

# **Record of Decision**

## **I-49 South Route US 90 Raceland to the Westbank Expressway**

### **Jefferson, Lafourche, and St. Charles Parishes Louisiana**

**January 2008**

**Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2) (c), 23 CFR 711,  
and CEQ Regulation (40 CFR 1500-1508)  
State Project No. 700-92-0011  
Federal Project No. HP 9201(501)**

**U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration  
Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development**

**Cooperating Agencies:  
New Orleans District – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Coast Guard**



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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.0	Decision	1
1.1	Summary of Decision	1
2.0	Alternatives Considered	2
2.1	Compliance with Federal Highway Administration Environmental Impact and Related Procedures	3
2.2	Alternative 1B	4
2.3	Alternative 2B	5
2.4	Alternative 3A	6
2.5	Alternative 4A	7
2.6	Alternative 5A	8
2.7	Alternative 6B	10
2.8	Selected Alternative	11
2.9	Selection of a Build Alternative over the No Build Alternative	12
3.0	Measures to Minimize Harm	12
3.1	Relocation	13
3.2	Environmental Justice	13
3.3	Noise	13
3.4	Surface Water	13
3.5	Wetlands	13
3.6	Floodplains	14
3.7	Levees	14
3.8	Threatened and Endangered Species	14
3.9	Geology, Topography, Soils, and Prime Farmland	14
3.10	Hazardous Sites	14
3.11	Utilities	15
3.12	Aesthetics	15
3.13	Cultural resources	15
3.14	Impacts to Transportation patterns	15
3.15	Construction Impacts	15
3.15.1	Traffic and Circulation	15
3.15.2	Noise	16
3.15.3	Utilities	16
3.15.4	Geology, Topography, Soils, and Prime Farmland	16
3.15.5	Hazardous Sites	16
3.16	Navigation	16
3.17	Cumulative Impacts	16
4.0	Monitoring and Reporting	17
5.0	Comments to the Final EIS	17
5.1	Comment 1	17
5.2	Comment 2	18
5.3	Comment 3	18
5.3.1	Pending the Recovery of New Orleans Area after Katrina, only the No-Build Alternative should be considered	18
5.3.2	Lack of Data regarding Impacts to Wetlands by Existing Highways	18
5.3.3	Error in Table 7-1 of the Final EIS	19

5.3.4	Need to Develop Environmental Indicator Sets	19
5.3.5	Combining the Sections of Independent Utility should Produce an Additional Alternative	19
5.3.6	Questions Response D-1 in Final EIS	21
5.3.7	Concerns regarding a Fully Elevated I-49 including a Misunderstanding of Comment 41-5 as shown by response F-11 in the Final EIS	22
5.3.8	Questions concerning Demographics and Traffic Projections	22
5.3.8.1	What does the traffic study consider?	23
5.3.8.2	Is the current Huey P. Long Bridge project included?	23
5.3.8.3	Why is there no quantitative assessment of energy costs with a comparison among the alternatives?	23
6.0	Record of Decision Approval	24

## APPENDIX

### Comments Received in response to the Publication of the Final EIS

Comment 1	27
Comment 2	28
Comment 3	31
USEPA Notice	38
USCG Notice	39

## EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1-1 Selected Alternative	2
Exhibit 2-1 Alternative 1B	4
Exhibit 2-2 Alternative 2B	5
Exhibit 2-3 Alternative 3A	6
Exhibit 2-4 Alternative 4A	8
Exhibit 2-5 Alternative 5A	9
Exhibit 2-6 Alternative 6B	11

## 1.0 Decision

### 1.1 Summary of Decision

This Record of Decision (ROD) approves the Selected Alternative for the portion of proposed I-49 South that would extend along the US 90 corridor from the LA 1 interchange in Raceland in Lafourche Parish to the existing completed portion of the elevated Westbank Expressway near Ames Boulevard in Jefferson Parish, a distance of 36.3 miles. The project also includes an extension of I-310 from its current alignment to an interchange with I-49, a distance of approximately 2.3 miles. The total length of mainline interstate construction would be 38.6 miles as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on October 19, 2007, and the cover of the document is dated October 26, 2007.

The Final EIS studied the proposed construction of an elevated fully controlled access freeway with local access frontage roads as required along portions of the U.S. 90 corridor. Every effort was made to follow the existing US 90 as closely as possible to avoid impacts to surrounding wetlands. Project objectives include development of an elevated fully controlled access freeway in the US 90 corridor, while providing: the least disruption to local, business, and through traffic during construction; least impact to the natural and human environment; best access for local and business traffic in the completed project; and an improved hurricane evacuation route.

