

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

DATE: November 8, 2019
TO: Mayor and Councilmembers
FROM: Dawn Prince, Deputy City Manager
Cc: Jerene Watson, City Manager; Leadership Team
SUBJECT: El Paso Port of Entry Tour

The report is to provide an update to all City Council since not everyone was able to attend the El Paso Port of Entry Tour on October 30.

DISCUSSION:

Based on previous recommendations from GSA to visit select ports to gain lessons learned as we prepare for the creation of our own Commercial Port of Entry, Councilmember Grijalva, Damian, Luis Ramirez, Corinne and I toured the Port of Entry in El Paso on October 30. Although there are four border crossings in the area, the tour was predominantly held in the International Bridges department located at the Puente International Lerdo Stanton Bridge.

Upon arrival, we were welcomed by a large cross functional/ cross organizational team including the City Manager and his staff, The International Bridges Department, a group of economists, several police department employees and CBP. During the detailed presentation, we were given information about their crossings and how different factors throughout history have affected those crossings. In 2018, northbound only traffic saw more than 800,000 trucks, 12 million cars and 7 million pedestrians. Eighty one billion dollars (\$81 Billion) in trade is attributed to shipping traffic through El Paso ports.

In addition to this history and data, we also learned the following:

- In an effort to evaluate all aspects of the border crossing processes for streamlining and to identify possible improvements, El Paso embarked on a Lean 6 sigma process, including utilizing economists for projection data and the creation of their Bridges Steering committee. This has helped them to work through issues in a more streamlined and effective manner.
- El Paso has used lobbyists and different funding programs such as the 559 program to help them secure funding for some of their infrastructure and other projects.

- One of the surprising things we learned is that El Paso uses some of this 559 program funding to cover the overtime costs for CBP officers to staff additional travel lanes. This has helped to keep the border crossing wait times down during peak hours by having additional lanes open.
- To tackle some challenging traffic issues, El Paso utilized university students to redesign one of their more dangerous pedestrian crossing areas.
- El Paso also created and implemented a survey which is intended to help them understand who is traveling, for what purpose, what types of items are being purchased and how much money is being spent.

In addition to visiting the port and learning about port operations, we also had the opportunity to speak with their Economic Development staff to hear about and learn from their successes and struggles. Common areas heard here that are in line with what we are hearing in general is the need to provide quality of life and experiences to attract visitors and those who would relocate. There is much growth happening in the Economic Development arena in El Paso. They highlighted the following best practices as things that helped their growth: City investment into infrastructure, providing incentives for difficult to promote areas (such as downtown areas), assessing area strengths and capitalizing on those, branding the area as a destination, increasing access (airport, rail).

RECOMMENDATION / CONCLUSION:

Although the Ports in El Paso and the port we are looking to create are very different in scale and scope, from the lessons learned perspective, this was a valuable tour. Two additional port tours (San Luis/ Calexico and San Ysidro) are being organized to further help us to hone in on our path forward to the creation our new port.