

APPENDIX B

**Notes from Coordination Meetings with Legislators, Local Elected
Officials and Resource Agencies**

Correspondence with St. Mary Parish

Follow-up Comments from Resource Agencies

Summary of Comments

Presentation to Legislators

1:00 PM, May 10, 2013, Room 302AA Executive Classroom, DOTD Headquarters

Attendees:

Elected Officials: Sen. Bret Allain, Pres. Paul Naquin, Pres. John Young

Elected Officials Staff: Frank Fink, Michael Hare, Raymond Harris, Jr., Tommy Hebert, Michael Tamporello

DOTD: Noel Ardoin, Coan Bueche, Eric Kalivoda, Dan Magri, Elnur Musa, Quang "Wayne" Nguyen, Bill Oliver, Robin Romeo, Ed Wedge, Ann Wills

AECOM: Bob Schmidt, Louis Costa

Deputy Secretary Kalivoda opened the meeting by explaining that there were Records of Decision for the segments of I-49 South from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick (St. Mary Parish) and from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway (Jefferson, Lafourche, and St. Charles Parishes), but that work had not progressed because the estimated costs of the proposed projects exceeded available funding. Therefore, the DOTD has developed alternative concepts to advance the improvement of the corridor. This meeting, and the meetings scheduled in the four affected parishes, are intended to introduce the elected officials in those parishes to the revised concepts and to receive their comments prior to meeting with the resource agencies and announcing the program to the public. He then introduced Mr Schmidt who presented the concepts.

Mr. Schmidt explained that the Records of Decision were influenced by the experience of Katrina which occurred during their development. The current concepts are guided by safety and efficiency and an effort to make real improvements that can be constructed within available resources. As presented on the first powerpoint slide, the cost comparisons between RODs and the current concepts were great (\$435 million versus \$248 million for Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick and \$4.8 billion versus \$1.3 billion for Raceland to the Westbank Expressway).

The concepts are divided into two programs, an Interim Program that would improve safety and efficiency and, in some cases, create a segment of freeway, and a Freeway Program that would complete the creation of I-49 South.

He also explained that the maps in the handouts show the differences between the concepts in the RODs and the current concepts. The Deputy Secretary pointed out that there can be a freeway that occasionally floods or the existing roadway that occasionally floods. Louisiana cannot afford the concept of an elevated roadway in the RODs.

Sen. Allain asked if similar concepts were being developed for the I-49 Connector and the segment from the Lafayette Airport to LA 88. The Deputy Secretary responded that because of the litigation regarding the Connector, DOTD did not feel that anything could be changed in that concept. In the other section, much of it is at grade on the existing alignment and does not need to be revised. It can also be phased to make each section more manageable financially. Only about 2 miles (about 35%) of the Connector is at grade.

Mr. Schmidt then began the presentation of the Interim Improvements and the Freeway Improvements in St Mary Parish. President Naquin asked about the interim improvements in Patterson, especially regarding a frontage road. Mr. Schmidt explained that parts of the frontage road would be built under the Interim Program, but most of the improvements would be access management along the existing highway. There then was a discussion of the intersection at Thorguson in Berwick and of the optional concepts that were proposed. It was generally agreed that the option that elevates the mainline over the intersection is preferable.

Mr. Schmidt reached the slide that presents the cost estimates for the St. Mary projects. The Deputy Secretary said that these were manageable figures.

Sen. Allain asked for more explanation regarding the Southeast Boulevard interchange. Mr. Schmidt returned to that slide and gave a more detailed explanation. The Deputy Secretary said that DOTD expected more discussion as the project moved into the public phase. President Naquin said that there also would be more detailed questions from the local officials at the parish meeting.

Mr. Schmidt then presented the Interim and Freeway concepts in the segment from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. During this presentation, the Deputy Secretary pointed out that in Lafourche Parish, as the road approaches bayou Des Allemands, existing US 90 is used as the frontage road.

Regarding the new freeway alignment south of Paradis, Sen Allain asked if the roadway would be at-grade or elevated. Mr Schmidt said that it was intended to be at-grade and

it was hoped that the US Army Corps of Engineers would allow the impact of wetlands since the total number of wetland acres would be reduced.

Along the Westbank Expressway, Mr. Schmidt suggested that the cost could be reduced if the roadway was primarily at grade and elevated only at major intersections. The Deputy Secretary asked President Young what he thought about the possibility of this less expensive option. The President said that he would discuss the matter with Sen. Alario who represents the district. He explained that there once had been opposition to an elevated roadway through Westwego, but that opinions may have changed.

As the presentation of the concepts was completed, Mr. Schmidt asked if there were further questions or comments. Sen. Allain asked if there were costs for the major section of the Raceland to Westbank Expressway segment. Mr. Schmidt referred him to the Executive Summary that gives the breakdown as follows:

- LA 308 Interchange to I-310 Interchange: 17.8 miles, \$328.0 million
- I-310 Interchange to the Huey P Long Interchange: 13.8 miles, \$567.2 million
- Huey P Long Interchange to Ames Boulevard: 3.9 miles, \$417.8 million

President Naquin asked what, if the concepts are accepted, would the implementation timeline be. Mr. Schmidt then presented the Next Steps slides that indicate that following the Parish Presentations, the DOTD will meet with the Resource agencies to get their initial response and then with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The FHWA would then make a determination of the actions required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Deputy Secretary explained that it was difficult to make a good time estimate before the NEPA determination is made by FHWA.

He continued, in closing, to say that the important consideration is to keep the combined cost of both segments below \$3 billion.

Sen. Allain asked if NEPA would be required for the Interim Projects. The Deputy Secretary said that would be part of the FHWA determination. Mr. Hare asked about the schedule for the other segments of the road that are incomplete. The Deputy Secretary said that the LA 18 interchange is under construction, the railroad crossing is being replaced by a pipeline, and that Preliminary Engineering at a cost of \$30 to \$40 million will begin shortly on the Connector. This will allow for the right-of-way to be established and therefore to continue right-of-way acquisition. Also, design has begun on the Ambassador Caffery interchange.

Sen. Allain asked about the Albertsons interchange. The Deputy Secretary said that the DOTD had advertised a design build project for that portion of the road.

President Young noted that the section for I-310 to Ames Boulevard was the most expensive. Mr. Schmidt said that in addition to the elevated Westbank Expressway, the

other very costly section was the elevated section through Boutte. He explained that one option to reducing the cost would be to relocate the railroad to the north far enough to locate the highway between existing US 90 and the relocated railroad. This would allow I-49 to be at grade.

The Deputy Secretary asked if any elected officials were concerned about any aspect of the proposal. Were there any fatal flaws? The response was that they did not see any serious concerns. Sen. Allain said that he wanted it all built and that improvements in other parishes were just as important as improvements in his district. President Young agreed and reminded the group of the importance to the Port of New Orleans.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Summary of Comments

Presentation to St. Charles Parish Leaders

10:00 AM, May 15, 2013, Conference Room 302AA, DOTD District 02

Attendees:

St. Charles Parish: President V. J. St. Pierre, Councilman Paul Hogan, Steve Romano, Dean Bailey

DOTD: Coan Bueche, Bambi Hall, Ennis Johnson, Eric Kalivoda, Dan Magri, Quang "Wayne" Nguyen, Brittany Rooney, Michael Stack, Ann Wills

AECOM: Bob Schmidt, Lou Costa

Deputy Secretary Kalivoda opened the presentation with a brief review of the cost estimates in the Records of Decision for the two segments from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick and Raceland to the Westbank Expressway and explained that the costs exceeded the State's resources. He went on to explain that DOTD undertook the Safety and Efficiency Study to identify improvements, leading to completion of I-49 South, that could be phased and that would have a cost that the State could afford.