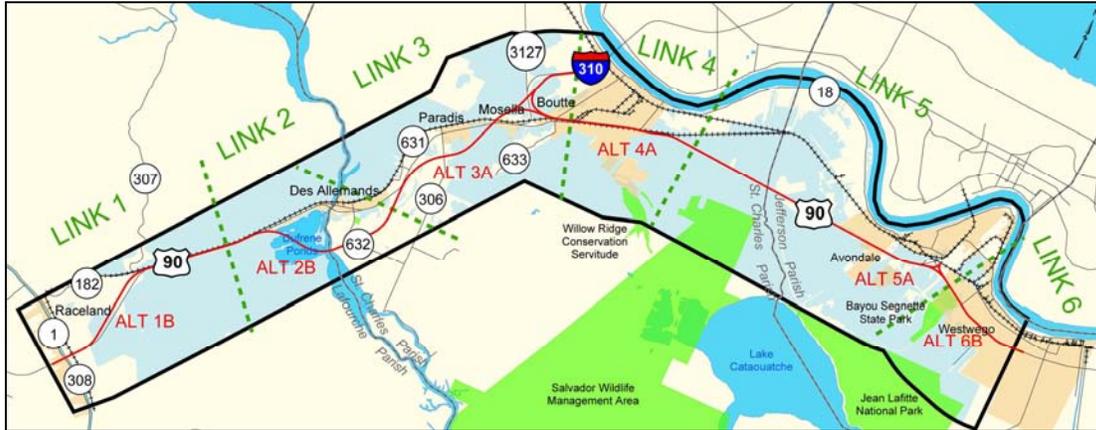
The project is made up of links which are portions of roadway alignment that are distinguished by geometry, environmental conditions, and/or use of the US 90 right-of-way. Each Build Alternative considered during the Alternatives Analysis, including the Preferred Alternative described in the Draft EIS and the Selected Alternative in the Final EIS, has been comprised of six links. Alternative alignments were developed at the Link level, and an Alternative could be assembled from various combinations of these alignments.

As shown in Exhibit 1, the Selected Alternative is made up of Link Alternatives 1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A and 6B, and the Links can be defined as follows:

- Link 1: LA 1 to just west of Dufrene Ponds
- Link 2: From Link 1 to about 2.3 miles west of Bayou Gauche Road (LA 306)
- Link 3: From Link 2 to just east of Paul Maillard Road (LA 52)
- Link 4: From Link 3 to just east of the Davis Pond Diversion Canal;
- Link 5: From Link 4 to a point just east of Segnette Boulevard; and
- Link 6: From Link 5 to the existing completed portion of the elevated Westbank Expressway (US 90 Business) at approximately Ames Boulevard in Marrero in Jefferson Parish.

Initially, the project also included two Sections of Independent Utility or SIUs. SIU 1 included Links 1 – 4 and SIU 2 overlapped this area and included Links 3 – 6. In response to comments received after distribution of the Draft EIS for SIU 1 that suggested that there may be an issue of segmentation, the project was unified and a Draft EIS for all six links was issued February 1, 2007.

**Exhibit 1-1  
Selected Alternative**



This decision is based on analyses contained in the Draft EIS; the Final EIS; the comments of federal, state and local agencies, members of the public, and elected officials; and other information in the record in this matter. Following the approval of this ROD, the project will be able to begin provisions to preserve the I-49 additional required right-of-way, and, as funding becomes available, design and construction will be implemented.

## 2.0 Alternatives Considered

The unified Draft EIS for the portion of I-49 South extending from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway comprising all six links was prepared and distributed in February 2007. The Draft EIS considered only the line and grade alternative that upgraded the existing US 90 corridor to a control of access freeway and that was believed to be the least damaging, yet practicable alternative. The corridor was divided into six links designated Links 1 – 6. The links are portions of roadway alignment that are distinguished by geometry, environmental conditions, and/or use of the US 90 right-of-way.

This approach enabled the alternatives analysis to be highly flexible and to focus on specific corridor issues. Alternatives could be developed, refined, or eliminated in one link while not affecting the same process in another. In the Draft EIS for SIU 1 comprising Links 1 – 4 distributed in August 2005, combining all Link Alternatives in all possible combinations resulted in eight Build Alternatives for SIU 1. In the Draft EIS for SIU 2 comprising Links 3 - 6, that was not distributed, combining all Link Alternatives in all possible combinations resulted in eight Build Alternatives for SIU 2 also.

In the unified Draft EIS, there was only one Build Alternative, which was the Preferred Alternative. It became the Selected Alternative described in the Final EIS. The Selected Alternative is made up of Link Alternatives 1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, and 6B, which are described in the Sections 2.1 through 2.6 of this ROD.

## 2.1 Compliance with Federal Highway Administration Environmental Impact and Related Procedures

In the development of alternatives, the requirements of 23 CFR 771.111(f) state that the project must:

- Connect logical termini,
- Have independent utility, and
- Not restrict the consideration of future transportation alternatives.

The proposed project meets these requirements. It has logical termini and independent utility, and it does not restrict consideration of other transportation improvements in the area.

