

President Calderón officially opens Donna-Rio Bravo bridge

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Bill Rovira

RIO BRAVO, Mexico, Dec. 15 - Under heavy security, Mexican President, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa presided over the opening ceremonies of the Donna-Rio Bravo international bridge on Tuesday.

The inauguration was the culmination of a project that began back in the years of the Jimmy Carter administration that had been delayed over the years by economics, lost paperwork and a lack of priority given to it by previous governments on either side of the border.

“It is very gratifying for me to see this project through to its completion,” said the Mexican president, adding that it had been the final vision of Tamaulipas Gov. Eugenio Hernandez Flores, to see the Donna-Rio Bravo bridge open and running before the end of his term. Hernandez will turn the state government over to his successor in January.

Calderón cited a strong and growing Mexican economy, highlighting the heavy infrastructural investment his administration has made. He said this would assure that his country and the state of Tamaulipas would continue to grow and prosper despite the challenging security issues that came to a head during 2010.

“Mexico has surpassed Japan in providing 13 percent of its imports. That is up from 10 percent just a few years ago. For that to continue it is vital to continue to invest strongly in bolder infrastructure,” Calderón said, referencing the Donna-Rio Bravo Bridge and the Anzalduas Bridge that opened up in January of this year.

The President spoke of the creation of almost one million “real” jobs with benefits during 2010 and boasted as to having built or modernized more miles of road during his administration than in the entire history of the country.

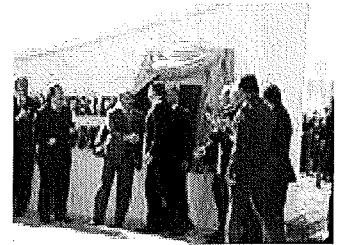
Calderón assured the crowd of continued support for the security of the area:

“I want to reassure our friends in Rio Bravo and in all of Tamaulipas, that we have been present and will continue to be present with federal forces to support the people of Tamaulipas and to attack organized crime,” said the President, emphatically underscoring his desire to protect those who live and invest in Mexico.

U.S. Rep. Rubén Hinojosa spoke not only at the inauguration but also a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new administration building on the Donna side of the Bridge. The Mercedes Democrat showed obvious emotion in witnessing the culmination of a project that had been years on the drawing board.

“In 1997 the leaders of the City of Donna came to me asking for my support for this project that had been languishing for 20 years,” said Hinojosa, referencing the drawn out and often shuffled nature of the bridge project, which had been signed off on by President Jimmy Carter and misplaced.

“I saw the potential this project had to become an engine of growth for the Mid-Valley region and the city of Rio



Mexico President Felipe Calderón and Tamaulipas Gov. Eugenio Hernandez Flores unveil a plaque at the new Donna-Rio Bravo International Bridge.

Bravo,” said the Congressman, citing the need to create jobs and spur growth on both sides of the border.

In an exclusive interview with the *Guardian*, Donna Mayor David Simmons said that the Donna Bridge would not have to compete for commercial traffic in the same manner as bridges such as Anzalduas or Los Indios:

“What is unique about this situation is that the city of Donna had a presidential permit issued 30 years ago where it automatically received commercial traffic. We do not have to wait until the Pharr Bridge reaches its peak,” Simmons said. “We can immediately begin to receive commercial traffic as soon as the facility is completed in 2012.”

Present at the ceremony were the city leaders of Donna, former Hidalgo County Judge and now Administrator for Region 7 of the U.S. General Services Administration J.D. Salinas, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Alan Bersin, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Carlos Pascual, and U.S. Consul General in Matamoros Michael Barkin.

Present at the ceremony for Mexico, in addition to Calderón and Hernandez, were outgoing Rio Bravo Mayor Roberto Benet, and Mexican Secretary of Communications and Transport Juan Molinar Horcasitas.

On the U.S. side of the border, the structure will be called the New Alliance Bridge, while in Mexico either the Centennial (in honor of the Mexican Revolution) or Bicentennial (in honor of Mexican Independence). A final decision has not yet been made. Gov. Hernandez in his address quipped that he would leave that choice up to the Mexican President.

Elizabeth M. Boyce, administrative assistant for the City of Donna, said the bridge will be open seven days a week from 7 a.m. through 7 p.m. At this time, the bridge will be open for passenger vehicles only. Commercial traffic use is currently not permitted at the bridge but the authorities have the right to change this policy.

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