



**Office of the Secretary of State
Border Commerce Coordinator Report 2023**

**Jane Nelson
Secretary of State**

Introduction

In January 2023, Governor Greg Abbott appointed Jane Nelson as Secretary of State and designated Secretary Nelson as Border Commerce Coordinator (BCC) pursuant to Section 772.010 of the Texas Government Code.

The BCC's role is to facilitate communication and coordination of border initiatives among state agencies, local officials, and the federal governments of the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Additionally, the Secretary of State serves as the Chief International Protocol Officer for the State of Texas and acts as the Governor's Chief Liaison to Mexico and the Border Region of Texas, working closely with Mexican officials and other stakeholders to promote cross-border cooperation and collaboration.

This report covers the activities of Secretary Nelson as Border Commerce Coordinator in 2023.

I. Overview of Border Commerce Coordinator's Role and Responsibilities

Section 772.010 of the Texas Government Code outlines the duties and responsibilities of the State's Border Commerce Coordinator.

Pursuant to Section 772.010(a), the Border Commerce Coordinator is tasked with, among other duties: examining trade issues between the United States, Mexico, and Canada; acting as an ombudsman for government agencies within the Texas and Mexico border region by improving communication and cooperation between federal, state, and local governments; working with federal officials to resolve transportation issues involving infrastructure, including roads and bridges, to allow for the efficient movement of goods and people across the Texas-Mexico border; and working to identify problems associated with trade and transportation infrastructure and develop recommendations for addressing those problems.

Section 772.010(c) reflects that the BCC will coordinate with other state agencies, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, other "appropriate community organizations" along the Texas-Mexico border, and "comparable entities in Mexican states" along the Texas-Mexico border to "address the unique planning and capacity needs of those areas." Under this provision, "the coordinator shall assist those governments, organizations, and entities to identify and develop initiatives to address those needs."

Section 772.010(d) directs the BCC to work with: (1) "private industry and appropriate entities of Texas and the United States to require that low-sulfur fuel be sold along highways in Texas carrying increased traffic related to activities under the North American Free Trade Agreement"; and (2) "representatives of the government of Mexico and the governments of Mexican states bordering Texas to increase the use of low-sulfur fuel." In addition, Section 772.010(e) provides for the creation of the "Texas Good Neighbor Committee," consisting of the mayors of "every municipality located in this state along the border between Texas and Mexico that has an adjoining sister city in Mexico." The Good Neighbor Committee is tasked with advising the BCC

on “key trade, security, and transportation-related issues important to the municipalities appointed to the task force”; meeting with mayors of Mexican cities to identify problems and recommend solutions; seeking assistance and input from private-sector stakeholders; and providing recommendations to the BCC in carrying out the BCC’s statutory duties.

This report is being submitted pursuant to Section 772.010(c) of the Texas Government Code, which provides that before January 1 of each year, the BCC “shall submit to the presiding officer of each house of the legislature a report of the coordinator’s activities under this subsection during the preceding year.”

II. Communications with Mexican Officials and Others Relating to Texas-Mexico Trade

In 2023, the Border Commerce Coordinator and representatives of the Secretary of State’s office frequently interacted with Mexican government officials and other border affairs stakeholders. These efforts have been instrumental in maintaining a strong relationship between Texas and Mexico, which will help foster economic development, promote robust commerce, and enhance cross-border infrastructure activities.

Secretary Nelson visited various border cities and held meetings with economic development leaders from both sides of the border. Through these interactions, Secretary Nelson collaborated with government officials from the four Mexican border states to promote economic development, cross-border trade, and infrastructure developments.

Chihuahua Governor Maria Eugenia Campos attended Governor Abbott’s inauguration ceremony in January. After the ceremony, Secretary Nelson hosted a lunch to welcome Mexican dignitaries, followed by a consular reception at the Capitol with Texas-based diplomats. In March 2023, Secretary Nelson met with Nuevo León Governor Samuel Garcia Sepulveda to reiterate their respective commitments to improving cross-border infrastructure between Texas and Nuevo León. The discussion focused on enhancing the highway systems that connect both states and developing the railroad infrastructure to include additional logistics hubs and warehouses. A week later, Secretary Nelson met with Monterrey Mayor Luis Donaldo Colosio regarding the development of academic programs to enhance workforce integration in the Texas-Mexico border region.