The new concepts from that study will require additional environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Prior to beginning the NEPA process, DOTD is visiting with the elected officials of the affected Parishes to receive their comments on the concepts. Following those meetings, DOTD will meet with the resource agencies and then with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to determine the NEPA process requirements. Once that is completed, DOTD can prepare an estimate of the timeline for implementation.

He then introduced Mr. Schmidt who began the presentation of the concepts for the segment from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. Mr. Schmidt explained that he would first present the Interim Program and then the Freeway Program for the entire length. More detailed discussion of issues in St Charles Parish would follow the PowerPoint presentation. He also reviewed the contents of the packets that were distributed.

When Mr. Schmidt reached the access management area in Des Allemands, President St. Pierre asked if US 90 would be rebuilt, or simply upgraded in this project. Mr. Schmidt explained that it was only an upgrade of the existing road.

The President then asked that he and Councilman Hogan be sent electronic copies of the drawings so that they could study them in detail, and it was agreed that this would be done.

After Mr. Schmidt presented the access management improvements in Paradis including the proposed new median, the Councilman stated that the residents have asked for this section to be improved for some time and that he wanted this to be a high priority.

When Mr. Schmidt reached the I-310 interchange he gave a detailed explanation of the flyover ramp for eastbound to northbound traffic and the associated changes that are part of the Interim

Program and contribute to the Freeway Program. The President stated that he understood that the RPC was working on this and Mr. Stack agreed that RPC is planning on initiating a study to advance this project through the NEPA process, but that it had not started yet. Mr. Nguyen explained that in addition, DOTD may have to prepare an Interchange Modification Request to FHWA for the project. This is not seen as a concern, but it is a step that must be coordinated with FHWA to determine if it is a necessity, and completed if appropriate.

Mr. Bueche added that as stated earlier by Mr. Schmidt, some Interim Projects would contribute to the completion of the Freeway and that his was a good example, unlike Paradis which is a valuable safety improvement, but does not contribute to the completion of I-49.

Moving on to the access management improvements in Boutte, the ongoing RPC Environmental Assessment project on Paul Maillard was mentioned, but it does not improve the US 90 intersection which is included in this Interim project.

Mr. Schmidt then explained that there is an Interim project that converts US 90 to a freeway between Davis Pond and Avondale and how that would be accomplished.

The Councilman then asked that attention return to the Barton Avenue area. He explained that another RPC study that is ongoing is concerned with extending Willowdale across US 90 and both the BNSF RR and the UP RR to connect with River Road to replace Barton Avenue. Discussion of the impact of this project on the new concepts was delayed to the point in the presentation when the Freeway program reached this area.

Mr. Schmidt then resumed his explanation of the Interim projects through Jefferson Parish to the end of the segment.

President St Pierre asked to go back to the Paradis area to discuss the bypass. The Deputy Secretary suggested that that discussion wait until the presentation of the Freeway program reached that point, and the President agreed.

Mr. Schmidt then explained the status of the freeway completion based on the Interim projects and began a discussion of the Freeway projects. The Councilman asked how the residential development along US 90 west of the commercial area that is west of Bayou Des Allemands would be served. It was explained that their direct access would be removed, but that the internal street that is parallel to US 90, would be connected to the portion of US 90 that becomes a frontage road at the new interchange. Unfortunately the scale of the drawings made it difficult to see this connection.

The Councilman also pointed out that the proposed realignment of I-49 east of the Bayou Des Allemands bridge goes through a wetland mitigation bank. It was explained that the alignment in the EIS, although different, also went through the mitigation bank and that DOTD was aware of the mitigation issues involved with the USACE.

A further question regarded the dead end of US 90 to the west of Paradis where I-49 re-enters the existing US 90 alignment. The Councilman asked if there could be ramps connecting the two roads. The Deputy Secretary explained that FHWA does not approve of half interchanges

on interstates because drivers unfamiliar with the area tend to become lost. He continued to explain that the new interchange near Des Allemands would provide access to that portion of US 90. The Councilman expressed concern that this would not be a convenient arrangement and the President expressed concern for the access of emergency vehicles.

Mr. Romano asked if the LA 306 interchange could be moved farther from US 90. Mr. Stack said that he did not think that the USACE would approve because it would align the eastward extension of the road farther into the wetlands.

The President asked if there could be a levee to protect the road if it is at grade. He also expressed some concern with the by-passing of the commercial areas in Paradis and Mosella.

As there is a section of US 90 that is removed between LA 306 and the point at which I-49 would leave the US 90 alignment and turn south of Paradis, Mr. Romano asked if this could be maintained and transition to a two way frontage road on the north side of I-49 to connect around the dead end that concerned the Councilman. It was agreed that this could be considered, but that it would increase the cost of the project.

Mr. Schmidt then resumed the presentation moving through the I-310 interchange to the elevated section through the Monsanto property. He explained that this is one of the most costly elements of the project that was taken directly from the EIS. He also explained that there were potential less costly alternatives such as relocating the railroad farther from US 90 and building I-49 at grade between the railroad and US 90. This would need to be considered further during the NEPA phase of the new efficiency concepts.

The presentation continued to the US 90/US 90B interchange connecting to the Huey P Long Bridge. At this point, the Councilman mentioned that the current conditions regarding the westbound merge lane of the Westbank Expressway onto US 90 was substandard and asked that some improvement be made as soon as possible.

After completing the presentation of the Freeway projects, Mr. Schmidt reviewed the cost estimates for all three Parishes and the Next Steps that had been summarized by the Deputy Secretary in his opening remarks.

Following the presentation, general discussion began. The President asked about the timeline for the Interim projects. The Deputy Secretary responded that there is a small amount of funding available for I-49 South and that whatever that cannot cover would need to be worked into the regular program. Mr. Stack said that the District was already working on access management improvements in Paradis and Boutte similar to the Interim project proposals.

Mr. Romano asked what sort of median changes were included. Mr. Stack said that the median would be extended to Paul Maillard and would have typical turn lanes. He continued to say that he understood that there would initially be some concerns from merchants, but that safety was important and that the current conditions were unacceptable.

The Deputy Secretary stated that DOTD would make every effort to find funding for the I-310 flyover project. Mr. Stack agreed that it was a high priority.

The President expressed his hope that the frontage road connecting the two parts of US 90 between LA 306 and Des Allemands would be added to the plans.

Mr. Romano asked if tolls would be considered. The response was that there is continuing discussion of tolls, but that there does not appear to be any political support.

The Councilman asked if DOTD would consider the extension of the Sunset Drainage District levee across US 90. The Deputy Secretary said that this should be coordinated with Mr. Stack.

There being no further comments, the discussion ended.

