

El Paso, TX to Chihuahua City, MX... Long Haul Fiber Project

Project Parameters:

- Length of project... (225) miles
- Single HDPE duct, single (48) count fiber cable
- Construction Method... Trench, plow, directional bore
- Dynamic Cable Construction Co., L.P. from Texas undertook the project on a consulting basis for a Texas/Mexico based CLEC

“The Story”

The Chihuahua fiber route was not your typical Mexico project as Mickey Redwine, CEO of Dynamic Cable, had hoped it would be.

Throughout its history, Dynamic has completed numerous projects in Mexico. It was not unusual for the projects to be tough and complex. Subsurface soil conditions, and unsolicited local and federal governmental intervention, often caused time delays and excessive (although expected) costs.

For a desert build through the badlands of Mexico, this project, at first glance, seemed typical to Redwine as he performed the pre-engineering feasibility route study from a helicopter. What wasn't expected were the challenges his crews would face from both a Drug Cartel and an extortionary former State Governor.

Working in this remote and rocky Mexican desert, cell phone service is sporadic, diesel and water are precious commodities that must be imported daily, and wrangling with rattlesnakes and scorpions is commonplace. The Dynamic personnel overcame language barriers with their locally hired workers and maintained their budgeted productivity.

Additionally, the crews often drove two hours (one way) to the nearest lodging accommodations after working twelve to thirteen hours per day, seven days a week, and in temperatures that often exceeded (110) degrees.

Project managers and workers alike displayed uncommon patience, professionalism and composure as they dealt with the project's harsh demands and unpredictability.

In the small city of Villa Ahumada, this composure was tested just after the project began. In the middle of the night, Dynamic's crew was startled to hear the voices of several men coming from the parking lot in front of the gated motel. This was where the construction vehicles and light equipment were parked and chained. One crew member opened his motel door and faced six men, dressed in black fatigues and carrying M-16 rifles. One of the blacked-out commandos opened fire with his fully automatic rifle, perforating a nearby vehicle. The crew member smartly acquiesced and returned to his room, choosing discretion over valor.

The thieves stole two of the crews ATV four-wheel drive Kawasaki Mules. The local police were called, but refused to file a report or investigate the incident. They openly speculated that it was the work of the local Drug Cartel. It was then decided, by unanimous consent, that the recovery of the ATV's was highly improbable and that they would be replaced.

Due to the equipment's consistently high risk of theft, easily transportable equipment was housed during off-hours at a fenced lay-down yard, secured by a twenty-four hour guard. Equipment that would be difficult to abscond remained guarded on the right-of-way.

Soon after the Villa Ahumada incident, the security guard at the lay-down yard was assaulted and tied up. A seventy-five kilowatt generator was hooked to a truck and stolen.

The Dynamic crews spotted the generator the next day at a private residence in the small city of Samalucya . It was still connected to the back of the truck that had pulled it away from the lay-down yard. Both the local police and Federales were called, and once again they refused to file a report or repossess the generator. Not wanting conflict with the Cartel, it was decided that the generator would be forfeited and considered among the costs of doing business in Mexico.

After two encounters with the Cartel, and having grave concerns for the safety of the crews, the project was shut down until ex-military, armed guards were placed at every work site and the lay-down yards. That security measure was complex and time-consuming due to the very restrictive federal gun laws in Mexico.

Fortunately, there were no more encounters with the Cartel. However, the troubles persisted: A former, Mexico State Governor, who claimed ownership of the state/federal right of way (that Dynamic's customer had permits to construct in), would add substantial court costs and downtime to the project.

Towards the completion of the project, on MX 45, north of Sacramento and deep in the desolate Chihuahuan desert, the plow crews were confronted by several well dressed men (all of which were large and intimidating enough to be pro-wrestlers). They identified themselves as representatives of the Ex-Governor. The burly men matter-of-factly informed the crews that they were trespassing, and placing duct, on private property owned by the Ex-Governor. They demanded that construction stop immediately.

The Ex-Governor's men were informed that the proper state and federal permits were in place, and that the construction was taking place on the MX45 right-of-way and not on private property. The men persisted, and parked their vehicle in front of the plow dozer and locked the doors.

To avoid any confrontation or "wrestling matches", the Dynamic crews shut down the plow operation and returned the next day with both the Federales and local police. The project was resumed, but was shut down the following day when the gentlemen returned, accompanied by a staunch and irritated leader. Additionally, more of the Governors men parked on four wheel ATV's, and kept an intent watch from the perimeter of the worksite.

The Ex-Governor identified himself and told the crew supervisors to stop construction immediately because he owned the property that bordered the MX45 highway, as well as that portion of the right-

of-way. He demanded compensation from the project owners for them to occupy the right of way. It was subsequently learned that the governor had previously placed make-shift toll booths across the highway and attempted to collect tolls from passing motorists. The toll booths were illegal, and dozed down by the local authorities.

After costly and time consuming litigation and multiple appeals, Dynamic's customer finally prevailed and the fiber route was completed as originally permitted, and without paying the Ex-Governor any compensation or toll fees.

However, throughout the process it was learned that in Mexico, even after going out-of-office, an Ex-Governor can remain powerful, with connections that run deep, both politically and judicially. This was evidenced by his ability to get a court-ordered injunction to shut the job down, even though it was legally permitted and on a state/federal right of way. Even those that disliked the governor still respected him... Perhaps from fear and/or his reputation!

In light of the aforementioned setbacks and constraints, never-ending delays at customs when importing vehicles and equipment, military and police check points throughout the (225) mile route, and the normal obstacles and dilemmas when building in Mexico in a remote desert environment, Dynamic brought the project in on schedule (11 months) and within budget.

The customer was given delivery of a fiber route that was built to the highest of standards with security of the asset constantly in mind. Manholes, splices, and other sensitive areas of the route were placed at greater depths to prevent vandalism and un-authorized access.

"These crews are absolutely second to none, I'll put them against any crew anywhere when it comes to dedication, quality, budget, meeting a tight schedule, determination, and intestinal fortitude to not be deterred", says Redwine.

"Their expertise is obvious from a layman's perspective when observing the restoration and cosmetics of the completed route, but much more so from a professional perspective when taking into account the strict adherence to our standards of quality and workmanship while faced with so many obstacles. The tell-all as to how well an underground fiber route is built is when the fiber is placed. Our crews averaged placing/blowing an eight mile reel of fiber per day per crew (four jets).

That kind of fiber placement /production can only be accomplished when the duct is placed straight in the trench, manholes/handholds are well thought out and strategically placed, splice couplings are properly installed, and lastly, attention is paid to every detail of construction from beginning to end."