

SECTION 5

Impact of the Stimulus Package (American Reemployment and Recovery Act) on the Lower Rio Grande Valley

by Marc Anderberg

President Obama and Congress put together an economic stimulus package titled the American Reemployment and Recovery Act (ARRA). The total ARRA appropriation will be \$787 billion. Local projects' dollars will come either directly from federal agencies on an earmark basis and through Solicitation of Grant Applications (SGAs). The balance will flow through state agencies. To identify funding options and the criteria used in grant application evaluations, go to the official federal website at <http://www.recovery.gov>.

The WIBs, the CoG and/or the TP Consortium should track these grants and loans to see what kinds of businesses will be forming in the Valley once the recovery is under way. With nothing more than the NAICS code identifier of a business that will be opening or expanding and the dollar amount to be spent, a consulting labor market economist can estimate the staffing pattern, its skill requirements, dimensions of the labor shed and labor availability. Those estimates, in turn, can yield a skills-gap analysis and a list of expected learning outcomes that education and training providers can use to drive responsive curriculum development and enrollment management.

The Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps) website at <https://www.fbo.gov/> will be of particular interest to businesses in the Valley. That site provides information on contracting directly with federal agencies (e.g., Government Services Administration, Department of Homeland Security, etc.). Most federal agencies have been given stimulus dollars for their own green initiatives, such as retrofitting government buildings or upgrading fleet vehicles in the motor pool (e.g., Border Patrol cars), to make government operations more energy efficient. Another useful site is www.sba.gov. The Small Business Administration is tasked with stepping up its loans to women-owned and historically underutilized business (e.g., Hispanic-owned enterprises). Also be advised that the Treasury Department and federal regulators are pushing banks for more faithful adherence to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). The CRA requires financial institutions to reinvest in the communities where the majority of their depositors reside. Applicants who previously were turned down for business loans by review committees operating outside the Valley may now find that the local branch has more latitude in making lending decisions. Industry Development Boards in the Valley may qualify for grants to drive a “renaissance of manufacturing.” The Department of Commerce is using its share of the stimulus dollars to promote broadband business-to-business connectivity as well as energy-efficient “lean manufacturing.”

The State Comptroller is tracking all ARRA funds that flow through the Texas state treasury to local projects either through state agencies for projects enabled by the last legislative session or through competitive state grants. To see how funds flow through Texas state agencies, go to <http://window.state.tx.us/recovery/>. That site allows users to track spending, search for funding opportunities, and estimate the economic impact that projects funded with stimulus dollars will have on their community.

In particular, see:

- <http://window.state.tx.us/recovery/resources/state.php> and
- <http://www.window.state.tx.us/comptrol/expendlist/cashdrill.php>.
- Several self-appointed watchdog groups also track ARRA allocations and expenditures. Many are for-profit consulting firms that charge users to access data that are available for free elsewhere. Those sites typically offer for-fee services to broker deals or write grant applications. A few are objective and taxpayer-oriented (e.g., www.staterecover.org).

Some of the ARRA funds have not yet been obligated and most, to date (August 2009), have not been spent. Therefore, some state agency reports and tracking utilities are incomplete while others are up to date.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDS UNDER AARA

Funds for a Youths' Summer Jobs initiative were the first stimulus dollars to be released by the Department of Labor. By the time this report is filed, those funds will have been obligated to the Workforce Investment Boards. They must be spent by September 1, 2009. (The CEOs of the Cameron County and Lower Rio WIBs should have up-to-date data on the kinds of jobs being filled by youths from the Valley this summer.)

Ray Uhalde, Obama's point-person on Congressional reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, revealed that the President and Secretary of Labor Solis will ask Congress to make summer jobs for youths a permanent program. Such a program was part of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) during Uhalde's prior tenure as head of the Employment and Training Administration. But Summer Youth Jobs virtually disappeared when JTPA was superseded by the Workforce Investment Act.¹ Secretary Solis also is reportedly in favor of expanding year-around programs to provide work readiness and job training of at-risk youths and young adults (up to the age of 24).

Many of the youths eligible for summer programs have either dropped out or are performing poorly in school. A positive work experience and the self-esteem that comes from earning a first paycheck may motivate them to seek out the training they need for career success. Tech Prep can play a role by capitalizing on those positive results. Career and Technology Education teachers and school district administrators should coordinate with Summer Youth Job program managers to meet those enrolled before the program expires to interest them in pursuing a coherent sequence of CATE courses leading to an advanced associate's degree.

If summer youth work programs and increased attention to year-around youth programs are incorporated in the Workforce Investment Act's reauthorization, then Tech Prep professionals will have opportunities to work with employers to place students in work experiences related to their articulated sequences of CATE courses. Such coordination is essential to prevent youth services under WIA from being dismissed as "make-work projects." In the past, anecdotal information about a handful of mismanaged summer projects was used to undercut them when JTPA was superseded by WIA – despite the fact that the mismanaged projects were not representative of the program.

To be effective in motivating labor-force attachment and lifelong learning, summer jobs have to be connected to youths' career aspirations rather than rounding them up off the streets to have them mow soccer fields for a town's Parks and Recreation Department. Private-sector employers have to be engaged to provide youths with meaningful work opportunities. Ideally, youths who perform well in temporary, subsidized summer jobs will be considered for an internship, mentoring and/or part-time after-school work in the fall.

Educators need not start from scratch in devising strategies for integrating classroom instruction with work experiences. The conceptual work was done and partnerships were formed previously under the School-to-Careers initiative. In all likelihood, since Ray Uhalde was a champion of School-to-Work in the '90s, the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act will contain provisions for funding youth programs with very similar features.