The project limits were defined to further the development of I-49, and to address local traffic demand, safety issues, and emergency evacuation opportunities on a portion of US 90. The project would connect two completed sections of I-49. One extends northbound from LA 1 to Morgan City, and the other extends southbound from the terminus of this project near Ames Boulevard along the Westbank Expressway to the Crescent City Connection and the Pontchartrain Expressway to the terminus of I-49 at the I-10 interchange in New Orleans.

Regardless of other I-49 initiatives, the project limits have been defined by traffic volumes and capacity requirements that result from regional growth and a need to enhance hurricane evacuation capabilities. The local traffic demand and safety concerns affirm the project's logical termini and demonstrate the independent utility of the project.

The project is demonstrated to meet logical termini and have independent utility as it meets the following components of the Purpose and Need:

- Connect I-49 South to north Louisiana and the nation (system linkage);
- Facilitate hurricane evacuation;
- Increase capacity to meet the design year demand;
- Improve safety and efficiency through higher roadway design standards;
- Enhance the economic potential of Louisiana through improved access to ports, airports, industrial sectors, and tourist attractions; and
- Achieve these goals while maintaining consistency with flood control plans and with *Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast* and other programs that provide for the protection of the natural environment.

The Final EIS contains an adequate detailed statement of the following: description of the proposed project; need for the project; alternatives; affected environment; environmental consequences; and comments and coordination.

The Draft and Final EIS's have been coordinated with appropriate local, state and federal agencies and also made available for public comment and at the Public Hearing for the DEIS held on March 22, 27, and 29, 2007. The comments received have been addressed in the Final EIS and this ROD.

## 2.2 Alternative 1B

Link 1 extends from LA 1 to just west of Dufrene Ponds. Two Alternatives have been analyzed for Link 1. Alternative 1A, a partly at-grade alignment, was included in the SIU 1 DEIS. Alternative 1B is fully elevated. It is described below and shown in **Exhibit 2-1**.

**Exhibit 2-1**  
**Alternative 1B**



Alternative 1B is the selected and evolved from early decisions that I-49 South should follow the US 90 right-of-way (ROW) as closely as possible, and that an interchange with LA 182 should be provided. Following the 2005 hurricane season, it was determined that the I-49 mainline should be elevated throughout this project. Other Link 1 goals that the design of 1B would achieve include:

- An elevated mainline across the Barataria Basin between LA 182 and Bayou Des Allemands;
- A route for vehicles traveling on LA 308 to travel westbound on I-49 and for eastbound vehicles on I-49 to reach LA 308;
- The provision of local access to the extent possible along the existing US 90 ROW;
- The improvement of traffic operations at the intersections of LA 182 with US 90 and with LA 307;
- The reduction or elimination of roadway-associated obstacles to surface flow in the Barataria Basin; and
- The assurance that the I-49 mainline would remain above the probable flood elevation.

East of the LA 182 interchange, Alternative 1A and Alternative 1B are identical. From LA 182 to the point that it ties into the Bayou Lafourche Bridge, Alternative 1B would be elevated 16.5 feet above the grade of LA 182. The elevated mainline between LA 182 and the bridge would occupy a ROW separate from US 90. The separate ROW would allow the Parish to extend the remnant of US 90, operating as an access road for abutting properties, from its western termination to LA 308. This extension had been requested by the Parish early in the scoping process. Constructing the extension is not part of the I-49 South project.

### 2.3 Alternative 2B

Link 2 extends from just west of Dufrene Ponds to about 2.3 miles west of Bayou Gauche Road (LA 306). Two alignment Alternatives were developed for Link 2. Alternative 2A continued farther southbound before crossing Dufrene Ponds and Bayou Des Allemands. Alternative 2B resulted in potential impacts to developed areas, to navigation channels, and to species of interest. Noise impacts also were projected. Alternative 2B is described below and shown in **Exhibit 2-2**.