Summary of Comments

Presentation to Jefferson Parish Leaders

2:00 PM, May 30, 2013, Conference Room New Orleans Regional Transportation Center

Attendees:

Jefferson Parish: President John Young, Mayor Ronnie Harris of Gretna, Ron Bisson for State Rep. Connick, Robin Christiana for Councilman Lagasse, Kazem Alikhani, Mark Drewes, Brett Lawson, Terri Wilkinson

Others: Rachel Perez for US Sen. Vitter, Gard Way of the I-49 International Coalition

RPC: John King, Jeff Roesel

DOTD: Coan Bueche, Bambi Hall, Ennis Johnson, Eric Kalivoda, Quang "Wayne" Nguyen, Michael Stack, Ann Wills

AECOM: Bob Schmidt, Lou Costa

Deputy Secretary Kalivoda opened the presentation with a brief review of the cost estimates in the Records of Decision for the two segments from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick and Raceland to the Westbank Expressway and explained that the costs exceeded the State's resources. He went on to explain that DOTD undertook the Safety and Efficiency Study to identify safety improvements that could be implemented in a timely manner and lead to the completion of I-49 South. The study also explored options that would identify segments that could be phased and that would have a cost that the State could afford.

He explained that the DOTD is in the process of briefing the elected officials in the affected Parishes prior to introducing the new concepts to the public.

He then introduced Mr. Schmidt who began the presentation of the concepts for the segment from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. Mr. Schmidt explained that he would first present the Interim Program and then the Freeway Program, which is more complex and expensive, for the entire length. He also reviewed the contents of the packets that were distributed.

Following the presentation of the Interim Program, the Mayor asked if the realigned lanes between Wayne Avenue and the Huey P Long interchange would become frontage roads in the completed project. Mr. Schmidt said that they would. Others asked the timeline for the flyover ramp from the Westbank Expressway toward the bridge. The Deputy Secretary explained that no schedule has been established because no funds are currently available. Ms. Wilkinson asked if all existing signals along the Westbank Expressway would remain. Mr. Schmidt said that all signal locations would remain, but they would be interconnected to provide improved operation.

Mr. Schmidt then began the presentation of the Freeway Program. At the end of the presentation he indicated that the Westbank Expressway as shown is entirely elevated except for the connection to the existing which is briefly at grade to reduce both the budget and the

construction disruption. He went on to say that a less costly option would be to only elevate it at interchanges and to build it at grade elsewhere.

Mr. Schmidt then explained the next steps.

The Mayor asked for the cost comparison between the 2008 cost estimate and the current one. Mr. Schmidt referred him to the Efficiency Program map which indicates that in 2011 dollars, the 2008 concept would cost \$4.8 billion while the new concept would cost \$1.3 billion. The Deputy Secretary pointed out that the difference in cost resulted primarily from the new concept being at-grade as much as possible while the EIS was all elevated. He continued by stating that we have a road that floods now. We can afford an interstate that would flood sometimes, although less than the existing road or we can have the existing road. The state cannot afford an elevated interstate.

Ms. Wilkinson asked if right-of-way costs were included. Mr. Schmidt said that they were, but were lower than the right-of-way costs for the EIS concept. He went on to explain that by looking at the maps in the hand-out that compare the two concepts, it can be seen that there is less new right-of-way in the new concept. This also reduces the impact to wetlands.

Mr. Schmidt then explained the focus maps. He also reminded the meeting that the NEPA process had to be completed and that some changes would likely result from that.

Following the presentation, general discussion began.

Mr. Roesel asked how NEPA would be done. The Deputy Secretary said that for many of the Interim Projects it could be done piece by piece, but that for the Freeway, the EIS would be reopened.

Ms. Wilkinson asked how long the NEPA would take. The Deputy Secretary said that FHWA would have to be involved to give a firm answer, but that he estimated about 2 years. He continued by saying that one of the advantages of the new concept is that it can be phased.

Mr. Wayt asked if the Interim projects needed to wait for the 2 years, and Ms. Wilkinson asked specifically about the schedule for the Interim projects in Jefferson Parish. Mr. Schmidt said that the signal improvements could be done in the least time, and Mr. Stack added that the signals and the improvements in geometry at the western end of the elevated Expressway all could be done in the near term.

The Mayor asked how the projects would be funded. The Deputy Secretary responded that federal funds would be used to the extent that they are available, but that there is no way to predict what Congress will do relative to infrastructure funding. He also said that transportation was to receive the sales tax from the sale of motor vehicles, but the law has a provision that allows those funds to stay in the general fund if certain limits aren't reached in the collection of other taxes. Unfortunately, DOTD has yet to receive these taxes. The Mayor then asked about the unclaimed property fund. The response was that that fund produces about \$7.5 million annually and would be expected to continue, but that it is not additional revenue.

The Mayor then raised the issue of public perception relative to the Westbank Expressway and I-49. He said that the public views the elevated portion of the Expressway as an interstate and that he feels it should be signed as I-910 as permitted by USDOT. The Deputy Secretary said that there is a reluctance to do that because it is intended to become a section of I-49. Mr. Wayt asked if the Future I-49 signs could be replaced. The Mayor said that the interest in I-49 and the spirits of the public would be raised if the I-910 signs were installed. The response was that the cost of the signs was not an issue; the concern is the creation of confusion regarding the name of the road.

The Deputy Secretary inquired about the general attitude of the Expressway being either elevated or at-grade. The Mayor said that former Jefferson Councilman Lloyd Giardina complained that an at-grade roadway would be a separation. The current proposal is for it to go to grade between Ames and Westwood and then to be elevated again. This is to avoid the cost and construction disruption that would result from an elevated connection. It was mentioned that the proposed section through Avondale would be at grade except for overpasses at Lapalco, Jamie, and Live Oak. Ms. Wilkinson said that planning would begin next year for the area south of Avondale. Mr. Schmidt and the Deputy Secretary asked that those plans be made in consideration of the fact that the highway would be constructed at grade.

There being no further comments, the discussion ended.

Summary of Comments

Presentation to Lafourche Parish Leaders

2:00 PM, June 11, 2013, Council Chamber, Mathews Government Complex

Attendees:

Lafourche Parish: President Charlotte Randolph, Archie Chaisson, Jeff Luenberger, Pat Matherne

Others: Steve Romano, St. Charles Parish, Michael Tamporello for State Sen. Allain

SCPDC: Rudynah Capone, Leo Marretta

DOTD: Coan Bueche, Lyle LeBlanc, Quang "Wayne" Nguyen, Ann Wills

AECOM: Bob Schmidt, Lou Costa

Mr. Bueche opened the presentation with a brief review of the cost estimates in the Records of Decision for the two segments from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick and Raceland to the Westbank Expressway and explained that the costs exceeded the State's resources. He went on to explain that DOTD undertook the Safety and Efficiency Study to identify safety improvements that could be implemented in a timely manner and lead to the completion of I-49 South. The study also explored options that would identify segments that could be phased and that would have a cost that the State could afford.

He explained that the DOTD is in the process of briefing the elected officials in the affected Parishes prior to introducing the new concepts to the public. He also said that he was representing DOTD Deputy Secretary Eric Kalivoda, who would normally open the meeting. Dr. Kalivoda was unable to attend the meeting and sent his apologies.

He then introduced Mr. Schmidt who began the presentation of the concepts for the segment from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. Mr. Schmidt explained that he would first present the Interim Program and then the Freeway Program, which is more complex and expensive, for the entire length. He also reviewed the contents of the packets that were distributed.