Governor Perry declined to accept additional stimulus dollars for increased Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits on the grounds that the strings attached would have required Texas employers to pay additional payroll taxes for coverage of some part-time workers.² However, other parts of the UI stimulus dollars will go through Workforce Investment Boards to help cover the costs of serving:

- dislocated workers (ones who lost their jobs in mass layoffs of 50 or more persons from the same firm)
- Trade-affected workers (who lost jobs either in Manufacturing or Services due to foreign competition)
- Trade-affected firms (which need to upgrade the skills of their incumbent workers to remain globally competitive)
- Trade-affected communities (for economic development initiatives that will create jobs in new high-growth industries to absorb workers who were put out of jobs because of foreign trade).

Labor market targeting is integral to serving dislocated and trade-affected workers. The external forces which eliminated their jobs are most likely eliminating similar occupations in related industries. The skills the dislocated and trade-affected workers currently possess may be transferable only to jobs where employment demand is declining. Rapid reemployment in a declining industry or occupation is only a temporary fix. (Think of it as equivalent in the past of placing workers dislocated by the closure of a Levi-Strauss plant to jobs at a Hagggar plant.) Without attention to the long-term outlook for reemployment target occupations, placements may simply trap participants in a revolving door. Effective case management includes counseling dislocated and trade-affected workers about education and training opportunities to help them upgrade their skills or retool themselves in order to qualify for jobs on a different but more promising career path.³

Tech Prep needs to look past the traditional progression of students straight through a coherent sequences of CATE courses from high school to an advanced associate's degree. Since Tech Prep programs are tied to high-demand occupations, postsecondary administrators should consider recruiting dislocated and trade-affected workers whose current skill sets no longer have much value in the labor market. Recognition of prior learning and

skill assessment⁴ would identify any remediation requirements and facilitate appropriate lateral-entry placements.

EDUCATION STIMULUS DOLLARS

Title I.A of the ARRA provides extra funding to improve instructional delivery to disadvantaged students (e.g., those at-risk of dropping out, those from poverty households, migrant students, etc.). Title I.A funds have already been allocated through the respective states' boards of education largely on a formula bases (e.g., average daily attendance, counts of students qualified for free and reduced lunches, and at-risk factors).

To see how ARRA Title I.A education funds will be distributed by the Texas Education Agency to ISDs in the Valley, find your school's name in the alphabetic listing at: <http://txstimulusfund.com/userfiles/file/Title%20I%20Part%20A%20Amounts.pdf>.

Other ARRA education funds will be allocated on a grant basis for initiatives described below:

1. Upgrading/retrofitting existing school facilities to make them more energy efficient (e.g., rooftop solar to reduce utility expenses). While these measures will not alter what is taught in the classroom, savings realized from more efficient energy use should free local dollars to be spent directly on instructional delivery. Most of the jobs involved in making school facilities greener can be handled by specialty trade and craft workers in the construction industry. Once the equipment is installed, it can serve as a "laboratory" for teaching students about renewable energy through curriculum materials provided by the State Energy Conservation Office (SECO).⁵

There may be opportunities to add a layer of green-skill certification training atop incumbent workers' existing knowledge, skills and abilities. These may include energy audits by construction superintendents or inspectors; knowledge of new green materials and techniques by architects, HVAC technicians and construction company procurement officers; rooftop solar panel installation and interconnection by roofers and electricians. Instructional delivery for adding green layers of skills atop existing KSAs most likely can be done through: add-on modules to existing courses; a capstone course at the end of an existing training or apprenticeship program; continuing education credit courses; or employer-contract training. However, given the mandate to spend these dollars promptly to stimulate a fast recovery, it is unlikely that formal postsecondary programs and articulation with public education can be put in place before the rapidly approaching expenditure deadline.

With the recession, construction permit applications and residential and commercial construction projects are significantly lower than they were two years ago. Current openings are not likely to absorb the pool of unemployed construction trade workers in the Valley. Those in charge of securing program start-up funding and enrollment management will have to rely on long-term forecasts to support just-in-time instructional delivery.

Tech Prep planners are best advised to anticipate follow-on dollars for green building initiatives in the forthcoming federal Fiscal Year 2010-2011 budget. They should begin to

collaborate immediately with instructors in the Construction Trade programs, local LEED-certified architects, municipal/county building inspectors, federal building maintenance and operations contractors,⁶ trade unions and the Association of General Contractors to align any new curriculum module content with emerging skill requirements. Spring term 2010 would be a reasonable start-up date to anticipate increase demand for appropriately reskilled construction trade workers after the recovery is underway.⁷

2. Improving service delivery to scattered students through distance learning and conversions or purchases can make school-bus fleets more energy efficient with fewer emissions. These kinds of grants should be of particular interest to officials in sparsely populated ISDs of northwestern Willacy County and northern Starr and Hidalgo Counties. Note that municipal and county governments also may qualify for grants to upgrade or procure more energy-efficient trucks, buses and vehicles (e.g., police cars). Schools, municipal and county governments may want to collaborate on projects such as conversion of existing diesel vehicles to run on biodiesel. In fact, nonvirgin vegetable oil (e.g., reclaimed from French fryers at fast-food establishments) can be processed into biodiesel.⁸

There already are a number of reclaimed (slop, waste, used) oil operations in the Valley. Demand for reclaimed oil is increasing worldwide (especially in China). Similar operations could reclaim and process used vegetable oil as nonvirgin biodiesel. If slop-oil operators in the Valley expand into nonvirgin biodiesel, there likely will be increased employment demand for chemical technicians and pump/siphon-truck drivers.