**Exhibit 2-2**  
**Alternative 2B**



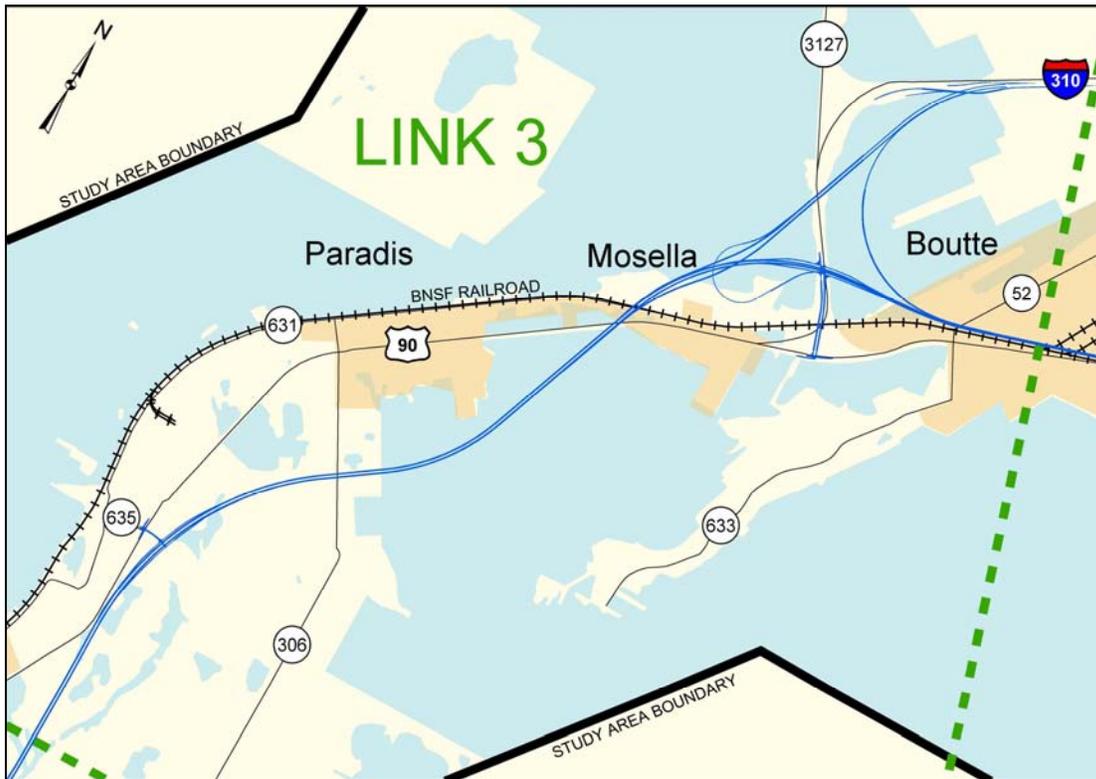
Alternative 2B is the selected and would extend from the elevated eastern end of Link 1 to an interchange with US 90 at the western end of the developed area along Dufrene Ponds. 2B would then cross the Ponds and Bayou Des Allemands, pass through the Paradis Wetland Mitigation Bank, and terminate near the interchange with LA 635 between Des Allemands and Paradis in St. Charles Parish. Alternative 2B is essentially unchanged from that which was presented in the Draft EIS for SIU 1. There is a slight realignment within the vacant area of the Paradis Mitigation Bank as it approaches its joining with Link 3. This is required by a realignment in Link 3 to provide the interchange with LA 635 that replaces the interchange with US 90 shown in the DEIS for SIU 1

Alternative 2B would achieve the Link 2 goal of providing a freeway and an interchange providing access to US 90 for local access, while avoiding or minimizing the potential environmental impacts that characterized 2A.

## 2.4 Alternative 3A

Link 3 extends from west of LA 635 to just east of Paul Maillard Road (LA 52). Two alignment Alternatives were developed for Link 3. Alternative 3A is described below and shown in **Exhibit 2-3**.

**Exhibit 2-3**  
**Alternative 3A**



An Alternative 3B was developed to avoid low-income and minority neighborhoods. After crossing LA 306 it was aligned farther south than Alternative 3A along the edge of Magnolia Ridge, the route of LA 633 on Exhibit 2-3, and joined Link 4 after crossing US 90 in the vicinity of the LA 52 intersection. A connection to I-310 approached from the south and generally paralleled LA 3127. The intersection of LA 3127 and US 90 was relocated farther south as US 90 was realigned.

It was not selected primarily because of the greater number of wetland acres impacted and a lack of community support. Initially it was believed to impact fewer wetland acres as the roadway was initially drawn as a single structure. Once it was redrawn as separate structures as in Alternative 3A, the result of the comparison was reversed. The community did not support Alternative 3B because, although the impacts to low-income and minority neighborhoods were eliminated, there was a higher total number of relocations. Also, most of the members of the community that object to any of the

alternatives, including those living in low-income and minority neighborhoods, support alternatives far to the south of US 90 and expressed no support for Alternative 3B as it was aligned in the developed area and was more disruptive of the existing land use pattern.

Alternative 3A is the selected and would begin at the point that I-49 becomes parallel to US 90 in the Paradis Wetland Mitigation Bank, have an interchange with LA 635, travel south of Paradis, and turn north between Paradis and Mosella to cross US 90, LA 631, and the BNSF Railroad. Alternative 3A would then curve to the east, cross LA 3127, and continue east to join Link 4 parallel to and on the north side of the BNSF Railroad. Interstate-to-interstate ramps connecting I-49 South to I-310 and a diamond interchange with LA 3127 would be constructed as part of Alternative 3A. Alternative 3A also would include a new southern terminus for LA 3127 with a single signalized intersection at US 90 to replace the two intersections now operating.

Alternative 3A is substantially the same as was presented in the SIU 1 DEIS. Alignment refinements not found in that document include:

- An interchange with LA 635 rather than the interchange with US 90 to serve the area at the western end of Link 3;
- A modified configuration of the I-49 interchange with I-310 to provide for the ramp from southbound I-49 to I-310 to depart from the right;
- A modified alignment of the ramp from northbound I-49 to northbound I-310; and
- The realignment of I-49 northward to the east of LA 3127 to accommodate a realignment of Link 4.