There were questions regarding the proposed LA 308 flyover U-turn. Mr. Romano asked why cloverleaf ramps were not proposed. It was explained that the development to the south of US 90, the cemetery to the north, and the railroad made it difficult and costly to install such ramps. President Randolph added that the railroad was not abandoned. Mr. Marretta asked about the distance between the existing bridge over the bayou and the flyover. Mr. Schmidt explained that the distance was determined by geometric criteria. Mr. Marretta went on to say that his question was prompted by the fact that the flyover impacted the wetland area east of the cane field. Mr. Schmidt said that while there was an impact, the overall impact is less than in the EIS design which relocated the mainline through the wetlands.

Mr. Schmidt then explained that farther east the existing roadway would be converted to a freeway by closing median openings and driveways. The President commented that a number

of people would be unhappy with that concept. Mr. Schmidt said that the right of access would be purchased. The cost is estimated to be much less than constructing an elevated roadway. He continued to explain that the work could not be done without a NEPA process including public participation.

Mr. Schmidt explained that the need to purchase access continues through the LA 182 intersection and along the roadway to the east until reaching Des Allemands. He said that in the EIS there was an interchange proposed at LA 182, but that an interchange would be much more costly than the acquisition of access rights.

Mr. LeBlanc stated that the area between LA 182 and Des Allemands floods. That the road had been raised one foot about 13 years ago, but that it subsides at a rate of about half an inch per year. Last year the eastbound right lane was closed for a week due to flooding caused by the hurricane. Mr. Schmidt said that raising the roadway again would be considered if the roadway were converted to a freeway, but that it would be better to have a freeway that could flood than an arterial that does flood.

He explained that in the Des Allemands area where the Interim freeway project would end, the median would be widened to provide improved turn lanes and that DOTD would work with the Parish to control driveway openings.

He then continued to explain the Interim projects through St. Charles Parish with emphasis on the flyover ramp at I-310. Mr. LeBlanc asked what would be done at the ramp terminal for southbound traffic turning eastbound on US 90. Mr. Schmidt said that the signalized intersection would be improved to provide two turn lanes. Ms. Wills pointed out that the RPC is preparing to undertake an EA for the proposed improvements at I-310.

Mr. Schmidt then explained the remainder of the Interim projects including the conversion of US 90 to a freeway between Willowdale Boulevard and Avondale, the widening of the median through Avondale, and the improvements to create free flow through the Huey P Long interchange.

Mr. Schmidt then presented the Freeway Program. He first explained how a freeway would be constructed between US 90 and the railroad through Des Allemands that would connect to the existing bridge that would be widened to provide shoulders. He explained that on the St. Charles side, US 90 would be rerouted onto LA 361 and across the LA 361 bridge to connect with US 90 in Lafourche Parish to provide a continuous roadway for local access. He added that there also was a possibility to provide a new frontage road along the freeway section on US 90 just west of Paradis that would extend this local access road from Boutte to Des Allemands.

Continuing east through St. Charles, he showed how the I-310 flyover could be incorporated into the final design of the interchange and explained that the new freeway through Boutte could be located at grade if the railroad could be relocated.

After completing the Freeway Program through Jefferson Parish, Mr. Schmidt reviewed the cost estimates by Parish and the next steps in the project. He explained that the purpose of the Parish briefings is to explain the program to the elected officials and to receive their comments

before the program is presented to the resource agencies and the NEPA actions required are determined by FHWA. Following these steps, DOTD will inform the public of the plan to move forward.

Mr. Schmidt then pointed out that the maps on the wall were large scale representations of the proposed improvements in Lafourche Parish.

It is anticipated that some projects, especially those in the Interim Program can move forward independently, but the Freeway Program was expected to require a reopening of the EIS process. It was explained that the concept of an elevated roadway in the Record of Decision is difficult to build in segments, but a concept that is largely at grade can be constructed in phases more easily.

President Randolph asked Mr. LeBlanc for his first impression. He replied that he expected some property owner concerns in the LA 182 area, but that he agreed that an interchange there would cost considerably more than the cost of acquiring the property access rights. He asked Mr. Schmidt if the U-turn flyover could be closer to the bayou if there were a left exit. Mr. Schmidt said that left exits do not meet current interstate standards.

President Randolph stated that she hopes to someday see an extension of the elevated section of LA 1 along the eastern edge of the sugar cane field to interchange with US 90. If this were constructed, the interchange would be in the general location of the proposed flyover. The probability of this new roadway is constrained by a current lack of funds. Mr. Schmidt said that the possibility could be considered during the NEPA process.

Mr. Romano said that he likes the idea of an Interim Program because it would begin the improvement of the corridor. Mr. Bueche said that that was precisely the point of the project, but that it must be remembered that the Interim Projects would compete with all the other projects in the state.

Mr. Luenberger asked when the program would be finalized as he wants to incorporate them into the Parish Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Romano said that the St Charles plan shows the I-310 interchange north of US 90 as it is shown in the EIS and asked if the plan should be revised. It was explained that no schedule can be established until the FHWA determines the NEPA requirements and changes are premature until the NEPA process is completed.

Ms. Wills asked if the Parish officials agreed that the program should go forward. There was general agreement that it should proceed at present.

There being no further comments, the discussion ended.

Summary of Comments

Presentation to St. Mary Parish Leaders

5:00 PM, June 13, 2013, Patterson Civic Center

Attendees:

St. Mary Parish: State Senator Bret Allain, Steve Bierhorst, Gary Beadle, Councilman Sterling Fryou, Mayor Rodney Grogan, Raymond Harris, Glen Hidalgo, State Representative Sam Jones, Henry LaGrange, Councilman Troy Lombardo, Councilman Larry Mendoza, Mayor Louis Ratcliff, James Richard, Councilman Charles Sawyer, Michael Tamporello, Councilman Edgar Thomas, Mayor Pro Tem Sandra K Turner

Acadiana Regional: Grayling Hadnott

Other: Tommy Hebert representing US Senator Vitter

DOTD: Coan Bueche, Deidra Druilhet, Elnur Musa, Quang "Wayne" Nguyen, Ed Wedge, Ann Wills

AECOM: Bob Schmidt, Lou Costa

Mr. Bueche opened the presentation with a brief review of the cost estimates in the Records of Decision for the two segments from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick and Raceland to the Westbank Expressway and explained that the costs exceeded the State's resources. He went on to explain that DOTD undertook the Safety and Efficiency Study to identify safety improvements that could be implemented in a timely manner and lead to the completion of I-49 South. The study also explored options that would identify segments that could be phased and that would have a cost that the State could afford.

He explained that the DOTD is in the process of briefing the elected officials in the affected Parishes prior to introducing the new concepts to the public. He also said that he was representing DOTD Deputy Secretary Eric Kalivoda, who would normally open the meeting. Dr. Kalivoda was unable to attend the meeting and sent his apologies.

He then introduced Mr. Schmidt who began the presentation of the concepts for the segment from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick in St. Mary Parish. Mr. Schmidt explained that he would first present the Interim Program and then the Freeway Program, which is more complex and expensive, for the entire length of the study area. He then reviewed the contents of the packets that were distributed. Mr. Schmidt said that none of these concepts are finalized. They are the current proposals that could improve safety and efficiency and complete I-49 for a lower cost than the construction of the concept in the Record of Decision.

