreement between DHS and the City of Laredo.

Target Agencies

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

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Section 482 Donation Acceptance Authority
Proposal Evaluation Procedures & Criteria Framework

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo seeks a change in section 482 of the Cross-Border Trade Enhancement Act of 2016, P.L. 114-279. Section 482 supplanted section 559 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 P.L. 113-76 (Section 559) that became law on January 17, 2014. This law authorized U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to accept donations of real property, personal property (including monetary donations) and non-personal services from private sector and Government entities.

Background
The World Trade Bridge is the commercial center of the City of Laredo’s Bridge System. In FY 2018, a total of 1,995,266 commercial vehicles crossed the bridge outbound. Approximately 6,000 trucks currently traverse the Bridge in each direction every weekday, often peaking above 6,500. The Bridge has become the centerpiece of U.S-Mexico trade, and demand is forecast to continue to grow in the range of 3% to 5% per year.

On November 11, 2016, the City of Laredo submitted a proposal to Garrett D. Wright, Branch Chief, Donations Acceptance Program, for the World Trade Bridge FAST Lanes Relocation Project. It is essential that the World Trade Bridge’s POE operate as efficiently as possible. The project will relocate the FAST Lanes to an optimum site, eliminating a major bottleneck and giving FAST participants their own dedicated route through the POE. The elimination of this bottleneck will benefit non-FAST vehicles as well. The City of Laredo will be investing $10.3 million. On April 18, 2017, Acting Commissioner for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection notified the City of Laredo that the proposal had been selected for further planning and development.

Solution
The City of Laredo seeks a change in section 482 of the Cross-Border Trade Enhancement Act of 2016, P.L. 114-279. Section 482 supplanted section 559 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, P.L. 113-76 (Section 559) that became law on January 17, 2014. This law authorized U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to accept donations of real property, personal property (including monetary donations) and non-personal services from private sector and Government entities. The proposed change would be to allow donor (Government entities) to enter into a lease agreement with the U.S. General Services Administration at completion of the project to allow for financing of the project with bond proceeds.
Target Agencies
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. General Services Administration

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Revenue Vehicle Replacement Needs for Aging Transit Fleet

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo has a bus fleet which totals forty-five (45) heavy-duty diesel and compressed natural gas powered buses for fixed route services as well as an additional eighteen (18) Paratransit vans for the Demand Response service that complements the fixed route service. The current annual ridership within the urbanized area of Laredo of over 3.2 million passenger trips alongside the severe summer temperatures produce a strain on the transit system’s aging bus fleet.

Background
Public transportation is critical for the City of Laredo as thousands of people are transit dependent and utilize El Metro buses every day to go to work, attend business and attend school. Public transportation alleviates traffic and congestion challenges while having a positive impact on the environment by reducing energy consumption.

The Laredo Transit Center is conveniently located in the downtown area where a large number of local and rural commuters connect within the transit system. In addition, El Metro administration has successfully implemented a Student Transportation Program in partnership with Laredo College (LC) and Texas A&M International University to provide transportation services to students enrolled in higher education. The program is expected to boost attendance, enrollment and possibly work opportunities for transit dependent students and promote transit by the student population in general.

The high demand and utilization of the Laredo buses along with the summer heat has taken a significant toll on our existing equipment making replacement of buses a priority for the City of Laredo. As the buses age, additional funds are spent to maintain the buses adequately. Additional capital funding is required to purchase needed heavy duty bus replacements in order to continue to provide adequate and cost effective transit service within the City of Laredo.

According to Federal Transit Administration guidelines, the useful service life expectancy of a heavy duty transit bus is twelve (12) years or five hundred thousand (500,000) miles. By the end of FY18-19 the City of Laredo Fixed Route fleet will have nine (9) buses that will have exceeded this threshold; about 20% of the fixed route fleet will be obsolete and/or exceeded its life expectancy.

Solution
The City of Laredo requires $4.5 million dollars in Federal assistance to replace its aging bus fleet. This level of federal funding would allow the city to replace the buses that have exceeded their useful life and
also allow the transit system to continue to provide cost efficient and reliable public transit service for the citizens of Laredo and those that visit Laredo. The City of Laredo is asking for Congressional support for future grant applications in the amount of $4.5 million dollars.