With public entities being given incentives to “green” their motor fleets and auto manufacturers being told to improve their CAFE standards,⁹ there may be enough critical mass to warrant adding more advanced courses in hybrid, electric, and/or biodiesel vehicle maintenance and repair to existing CATE, postsecondary technical and Tech Prep automotive programs.

3. Teacher-salary supplements and credential-upgrade grants can increase the number who are subject-matter certified in Math, Science, Engineering and Technology. These grants would be particularly useful to Tech Prep programs in Engineering and Technology fields as well as for laying a better foundation among TP students in academic and applied Math and Science.
4. Changes are under way in the Pell Grant system. The ARRA adds \$15.64 billion to the Pell Grant pool, and eligibility rules have been changed to look at current rather than past earnings. The changes mean out-of-work individuals who once earned high wages can qualify for assistance in training for new careers.

Tech Prep officials may have to make special provisions for lateral entry and individualized education plans based on recognition of prior learning to accommodate a new kind of Pell Grant student coming into postsecondary institutions with prior work experience rather than straight from high school. Career advice and articulation likely will have to be coordinated with WIB case managers rather than with high school counselors.

ENERGY CONSERVATION AND EFFICIENCY BLOCK GRANTS

Most of these funds coming to the Valley will be funneled through city and county governments. They can be used to retrofit and weatherize public buildings. To date, the listing for Valley governments includes: Hidalgo County (\$3,539,500); Brownsville (\$1,659,200); McAllen (\$1,292,000); Edinburg (\$683,100); Harlingen (\$645,000); Mission (\$629,500); and Pharr (\$608,900). To see a full distribution list by city/county name, go to <http://txstimulusfund.com/userfiles/file/Allocation%20of%20Stimulus%20Money.pdf>.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Stimulus funding for infrastructure improvements nationwide will total \$111 billion. Because the President and Congress were eager to get stimulus dollars into the economy to spark a rapid recover, preference will go to spade-ready projects (e.g. bridge, water and wastewater treatment, etc.) that were stalled as state budgets started going into the red when tax receipts started to drop and rainy-day funds were running dry. While ARRA was still being debated in Congress, several cities had publicized their proposed projects to get public input on spending priorities. The US Conference of Mayors provides detailed information on proposed projects. Education and workforce preparation administrators need to keep in close touch with city officials to see which spade-ready projects will be funded. The specific projects that ultimately get funded will determine the shape of employment demand (e.g., heavy construction versus specialty trade contractors). To see the preliminary list of proposed projects, go to <http://www.stimuluswatch.org/>. Users can click on a specific project to get details and to register their opinions about the criticality of any project. For example, the total for proposed projects in McAllen was \$179,305,977.

PROPOSED FOR McALLEN

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion capacity from 6 to 18 million gallons per day to improve quality of treated wastewater and biosolids, eliminate use of hazardous chlorine gas, and incorporate a more energy-efficient process	125	\$40,000,000	Water
Turn Lanes, Signalization, Median, Signage, Delimiters, and Other Traffic Devices to Improve Traffic Flow and Increase Safety at Various Locations	90	\$598,000	Streets/Roads
Reservoir Pipeline	100	\$14,000,000	Water
Lift Station Replacement at 2nd & Jonquil. The project replaces a failing lift station and will improve air quality through treatment and removal of hydrogen sulfide. Construction will take six months to complete in 2009.	10	\$790,000	Water
Upgrade Electrical Breakers to Current Code	1	\$40,000	Energy

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Dove (41st to Bentsen)	40	\$1,400,000	Streets/Roads
4 MGD expansion to N. Water Treatment Pl.	5	\$5,000,000	Water
Terminal Expansion Design	0	\$1,500,000	Airport
Mobile Aircraft Fire Trainer	0	\$800,000	Airport
Conversion of Irrigation Pump Stations from potable water to river water at La Vista Park	4	\$35,000	Energy
Replacing Impact Attenuators on various bridge railings	23	\$252,000	Streets/Roads
13,000 L.F. of 60" Pipeline for New Reservoir	25	\$5,000,000	Water
Conversion of 13 Irrigation Pump Stations from potable water to river water at Hike and Bike Trails	52	\$247,000	Energy
HVAC Balancing	3	\$30,000	Energy
Conversion of Irrigation Pump Stations from potable water to river water at Jackson City School Park	4	\$30,000	Energy
Homeland Security Overlay Patrol Program	30	\$1,628,310	Public Safety
Fire Station #3	15	\$1,500,000	Public Safety
Service Expansion (through 10 pm daily & Sunday 10 am - 7 pm)	24	\$700,000	Transit
3,000 L.F. of 48" Pipeline for new Reservoir	8	\$750,000	Water
Intermodal Transit Terminal Improvements (photo-voltaics to power exterior lighting, fans, misting)	15	\$250,000	Energy
Lighting at 2nd Street - Trenton Rd to Wisconsin Rd	4	\$110,000	Energy
Duct Cleaning and Repair	3	\$30,000	Energy
Re-surface interior streets for Vine Terrace	6	\$60,000	Housing
Upgrade/modify existing bathroom facilities in handicap units to current ADA compliant features	0	\$30,000	Housing
Electronic Informational Displays (6@ \$7,000)	1.47	\$42,000	Transit
De-watering facilities at SW. Water Plant	10	\$1,500,000	Water
3,000 L.F. of 54" Pipeline for N. Water Plant	5	\$1,000,000	Water
6th and Martin Lift Station Replacement	10	\$750,000	Water