He began with Interim Projects 1 and 2 that are designed to improve LA 182 by providing a new crossing of Wax Lake Outlet. Interim Project 3 provides access management improvements throughout the corridor that had been designed in cooperation with District 03 and creates some sections of frontage roads.

At Southeast Boulevard, he pointed out the signalized J-turns. He then discussed the Thorguson/Berwick South intersection and explained how that intersection would operate. He was asked if an overpass had been considered for this intersection, and he replied that an overpass is included in the Freeway Program.

Mayor Grogan of Patterson said that the city had asked for the Catherine Street overpass to be moved to Red Cypress. Parish President Naquin's representative said that the President wants everyone to understand that the Red Cypress location needs to be considered. Mr. Schmidt said that in the NEPA process all alternatives will be considered. It was then asked whether the NEPA process would apply to the Interim Program or the Freeway Program.

Mr. Schmidt explained that we know that the Freeway Program would require the reopening of the EIS, and that the Interim Program would require some level of NEPA review, but that some of the Interim projects may be cleared through NEPA with Categorical Exclusions or Environmental Assessments as determined by FHWA.

The next question was why Red Cypress had not been considered in this study. Mayor Grogan added that the Red Cypress interchange was a proposal of long standing. Mayor Ratcliff of Berwick asked why the frontage road between Bayou Vista and Berwick was also left out. One of the Councilmen said that the frontage road and associated drainage has been an issue for a long time. Berwick wants it built, not more environmental study.

Mr. Schmidt asked Mr. Costa to explain what he knew of these issues from the EIS process. Mr. Costa responded that the Catherine Street interchange had been proposed in the Draft EIS, but at the Public Hearing the City of Patterson asked that it be removed from the project. Relative to the frontage road in Berwick, he explained that it also was proposed during the course of the study, but that the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) had opposed it and said that it would not be able to receive a permit.

The consensus of the attendees was that DOTD should revisit these issues and consult with the local community.

Mr. Schmidt said that the concept in the ROD is what it is. The issue today is how to complete I-49. What he is presenting is an effort to achieve completion of I-49 at an affordable cost. He then began the presentation of the Freeway Program.

The first project is completion of the Ricohoc interchange, which he pointed out was needed to complete the interstate, but that it was not included in the EIS, which ended at Wax Lake Outlet except for the LA 182 bridge across the Outlet that is now an Interim Project. He said that this interchange and the existing interchange in Berwick at the end of the Atchafalaya bridge are about 11 miles apart. To meet highway design standards, there should be two other interchanges between them.

He then continued describing the Freeway Projects including the south frontage road to provide access and egress to the gas plants. When he reached the Catherine Street interchange, he said that it could be relocated, but that it may not work as well at a different location. An audience member said that there is a drawing of it at Red Cypress including the railroad

overpass. Mr. Schmidt then showed the alternative configuration developed for the overpass and interchange and said that if it was at Red Cypress it would impact the residential area along that street because of the length of the overpass. In response, someone pointed out that Red Cypress is a truck route and leads to LA 182 and a bridge across the Atchafalaya.

Mr. Schmidt then explained how the Cotten Road area would be constructed and showed how the park would be approached from each direction by exiting from the interchanges on both sides and following LA 182. In response to a question regarding a south frontage road, he replied that there was one only from Enterprise Street to Harmony Lane.

He then continued with the presentation of the Southeast Boulevard interchange and the Thorguson/Berwick South overpass. There were several comments regarding the need for an interchange at the latter location. Mr. Schmidt explained the next interchange is only about half a mile away and that it is too close. He also explained that FHWA no longer allows the construction of ramps in less than all four quadrants of an interchange. Additional comments indicated that Berwick South is more than the route to the landfill. It is the major industrial corridor on the west side of the river and needs good access.

Rep. Jones said that having no interchange at Red Cypress is not acceptable. He also wants the J-turns throughout the corridor and the frontage road from Thorguson to Southeast Boulevard implemented immediately. He said that routing trucks from Berwick South through the developed area of Berwick was not acceptable. He doesn't think that 18-wheelers can even make some of the turns that would require. He ended by saying that these are the first improvements that should be funded.

Mr. Schmidt then reviewed the budget for the St Mary projects and explained only about half of the cost of Interim Project 3 that includes the J-turns contributes to the completion of the interstate.

Mayor Grogan asked if eliminating the Ricohoc interchange would make more improvements in Patterson possible more quickly. Mr. Schmidt said that the interchange would need to be built eventually because otherwise there would be a gap in the freeway.

Rep. Jones asked why the south frontage road is needed attached to the interchange. Mr. Schmidt explained that it provides access to the gas plants and other property in the area.

Sen. Allain asked if the interchange could be moved to the east side of the Outlet but keep the overpass at Ricohoc. This would eliminate the south crossing of the Outlet to help defray the cost of the Ricohoc overpass. He continued by saying that he believes that there is another alternative between the ROD and the current proposal.

Mr. Bueche said that the purpose of the meeting is to hear their comments. The concept in the ROD is financially out of reach. The open issue is what the state can afford that is compatible with local needs and interstate standards.

Rep. Jones said that I-49 west of Wax Lake Outlet is funded. He wants a program that is ready before the next Legislative session so that he can begin the process of getting it funded. Sen.

Allain agreed and said that they want something that is shovel ready in case there is a new federal stimulus package. He wants to keep this discussion alive because this is the final most dangerous section of the corridor.

Mr. Bueche said that was consistent with the intent of DOTD, but to remember that funding some Interim Projects did not necessarily advance I-49. General conversation followed. It was concluded that J-turns throughout the corridor and frontage roads where most needed is of the highest priority to eliminate the worst safety concerns.

Sen. Allain said that the Parish will work together to develop a St Mary plan. He also asked how to get ramps in less than all quadrants. Mr. Schmidt said that FHWA would not allow that. The Senator then asked if the exiting Berwick interchange and the Thorguson/Berwick intersection could be redesigned into a single interchange. Mr. Schmidt said that it could be done, but the cost would increase.

Mr. Schmidt then completed the presentation of the Next Steps.

Mayor Ratcliff asked if the current construction on US 90 in Broussard could be considered an Interim project. It was agreed that, while not part of this program, it was the equivalent of an Interim project.

Sen. Allain asked that maps be left for the group's use in developing a St Mary plan. It was agreed that these would be left and Senator Allain would meet with the council who would prepare the plan and send it to DOTD.

There being no further comments, the meeting ended.

Meeting Notes

Resource Agency Briefing

10:00 AM, August 28, 2013, Room 302AA, DOTD Headquarters

Attendees: See Attached.

Agenda: See Attached.

Mr. Costa welcomed everyone and asked that those present introduce themselves.

Dr. Kalivoda then explained that the projects defined in the two Records of Decision are too costly for DOTD to implement. Therefore, DOTD has developed alternative concepts that have lower probable costs and that can be implemented in phases, which was difficult for the earlier projects that were largely elevated. He asked the agency representatives to listen and to tell DOTD their thoughts.

Mr. Schmidt began the presentation by reiterating Dr. Kalivoda's statement that these concepts can be developed incrementally and added that another advantage is that much more of the proposed alignment uses existing US 90.

(See the copy of the PowerPoint presentation.)