**Target Agency**
Federal Transit Administration

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Funding Support for New Maintenance and Operations Facility

**Situation Assessment**
The City of Laredo and El Metro Transit System are requesting funding for the construction of a new Bus Maintenance, Operations and Administration facility to meet the growing needs of public transportation for the City of Laredo.

**Background**
A new Maintenance and Operations facility will house buses, paratransit vans, fueling station (CNG, diesel, and unleaded), operations, maintenance, and administration for the transit system and will also allow for the growth of the transit system.

The City of Laredo’s Transit system provides a critical service for the community by providing 3.2 million passenger trips annually. Currently, the Transit System is comprised of 45 light and heavy duty buses along with 18 para transit vans and support vehicles. The operation and maintenance of the fleet has outgrown the present operations and maintenance facility located in the central part of the city. It is anticipated that the future growth of the Transit System will require a transit fleet comprised of approximately 100 buses, 40 vans and support vehicles. The current facility which is located in a residential neighborhood is to be replaced with a new Operations and Maintenance Center scheduled to be located in an area zoned for this type of activity. The proposed site has been acquired and platted on a 23 acre tract of land in close proximity to the City of Laredo Airport.

**Solution**
The City of Laredo has acquired the necessary land and completed the facility design process. The estimated total cost of the project is over $35 million. The City has received $9.8 in partial funding for the phase one of the project, and seeks funding assistance for the remaining balance. The City of Laredo is asking for Congressional support for current and future competitive applications to successfully complete the Transit Operations and Maintenance Facility.

**Target Agency**
Federal Transit Administration
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Loop 20 (Future IH 69W)
Upgrade to Interstate Standards

**Situation Assessment**
In 2014, the Texas Transportation Commission and the Federal Highway Administration re-designated Loop 20 as US 59 and ultimately this roadway segment will be part of the future I-69 system as I-69 West. The City of Laredo, the Regional Mobility Authority and the Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization seek funding through the INFRA Grant Program and or other available resources to upgrade this corridor to interstate standards.

**Background**
Fulfilling the construction standards adopted by the Federal Highway Administration will allow US 59 to become part of the I-69 West’s system from US 59 in George West, Texas to its terminus at the United States-Mexico Border at the World Trade International Bridge.

The Laredo International Bridge System is the U.S. Port Entry of choice. It is recognized as the largest U.S. inland port, the second “overall port” after Long Beach, and the third largest U.S. Customs District, with a reported trade value of over $303 billion dollars in 2017. In FY 2018, a total of 1,995,266 commercial vehicles crossed the bridge outbound. Approximately 6,000 trucks currently traverse the Bridge in each direction every weekday. The Bridge has become the centerpiece of U.S-Mexico trade, and demand is forecast to continue to grow in the range of 3% to 5% per year, maintaining its status as the busiest inland border crossing in the United States. The project will help provide additional capacity to the existing congested freight corridor along I-35 and provide an additional route for freight traveling between the economic centers of Laredo, Houston, Memphis, Indianapolis, and other parts of the continental United States including its terminus in Port Huron, Michigan at the Canadian Border.

Additionally, the upgrade of US 59 (Loop 20) from an urban arterial to interstate standards will support the increased traffic volumes spurred by the expected residential and commercial development between International Boulevard and University Boulevard. At typical peak travel times, Loop 20 is highly congested, often requiring motorists to wait in line at the various traffic signals located along the corridor over repeated signal light cycles. The congestion creates travel impediments and delays for emergency vehicles.

The frontage roads along Loop 20 currently end at the Kansas City Southern (KCS) railroad tracks, so vehicles and pedestrians have to get onto the Loop 20 mainlanes’ bridge to cross the railroad tracks. Added capacity is necessary to accommodate Laredo’s continued population growth, improve mobility, enhance public safety and further economic development.
Solution
The City of Laredo, the Regional Mobility Authority and the Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization strongly urge the state and the federal government to provide much needed funding through the INFRA Grant Program and or other available resources for the upgrade of this corridor to interstate standards. Construction of 5 grade separations, to be located at Shiloh, University, Del Mar, Jacaman and the Airport, as well as, the construction of frontage roads along the entire length of the roadway would enhance safety, increase efficiency and improve the highway’s level of service.

