



County Commissioners' Court unanimously endorses Universal Freight Shuttle Concept

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EDINBURG — The Hidalgo County Commissioners' Court unanimously approved a resolution this week in support of a "universal freight shuttle" along U.S. Hwy 281.

The freight shuttle concept would complement recently-announced improvements to U.S. Highway 281 that will help bring it up to interstate standards. The freight shuttle is a linear motion, automated track with single container transporters that could get goods quickly and safely from Point A to Point B using only renewable energy sources and with zero-emissions (See Diagram Below). This concept, developed over the past eight years by the Texas Transportation Institute, could be used within the footprint of existing highways, including U.S. Highway 281.

"Hidalgo County is working with the communities along U.S. Highway 281 to make sure we are ready to be the first to make the most of this new technology," said Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas III.

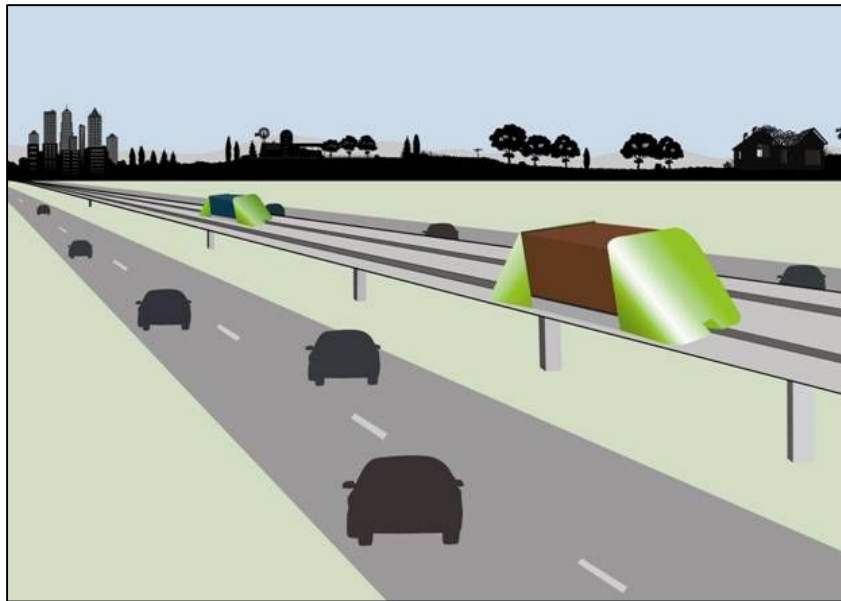
"We know for a fact that the freight shuttle would be a good fit here since there are already nine international bridges in place or under construction that feed more than 1,300 heavy trucks daily into the U.S. Highway 281 NAFTA corridor. Even without being an interstate, U.S. Highway 281 is the third busiest road in the state for truck traffic and it is expected to double by 2030. Hidalgo County is also home to more than 250 *maquiladoras* and U.S. manufacturing clusters centered around Reynosa, Mexico. If Texas wants to see maximum results from a freight shuttle, they need to locate it here."

The universal freight shuttle meets many modern-day trucking challenges head-on. A freight shuttle could:

- Reduce congestion on roads
- Increase productivity — this system is independent of weather conditions, human conditions and trucking industry restrictions
- Make up for driver shortages in the trucking industry, ensuring that goods get where they need to go on time
- Reduce energy and fuel consumption
- Improve air quality
- Make highways safer and reduce road maintenance costs

“We’ve also considered the possibilities that the freight shuttle could serve us in case of an evacuation or could bring in much-needed products after a disaster,” Judge Salinas said.

Would there be security on the freight shuttle? Yes. The concept being developed includes a high tech security terminal facility that would allow for goods to be inspected while the freight is in motion.



The diagram illustrates what the freight shuttle could look like: an elevated, unmanned track with single load transporters going in both directions. At destination, the transporters would enter cargo bays terminals at which point the trailers would simply hook up with a traditional big rig to get a short distance to a particular store.

“This concept is environmentally responsible and it would increase employment opportunities in South Texas. This would make Hidalgo County, the Rio South Texas region and the U.S. Highway 281 corridor a more desirable place for business, namely manufacturing and distribution facilities,” Judge Salinas said. “We would welcome an innovative project like this and plan to work hard to make sure U.S. Highway 281 is considered as a route for the project.”

More information, including the resolution passed on March 17, 2009, and a power point presentation on the Universal Freight Shuttle is located online at www.co.hidalgo.tx.us.

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