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Installation of Street Lighting	0	\$230,000	CDBG
Old Wastewater Plant Lagoon Water Conservation	7	\$125,000	CDBG
Recycling Center Photovoltaic System Installation	10	\$350,000	Energy
Parking Garage Rooftop Farmer's Market (photovoltaic power generation, cool roof)	80	\$250,000	Energy
Lighting at Bicentennial Trail - Nolana to Pecan	4	\$135,000	Energy
Conversion of Irrigation Pump Stations from potable water to river water at Los Encinos - purchase water well south of Sara, run pipeline, install pump	4	\$120,000	Energy
Conversion of Irrigation Pump Stations from potable water to river water at DeLeon Soccer Complex	4	\$25,000	Energy
Roof Improvements Including Rain Gutters	10	\$400,000	Housing
Re-surface interior street for Retama Village	8	\$30,000	Housing
Homeland Security Overtime Program	10	\$375,693	Public Safety
University Circulator Route	10	\$300,000	Transit
Purchase two Vans for Paratransit Service	5	\$145,000	Transit
Purchase two Vans for Paratransit Service	5.08	\$145,000	Transit
Airside Service Road	0	\$1,500,000	Airport
Land Acquisition	0	\$1,500,000	Airport
Quinta Natural Science Indoor/Outdoor Classroom (energy efficient HVAC, photovoltaics, cool roof)	20	\$540,000	Energy
North Police Training/Community Center (Additional funding for photovoltaic installations)	15	\$500,000	Energy
Convention Center Rooftop (photovoltaic installation)	15	\$400,000	Energy
Express Route	9.63	\$275,000	Transit
Purchase and Installation of Bus Shelters	2	\$60,000	Transit
Colbath Avenue Lift Station Replacement	10	\$750,000	Water
Sentri Lane Canopy at International Port of Entry (photovoltaic retro-fit)	10	\$162,000	Energy
ADA Accessibility Improvements for Vine Terrace	6	\$200,000	Housing

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Replace Existing Exterior Doors and Screen Doors	15	\$100,000	Housing
Purchase of Rolling Stock (12 buses)	147	\$4,200,000	Transit
Purchase four Hybrid Buses	70	\$2,000,000	Transit
Purchase five 30-ft Transit Buses Medium Duty	35.88	\$1,025,000	Transit
Parking Lot Improvements for Bus Terminal	14	\$400,000	Transit
Express Route	10	\$275,000	Transit
Office and Common area Furniture for Bus Terminal	1	\$30,000	Transit
Bridge replacements along Bicentennial Ditch and Ditch Regrading	50	\$4,208,000	Streets/Roads
Auburn (Main to 10th)	35	\$1,160,000	Streets/Roads
Development Services Building	20	\$2,000,000	Energy
Convention Center Parking Area Lighting (photovoltaic installation)	15	\$432,000	Energy
Construction of Parking Lot for Bus Terminal	14	\$400,000	Transit
Convention Center Route	9.63	\$275,000	Transit
Bus Terminal Signage (Interior and Exterior)	1.93	\$55,000	Transit
Transit GIS Planner	1	\$40,254	Transit
Office and Common Area Furniture for Bus Terminal	1.05	\$30,000	Transit
Bentsen Road	100	\$13,000,000	Streets/Roads
Martin Avenue widening and RR crossing	20	\$400,400	Streets/Roads
Trail Development of Business 83 - Jackson to Taylor Road	30	\$840,000	CDBG
Solar-Shade Repair	2	\$20,000	Energy
Replace Existing Windows in all Units with Energy Efficient Product	53	\$200,000	Housing
Cesar Chavez Learning Center parking lot re-surface and striping including handicap ramps	4	\$25,000	Housing
Pedestrian Walkway/Canopies	42	\$1,200,660	Transit

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Service Hour Expansion	20.3	\$580,000	Transit
29th (Oxford to Sprague)	35	\$1,102,000	Streets/Roads
New Beginnings Rehabilitation/Replacement (12)	0	\$252,000	CDBG
Northbound Pedestrian International Bridge Canopy (canopy retrofit with photovoltaic system)	10	\$270,000	Energy
Upgrade Fluorescent Fixtures	5	\$150,000	Energy
ADA Accessibility Improvements for Cesar Chavez Learning Center	2	\$7,000	Housing
Pedestrian Walkway/Canopies	42.02	\$1,200,660	Transit
Purchase and Installation of four Solar Powered A/C Shelters	20.3	\$580,000	Transit
Scattered Site New Construction - five Units	0	\$260,000	CDBG
Five Trail restrooms and Trail parking nodes	4	\$250,000	CDBG
City Hall Annex at Pecan Re-roofing (cool roof, photovoltaic system)	15	\$750,000	Energy
Southbound International Port of Entry Canopy (photovoltaic system, cool roof)	15	\$378,000	Energy
Cascade Park Little League Fields	7	\$85,000	Energy
North Police Community Center	40	\$3,500,000	Public Safety
Purchase one Rolling Stock - Implement new Express Route	10.5	\$3,000,000	Transit
Pavement Recycling (46 miles Mill and Overlay and five miles full depth repair)	60	\$11,820,000	Streets/Roads
International Museum of Arts & Sciences (Energy Efficient HVAC, photovoltaic installation)	25	\$1,620,000	Energy
Three Miles of Sidewalk	0	\$400,000	CDBG
Los Encinos Park - Construction of Family Reunion Pavilion	20	\$350,000	CDBG
Uvalde Practice Fields Parking and Shade Structures	7	\$120,000	CDBG
Tax-Office Re-roofing (cool roof, photovoltaic system)	15	\$600,000	Energy
Palmview Community Center - Add Fitness Lifestyles	26	\$325,000	CDBG