Target Agency
Federal Highway Administration

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Grade Separation Opportunities

**Situation Assessment**
The Texas Department of Transportation Rail Division (lead agency) in conjunction with the City of Laredo has completed a railroad mobility study. The study identified potential grade separations along both the Kansas City Southern (KCS) and Union Pacific (UP) lines. However, without assistance from the State of Texas or the federal government (and since the railroad companies are not required to participate financially to any significant degree), the City is obligated to bear the financial burden of implementing any grade separation opportunities.

**Background**
Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and the Kansas City Southern Railroad (KCS) have operated in Laredo and have used the city as a crossing point between the U.S. and Mexico for over a century. The Kansas City Southern rail line, which runs east west, bisects the city’s downtown and the Union Pacific Railroad, which runs north/ south bisects neighborhoods the length of the City.

KCS trains traveling into Mexico are stopped for southbound inspection (going into Mexico) at the international rail bridge. These trains block all of the north-south at-grade crossings leading to and from the Laredo downtown. These blockages can last anywhere from 10 minutes to 45 minutes. Similarly, trains traveling north (from Mexico into the U.S.) also stop and block the at-grade crossings leading to downtown during inspection and crew changes.

The Union Pacific Railroad experiences the same problems on their north-south bound lines. As train lengths have increased, blockages of at-grade crossings (including connections to the City’s designated truck route) have grown more frequent. At-grade crossings are blocked for longer periods of time. Reports from residents of affected neighborhoods indicate that in some instances the grade crossings are shut down from 1 to 15 hours daily. The effect on mobility and especially emergency response is significant.

**Solution**
Given the tremendous amount of cargo that crosses the international rail bridge and the national significance of Laredo as an inland port, federal funds should be allocated to programs within the Federal Rail Administration to provide for grade separation projects.

**Target Agency**
Federal Railroad Administration
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Widening of I-35

Situation Assessment
I-35 is a vital segment of the national freight system. Laredo’s commercial truck traffic relies on this roadway to move freight to distribution centers in Texas and throughout the United States. The 150 mile stretch of this highway from Laredo to San Antonio has seen little in recent years in substantive improvement. Other than the Texas Freight Mobility Plan’s recognition that the “I-35 corridor from Laredo to the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex serves as major distribution locations” no capacity enhancements have been made; however, some advance planning and funding has been programmed by the Texas Department of Transportation.

Background
The 2016 Texas Freight Mobility Plan predicts the highest increase in truck volumes are projected to be on I-35, 1-10, 1-45, and 1-40. The Plan states that “Increased congestion, truck tonnage, daily truck trips, and truck VMT on the Texas highway network, coupled with population growth and other factors, will significantly constrain the efficient movement of freight and people throughout the state.” In 2014, over 19 percent of interstate centerline miles were considered deficient; by 2040 that number will grow to over 45 percent. Large stretches of interstate corridors are predicted to have unacceptable Levels of Service (LOS) in 2040, including: 1-35 from Laredo to Dallas-Fort Worth; 1-45 from Houston to Dallas; 1-10 from Houston to San Antonio; 1-20 in Fort Worth to US 84 in Abilene; I-10 from 1-20 to El Paso; and US 59 from I-20 to Houston.”

Truck traffic on the Laredo - San Antonio segment of I-35 has continued to increase and on any given day sections of this four lane divided highway are subject to being shut down for hours, leading to truck and vehicular traffic coming to a standstill.

Solution
The City of Laredo strongly urges the State and Federal Government continue the process of providing for the widening of I-35 to a six (6) lane divided highway to enhance safety and increase efficiency and improve the highway’s level of service.

