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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

In 2009, the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) applied for and was selected to receive an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to develop a project entitled "Regional Economic Adjustment Plan for Building Disaster Resilient Communities (Regional EAP)." This grant will enable Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy and portions of Starr Counties to work together to develop a regional master plan that will foster economic growth and economic recovery following natural disasters.

Hurricane Alex followed by Tropical Depression #2 reminded all of us of the potential impacts of storm events. The overall goal of the LRGV Regional EAP is to provide a framework for governmental entities within the Lower Rio Grande Valley to work together to plan and manage their current and future public works infrastructure and storm water-related systems in order to minimize storm related water damage and economic impacts in the event of a major storm event, such as hurricanes.

This plan will be a "big picture" plan that compiles information on major drainage systems, catalogs potential and known flooding problem areas and needed improvements, and incorporates these into the region's comprehensive document. The plan will include a Geographic Information System (GIS) centralized database for the collection and maintenance of infrastructure and assets which will be available to governmental entities within the LRGV. The plan will identify storm-related public works infrastructure critical to diversifying the region's economic base, and recommend funding mechanisms and sources for a phased regional Capital Improvement Plan to complement the current and developing infrastructure in the study area.

This regionally based collaborative effort relies on multi-jurisdictional cooperation among local, state and federal government agencies and includes a broad public involvement effort to help the public learn about and provide input for the plan. It is critical to overall recovery and the future growth of the region that the four counties have adequate storm systems to minimize storm-related water damage and associated economic impacts in the event of a disaster.

The recently appointed Steering Committee and Technical Committee will be keys to guiding the project. They will assist with data collection and prioritization and help to amplifying public outreach. These committees, consisting respectively of 29 and 18 members, include elected and appointed officials, business leaders, landowners and other stakeholders from the four counties and were appointed by the LRGVDC Board of Directors. These committees will meet at intervals throughout the project. Public meetings in all four counties will be held late this summer and again next year. Other activities planned include regular reports to the Board of Directors of the LRGVDC and input from several focus groups.

At the first combined meeting of the Steering Committee and the Technical Committee on June 17, Godfrey Garza, representing Hidalgo County Drainage District #1 was elected chair of the Steering Committee and Sonia Lambert, General Manager of Cameron County Irrigation District #2 was elected chair of the Technical Committee. Vice-chair of the Steering Committee is Cameron County Commissioner David Garza and vice-chair of the Technical Committee is Raul Sesin, P.E. who is Planning Engineer for Hidalgo County.

A website has been established (www.lrgv-regional-eap.com). Project newsletters and updates will be posted to this site. An 800 number is also available (1-800-945-2156 x21) to reach the Public Outreach Team Leader, Leah Olivarri, who is available to answer questions about the project.

A consultant team headed by S&B Infrastructure, Ltd., with assistance from Bickerstaff, Heath, Delgado, Acosta, LLP; Guzman and Munoz Engineering and Surveying, Inc.; Rigcatco Consulting; L&G Consulting Engineers, Inc.; Olivarri & Associates, Inc. and TEDSI Infrastructure Group, Inc., will be working with LRGVDC to complete the plan over the next year.