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Fitness Room on North Side			
Helping Hand Grants - 25 borrowers	0	\$250,000	CDBG
Retiree Haven Park	0	\$250,000	CDBG
Development Center (cool/green roof with photovoltaic installation)	65	\$2,810,000	Energy
Los Encinos Soccer Fields	7	\$150,000	Energy
Replace Existing Vinyl Tile Flooring	6	\$130,000	Housing
Archer Park Rehabilitate Amphitheater, Landscaping, Bandstand	53	\$900,000	CDBG
Springfest Park - Development Sportsfield Use (fencing, restrooms, irrigation, parking)	13	\$450,000	CDBG
Video Surveillance System	40	\$2,000,000	Public Safety
Replace Interior Doors	7	\$60,000	Housing
Construction of new Community Center for Vine Tr	20	\$1,200,000	Housing
Bicentennial Road	100	\$13,000,000	Streets/Roads
Marketing Campaign	4	\$100,000	Transit
Three Administration Vehicles	1.58	\$45,000	Transit
Three Administration Vehicles	2	\$45,000	Transit
Motorcross Park south of Airport - development for off-road use to attract people to MFE	16	\$150,000	CDBG
Part-time Receptionist	0	\$10,000	Transit
Las Palmas Community Center - Demo Old Adult Education Building and Build New Adult Center and rehab old building	130	\$2,250,000	CDBG

PROPOSED FOR PHARR

Projects Proposed for Pharr from http://www.stimuluswatch.org/project/by_city/Pharr/TX.

The total cost of all the projects submitted by Pharr is \$23,950,000

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Old Fire Station Museum	106	\$1,750,000	CDBG
STEP - "Pedestrian Mobilty & Safety Improvements"	500	\$8,200,000	Streets/Roads

Description	Jobs	Cost	Program Type
Centennial Plaza	12	\$200,000	CDBG
Public Safety Radio System	20	\$9,000,000	Public Safety
STEP - "Railroad Heritage Park"	130	\$2,200,000	Streets/Roads
STEP - "Farm-to-Market" Museum	160	\$2,600,000	Streets/Roads

Brownsville "Spade Ready" proposals

Wier-Dam: This project will hold water from the Rio Grande River that will be used for drinking by the city of Brownsville and will raise the water level of the river that will serve as a deterrent for illegal drug traffic crossing the border.	250	\$58,000,000	Water
Section 108 Loan for street reconstruction	120	\$4,000,000	CDBG
Gymnasium in a low-income area	50	\$3,000,000	CDBG

Proposed projects for Harlingen and Cameron County were not listed at www.stimulus.com. To learn about what has been proposed for Harlingen, contact City Manager Craig Lonon. To see what has been proposed for Cameron County, contact the Cameron County Planning Director (Frank Bejarano) or County Judge Carlos Cascos.¹⁰ The *Brownsville Herald's* beat reporter, Jared Jones, has been tracking proposed projects in Edinburg and Hidalgo County.¹¹ The chief proposal coming from Starr County is for improvements for the Rio Grande City-Camargo Bridge.

WHERE ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE INTERSECT

There are billions of dollars in the stimulus package to promote both renewable energy and infrastructure (which would include improving the electricity grid). But returns on investments of either may prove disappointing unless there is better coordination. T. Boone Pickens, for example, ordered 667 wind turbines from GE but has cancelled plans to install them in the Texas Panhandle.¹² One reason given for the change of plans was the inadequate transmission capabilities from the locations where wind power would be generated to the population centers along and east of IH35 where there is the greatest demand for electricity. When GE finally delivers the turbines, Pickens intends to install them at several smaller wind farms rather than at a single remote location in the Panhandle.

The Valley may be an ideal candidate for securing some of those wind turbines as well as federal dollars for transmission lines and their integration into the grid. An existing wind farm near Sarita in nearby Kenedy County has already demonstrated that average wind speeds across open portions of southeastern Texas are sufficient to sustain efficient power generation. Computer simulations also indicate that wind speeds offshore also can sustain efficient power generation. There are open lands in Willacy and Starr Counties ideally suited for wind farming with sufficient average wind speeds and close enough to dense populations of energy consumers to make transmission cost less of an obstacle than they would be for comparable farms in the

Panhandle. Turbines also could be sited just offshore without interfering with shipping lanes, commercial fishing and shrimping or tourists' line of sight.

Development of wind farming in the Valley would create job opportunities for locals if appropriately trained:

- 1) in the erection phase for heavy/utility construction workers;
- 2) for electrical workers in the connection phase; and
- 3) for wind technicians in the operation and maintenance phase.

COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE AND COMPETITION AMONG ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES

Ethanol has become a controversial topic. Governor Perry, for example, has asked the federal government to waive or reconsider its requirement under its Renewable Fuels Standard that would mandate doubling the amount of grain-based ethanol in the inventory of fuels sold state wide.¹³ With the backing of agricultural groups (e.g., cattlemen and dairymen's associations) and food processors (e.g., grocery manufacturers, Kraft Foods) and retailers (grocery, restaurants), the governor argued that the diversion of grain into ethanol production was driving up the price of livestock feed and grain-based foodstuffs. But with strong support for grain-based ethanol coming from Midwestern farm lobbies, the EPA has not backed away from its Renewable Fuel Standard. Moreover, the ARRA includes stimulus dollars to promote renewable alternatives for transportation fuels including ethanol.

