Roads are certainly not glamorous or very exciting subjects, however, they have and continue to hold an important role in our society. In the early days of the Valley's 20th Century development, land transportation was slow and erratic. The well-utilized old Military Telegraph Road following the river was deeply rutted and not publicly maintained. Outside of the major cities and towns, and often indeed within them, Valley roads were in a sorry state. Poor drainage of unpaved roads, perhaps better termed trails, in periods of rain was the major impediment.

An anecdote told about Lon C. (Mose) Hill, Jr. is now humorous in nature but reflects on a serious subject at the time. It relates:

About 1903 Mr. Hill's father sent him and Henry Bell with a load of lumber and cement to the Donna Pumping Plant. They used the old Military Road and, being heavily loaded, they drove the mules too hard and both mules died on them on the way up there. They would stop and borrow mules from ranch to ranch, and it took them about a week to get their load of material delivered to the Donna Pumping Plant and about a week to get their wagon back to Harlingen. Also a few years later, Mr. Hill's father sent him down to the Harlingen Pumping Plant on the river. They had to cross the Arroyo Colorado and the crossing was between two deep holes of water and quicksand. He got his wagon and mules off in the quicksand and drowned both the mules. His father told him that he was not going to send him anywhere else with a team because he could kill the mules faster than he could buy them.

Harlingen's streets and roads were a major issue from the time of the city's naming and first post office establishment in 1904. Samuel McPheeters Glasgow was a recent seminary graduate when he arrived here to take up church work. He described Harlingen in 1909 as a mud town, no paved streets, or roads, or sidewalks—coal oil lamps, not a plumber in the entire Valley—burros, or horses, or mules were the chief means of transportation, and he estimated the population to be about 200.

The Harlingen Board of Trade in its 4/25/11 report notes among city improvements the new one-lane steel bridge over the Arroyo costing $17,000 and two miles of graded streets costing $1,500, and drainage into the Arroyo for $2,200. The bridge was at the south end of Mexico (now F) Street. Contractor Alsbury and Son of Houston commenced work on the steel bridge on 6/11/11. To go to San Benito this bridge was the only way to cross the arroyo without descending into it.

In 1912 more dirt streets are graded, some concrete sidewalks started, and wooden platforms are built at street crossing.

In 1920 a significant political event occurs. Long-time County kingpin, Jim Wells, loses control of the politics of Cameron County forever. Oscar C. Dancy is elected to the Cameron County Commissioners Court. He will serve as county judge for 50 years. Dancy come to have the nickname "Concrete" after he embarks on a program to connect Cameron County towns with paved roads.

On 11/2/21 it is revealed that four additional city blocks are to be paved in order to connect to the newly completed concrete highway (part of F Street) from Harlingen to San Benito. This road goes all the way to Brownsville and is the first hard surfaced road in the Valley.

Chronologically some road highlights that were to follow are:
1924  A nine foot wide concrete road from Harlingen to Combes is completed. This is the New Combes Highway made pretty much obsolete when Business 77 comes through. The cost of this improvement has come from a county bond issue of $350,000 passed in 1922 and to be used to complete the Brownsville to San Benito paving and then west to the Hidalgo County line.

2/13/25  The contract for $57,435 is awarded to Dodds and Wedegartner of San Benito for a new Arroyo Colorado vehicle bridge east of F Street. It is to be built to the east of the 1911 one now deemed unsafe. The new structure will have two 150’ spans on concrete piers and an overall length of 350’. Judge Dancy is to later explain that 2/3 of the costs will come from the state and the remainder from the county.

2/27/25  Six blocks of North Fordyce Street are paved in concrete running from the South Texas Lumber Co. to the properties of John Myrick and Charles F. Perry. In 1926 and for the next two the city moves forward with street paving and the installation of sidewalks and curbs. Lot owners are assessed most of the costs for these activities. Major lot owners are Osco Morris, J.M. Green, A.E. and A.L. Benoist, A.L. Brooks and the Harlingen Development Co. The latter had been incorporated for $100,000 and its existence was predicated on expeditiously selling numerous townsite lots that had languished under the control of an absentee entity.

8/6/26  By this date A.D. Holmes, street commissioner, boosts of 21 miles of paved road, 18 miles of sanitary sewer, and six miles of storm drains. In 1927 a new two-lane bridge is erected across the Arroyo Colorado at F Street to replace the old one lane one. It has a central concrete pier in the middle of the arroyo.

3/15/27  A $12,000 high bridge over the Arroyo Colorado to connect to Rio Hondo is being constructed.

12/2/27  The paving of the road between Harlingen and Rio Hondo is completed. The road paving from San Benito to Rio Hondo was also recently completed. This allows for a scenic circle drive on paved roads of about 24 miles.

1928  There are 21.79 of paved roads in the city.

1/21/29  HWY 96 currently paved for three miles north of Harlingen is to be paved all the way to the Willacy County line.

7/4/29  Dodds and Wedegartner finish paving the Altas Palmas stretch on Stuart Place while McElwrath completes the Palmetal Road one.