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River Road Along the Rio Grande

Situation Assessment
Much illegal crossing activity appears to occur along the riverbanks (“vega”) of the Rio Grande within the corporate boundary of the City of Laredo. The thick vegetation that is typical of the river bank area interferes with law enforcement’s ability to patrol and monitor the river bank, which impedes quick response to problem areas as well as makes it increasingly dangerous for law enforcement personnel.

Background
The ability of Homeland Security and other law enforcement agencies to patrol and interdict both illegal immigration and drug activity along the river is enhanced by direct access and monitoring of activity along the banks of the Rio Grande. The City of Laredo owns much of the vega land and could partner with federal agencies to work on a river road that would provide this direct access to the river banks.

Solution
Construction of a river road in the “vega” next to the Rio Grande would promote a secure border.

Target Agency
Homeland Security - Customs and Border Protection

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Transportation Funding Formulas

Situation Assessment
The City of Laredo seeks continued legislative, Federal Highway Administration and Texas Department of Transportation support for the development of transportation funding formulas that recognize the importance of freight mobility and the impact of significant numbers of commercial vehicles on Laredo’s local roadway network.

Background
The Laredo International Bridge System is the U.S. Port Entry of Choice. It is recognized as the largest U.S. inland port, the second “overall port” after Long Beach, and the third largest U.S. Customs District, with a reported trade value of over $303 billion dollars in 2017. In FY 2018, a total of 1,995,266 commercial vehicles crossed the bridge outbound. Approximately 6,000 trucks currently traverse the Bridge in each direction every weekday, often peaking above 6,500. The Bridge has become the centerpiece of U.S-Mexico trade, and demand is forecast to continue to grow in the range of 3% to 5% per year.

As a “gateway” to the U.S. and the dominant Port of Entry (POE) along the U.S./Mexican border, appropriate investments in transportation infrastructure are critical to meeting the current and future challenges of moving people and goods in the region, the nation, and enhancing the economic competitiveness of the U.S. In 2018, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute assessed Laredo’s Loop 20 as the second most truck-congested roadway in Texas. In the same year, approximately 4,563,572 commercial vehicles accessed Laredo’s ports of entry via the local roadway network. In order to access industrial areas and individual warehouses, commercial vehicles must leave the on-system roadways and utilize local roads to arrive at their ultimate destinations. Commercial vehicles cause significantly greater wear and tear on the roads than standard passenger vehicles. The costs of providing and maintaining a network able to accommodate such considerable levels of commercial traffic should be more effectively recognized in the state’s funding formulas.

Solution
The City, the County and the MPO seek support for the development of transportation funding formulas with increased weight given to the number of commercial vehicles and the number of commercial vehicle miles traveled.

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Ratification of the United States–Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)

Situation Assessment
Following the renegotiation of NAFTA, President Trump, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto signed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in November 2018. The new trade deal remains pending ratification by all three governments.

Background
Nationwide, approximately fourteen (14) million U.S. jobs depend on trade with Canada and Mexico, and 43 of 50 U.S. states list Canada or Mexico as their 1st or 2nd largest export market. In Laredo, the trade and transportation industry accounts for approximately 31% of all jobs.

The Laredo International Bridge System is the U.S. Port Entry of Choice. It is recognized as the largest U.S. inland port, the second “overall port” after Long Beach, and the third largest U.S. Customs District, with a reported trade value of over $303 billion dollars in 2017. In FY 2018, a total of 1,995,266 commercial vehicles crossed the bridge outbound. Approximately 6,000 trucks currently traverse the Bridge in each direction every weekday, often peaking above 6,500. The Bridge has become the centerpiece of U.S-Mexico trade, and demand is forecast to continue to grow in the range of 3% to 5% per year.

The ratification of USMCA will further create new opportunities for border communities such as Laredo, whose economies rely heavily on the trade and transportation industry.

Solution
It is imperative that the USMCA be ratified to ensure 1.) the U.S. remains competitive against other trade blocs, 2.) U.S. jobs are preserved; and 3.) the outflow of capital is discouraged.

