

# Senator Eliot Shapleigh

## CAPITOL REVIEW

Fall 2008



*“Fighting for our children,  
our community and our future”*

*– Senator Eliot Shapleigh*

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### A Great Year for El Paso

#### *Dear Friend,*

What a great year we have had in El Paso! Despite some tough times on Wall Street, here on Main Street we are moving our community forward.

We continue to build on the success of our last legislative session, gearing up El Paso's four-year medical school and planning the Medical Center of the Americas. Ft. Bliss continues to grow. Today, we see downtown buildings are on their way to new life. The State of Texas and the City of El Paso have approved an historic \$1 billion transportation plan.

More than any time in our lifetimes, El Paso is the best place to be.

In the next session, we will continue to work hard to move El Paso's agenda. We will fight to fund BRAC, improve schools, and make health care accessible for all. We will grow our medical school and UTEP as well.

In this edition of Capitol Review, we are highlighting the future of rail in our region—its challenges and opportunities—and sharing some of the work we have done over the interim.

Please enjoy this edition of Capitol Review. During this Fall season, we have many reasons to be thankful!

Very Truly Yours,

*Eliot Shapleigh*

Eliot Shapleigh

# OUR FUTURE IS POWERED BY RAIL

By Senator Eliot Shapleigh

The El Paso del Norte region is the largest metropolitan area along the U.S.-Mexico border. It rests at the intersection of three states and two countries and is now among the largest international commuter and commercial ports in the Western Hemisphere.

Our region serves as an air, truck, and rail hub for commercial traffic. In 2007, there were a staggering 23 million border crossings from pedestrians, commuters and commercial trucks. In order to remain a successful port, enhanced mobility in the region has become increasingly more important.

A part of our future success with the mobility puzzle is commuter rail and mass transit. In its earliest years, El Paso del Norte was an international leader in commuter rail. In 1881, El Paso's street car service consisted of wooden trolleys driven by human drivers and sturdy mules—the most famous being Mandy the Mule. In 1901, the El Paso Electric Railway Company began electric streetcar operations, running a city streetcar system that grew to 35 miles by 1907. The El Paso Electric Railway Company grew steadily, through World War I and the postwar era, and by 1925 took its name as the El Paso Electric Company.

The first buses to replace streetcars, on the Ysleta line, came in 1925. By 1943, National City Lines—owned by General Motors and Standard Oil—purchased the Transportation Division of the El Paso Electric Co. and shut down the remaining lines, but decided to retain streetcars on the 3.2 mile international line across the border to Juarez.

At the same time, a competing vision of transportation emerged on the American landscape. In 1956, the Interstate Highway System was authorized under President Dwight Eisenhower. Today, with gas prices skyrocketing, and with highway costs inflating 75 percent every five years, forty cities across America are re-thinking that model.

Since our founding, rail has been a major driver in El Paso's economic growth. Before rail, El Paso was a sleepy town of 736. After rail—in one month from May to June 1881—El Paso's population jumped from 761 to 1,500. By 1965, El Paso was America's third most sprawled city. With gas at 25 cents per gallon, driving and drive-ins made more sense then than now.

Over the last few months, gas has reached as high as \$4 a gallon. Only eight years ago, at the start of George Bush's first term, gas was \$1.40. By 2012, El Pasoans can expect \$7 gallon gas—and increased costs for everything from food to concrete whose value is in part linked to transportation costs.

What's more, by 2035, due to a massive increase in West Coast port capacity, El Paso will experience a rise from today's 35 trains per day to as many as 200 east-west trains. In Punta Colonet, Baja California, Mexico, a \$6 billion Pacific coast container megaport is being planned for operation in four to five years. The megaport would be about 150 miles from San Diego, and it would route Asian cargo through Mexico to the American heartland. In addition, it would be built in tandem with a rail link that would carry containers from Punta Colonet to the U.S.-Mexico border. The megaport is expected to handle up to 6 million containers a year. Luis

Téllez, Mexico's secretary of transportation and communications, recently commented on the project, "The complexity of this project . . . is enormous." With increases also expected at Lazaro Cardenas and Long Beach, the West Coast and US-Mexico border is about to explode with trade by rail.

## So what do we do?

Meeting the challenge of mobility in the Pass of the North is just as important as meeting the challenge of a new

medical school or base realignment. New trade represents new opportunity—and new challenges. How we reduce congestion and pollution, and increase trade and mobility will define us against ports all over the Americas.

In Dallas, communities are preparing to invest \$5.6 billion into its DART commuter rail system. In Austin, a 32-mile "MetroRail" track is under construction from Leander to downtown. In New Mexico, Governor Bill Richardson has made rail a priority and is working to create a statewide system. The Land of Enchantment's Rail Runner system already connects Sandoval County to Belen over 85 miles of rail.

In El Paso-Juarez, our international rail system was up and running until Sept. 4, 1974, when a disagreement over tolls ended the service. Up until its final day, 13,000 passengers rode the international line every day. Today, El Paso and Texas must lead with rail again. How we meet that challenge—and maximize that opportunity will be as important to the next 100 years as rail has been to the last. Our future is powered by rail!