The controversy, however, may give the Valley comparative advantage. Brazilian producers have already demonstrated the feasibility of cellulosic ethanol as a price-competitive alternative to grain-based ethanol. Rather than relying on grains (like corn) diverted from the food supply chain, cellulosic ethanol can be produced from the byproducts or waste from crop and food production. For example, after the sugars are removed from sugar cane, the cellulose-rich fibrous remains can be processed into ethanol. Scientists from Texas A&M University also have demonstrated that it is feasible to produce cellulosic ethanol from the pulp left after the production of fruit juices, jellies and preserves. Because of the heavy concentration of the state's sugarcane, citrus and vegetable growing, the Valley is well-positioned to secure funding to develop a cellulosic ethanol industry. That development, in turn, would drive up employment demand for persons trained as chemical and biochemical process technicians, industrial operations technicians, freight handlers (liquid and bulk dry goods), and tank truck drivers.

TRANSPORTATION

The biggest chunk of infrastructure improvement dollars will come from the federal Department of Transportation through the Texas Department of Transportation. TxDOT projects can be tracked at <http://www.texaswatchdog.org/2009/04/txdot-stimulus-database-search/> by plugging in the county name or at the interactive map at <http://www.texaswatchdog.org/WEB/INDEX.HTML>

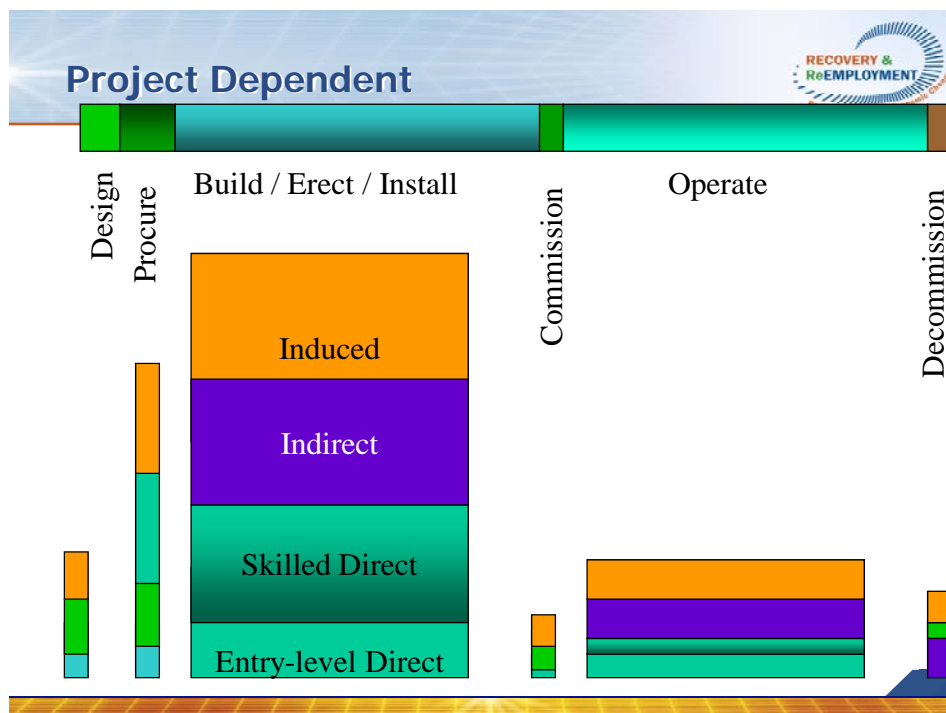
While most of the proposals are small-scale improvements to existing roadways and crossings, there are three big proposals for the Valley:

- Proposed development of an Interstate 69 (I69) would link the Valley to Houston via Corpus Christi. The issue being debated is whether to make improvements to Highway 77 as the I69 route or to follow Highway 281.¹⁴
- The Lower Rio Development Council Transit has proposed transit fleet purchases totaling \$384,000.¹⁵
- A proposed tollway would connect the Port of Brownsville to nearby farm-to-market roads.¹⁶

Road construction and improvements will create a spike in demand for heavy equipment operators. Once completed, the projects may alter residential housing and commuting patterns. They also will affect business-site selection. A tollway connecting the Port of Brownsville would encourage economic development of the kinds of businesses currently operating in the Brownsville Navigation District, truck freight, warehousing and logistics. The much longer I69 would have more varied effects in attracting: tourism; retail establishment; light industry; and warehousing and logistics.

PROJECT DEPENDENT JOB CREATION AND DURATION

Determining the impact of stimulus dollars on labor market demand has to be done on a project-by-project basis. Each project results in direct employment of workers in various occupations (most of which will be conventional blue-collar jobs). Some jobs (such as the lead architect or the construction-company procurement officer) may need a layer of green certification atop their existing KSAs. Indeed, each phase of a project while contributing to increased energy efficiency may be more or less green. There also will be indirect employment at each phase as vendors upstream in the supply chain add staff to handle materials ordered and delivered to the worksite. There also will be induced labor demand as both directly employed on a project and those indirectly involved spend some of their paychecks locally on consumer goods and services. The schema below depicts the project dependency of green job creation and the ripple effects.



Other economic stimulus initiatives of interest to the Valley include:

- Funds coming through the Department of the Interior for improving wildlife conservation, wetland preservation and fisheries in national parks, refuges and territorial waters.
- Clean water projects funded either through Community Development Block Grants or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the Texas Department of Environmental Quality and the Texas Water Development Board. The Department of Agriculture also has \$23.6 million in stimulus dollars available for watershed improvements. Those funds may be of interest to farmers and ranchers in the Valley concerned about the impact of commercial and residential drawdowns on stream flow in the Rio Grande and availability of water for irrigation. Funds also may be available from the EPA for brownfield reclamation.¹⁷
- The Army Corps of Engineers has been given an additional \$171.8 million for construction and \$224.4 million for maintenance in Texas.
- Coastal communities vulnerable to tropical storms may be eligible for stimulus dollars available through Federal Emergency Management Administration (Department of Homeland Security) or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Department of Commerce).
- In addition to providing stimulus dollars for conservation and renewable, the Department of Energy will fund upgrades to the electrical grid to improve energy delivery. The Department of Commerce will make \$150 million available for economic development initiatives and \$4.7 billion for broadband research and installation.