Target Agency
Office of the United States Trade Representative
Executive Office of the President

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Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Situation Assessment
The U.S. requires an immigration system that provides for public safety, national security, and economic prosperity. The City of Laredo supports the enactment of comprehensive immigration reform that: (1) benefits families, businesses and investors, and deters human trafficking and illegal entry into the United States, (2) expedites the process and provides for the care of individuals seeking asylum, and (3) provides a path to permanent residency and citizenship to Dreamers and DACA who are contributing community members and who are faced with deportation. Our nation’s interests and security are not served by the outdated, inefficient, and slow-moving immigration system and its backlog affecting family reunification and business.

Background
The City of Laredo has a major stake in fair, practical, and comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level. While the City of Laredo is not a sanctuary city, the vital social, cultural, and economic investments, business ventures and contributions of immigrants to our City and state are acknowledged.

1. Comprehensive immigration reform requires the implementation of a previously proposed W-Visa market-based guest -worker program to meet the demand for workers and to give U.S. business access to a reliable, rotating workforce. Birth rates in the United States are declining below the levels necessary to sustain our economic growth and satisfy our country’s need for workers. Conversely, slow economies in Latin America and the need for workers in the United States generate a “push-pull effect” that fosters illegal immigration. Through the W-Visa program, registered employers would need to first make available job openings to Americans before filling lower-skilled jobs such as in housekeeping, landscaping, and retail and food service industry with temporary foreign workers.

Eighty to ninety five percent of illegal immigrants employ smugglers to assist them in crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and often fall prey to networks of human trafficking and exploitation run by drug cartels. Human trafficking traps millions of people in cycles of exploitation for sex or labor, and is a direct affront to individual human rights.

It is equally important that comprehensive immigration reform provide resources to Border Cities and the State of Texas for effective immigration enforcement that both respects our nation’s right to secure its border and the human rights of immigrants.
2. It is imperative that family units, inclusive of single parents with children or women who are pregnant, who legally seek asylum are processed expeditiously and provided the means for care in the interim that they are released from federal custody and scheduled to appear before an immigration judge to present their case. Often times, asylum seekers are transported by ICE from one border town to another in large numbers and left at bus stations to fend for themselves without clothing, food, money or shelter. The federal system followed in processing asylum seekers and their temporary release is dysfunctional in that it creates an unfunded mandate for local government entities and non-profit service organizations to provide humanitarian relief and prevent the spread of communicable disease. Just recently, 300 asylum seekers from Central America who were previously housed in a holding facility by ICE in Del Rio, TX and who were awaiting their federal immigration court dates, were transported to Laredo and released at the local bus depot. Upon receiving notification from the federal government, the City of Laredo reached out to local non-profit homeless service providers for assistance with resources and shelter. To address possible health concerns, the City’s Health Department provided screening for all individuals. Providing such assistance places a strain on already limited local resources.

3. The proposed bipartisan Dream Act of 2017 would have provided administrative relief from deportation and a path for citizenship for nearly 800,000 young people enrolled in DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and the 3.6 million Dreamers who entered the United State before the age of 18. Dreamers have passed background checks and received permission to live and work in the nation where they were raised as Americans. They know no other country as their home other than the United States and should be able to live without fear of deportation as long as they have not committed crimes. United State taxpayers have helped educate Dreamers from elementary through high school, giving all Americans a vested interest in their success in the work force of tomorrow. More than 800 Dreamers are now serving in the U.S. armed forces.

As reported in a series of survey studies conducted by Tom Wong, et.al. from the University of California, and most recently in August 2018, DACA beneficiaries continue to contribute to the U.S. growing economy. Of those surveyed, 92% of DACA beneficiaries who are 25 years and older are employed; 62% have purchased a car; 20% have purchased a home; and 40% are enrolled a school with approximately 75% pursuing a bachelor’s degree or higher. Further, the Center for American Progress estimates that ending DACA would result in the loss of $460.3 billion from the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the next decade and the removal of an estimated 685,000 workers from the national economy.
Solution
The City of Laredo hereby supports comprehensive immigration reform which benefits families, businesses and investors, while deterring human trafficking and illegal entry into the United States. Further supported is the creation of a market-based temporary-worker program that meets the country’s increasing demand for workers, and allows temporary workers to contribute to our economy through their work and taxes; the creation of an expeditious and humanitarian federal processing system for asylum seekers; and legislation that provides qualifying and contributing Dreamers and DACA beneficiaries a path to permanent residency status and citizenship.