These refinements, when compared to the SIU 1 DEIS alignment, reduce the number of acres of potentially impacted wetlands, but require the taking of an additional developed property. Of the Link 3 Alternatives, 3A would require fewer relocations and fewer acres of potential wetland impacts, and it would have less likelihood of causing traffic impacts during construction as no existing local roadways would have to be relocated.

As 3A crosses Old Spanish Trail (LA 631) and the BNSF Railroad it results in some residential relocations and noise impacts to properties in a minority or low income neighborhood in Mosella that is adjacent and parallel to the railroad. There also are residential relocations and noise impacts that result in a minority or low income neighborhood in Boutte between LA 3127 and the Monsanto Plant.

## **2.5 Alternative 4A**

Link 4 extends from just east of Paul Maillard Road (LA 52) to the Davis Pond Diversion Canal. Two alignment Alternatives were developed for Link 4: an entirely elevated 4A and a partially elevated 4B. Alternative 4A is the selected and is described below and shown in **Exhibit 2-4**.

Alternative 4A would be aligned parallel to the BNSF Railroad as it crosses the Monsanto property and then turn southeasterly to cross the railroad into the US 90 ROW just west of Barton Avenue (LA 3060). East of the Willowdale Boulevard interchange, 3A would continue within the US 90 ROW. US 90 would be converted

to a 2-lane 2-way access road where it and I-49 South cross the Davis Pond Diversion Canal.

**Exhibit 2-4  
Alternative 4A**



The alignment of Alternative 4A is substantially the same as presented in the SIU 1 DEIS. The two refinements made include:

- The realignment of I-49 northward between Link 3 to the west and the crossing of the BNSF Railroad near Barton Avenue; and
- The widening of the required ROW between Barton Avenue and the Davis Pond Diversion Canal.

The first refinement eliminates the potential for conflicts with the operation of the BNSF Railroad and simplifies coordination with Monsanto regarding required infrastructure relocations. The second refinement improves the geometry of the Willowdale interchange.

Of the Link 4 Alternatives, 4A would be entirely elevated. Alternative 4A has the potential to require one commercial relocation, but it would have considerably less impact on traffic during construction than Alternative 4B. Alternative 4B, on the other hand, would require numerous relocations and would relocate US 90 to the south.

**2.6 Alternative 5A**

Link 5 extends from the Davis Pond Diversion Canal in St. Charles Parish to the beginning of US 90 Business near Segnette Boulevard in Jefferson Parish. Three alignment Alternatives were developed for Link 5: an entirely elevated 5A, a partially elevated 5B and a partially elevated 5C. Alternative 5A is the selected and is described below and shown in **Exhibit 2-5**.

Alternative 5A would extend from the Davis Pond Diversion Canal to Avondale on the existing US 90 alignment. I-49 would be on two elevated structures near the edges of the ROW with a frontage road between them on the existing fill section of US 90. The required ROW in this area would be expanded slightly to provide the desirable 25 feet outside the proposed structures. As currently proposed, the frontage road would be a 2-way, 2-lane facility as the design year traffic projection does not justify a greater capacity. The distance between the northbound and southbound I-49 structures is adequate to provide a 4-lane frontage road with a 16 foot median designed to urban standards if traffic projections can justify this capacity at the time that Final Design is initiated.

In Avondale, the ROW would be widened to provide 2-lane frontage roads on each side of elevated 4-lane I-49 in the center of the ROW. All additional required ROW would be acquired south of the existing ROW where there is less development. This section would continue to Lapalco Boulevard. At the western end of Avondale, a northbound entrance to I-49 and a southbound exit would be provided. Immediately east of Avondale Garden Road, a northbound exit and a southbound entrance to I-49 would be provided. A full diamond interchange would be provided at Lapalco Boulevard. The ROW here is adequate to provide a 6-lane I-49 and/or a 6-lane frontage road if traffic projections can justify this capacity at the time that Final Design is initiated.

### Exhibit 2-5 Alternative 5A



Just east of Lapalco Boulevard, the Huey P. Long interchange begins. Alternative 5A would provide new ramp connections to and from the I-49 mainline, the frontage roads, and the Bridge Approach (US 90 East) in all directions. North of the Union

Pacific Railroad, LA 18 would be relocated to the south to eliminate the signalized intersection of US 90 and LA 18.

East of the interchange, Alternative 5A would transition to the elevated Westbank Expressway with a 6-lane mainline and a 6-lane frontage road.