Senator Shapleigh hosts a 'Coffee with Eliot' town hall meeting with constituents in El Paso.

# WORKING FOR YOU

I am very humbled to serve you in Austin. Working together with you, our office has worked harder, passed more legislation, and spearheaded more key initiatives than any of us could have imagined a decade ago. We are proud of that record and we are confident about our future.

We believe in great schools, a first-class university, our medical campus, a quality health care system, sustainable water, public safety, and meeting our infrastructure and transit demands—especially with the rise of fuel costs.

Together, we can truly make these next ten years the “golden era” of El Paso’s history. Here is a list of some of the activities we have been working on this year:

### Access to Capitol

- Coordinated the “Invest in the American Dream” conference at the El Paso Museum of Art on October 21 and 22. The conference focused on developing and applying best practices in financial literacy, creating financial stability, wealth creation, and access to capitol.

### Affordable Housing

- Worked with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Development (TDHCA) to secure more than \$3 million for El Paso to ease the affordable housing shortage affecting more than 22,000 regional households.

### Clean Air & Asarco

- Secured additional air monitoring for El Paso in Asarco’s Air Quality Permit No. 20345.
- Worked with the City of El Paso to make sure the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) recover lead and arsenic from all remaining homes in El Paso.
- Researched and informed El Pasoans on Asarco’s “15% Rule,” where Asarco allegedly altered the medical reports of Hispanic workers to hide health problems from the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA).

### Ft. Bliss and BRAC

- Worked with “Team Bliss” to identify and advocate for key new programs to fund schools, clinics and health care needed for BRAC growth.
- Brought members of the Senate Subcommittee on BRAC and Senate Veteran Affairs & Military Installations Committee, as well as members of the House Committee on Defense Affairs and State-Federal Regulations, for a special joint hearing on BRAC and Ft. Bliss. The joint hearing was held on May 13 at El Paso Community College—Transmountain Campus.
- Worked with the Texas National Guard to create the “Texas National Guard Letters from Home Project,” a letter writing campaign which gives area school children the opportunity to express their gratitude to our troops serving throughout the state. Over 1,700 letters from home were delivered this year.



*Senator Shapleigh visits with the Malayalee Association of Greater El Paso at the Marty Robbins Recreation Center.*

### Health and Human Services

- Released Texas Borderlands 2009: Ground Zero of Health Care in America, a study of the challenges and opportunities in health care in Texas.

### Higher Education

- Released Texas Borderlands 2009: “Learning & Earning,” focusing on challenges and solutions in higher education in Texas.

### Public Education

- Worked with “Equipo Bowie” to identify public education innovations, designed to improve Phase Four campuses.
- Released Texas Borderlands 2009: Public Education - “Investing in Our Future,” focusing on challenges and opportunities in public education in Texas.

### Technology

- Worked to secure \$2 million from the Texas Emerging Technology Fund to develop safer, faster, smarter trade solutions on the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Senator Shapleigh was honored by the American Electronics Association (AeA) Texas Council on January 10 for his commitment to the advancement of state of the art technology in Texas.

### Texas-Mexico

- Senator Shapleigh currently serves as Chair of the U.S.-Mexico Border Legislative Conference (BLC), an organization comprised of legislators from the ten states along the U.S.-Mexico border – including California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas in the United States, and Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas in Mexico.
- Represented Ten Border States at the XXVI Border Governors’ Conference held August 13-15 in Los Angeles, California.
- Met with Lt. Governor David Dewhurst and other state leaders to address drug-related violence in Juarez.



## State Senator Eliot Shapleigh

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### Transportation & Homeland Security

- Worked with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Mayor Cook, and others to advance an innovative \$1 billion transportation investment plan, and to finally complete El Paso's "Outer Loop."
- Brought the Senate Committee on Transportation & Homeland Security to El Paso for hearing at the El Paso Public Library on July 9. In preparation for the 81st Texas Legislature in 2009, the committee heard testimony on immigration, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and border violence.
- As Chair of the Border Legislative Conference, worked with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to co-host the "Americas 2020 Summit: Moving People and Products Safer, Faster, Smarter" in Austin on May 22 and 23.
- Served as Chair for the El Paso Metropolitan Organization (MPO) Committee on Rail, and held a special hearing on "Rail in the Pass" at City Hall on August 29. The full hearing is available for viewing online at [www.ci.el-paso.tx.us/realplayer.asp](http://www.ci.el-paso.tx.us/realplayer.asp).

### Water & Climate Change

- With the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), organized the "Far West Texas Climate Change Conference," on June 17 at the TechH2O Water Resources Learning Center in El Paso. The purpose of the conference was to review the possible impact of climate change on surface water supplies from the Rio Grande. The climate change conference was a result of SB 1762, authored by Senator Shapleigh. For more information, you can visit [www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/climate/climate\\_conference.htm](http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/climate/climate_conference.htm).

# HOW TO CONTACT

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