Target Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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**Virtual Wall/Bulkhead: Preferred Means to Enhance Border Security**

**Situation Assessment**

The proposed construction of a physical border wall poses a threat to the economy, the environment, and the peace and friendship enjoyed between the United States and Mexico. Border communities such as Laredo, Texas will bear the brunt of the negative ramifications of such action. As a means of enhancing border security, proposed is the development of a virtual wall and/or bulkhead that further promotes the use of technology, the eradication and mitigation of Carrizo cane, and the construction of all-weather river roads as the preferred means to enhance border security.

**Background**

Laredo City Council finds that the construction of the proposed border wall to be expensive, detrimental to the environment, dismissive of private property rights, and an impractical solution that will not enhance national security.

As reported in a study conducted by USA Today, there are approximately 4,900 parcels of property, mostly privately owned that sit within 500 ft. of the Texas/Mexico border. Taking of the parcels would prove to be very costly. This proved to be the case with the enactment of the Secure Fence Act which was suspended for the same reason. Given that the U.S. federal budget deficit for fiscal year 2019 is $985 billion, it is not in the nation’s best interest to spend up to an estimated $15 to $25 billion on fence construction.

The floodplain along the Rio Grande River is subject to seasonal flooding thus making a border wall not viable from an environmental, practical, and security standpoint. Also, because the U.S. Mexico border is the Rio Grande River, the wall would need to be constructed some distance from the actual border. This would cause private property to be divided, limiting access, and create isolated areas between the border wall and the border. The City of Laredo owns over 926 acres in La Grulla in Star County which it purchased for water rights and which it currently leases for farmland use. This land would too be subdivided and negatively impacted by the construction of a border wall.

A virtual wall will provide a meaningful long-term plan for border security, reduce illegal cross border activity, and aid CBP agents in the performance of their duties. This can be accomplished by increasing the accessibility and visibility of the border through the use of technology; the eradication and mitigation of Carrizo cane; and the construction of all-weather river roads.

A virtual wall incorporating the use of technologies, such as biometric data capture, ID verification, algorithmic intelligence technologies, aerial drones, and other surveillance tools, allows U.S. Custom and
Border Protection to be more effective in meeting mission objectives.

A border security solution incorporating Carrizo cane eradication and mitigation by mechanical or biological control methods enhances the ability of CBP to reduce illegal cross border activity, and assists in responding to migrant rescues. Carrizo cane (Arundo donax) is an invasive species that significantly limits CBP’s ability to fully and safely perform its mission by blocking the view of the border along the river, impeding and concealing the detection of criminal activity, and restricting access to the riverbank. Carrizo further consumes excessive amounts of water which is detrimental to water conservation and threatens water supplies for agricultural and municipal drinking water uses.

The construction of all-weather river roads and paving of existing river roads improves CBP’s access to the riverbank, reduces their response times, and protects the condition of their equipment. In the event that the decision to construct a physical barrier remains in place and is funded, the City of Laredo proposes that a bulkhead be constructed. This action is preferable to the construction of a wall/fence that appears defensive and detracting. The bulkhead would consist of a retaining wall constructed along the river from Chacon Creek to Manadas Creek, spanning approximately 12 miles, and would include park space and development leading up to an estimated 15 foot drop down to the Rio Grande and an adjacent pedestrian path that Border Patrol could use.

It is in the United States and Texas’ best interest to develop a virtual wall or bulkhead as a means to enhance border security.

Target Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Customs & Border Protection

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Virtual Wall/Bulkhead: Preferred Means to Enhance Border Security

The City of Laredo River Vega Project will serve as a bulkhead for security to prevent overflow of the river along the riverfront. A defensible wall that acts as a viewing platform to the Rio Grande, this 12-mile security enhancement will serve as access, flood, and erosion control as well as designed surveillance for the boundaries of the United States. The bulkhead construction will allow for additional uses, such as road, lighting and other related site improvements that will enhance the riverfront and provide security through environmental design.
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