Following the presentation, Dr. Kalivoda said that the new concepts would likely have more potential impacts on the built and human environment and fewer impacts on the natural environment, but that it was difficult to be sure without undertaking NEPA. He added that the use of existing US 90 and the reduction in elevated sections makes it feasible for DOTD to implement the projects one at a time.

Mr. Heffner (USACE) asked for clarification regarding the Interim projects that are access management improvements and do not contribute to I-49.

Ms. Ardoin asked Mr. Schmidt to define access management for those unfamiliar with the term. Based on Mr. Schmidt's explanation regarding the control of driveways, the reduction in median opening and left turns, to be replaced with U-turns and J-turns, Mr. Heffner said the any project that was part of the final plan for I-49 should be included in a single SEIS. Ms. Ardoin and Dr. Kalivoda added that these improvements were needed to provide safer driving conditions.

Mr. Frank (USCG) asked if any portions of the roadway would be raised to reduce the possibility of flooding. Dr. Kalivoda responded that this would be done only in locations where it was believed to be warranted.

Mr. Hartman (NOAA/NMFS) agreed that any project that contributes to I-49 should be included in a single SEIS. He also stated that a consideration of sea level rise should be made in any plans for new or improved roads.

Dr. Kalivoda responded that DOTD was aware of this concern, but needs more information regarding the plans for coastal restoration.

Mr. Frank asked if the USCG was a cooperating agency on Section 4. By reference to the FEIS it was confirmed that it was a cooperating agency and would be again in any new NEPA action.

He then asked when the first of the Interim projects could be expected to begin.

Mr. Schmidt said that the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission was expected to begin an EA for the ramp at I-310 in the near future. Dr. Kalivoda added that Categorical Exclusions for some of the access management projects would begin in the foreseeable future, but that no other projects have been scheduled.

Mr. Heffner agreed that it was reasonable to do the smaller projects in steps.

Mr. Schmidt replied that some others could be done under EA's such as I-1 and I-2 in Section 4 which are estimated to cost \$28 million and would extend the freeway operation an estimated 7 miles. He added, however, that the next step was for DOTD to make a proposal to FHWA regarding staging and NEPA requirements, and for FHWA to make a determination. After that, a schedule could be developed.

Mr. Mahoney said that FHWA would appreciate the resource agencies providing any comments or observations regarding permits or procedures to DOTD so that DOTD can incorporate them into their request to FHWA.

Mr. Hartman said that an SEIS in each section for the projects that contribute to the completion of I-49 would be a better course to follow than multiple NEPA documents. He reiterated his hope that sea level rise will be included in the NEPA analysis. He also explained that CPRA has methodologies for the evaluation of this problem.

Mr. Mahoney asked if these are readily accessible. Mr. Hartman said that he was unsure, but that the USACE also has a methodology that they are using currently. He also said that the new levees will not protect I-49 west of the new levee in St. Charles Parish that crosses US 90 just east of Davis Pond. He reminded the group the most of the flooding problems remain in the unprotected area.

Dr. Kalivoda said that there already are roads there and that DOTD may need to consider periodic raising of some of them to avoid flooding.

Mr. Hartman also reminded the group that there are a number of locations where drainage is interrupted by roads and other structures, but that upgrading the roadways would give an opportunity to alleviate these problems.

Mr. Soileau (USFWS) asked about the roadways south of US 90 in St. Mary Parish that are shown on the drawings at Red Cypress and east of Cotten Road.

Mr. Schmidt explained that the road leading east from the Red Cypress interchange provided local residents with a safe crossing of the railroad to access the developed area of Patterson south of US 90. It uses mostly existing roadways with some new connections between them and leads to a frontage road via Enterprise Street. It also makes it possible to close two grade crossings. The road east of Cotten Road provides access to three existing roads and to three utility facilities operated by the Parish. Mr. Costa added that it could be inside the right-of-way until it reaches Opperman Lane, but that would eliminate the opportunity to close additional grade crossings. In the FEIS, there was a 2-way frontage road on the north side of an elevated mainline with connecting roadways beneath to each of the crossings.

Mr. Soileau continued by asking about the plans at the Thorguson/Berwick South intersection with US 90. Mr. Schmidt replied that currently it is an at-grade intersection with a traffic signal. The current plan is an interchange that is substantially the same as the one in the FEIS.

Mr. Soileau concluded by saying that he agreed that one SEIS in each section was appropriate. He does not object to the access management projects being done separately, but any project that would increase the speeds should be studied in the largest context possible.

Mr. Mahoney said that while he has not received DOTD's formal proposal, he expects that in each section there will be one SEIS for all projects that contribute to I-49 with other NEPA actions for the other projects.

Mr. Soileau stated that the forested areas south of US 90 in St. Mary Parish have been identified as critical habitat for the Louisiana Black Bear.

Mr. Nguyen stated that he would appreciate written comments (letters or e-mails) from the agencies once they have had an opportunity to review the minutes and the PowerPoint presentation.

Mr. Heffner asked if the Interim were likely to induce development, especially any that would interfere with the completion of I-49.

Dr. Kalivoda said that the Interim projects should not induce development as they are primarily steps to increase operational safety [but the freeway projects have potential to impact land uses..](#)

Dr. Kalivoda then asked if there were any other comments or questions. There being none, the meeting adjourned.

Senator Bret Allain (District 21)
600 Main Street, Suite 1
Franklin, LA 70538, Phone 337-828-9107



Representative Sam Jones (District 50)
733 Main Street
Franklin LA 70538, Phone 337-828-7778

STATE OF LOUISIANA
St. Mary Parish Delegation

July 17, 2013

Secretary Sherri LeBas, P.E.
Department of Transportation and Development
P.O. Box 94245
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9245

Secretary LeBas,

As a follow-up to a recent briefing for local officials in St. Mary Parish on a study to identify interim projects and other cost efficiencies in Section 3 of the I-49 South Corridor, Rep. Sam Jones and I called for a meeting of parish and municipal leaders to further discuss the results presented to us on June 13, 2013.

The second meeting was held on July 8, 2013, in Patterson, Louisiana, in part, to better convey our concerns with some of the projects outlined and communicate potential alternatives St. Mary Parish officials would like to see explored.

Secondly, St. Mary Parish wanted to communicate its overall approval of the steps being taken to lower costs through reworked designs along the corridor. By decreasing the amount of elevated highway in exchange for grade-level improvements, these steps will hopefully result in furthering and expediting the goal of having Section 3 upgraded to interstate standards.

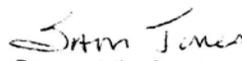
This project is important not only for the economic development opportunities that an interstate-grade highway will bring, but also in terms of the safety it will bring to the businesses and citizens that utilize it everyday. These improvements will also greatly contribute to a more efficient and safer hurricane evacuation route through South Louisiana.

Attached is a list of recommendations to the study made by St. Mary Parish officials for your further review. DOTD's Office of Planning and AECOM have copies of the maps we edited at the meeting per their requests.