The alignment of Alternative 5A has been modified since the third round of public information meetings for SIU 2. The five refinements were:

- A widened ROW west of Avondale to provide 25 feet outside the elevated structure;
- A widened ROW in Avondale to provide sufficient width to expand the capacity of the mainline and the frontage roads in the future if demand increases;
- Reorganization of the ramps to provide two full diamond interchanges, one with Lapalco Boulevard as the connecting road and the other with the combination of Dexter Drive / Homeplace Street, Butler Road, and Avondale Garden Road as connecting roads;
- Removal of the southbound exit to Segnette Boulevard; and
- Realignment of LA 18 at US 90 to reflect the change in the Regional Transportation Plan that routes LA 18 on the US 90 alignment between the intersection of the two roads and West Bridge Circle.

Of the Link 5 Alternatives, 5A is the only Alternative in which the mainline of I-49 would be entirely elevated. Alternative 5A would have the least number of acres of potentially impacted wetlands and no unresolved conflicts with proposed development plans in the area. Acquisition of ROW would result in relocation of some commercial and residential properties on the south side of US 90.

## **2.7 Alternative 6B**

Link 6 extends from the beginning of US 90 Business near Segnette Boulevard to Ames Boulevard. Two Alternatives were developed for Link 6: a partially elevated 6A and a fully elevated 6B. Alternative 6B is the selected and is described below and shown in **Exhibit 2-6**.

Alternative 6B would provide a 6-lane mainline and a 6-lane frontage road system in the existing ROW of US 90 Business. ROW acquisition would be limited to small areas along the edges of the ROW at the far western end of the Link.

Just east of Lapalco Boulevard, the Huey P. Long interchange begins. Alternative 5A would provide new ramp connections to and from the I-49 mainline, the frontage roads, and the Bridge Approach (US 90 East) in all directions. North of the Union Pacific Railroad, LA 18 would be relocated to the south to eliminate the signalized intersection of US 90 and LA 18.

East of the interchange, Alternative 5A would transition to the elevated Westbank Expressway with a 6-lane mainline and a 6-lane frontage road.

The alignment and configuration of Alternative 6B has been refined since the last public presentation at the third round of public information meetings for SIU 2 and to Public Officials of Jefferson Parish and the City of Westwego. The alignment was presented at a special fourth public information meeting in Jefferson Parish.

Refinements include full elevation of mainline I-49 in response to a need for an interstate highway that would not flood. Previously, Alternative 6B descended to grade just west of Ames Boulevard and returned to an elevated section farther west.

**Exhibit 2-6  
Alternative 6B**



Other refinements include relocation of entrance and exit ramps as follows:

- A northbound entrance to I-49 and southbound exit between Westwood Drive and Ames Boulevard that creates a diamond when paired with the existing US 90 ramps; and
- A full diamond interchange at Victory Drive.

Alternative 6B is the only Link 6 Alternative that is fully elevated. Compared with the other Link 6 Alternatives, Link 6B would require the fewest closings of existing cross streets. 6B would not impact Bayou Segnette State Park and Catfish Bourgeois Park, Section 4(f) properties.

## 2.8 Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative for the I-49 South from LA 1 in Raceland to the Westbank Expressway consists of a series of alternatives by Link as described in Sections 2.2 through 2.7 of this ROD. To summarize these Links include:

- Alternative 1B in Link 1 including improvements to the existing US 90 crossing of Bayou Lafourche, an improved interchange with LA 308, relocation of portions of LA 182 and LA 307, and a new interchange with LA 182;
- Alternative 2B in Link 2 including a new crossing of Bayou Des Allemands with a new interchange with US 90;
- Alternative 3A in Link 3 including an extension of I-310 and improvements to the intersection of US 90 and LA 3127 with new interchanges with LA 635 and LA 3127;
- Alternative 4A in Link 4 with a new interchange with Willowdale Boulevard;

- Alternative 5A in Link 5 including an improved interchange connecting I-49, US 90, and US 90 Business, with new interchanges in Avondale and at Lapalco Boulevard, and a new intersection of US 90 and LA 18 to facilitate travel between the I-49/Westbank Expressway corridor and the Huey P. Long Bridge crossing of the Mississippi River; and
- Alternative 6B in Link 6 with ramps to and from Segnette and Ames Boulevards and a full diamond interchange at Victory Drive.

Chapter 2 and Appendices 2-A, 2-B, 2-C, and 2-D of the Final EIS contain additional information regarding project alternatives.

The Selected Alternative decision represents a balance of impacts in which certain factors were weighted against others in reaching a decision. The factors that stand out as the favorable regarding the Selected Alternative in comparison to the alternatives are summarized below:

- It avoids impacts to threatened and endangered species;
- It minimizes the number of wetland impacts;
- It minimizes the number of relocations;
- It addresses the concern for residential takings that impact a family sharing property in common in Boutte;
- It improves safety, not only in the US 90 corridor, but also on the connecting roads, and
- It provides an elevated hurricane evacuation route for the entire length of this section.