Secretary Nelson hosted a delegation from the State of Jalisco in May. The delegation included Jalisco’s Minister of Innovation, Science, and Technology, the president of the workers’ association, and other public and private sector stakeholders. This meeting was significant in fostering stronger ties between the two states and served as a platform for exchanging ideas and perspectives on issues of mutual interest. Assistant Secretary of State for Mexican and Border Affairs Carlos Ealy later attended the Jalisco Economic Council Meeting in Austin.

In June, Secretary Nelson delivered the keynote address at the Port of Eagle Pass Trade Summit, highlighting the current and future growth of international trade through the Port of Eagle Pass. There, Secretary Nelson and Assistant Secretary Ealy also met with Coahuila Governor-Elect

Manolo Jimenez Salinas, who expressed his interest in furthering economic relations and cooperation with Texas. Secretary Nelson and Governor-Elect Jimenez Salinas received a presentation about the Puerto Verde Global Trade Bridge, a new international bridge project that will be built in Piedras Negras, Coahuila and Eagle Pass.

In October, Assistant Secretary Ealy attended an introductory meeting between Governor Abbott and Coahuila Governor-Elect Jimenez Salinas. The conversations focused on each side's priorities and opportunities for future collaboration between the states. Later that month, Assistant Secretary Ealy participated in the SMU Mission Foods Texas-Mexico Center 7th Annual Integration Symposium, where he visited with Esteban Moctezuma (Mexican Ambassador to the United States) and Francisco de la Torre (Mexican Consul General in Dallas).

Assistant Secretary Ealy met with Consul General Mauricio Ibarra (El Paso) and Consul General Pablo Marentes (Austin) on various occasions throughout the year. These meetings included discussions about strengthening the economic and cultural relationships between Texas and Mexico. Assistant Secretary Ealy also maintained ongoing communications with Mexican federal government representatives and government officials from all four border states and other Mexican states, such as Sinaloa and Jalisco, who expressed a strong interest in conducting business within Texas.

The Border Commerce Coordinator and staff look forward to collaborating with Mexican officials in 2024 to continue efforts to enhance the efficiency and productivity of Texas-Mexico trade.

III. Border Trade Advisory Committee

The Border Trade Advisory Committee (BTAC) was created in 2001 to develop strategies, address critical border trade/transportation challenges, and make recommendations to the Texas Transportation Commission and the Governor. The Border Commerce Coordinator serves as BTAC's presiding officer. BTAC members are recognized leaders of the Texas border region, including mayors of border cities, representatives of metropolitan planning organizations in border areas, directors of border crossings, and representatives of the private sector and cross-border commerce-related trade associations.

In 2023, Secretary Nelson convened BTAC meetings on February 1, April 20, August 22, and November 8. The Committee continued its work to implement the recommendations of the Border Transportation Master Plan (BTMP), which was issued in 2021 through a joint effort of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and BTAC to address the importance of the border region to the Texas economy and provide recommendations on policies, programs, and projects to address infrastructure challenges. These implementation activities included work on infrastructure projects, connectivity studies, and other efforts to advance the BTMP's recommendations related to transportation infrastructure in the Texas-Mexico border region.

Additionally, BTAC members were briefed on the study required by House Bill 4422 (88th Regular Session). The HB 4422 study is a collaborative effort between TxDOT, the Department of Public

Safety, the Texas Military Department, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, local law enforcement agencies near the Texas-Mexico border, and other border stakeholders. The study will identify ways to strengthen border security initiatives, implement public safety measures, and enhance technological and transportation infrastructure near the Texas-Mexico border. The bill requires TxDOT to submit a report on the study's findings to the Texas Legislature by December 1, 2024.