On behalf of St. Mary Parish, thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Senator R.L. "Bret" Allain
Member, Senate Finance Committee
District 21


Representative Sam Jones
Member, House Transportation Committee
District 50

cc: Eric Kalivoda, Melissa Mann, Louis Costa, Robert Schmidt

Recommendations for Further Review for Section 3

Interim Projects:

1. Zenor Road in Calumet for Airport Access for a J-turn and U-turn; remove one to west of Zenor and one at Marin St.
2. Continuing the Service Rd. through Catherine to Red Cypress and to Todd Subdivision.
3. Area at Bernard Street in Patterson; put turn there instead of just east at Wedell (a street that is not paved).
4. Look at potential access issues from the east for the truck stops in Bayou Vista (calls for a U-turn and a left to get to the area between Anthony St. and the Levee).
5. Berwick Service Road north of U.S. 90

Freeway Projects:

1. Put full interchange on east side of Wax Lake Outlet for better airport access (remove south service road bridge over Wax Lake Outlet to free up \$12.7 million to be put towards it).
 2. Eliminate the emergency ramp from gas plant to Catherine St. (find a shorter solution, i.e. emergency access merge lane).
 3. Overpass across tracks at Red Cypress with access roads around water plant on south side of tracks to reach Enterprise St.
 4. New Frontage Road for Plantation Pump and Opperman Lane in the Bayou Vista area.
 5. Access to Pumps in Berwick.
 6. Full Interchange in Berwick at Thorguson and Berwick South Rd. in accordance with existing EIS.
 7. Potential exit between SE Blvd and Red Cypress to allow traffic to pass through Patterson on service road that would run on north side of freeway.
 8. Exit at SE Blvd. should take into account the potential development south of the tracks (service road connecting this area to Cotten Road).
-



Office of the Secretary
PO Box 94245 | Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9245
ph: 225-379-1200 | fx: 225-379-1851

Bobby Jindal, Governor
Sherri H. LeBas, P.E., Secretary

August 1, 2013

Honorable R. L. "Bret" Allain
State Senator District 21
600 Main Street, Suite 1
Franklin, LA 70538-5437

Honorable Sam Jones
State Representative District 50
733 Main Street
Franklin, LA 70538

Gentlemen:

Thank you for your letter of July 17, 2013, concerning the review by state and local officials of the concepts prepared for I-49 South, from Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick. The project team at DOTD has given careful consideration to your recommendations. I am writing to provide you with our findings. We look forward to continuing to work with you to complete I-49 South.

Below are the project team's responses to each of the recommendations you provided. In a number of cases the project team has agreed to revise the concept as you recommend. However, please keep in mind that the concept is subject to change through the environmental process in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and related federal laws and regulations.

Interim Projects

1. The J-turns and U-turns initially presented were located based on discussions between the District 03 staff and the consultant using available but somewhat dated traffic data. As you and constituents are familiar with the local travel patterns, the concept drawings will be revised to reflect the comments. Prior to implementation, new traffic data will be gathered and analyzed. Based on the findings of this analysis, a safety analysis, and continued discussions with St. Mary Parish and the City of Patterson officials and the public, a final design will be determined.
2. Based on the other changes in the concepts discussed under Item 3 of the Freeway Comments below, the extension of the frontage road to the Todd Subdivision also will be included in the revised concept.
3. The termination of the frontage road will be relocated from Wedell Street to Bernard Street in the revised concept. It should be noted that during the environmental process we may find that relocations of existing properties would result.
4. Removal of a J-turn and U-turn west of Zenor Road and at Marin Street; continuation of the service road through Catherine to Red Cypress Road and Todd Subdivision, moving the turn just east of Wedell to area at Bernard Street in Patterson, addressing access issues from the east for truck stops in Bayou Vista, and a Berwick Service Road north of U.S. 90 will be included in the revised concept, but will be subject to the analysis discussed in Item 1 above.
5. Based on the findings of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) completed in 2006 that disallowed the frontage road between Bayou Vista and Berwick, we have not included this frontage road in the Interim

Honorable R. L. "Bret" Allain
Honorable Sam Jones
August 1, 2013
Page 2 of 2

Projects. It will be studied again in the environmental process, a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Freeway Program.

Freeway Projects

1. Because of the interstate design standard of a 3-mile minimum spacing between interchanges in rural areas, it would not meet design standards to provide an interchange at both Ricohoc and immediately on the east side of Wax lake Outlet (this is only 1 ½ mile spacing). During the SEIS both locations will be studied and compared and a decision adopted as to which location best serves St. Mary Parish.
2. While a shorter ramp was included in the FEIS, current standards do not support this design. The extension of the ramp to the next interchange will remain. The nearest interchange (Red Cypress Lane), however, will be nearer to the gas plants based on Item 3 below.
3. The interchange previously shown at Catherine Street will be relocated to Red Cypress and will include an overpass over the railroad. The project team agrees to extend the access to that overpass to Enterprise Street using, to the extent possible, segments of existing roadways.
4. This recommendation is closely associated with Items 5 and 8. In an effort to clarify the project team response to all three recommendations, let me say that the concept will be revised as follows: the frontage road on the south side of the mainline, which currently ends in the east at Harmony Lane on the north side of the railroad, would be extended on the south side of the railroad from Cotten Road to the sewerage pond in the vicinity of the levee between Bayou Vista and Berwick. This would provide access to all existing roadways and property on the south side of the highway and improve safety by closing the four at-grade crossings at AM Gray Lane, Harmony Lane, Opperman Lane, and the sewerage pond access. As access would be provided from Cotten Road, no new at-grade railroad crossing would be needed at Southeast Boulevard.
5. Regarding access to pumps in Berwick, see Item 4 above.
6. Regarding the recommendation of an interchange at Thorguson/Berwick south in conjunction with the existing LA 182 interchange in Berwick, the project team supports the concept. However, the ramp spacing shown in the FEIS may no longer meet current standards and must be studied in light of new traffic data that will be collected and analyzed in conjunction with the SEIS.
7. It will not be possible to provide a westbound exit between Southeast Boulevard and Red Cypress as current interstate design standards do not permit isolated exits separate from a full interchange.
8. Regarding the exit at Southeast Boulevard taking into account the potential for development south of the railroad tracks, see Item 4 above.

Again, thank you for your active interest and participation in the process of completing I-49 South. The current project has several more steps, including a meeting with state and federal resource agencies. Following that meeting, DOTD plans to establish the next steps with Federal Highway Administration and re-open the required environmental processes as soon as practicable.

You will be kept informed as the project develops. We look forward to your continued participation.

Sincerely,



Eric Kalivoda
Deputy Secretary



BOBBY JINDAL
GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES

ROBERT J. BARHAM
SECRETARY

September 13, 2013

Quang Wayne Nguyen, Demo/High Priority Program Manager
Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development
Transportation Planning Section
1201 Capitol Access Road, Room 200DD
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

RE: *State Project No. H.005171*
I-49 Study to Identify Interim Improvements for Safety and Efficiency

Dear Mr. Nguyen:

The professional staff of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has reviewed the information provided by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LDOTD) concerning the "I-49 Study to Identify Interim Improvements for Safety and Efficiency." The following recommendations have been provided by LDWF and should be given thorough consideration:

Natural & Scenic Rivers

Bayou Des Allemands, which is designated as a Scenic River, is located within the proposed project. Contact Keith Cascio with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at 318-343-4045 concerning this Scenic River.