## **2.9 Selection of a Build Alternative over the No Build Alternative**

Construction of the Selected Alternative will cause some unavoidable, adverse impacts, but it is the least damaging, yet practicable alternative because it best balances the identified transportation needs of the section of the US 90 corridor studied in the EIS with the project impacts. The No Build Alternative provides a benchmark for environmental analysis, but it does not meet the project Purpose and Need. During the Final EIS it has been dropped from further consideration as a viable alternative. Of all the Build Alternatives considered, the Selected Alternative is the “environmentally preferred alternative” for purposes of 40 CFR 1502.2(b) because it is successful at avoiding impacts and it minimizes the impacts that are unavoidable.

## **3.0 Measures to Minimize Harm**

During conceptual studies and the development of alternatives, efforts were made to avoid or minimize impacts. After determining that a potential impact to a resource or other feature could not be avoided, mitigation measures or other commitments to minimize harm were developed. The discussion below identifies key project areas for which mitigation and other measures to minimize harm have been addressed. The specific mitigation measures and commitments to minimize harm are listed. This subject is more fully discussed in Chapter 6 of the Final EIS.

### **3.1 Relocation**

Relocations and displacements will be addressed through the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 and as discussed in 3.2. If necessary, DOTD will provide housing of last resort to residential displacements.

### **3.2 Environmental Justice**

The Boutte neighborhood of Census Tract 628 that exceeds the minority population and poverty classification of St. Charles Parish will be affected by residential takings. As a mitigation strategy, a family occupying several residences will be relocated as a unit as documented in Appendix 6-A on page A-50 of the Appendix to the Final EIS. Residences in other minority neighborhoods on Pit Road and in Mosella also will be relocated in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Act. In all of these areas, the project will continue to make special efforts to involve the residents in planning and implementing the project.

### **3.3 Noise**

Application of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) noise policy resulted in the determination that barriers are not feasible and reasonable in association with the Selected Alternative.

### **3.4 Surface Water**

Frontage roads and other at-grade roadways constructed or improved by the project between LA 1 and Station 1530+00, between Station 1645+70 and Station 1748+20, and in the LA 18 alignment would utilize a rural typical section with open ditch drainage. This design would enable storm water runoff to flow through vegetated areas prior to discharge to surface waters. As with the existing condition, this rural section design would enable waterborne contaminants to be filtered from the runoff prior to discharge. The vegetated areas would slow the rate of runoff flow, thereby minimizing the effects of erosion. This condition would also apply to the elevated mainline as the area below is not planned to be paved.

At-grade roadways elsewhere would be constructed with sub-surface drainage and would rely on the Jefferson Parish drainage system.

### **3.5 Wetlands**

The total wetland impact by the Selected Alternative is estimated to be 578.9 acres, and will require a Section 404 permit.

Wetland impacts would be mitigated as determined through the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Section 404 permit process. To the maximum extent possible compensatory acres would be created within the ROW in association with construction. It is anticipated that the purchase of compensatory acres required for impacts to Bottomland Hardwoods and to Cypress/Tupelo Swamp would be purchased from the Paradis Mitigation Bank, which is traversed by the ROW. All compensatory acres are anticipated to be within the Barataria Basin.

### **3.6 Floodplains**

Impacts to floodplains are minimized by the entirely elevated mainline of I-49. At-grade sections of frontage roads and connecting roads will be constructed to an elevation of at least 5.0 feet msl, which is above the 50-year floodplain elevation. New or reconstructed culverts will be designed to convey normal drainage as well as storm flows.

### **3.7 Levees**

The roadway profiles of this project will provide adequate clearance for the maintenance of all levees that, prior to construction of I-49, have been constructed or have advanced sufficiently in planning to have a selected alternative alignment and grade.

### **3.8 Threatened and Endangered Species**

Bald eagle nests were identified in the project area, and the alignment of the Selected Alternative in Link 2 was adjusted to remain at least 3,000 feet from the nearest nest based on the guidance in place at the time. Should the proposed project encroach within 660 feet of any active bald eagle nest during the nesting season, further coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) would be necessary. The change in the distance separating the roadway from the nest results from the removal of the bald eagle from the listed species under the Threatened and Endangered Species Act.

Also, wading birds are known to nest in the project area. Should a rookery be encountered during construction, construction would halt pending consultation with the Louisiana department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

### **3.9 Geology, Topography, Soils, and Prime Farmland**

Cut and fill operations will be minimized, as practicable, to meet grade and level requirements set forth by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and DOTD. Design and construction activities will incorporate best management practices (BMP) to prevent future erosion. BMP's used during construction and development activities include temporary soil erosion control measures, permanent control measures, and low-impact land use practices. During the design phase of the project, consideration will be given to limiting the amounts of impervious surfaces created, preservation of stream buffers and sensitive areas such as natural wetlands and riparian corridors, limiting disturbance of soil and vegetation, and maintaining the natural infiltrative capacity of an area.

### **3.10 Hazardous Sites**

Mitigation for hazardous materials is not anticipated at any locations within the project study area, but the following sites were identified for further review prior to construction:

- A former landfill near the intersection of US 90 and LA 182 in Lafourche Parish,
- The HIST LUST (Circle K) east of the ROW, and
- The 42 sites in Links 5 and 6 that within or adjacent to the ROW.