Representatives from the Mexican states along the Texas-Mexico border attended BTAC meetings in 2023 and participated in its discussions. The representatives included Claudia Escudero (Chihuahua), Marco Gonzalez (Nuevo León), Morris Libson (Coahuila), and Ninfa Cantu and Sergio Guajardo (Tamaulipas). In addition, Consul General Pablo Marentes (Austin), Consul General Froylan Yescas (McAllen), and Deputy Consul General Martin Alcalá (Laredo) attended BTAC meetings on behalf of the Mexican federal government.

In 2024, BTAC will maintain its engagement with the Mexican federal government and the four Mexican states along the Texas-Mexico border. BTAC will continue to monitor the implementation of the BTMP and the development of the HB 4422 study and the Connecting Texas 2050 Plan. The next BTAC meeting is scheduled for February 20, 2024 in El Paso.

IV. Communications with Canadian Officials and Others Related to Texas-Canada Trade

Texas and Canada have a strong history of collaboration and binational trade. Canada is currently the second-largest foreign export partner for Texas, after Mexico.

To that end, Secretary Nelson participated in a welcome event for Susan Harper (Canadian Consul General in Dallas) to further develop and strengthen ties with Canada. Consul Harper attended BTAC meetings this year, as did Sandra Shaddick (Canadian Consul General in Northern Mexico). Both Canadian consuls provided valuable insight during the meetings and helped establish connections between important binational stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

The Border Commerce Coordinator looks forward to further advancing the Texas-Canada relationship in 2024 through events, exchanges, and travel.

V. The North American Development Bank

The North American Development Bank (NADBank) is a binational financial institution established by the United States and Mexico governments to provide financing to support the development and implementation of infrastructure projects. NADBank also provides technical and other assistance for projects and actions that preserve, protect, or enhance the environment in order to advance the well-being of the people of the United States and Mexico. Section 772.010(a)(6) of the Texas Government Code charges the Border Commerce Coordinator with working to "increase funding for the North American Development Bank to assist in the financing of water and wastewater facilities."

Assistant Secretary Ealy met with NADBank Managing Director Calixto Mateos-Hanel in May at NADBank's San Antonio headquarters to explore opportunities for cooperation and improved communication. In August, Assistant Secretary Ealy attended the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Texas Association of Business and five Mexican business organizations at the NADBank headquarters. The agreement established a shared spirit of collaboration by uniting advocacy efforts and exchanging best practices to strengthen supply chains, maximize nearshoring, and foster economic opportunities across both nations.

VI. Continued Work with Federal, State, and Local Officials and Stakeholders

The Border Commerce Coordinator maintained communication with the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), which applies boundary and water treaties between the United States and Mexico. Secretary Nelson met with IBWC Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner to receive an update about the ongoing water scarcity situation and to discuss the addition of a new Minute to the 1944 Water Treaty. Subsequently, Assistant Secretary Ealy attended over ten Rio Grande Minute negotiation meetings between the United States and Mexico. Assistant Secretary Ealy also met with several officials in Chihuahua, including the Executive Director of the state's Central Water and Sanitation Board and a representative of Governor Campos, to discuss water deliveries. In addition, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the State of Tamaulipas signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to ensure improved predictability of water deliveries.

Throughout the year, Assistant Secretary Ealy communicated regularly with stakeholders and elected officials from the Texas-Mexico border region. He met with Border Trade Advisory Committee members on multiple occasions, spoke at a Texas Border Coalition event, and testified in front of the House International Relations & Economic Development Committee. Secretary Nelson also tasked Assistant Secretary Ealy with participating in the Joint Executive Steering Committee for Connecting Texas 2050.

With respect to federal and state officials, Congresswoman Monica De La Cruz attended an event in connection with BTAC's August 2023 meeting in McAllen. In addition, Texas House Transportation Committee Chairman Terry Canales attended the BTAC meeting in McAllen, where he updated BTAC members on transportation developments from the recent legislative session and emphasized the importance of BTAC's work.

In addition to the BTAC efforts and other functions described in this report, the Border Commerce Coordinator looks forward to continuing to work with public officials and other stakeholders on border issues, consistent with Section 772.010 of the Texas Government Code. The BCC also will continue engaging with mayors and other local officials to address trade, security, and transportation-related issues impacting the Texas-Mexico border to strengthen commercial relations and support economic growth.