- For poverty populations, stimulus dollars for low-income housing projects will come through Housing and Urban Development (and some from Agriculture for rural communities). The Department of Agriculture received additional dollars for nutrition programs in anticipation of increased eligibility for Food Stamps and free school lunches. The Social Security Administration and the Department of Health and Welfare have additional stimulus dollars to extend Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits, Public Health Services and COBRA Insurance.
- The Department of Health and Welfare also has \$2 billion in stimulus dollars to improve healthcare information coordination. In all likelihood, healthcare reform will stall in Congress until a compromise can be reached. One of the areas of bipartisan agreement is healthcare information coordination, which is likely to receive substantial ongoing funding in the regular appropriations for FY2010-2011.

The Valley is in an odd situation *vis-a-vis* access to funding likely to be available for improving healthcare information systems.

- 1) Location quotients at the WIB level indicate that employment concentrations in Healthcare are above average.
- 2) At the county and subcounty level, portions of the Valley are classified as “medically underserved.”
- 3) Location quotients for employment in the Information sector put both WIB areas in the Valley near the very bottom relative to the balance of the state.

This unique combination of attributes suggest that these conclusions:

- A) Medically underserved communities in the Valley may be prime locations for delivery of telemedicine and telehealth. Connecting satellite operations (public health offices in colonias, rural clinics, etc.) to telemed bases in McAllen/Edinburg or Harlingen (or even to more distant providers (e.g., Houston-based ones or Texas Tech’s Rural Family Practice) will require significant investment in broadband connections and digitization of medical charting and record keeping).
- B) The majority of healthcare establishments in the Valley are not likely to have state-of-art electronic health information systems. They probably will be under pressure to install or upgrade their information systems in order to comply with cost-containment provisions stemming from Congressional/Presidential compromise on healthcare reform.
- C) Scenarios A and B above will most likely create employment opportunities in the Information sector across the Valley. Job requirements may require training in computers and telecommunication hardware installation and maintenance, programming, database management, network administration as well as an understanding of medical records and third-party billing.

The Tech Prep consortium can play a key role in positioning both Healthcare and Information firms in the Valley to access related fund flows. Namely, advanced associate’s degree programs in healthcare disciplines (e.g., nursing, medical records) and information technology can cross-fertilize each other. That is, a capstone course for certification in technology or information management could be added to a nursing program. Similarly, a capstone course on healthcare information systems could be added to an information technology program in order to certify graduates as healthcare information support specialists.

Publications

<i>A field Guide to Automated Student and Adult Learner Follow-Up</i>		
with Jay Pfeiffer	U.S. Department of Labor/ETA	1999
<i>Availability, Strengths and Weaknesses in Unemployment Insurance Wage Record Systems</i>		
Editor & consortium lead	U.S. Department of Labor/ALMIS	1999
<i>Becoming an Employer of Choice: Strategies for Recruiting & Retaining Talent in the Coming Skills Shortage</i>	<u>Benefits and Compensation Digest</u>	April 2009
<i>Digital Divide: Bridging the Job Opportunities Gap</i>		
	Texas Workforce Commission	2002
<i>Career Progression: Ladders, Lattices and Transferable Skills</i>		
with Elizabeth Dimmitt	Career Development Resources	1999
<i>Consumer Reporting Systems: Automated Tools to Drive Informed Career Choices</i>		
	U.S. Department of Labor/ETA	2000
<i>Converging Paradigms: Skills as the Common Denominator in the Worlds of Work & Education</i>		
with R.D. Bristow	State Occupational Coordinating Committee	1997
<i>Emerging Occupations: Conceptual and Data Development for Skill Requirements and Projections</i>		
with Pfeiffer & Whitfield	FL Education & Training Placement System	1997
<i>Emerging and Significantly Evolving Occupations in Texas</i>		
with Terry Ramsey	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	1998
<i>Emerging Occupations in Texas Revisited</i>		
with Barbara Miller	Career Development Resources	2001
<i>Getting Down to Business: Practitioner's Guide to Cluster-Based Approach to Regional Economic Development</i>		
	Texas Workforce Commission	2006
<i>Green Collar Workers and Other Mythical Creatures</i>		
	Texas Workforce Commission	2008
<i>Impact of the Emerging Biotechnology Industry on the Texas Economy</i>		
	Texas Workforce Commission	2004
<i>Job Chains: Practical Implications for Workforce Preparation and Economic Development</i>		
	Texas Workforce Commission	2006
<i>Infusing Local Wisdom in Strategic Planning for Workforce and Economic Development</i>		
with Campbell and Lewis	Career Development Resources	1999
<i>Mega Trends: An Environmental Scan of Exogenous Forces Shaping the Texas Economy</i>		
with Froeschle & Duksta		forthcoming
<i>Labor Market Information System of the Future</i>		
with R. Froeschle	U.S. Department of Labor/BLS	2000
<i>Returns on Investments in Child Care Assistance</i>		
	TX Child Care Management System	2002
<i>Roles and Responsibilities in Performance Measurement: Transitioning from JTPA to WIA</i>		
with R. Froeschle	State Occupational Coordinating Committee	1997
<i>Rural Economic Development in Triage</i>		
	SkillsNet Foundation	forthcoming
<i>Shortage of Nurses in Texas: Strategies and Incentives</i>		
	for Governor's Task Force	2003
<i>Shortage of Teachers in Texas: Strategies and Incentives</i>		
	for Governor's Task Force	2004
<i>Student Motivation and Labor Market Reality</i>		
With R. Froeschle	State Occupational Coordinating Committee	1996
<i>Technology Workers in the New Texas Economy</i>		
	Career Development Resources	2004