1935  In this year it is State HWY 96 which comes from Corpus Christi via Riviera and Sarita to the Valley. HWY 16 joins it from Robstown through Kingsville and then goes west to Falfurrias. State HWY 4 and US 83 parallel the river from west of Zapata all the way to Brownsville.

1936  The city has 22 miles of paved street, 47 miles of storm drains, 51 miles of water mains, and 365 acres in eight city parks. Assessed valuations stand at $7,568,290 with a tax rate of $1.80/$100 valuation.

7-8/47  The state constructs the Business 77 bypass bridge over the Arroyo Colorado. This alternate road to San Benito is widened in 1965 and again in 1989. When it opens in 10/47 it is termed the "Parallel Highway."

4/18/50  A temporary pontoon bridge is stretched across the arroyo to service Rio Hondo for the next few years until the new lift bridge is built. On 4/29 the old one lane steel bridge is demolished to allow passage of the canal dredge.
1953 (summer) The $500,000 lift bridge over the Arroyo Colorado opens. It connects the west side of FM 106 to Rio Hondo and allows for tall waterway traffic to reach Port Harlingen. It is the only such engineered bridge of its type in Texas.

7/54  The low, wooden two lane $2,750,000 Queen Isabella Causeway to South Padre Island from Port Isabel is completed and will be dedicated on 7/3/55. This opens the door for accelerated island development and for Harlingen to benefit from tourists in transit to the island.

1957  As Expressway 83 is widened in West Harlingen this necessitates the rearrangement of part of the municipal golf course. The south side airstrip is removed at what is now between the 7th and 13th fairways. Plans for what was to be Sam Botts Park on the very south end are discarded.

6/11/59  The low water wooden bridge across the Arroyo Colorado at Port Harlingen is completed. It replaces the wooden one destroyed last fall in a flood.

6/60  A contract is let to construct Spur Road 329 (now 374) to connect Expressway 77 with Expressway 83.

8/20/61  Nearly complete is the new 1.887 mile stretch of FM 507 north from business 77 to the HAFB. It is named Morgan Blvd. in honor of Col. John R. Morgan, the first commanding officer at the Harlingen Army Airfield in 1941 and who was to retire in Harlingen.

5/18/62  The Expressways 77/83 interchange at the end of West Harrison is nearly complete. Fill for its elevated sections came from the new Water Works reservoir at Dixieland Park.

8/68  At the sacrifice of considerable greenery, Commerce Street from Tyler to 77 Sunshine Strip is widened to a 60' width.

4/70  Expressway 77/83 interchange is nearing completion. It is completed on 5/71 as an elevated 1.5 mile $2.4 million overpass taking nearly 100,000 cubic yards of fill dirt.

2/71  Wilson Road has been widened to Stuart Place Road.

1973  The east portion of City Lake is filled in and a new part of 6th Street is constructed to make it a thoroughfare.

4/11/00  The state completes the construction of a new concrete beam bridge over the Arroyo Colorado near Port Harlingen. It has two lanes and is 46' wide and 320' long. It replaces the rickety one lane wooden low-water bridge which has served Cemetery Road for many years. A reliable, fast alternative route between Harlingen and Rio Hondo now exists.

2001-02  The direct connection of Expressways 77 and 83 by an overhead interchange is under construction as is the widening of 83/77 through Harlingen. The Expressway 83/77 construction schedules and costs for the Harlingen area are: Lincoln Ave. south to FM 509, start 4/2001 and conclude 5/2005 at a cost of $61 million; FM 509 to FM 732, start 5/03 and conclude 11/2006 at a cost of $68 million.

1/4/04  Loop 499 widening is to begin. A 4-lane boulevard with a median strip will be constructed by Ballenger Construction. The $6.3 million project will run from Expressway 77 to FM 507.

1/21/04  The extension of Sam Houston Street west of Business 77 to New Hampshire Street is opened. This new crossing of the railroad tracks will relieve some traffic congestion at the corner of Ed Carey and 77. Funds from the 2003 bond issue were used to complete it.
2/4/06 Dixieland Road will be extended southeast across the Arroyo Colorado to connect with Rangerville Road. Upon completion of an environmental study the $3.5 million project of which the state DOT has already earmarked $2 million will proceed. The new road should stimulate more economic development on the west side.

9/7/06 Cameron County authorizes the purchase of right-of-way to extend Dixieland Road to Rangerville Road. The 1.85 mile extension will end at Garrett Road on FM 1472. The $3.9 million cost will include a 345-foot, four lane bridge across the Arroyo Colorado. While the city will pay for design work and part of the construction cost, TxDOT will pay the remainder of the cost. Construction is set to begin the summer of 2007.

9/30/06 TxDOT reports $9.1 million eight month project to widen the EXP 77 overpass over Harrison and Tyler Street from the present four lanes to six.

9/08 The landscaped median strip on Loop 499 is completed from TSTC to Harrison Avenue.

As the reader well knows this chronology will continue well beyond our lifetimes and as always remain a source of some contention.