Louisiana black bear

The Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) may occur near Section 3 of the proposed project. It is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The Louisiana black bear utilizes a variety of habitat types, including forested wetlands, marsh, spoil banks, and upland forests. The primary threats to the species are continued loss of bottomland hardwoods, fragmentation of remaining forested tracts, and human-caused mortality. Louisiana black bears, particularly pregnant females, normally den from December through April. Bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and tupelo gum (*Nyssa aquatica*) with visible cavities, having a diameter at breast height of 36 inches or greater, and occurring in or along rivers, lakes, streams, bayous, sloughs, or other water bodies have legal protection as candidate or actual den trees. If construction is to be performed during the denning season or if bald cypress or tupelo gum with diameters at breast height of 36 inches or greater will be removed or destroyed, further consultation with this office will be necessary. We strongly urge workers and contractors to avoid bears, particularly if work is to be conducted during the non-denning season (April through December). Employees should be cautioned to not leave food or garbage in the field, as bears can become attracted and accustomed to human food easily. In addition, we recommend the use of bear proof garbage containers on site. If you have any questions please call Maria Davidson at 337-948-0255.

Bald Eagle

Our records indicate that Section 5 of the proposed project may potentially impact Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nesting sites. This species is protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 668-668c) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected by the state of Louisiana. This proposed project is less than 1,000 ft. away from the bald eagle nest of concern. All bald eagle nests (active, inactive or seemingly abandoned) should be protected, and no large trees should be removed. Please refer to the Bald Eagle Management Guidelines for more information on avoiding impacts to bald eagles: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/es/baldeagle/>. If additional information is needed contact the LNHP zoologist at 337-491-2576 Ext 3019.

Bird Nesting Colonies

Our database indicates the presence of bird nesting colonies within one mile of Section 5 of the proposed project. **Please be aware that entry into or disturbance of active breeding colonies is prohibited by LDWF. In addition, LDWF prohibits work within a certain radius of an active nesting colony.**

Nesting colonies can move from year to year and no current information is available on the status of these colonies. If work for the proposed project will commence during the nesting season, conduct a field visit to the worksite to look for evidence of nesting colonies. This field visit should take place no more than two weeks before the project begins. If no nesting colonies are found within 400 meters (700 meters for brown pelicans) of the proposed project, no further consultation with LDWF will be necessary. If active nesting colonies are found within the previously stated distances of the proposed project, further consultation with LDWF will be required. In addition, colonies should be surveyed by a qualified biologist to document species present and the extent of colonies. Provide LDWF with a survey report which is to include the following information:

1. qualifications of survey personnel;
2. survey methodology including dates, site characteristics, and size of survey area;
3. species of birds present, activity, estimates of number of nests present, and general vegetation type including digital photographs representing the site; and
4. topographic maps and ArcView shapefiles projected in UTM NAD83 Zone 15 to illustrate the location and extent of the colony.

Please mail survey reports on CD to: Louisiana Natural Heritage Program
La. Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries
P.O. Box 98000
Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000

To minimize disturbance to colonial nesting birds, the following restrictions on activity should be observed:

- For colonies containing nesting wading birds (i.e., herons, egrets, night-herons, ibis, roseate spoonbills, anhingas, and/or cormorants), all project activity occurring within 300 meters of an active nesting colony should be restricted to the non-nesting period (i.e., September 1 through February 15).

- For colonies containing nesting gulls, terns, and/or black skimmers, all project activity occurring within 400 meters (700 meters for brown pelicans) of an active nesting colony should be restricted to the non-nesting period (i.e., September 16 through April 1).

Page 3

LDOTD State Project No. H.005171

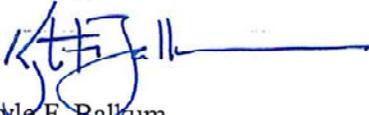
September 13, 2013

No other impacts to rare, threatened or endangered species or critical habitats are anticipated from the proposed project. No state or federal parks, wildlife refuges, wildlife management areas or other scenic rivers are known at the specified site or within ¼ mile of the proposed project.

The Louisiana Natural Heritage Program (LNHP) reports summarize the existing information known at the time of the request regarding the location in question. LNHP reports should not be considered final statements on the biological elements or areas being considered, nor should they be substituted for on-site surveys required for environmental assessments. If at any time LNHP tracked species are encountered within the project area, please contact our biologist at 225-765-2643.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries appreciates the opportunity to review and provide recommendations to you regarding this proposed activity. Please do not hesitate to contact LDWF Permits Coordinator Dave Butler at 225-763-3595 should you need further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Balkum', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Kyle F. Balkum
Biologist Program Manager

cm

From: Al Hindrichs [Al.Hindrichs@LA.GOV]
Sent: Friday, September 13, 2013 9:01 AM
To: Quang Nguyen
Cc: Costa, Louis
Subject: RE: I-49 comments

Mr. Nguyen,

LDEQ appreciates the opportunity to comment on the I-49 interim improvements project presented at LDOTD on August 28, 2013. LDEQ does not have any substantial comments regarding water quality issues at this time. However, during the course of construction LDEQ expects contractors to comply with all required or encouraged nonpoint source (NPS) water pollution control best management practices to reduce or prevent impacts on water quality in the area. More information on NPS best management practices can be found on the LDEQ website at: <http://nonpoint.deq.louisiana.gov/>.

I look forward to continuing to work with LDOTD on this or other projects as needed.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Albert E. Hindrichs

Environmental Scientist Senior

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

Water Permits Division

(225) 219-4054 (Office)

From: Soileau, David [david_soileau@fws.gov]
Sent: Friday, September 13, 2013 8:55 AM
To: Quang Nguyen
Cc: Costa, Louis
Subject: Re: I-49 comments

Wayne,

I've been out of the office quite a bit lately, but have finally taken a moment to put together a few comments regarding the current Hwy.90/I-49 proposal. To reiterate my comments from the August 28, 2013, interagency meeting:

- 1) I would prefer that the project modifications be evaluated through a supplemental EIS. This is because any individual component, standing alone, may not have a measurable impact on Louisiana black bears. But, the sum of all of the various features would change traffic dynamics through several miles of bear habitat, and would likely have an affect on the Louisiana black bear. Evaluating all of the project features in an SEIS format would also provide for a more comprehensive direct-impact assessment. However, after the SEIS is finalized, the various project components could possibly be individually authorized (e.g., individual CWA-Sec.404/LDEQ/etc. permits and authorizations).
- 2) Throughout Section 3 (Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick), virtually all forested habitat south of U.S. Hwy. 90 is breeding habitat, and has been designated as critical habitat, for the Louisiana black bear. We conducted formal Endangered Species Act consultation regarding the impacts of upgrading U.S. Hwy. 90 to interstate specifications, back in 2004. Our official biological opinion, including all of its terms and conditions, is still valid and applicable. We evaluated the impacts to "proposed" critical habitat at that time because critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear had not yet been designated. Now, that we have officially designated critical habitat we will have to consult regarding associated impacts. Based on the limited amount of information that I have received regarding the proposed project features, it is not possible to determine whether that consultation should be formal or informal. We can make that decision as project evaluation progresses.
- 3) A reasonable effort should be made to design the project features to avoid and minimize impacts to forested habitat, particularly those forests occurring south of U.S. Hwy. 90 within Section 3 (Wax Lake Outlet to Berwick) .

Thanks for the opportunity to provide comments in this early planning phase for the proposed Hwy.90/I-49 modifications,

Dave

David Soileau, Jr.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

646 Cajundome Blvd., Suite 400

Lafayette, Louisiana 70506

(337) 291-3109

david_soileau@fws.gov

<http://www.fws.gov/lafayette>

