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**Pharr Bridge poised for continued growth**

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By

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If all goes as planned, the Pharr International Bridge in South Texas will have a companion bridge on which to carry produce into the United States by the end of 2023.

“We are expecting to break ground by the summer of 2022,” said Bridge Director Luis Bazán, who is employed by the City of Pharr. “It’s a 14-month construction project so that would bring us to late in 2023.”

Bazán said the joint Mexico/U.S. project has been in the discussion phase since December of 2019 with significant progress made since December of 2020. He said it is basically a 50/50 project with simultaneous construction beginning on both sides, figuratively and literally meeting in the middle.

“We are going to add four more lanes of traffic,” he said, which will handle future trade growth between the two countries.

Trade between the United States and Mexico has been steadily growing for many years and a significant portion of that growth crosses at Pharr. Bazán revealed that about one-third of all agricultural imports from Mexico come through Pharr. “Last year, we saw a big increase, averaging about 17,000 truckloads per month over our bridge,” he said, noting that the volume is in the same ballpark this year.

In October of this year, he reported that more than 64,000 commercial trucks of all commodities used the bridge to go south into Mexico while northbound traffic topped 55,000 commercial trucks. He said the southbound traffic was dominated by oil and gas trucks, while agriculture is among the larger sectors for northbound movement.

While the building of a companion bridge is a huge project that will greatly enhance capacity, Bazán said Pharr has an ongoing list of projects that continually improve and speed up the process. Working through the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) Donations Acceptance Program (DAP), which is a private/public collaborative approach, the City of Pharr has secured partial federal funding to add lanes, increase docking capacity and improve the scope and speed of the service. “We have completed the DAP 15 projects (approved in 2015) and are now working with the GSA (federal General Services Administration) on DAP 16 projects (approved in 2016),” he said.

Bazán said the goal of all these projects is to facilitate trade between the two counties and make crossing the board an easier and quicker experiences. He said this is, of course, most important for agricultural shipments, which have a perishability that puts speed of crossing at a premium. Besides actual infrastructure work, the Pharr official said better border crossing protocols have also been established to speed the process. For example, a relatively new plan allows empty trucks to cross

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over the bridge in a special lane with limited inspection. That service reduces the inspection wait time for all trucks.

Bazán reiterated that the ultimate goal is to make the process easier as he has no doubt that trade between the two countries will continue to increase, and it is his job to put Pharr at the epicenter of that trend. He noted that the Pharr community has greatly benefitted by the bridge as the city is in a boom period with increased construction and a growing economy very evident to the naked eye.

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