<i>Using Career Information in an Applied Case Management or Counseling Setting</i> with Froeschle & Dimmitt	Career Development Resources	1998
<i>Using Follow-Up Data in Continuous Program Improvement & Institutional Effectiveness</i>	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	1994

Community –Based Activities

Grant Writing	funding of first shelter for battered women in St. Paul, MN	1976
In-Kind Services	local chapter program effectiveness evaluation for Retired Senior Volunteer Program of Ramsey County, MN	1988
	membership management system, Rotary Club - Corpus Christi	1984
	volunteer and participant database, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Blackhawk County, Iowa	1984
	Community needs assessment, United Way – Coastal Bend	1989
	Curriculum development, enrollment management, class Scheduling and student skill certification system for adult evening/weekend and continuing education classes for Tuloso-Midway and Calallen ISD collaboration	1987
Program Development	Life skills and work readiness training for at-risk and and special needs populations (e.g., juvenile delinquents and troubled youths, displaced homemakers, and returning veterans with combat-related injuries and transition adjustment needs)	current

ENDNOTES

¹ Ray Uhalde gave the keynote speech at the Department of Labor's Regional Reemployment and Recovery plenary workshops in Dallas in May and in Atlanta in June 2009.

² <http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/front/6307951.html>.

³ See M. Anderberg, *Transferable Skills: A SWOT Analysis* (forthcoming from the SkillsNET® Foundation in August 2009).

⁴ Recognition of prior learning (RPL) provides credit for tacit knowledge and work experience. With RPL, dislocated and trade-affected workers (and returning veterans) can be given remediation if needed to make lateral entry into a postsecondary training program. RPL (much like CLEP testing) facilitates development of an efficient learning plan that does not require students to take courses that duplicate what they already know and can do. As candidates for lateral entry, dislocated and trade-affected adults typically face higher opportunity costs (such as foregone earnings and financial obligations) than do students entering postsecondary institutions directly from high school.

⁵ http://www.seco.cpa.state.tx.us/re_solarschools.htm.

⁶ The General Services Administration (GSA) also is receiving stimulus dollars under the ARRA to improve the energy efficiency of federal buildings and to upgrade the federal vehicle fleet (e.g., Border Patrol vehicles).

⁷ The widely used term "green job" is ambiguous. In the rush to get stimulus dollars into local hands, little was done to define the term or estimate employment demand for them once the stimulus dollars expire. See M. Anderberg, *Green Collar Workers and Other Mythical Creatures* (Austin, Labor Market and Career Information Resources, 2008). SkillsNET® will be joining forces with consortia across the United States to gather information from subject matter experts. That research will provide an operational definition of "green jobs" or "green layers" of knowledge, skills and abilities that can be added atop existing occupations. The data will become part of the O*NET system by 2011. Until then, education and training providers faced with demands from local employers to train green workers can engage SkillNET® separately to do an objective and thorough job profiling. Profiling can identify the knowledge, skills and abilities that employers believe should be the learning outcomes of any specific green training module or program.

⁸ Some municipalities have made arrangements with McDonald's restaurants in their area to salvage their used vegetable oil and process it into biodiesel to fuel their public works trucks and city buses.

⁹ The Obama Administration extracted concessions from the automobile industry as a condition for providing emergency loans to Chrysler and General Motors. Among the concessions was an increase in the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFÉ) of cars they produce. It is likely that after emerging from bankruptcy (especially with money infused by Fiat), those two firms (followed by Ford) will produce more hybrid, electric and hydrogen fuel cell cars. The Big Three American auto manufacturers already have developed alternative fuel technology for other markets (Brazil, Eastern Europe, India and China). Even if the American manufacturers do not move swiftly to expand their sales of more energy-efficient cars, competitors in Europe (Renault-Nissan and Fiat) and Asia (India's Tata Motors and Chery of China) are already upgrading the body structures of their inexpensive fuel-efficient cars. Redesigns are intended to make their cars meet American crash-test standards in anticipation of penetrating the market here. Whether new cars on the market are American-made or foreign, there will be an increased demand for auto mechanics certified to work on hybrids, electric and hydrogen fuel cell cars as well as heavier vehicles that run on biodiesel.

¹⁰ For Harlingen stimulus news see <http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/3079901>.

¹¹ Go to <http://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/energy-99014-building-county.html>.

¹² <http://www.reuters.com/article/ousiv/idUSTRE5675L720090708>.

¹³ <http://governor.state.tx.us/news/press-release/5270/>.

¹⁴ <http://www.caller.com/news/2009/feb/22/officials-dont-lose-sight-of-281/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.texaswatchdog.org/2009/04/txdot-stimulus-database-search/?appSession=78532500381805>.

¹⁶ See http://www.valleycentral.com/news/news_story.aspx?id=270589. For more details from Eduardo Campirano, director and CEO of the Port of Brownsville at <http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/2940329>.

¹⁷ For example, cleaning up and removing toxic contamination from old oil-field and industrial sites so that they can be used again safely for industry and commerce that will expand the tax base.