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Suggested outline:

Cantú, Runnels join RMA Board of Directors      Photograph by David A. Díaz

McAllen banker Alonzo Cantú, featured left, and businessman Forrest Runnels, also of McAllen, on Wednesday, November 10, were sworn in by Sen. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, as the newest members of the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority Board of Directors during the RMA's work session in Weslaco. Cantú was appointed on Tuesday, November 2, by Hidalgo County Judge René A. Ramírez, who is featured in the background, while Runnels was appointed, also on November 2, by Hidalgo County Precinct 4 Commissioner Óscar Garza at the request of incoming Precinct 4 Commissioner Joseph Palacios. Both appointments received unanimous approval of the county commissioners court. The seven-member governing board for the RMA is charged with many responsibilities that will affect the economic and transportation development of Hidalgo County, including planning and financing toll roads and other major highway improvements for the region. See related story.

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## **Alonzo Cantú among new leaders hoping to drive transportation goals of Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority**

By **DAVID A. DÍAZ**

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McAllen construction magnate Alonzo Cantú reacted with humility and surprise when a reporter, noting the significance of the economic development leader's appointment to the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority Board of Directors, portrayed the multi-millionaire banker, Democratic Party fundraiser, and philanthropist as being "renowned (famous) throughout the state and in parts of the country."

"I didn't know that," Cantú laughed midway through that observation, prompting another reporter participating in the interview to emphatically add, "Well, I agree. I agree."

For the many public officials who supported Cantú's recent selection to the RMA leadership team, it is precisely his far-reaching reputation as a mover-and-shaker in politics and business that helped earn him a coveted spot on this crucial transportation public entity.

"I think having roads and infrastructure are certainly important to the future growth of the Valley," Cantú reflected. "So, I think it is important that we do that, and do it right. There are people on the (RMA) board who will help out the county."

Along with Cantú, two other McAllen leaders – businessman Forrest Runnels and R. David Guerra, Vice President and Director of International Bancshares Corporation, are the latest appointees to the RMA Board of Directors. Cantú and Runnels were sworn into office during the RMA's board meeting on Wednesday, November 10. Guerra was sworn into office during the RMA's meeting on Wednesday, October 27.

They join four accomplished veterans on the RMA Board of Directors who bring equally impressive credentials to the table.

### **"Alonzo, Forrest and David bring tremendous credentials"**

Dennis Burluson of Mission, a financial advisor, serves as chairman of the RMA Board of Directors. He is an appointee of Gov. Rick Perry.

Michael G. Cano of Pharr is an attorney with Linbarger, Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP in Edinburg.

Ricardo Pérez is Palmview branch president for Rio Bank.

Realtor Joe Olivarez hails from Weslaco.

"Alonzo, Forrest and David bring tremendous credentials, integrity and vision to one of the most important projects that will affect all Hidalgo County residents," said Cano. "For all of us, it is both very challenging and very gratifying to be part of history in the making. We encourage all Hidalgo County residents to provide their ideas, concerns, and hopes to us at any time."

According to its website ([www.lrgvdc.org/RMA](http://www.lrgvdc.org/RMA)), the Hidalgo County RMA is an independent governmental entity created by the Texas Transportation Commission and the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court on November 17, 2005 to accelerate needed transportation projects in Hidalgo County.

But for much of the public, the RMA is best known for trying to create a landmark highway loop around Hidalgo County which would be designed to handle heavy commercial truck traffic going through the region between Mexico – the state's largest trading partner – and the major cities in Texas and beyond.

That envisioned transportation system, which would eventually be similar to the famous Loop 410 that serves the San Antonio metropolitan region, is expected to take more than a decade, and hundreds of millions of dollars, before it becomes reality.

### **State transportation funding no longer a given**

Sen. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, who administered the oath of office to Cantú and Runnels, underscored the vital importance of the RMA's mission to improve the increasingly congested major highways and roadways in Hidalgo County.

Previewing the upcoming five-month regular session of the Texas Legislature, which begins in early January, Hinojosa warned that a projected state budget shortfall – estimated between \$18 billion and \$25 billion – means state funds may be in short supply for the long list of transportation needs throughout Texas.

"I think next session will be a very challenging session in lieu of the projected deficit in our state budget," Hinojosa told the full board. "We are very cognizant that transportation is very key, especially here in the Valley, since we are one of the fastest-growing areas in the country. We will continue to work with you locally, try to find ways to find finances and sources of revenue to continue our economic growth that will lead to more jobs, expansion of our economy, and a better quality of life."

Cantú, an American success story who believes hard work always achieves noble goals, in early November accepted an offer from then-Hidalgo County Judge René A. Ramírez to serve on the RMA's Board of Directors.

But even for a man with his capacity to understand a broad range of topics, Cantú acknowledged the daunting workload that faces him in this, his latest leadership role.

Environmental studies, pass-through financing, transportation reinvestment zones, the schematics for proposed roadway construction, and of course – the whirlwind of local, state and federal policies and politics required to lead to the construction of the Hidalgo County Loop – have now been added to Cantú's already full-plate of his many other private and charitable responsibilities.

### **Up for the challenge**

True-to-form, he readily accepts this imposing new public responsibility, and shoots straight about his first RMA session.

"(I have been) talking to some of the (RMA board) members, and with (Mario Jorge, P.E., district engineer for the Pharr District of the Texas Department of Transportation) – I met with them earlier – and by reading some of the materials they have given me," he described how he began getting up-to-speed for his first RMA board session.

"It is pretty comprehensive and a lot of work," Cantú said. "It is confusing."

Hidalgo County Judge Ramón García, himself a former member of the RMA Board of Directors, knows what is about to face his former colleagues and new board members.

Addressing Cantú and Runnels, the county judge welcomed them to their new roles.

"I am very happy to see them wanting to be involved," said García. "I know they bring their experiences, background, and knowledge of the financial matters to the table, to this regional mobility authority. That, frankly, makes us at the county commissioners court – at least speaking for myself – feel more comfortable about what's going on, what's being done, and what is being requested of the county."

Touching on the obvious, García couldn't resist reminding Cantú and the rest of the RMA board members that the scrutiny and hopes of Hidalgo County are riding on what is accomplished by this public body.

"I told Alonzo as we walked in, 'Welcome to the public sector,'" García, an attorney, counseled.

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