DOTD policies and procedures relating to hazards mitigation will be followed throughout the implementation of the proposed action.

### **3.11 Utilities**

In addition to typical relocation procedures discussed in 3.15.4, a special study during design would define the actions, responsible parties, and sequence required to relocate pipelines, railroad line, drainage structures, and other such infrastructure on the Monsanto property in Link 4. Monsanto will participate in this study.

### **3.12 Aesthetics**

The most valued visual resource in the project area is Bayou des Allemands, a designated Scenic Stream. Construction of the Selected Alternative would affect views over Bayou des Allemands. Mitigation for impacts to Bayou Des Allemands would be determined through the Class B Scenic Streams Permit process.

The elevated mainline structure between the I-49/US 90/US 90 Business interchange and the end of the project near Ames Boulevard, will be constructed to appear identical to the existing completed portions of the elevated Westbank Expressway.

### **3.13 Cultural Resources**

No impacts to cultural resources are anticipated, but, given the close proximity of the Preferred Alternative to eligible resources in the vicinity of Bayou Saut d'Ours at approximately Station 770+00 to Station 780+00, there is a potential for discovery of unrecorded resources during construction. If previously undocumented cultural resources are encountered during construction in the vicinity of Bayou Saut d'Ours, or elsewhere, work must cease at that location pending consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Mitigation for unavoidable adverse effects to cultural resources must be identified in a Memorandum of Agreement between the DOTD, the FHWA, the SHPO, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

A delineation and evaluation of Site 16J29 will be done prior to construction. If determined eligible, mitigation measures will be undertaken in coordination with the SHPO.

Prior to construction, tests will be made in the vicinity of the Old Mt. Airy Cemetery in Boutte to determine the location of any unmarked graves in the area of potential construction disturbance so that appropriate measures can be taken.

### **3.14 Impacts to Transportation Patterns**

During design, there will be a public involvement process to discuss Access Management and the issues that will arise from the Control of Access associated with the project. Properties impacted by Control of Access will be compensated in accord with DOTD policies and procedures.

### **3.15 Construction Impacts**

#### **3.15.1 Traffic and Circulation**

Construction sequence, traffic maintenance criteria, and plans will be developed as part of final design to coordinate construction activities and ensure continued access

to all properties. Needs for special considerations will be identified and addressed. These will include scheduling to minimize or avoid impacts to agricultural harvests, school access, and wading bird nesting season, and to provide at least two lanes of through traffic in each direction on US 90. Temporary lane closures would be allowed only during off-peak hours as determined by DOTD. A detailed traffic control plan will be developed by DOTD during the design process to minimize impacts to traffic and included in the construction contracts.

### **3.15.2 Noise**

Construction equipment that is operated with internal combustion engines would be properly muffled to minimize noise production. Shielding of stationary noise sources such as generators with temporary barriers would occur. As appropriate, construction noise abatement measures referenced in Section 107.15 of the *Louisiana Standard Specifications for Roads and Bridges*, and the FHWA Technical Advisory T 6160 2, dated March 13, 1984, would be utilized.

### **3.15.3 Utilities**

Specific relocation plans would be developed during the final design phase of the Selected Alternative and would be completed prior to construction of the improvements. Functional or financial responsibility for relocation of a specific facility or line may differ depending on prior agreements between the utility providers, current landowners, local government, and DOTD. The determination of responsibility would be in accordance with DOTD policies and procedures.

### **3.15.4 Geology, Topography, Soils, and Prime Farmland**

In compliance with the stormwater quality guidelines of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), BMP for soil erosion and sediment control would be implemented during construction to reduce impacts caused by construction of the project. These measures may include the use of sediment barriers, temporary and permanent vegetative cover for soil stabilization, dust control, and the use of riprap for the protection of soils from the erosive forces of water.

### **3.15.5 Hazardous Sites**

If areas of hazardous waste contamination are encountered during the construction of the Selected Alternative, construction will immediately be stopped and the policies and procedures of DOTD's Policy and Procedure Manual No. 48 (Underground Storage Tank and Contaminated Site Policy and Procedures) will be implemented.

### **3.16 Navigation**

The closures of the channels of Bayou Des Allemands or Bayou Lafourche would be coordinated with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and disclosed in the permit processes with the USCG and the USACE during final design and incorporated in the construction documents.

### **3.17 Cumulative Impacts**

To avoid or minimize a potential cumulative impact to water quality, mitigation strategies will be reexamined during final design.

#### **4.0 Monitoring and Reporting**

DOTD will monitor the project implementation through the development of a Project Management Plan (PMP), as required by FHWA to assure conformance with project commitments.

The requirements for the PMP and an Annual Financial Plan for projects receiving Federal financial assistance with an estimated cost of \$500,000,000 or more are contained in section 1904(a) of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which amends 23 U.S.C. 106(h).

In accord with the PMP Guidance issued by FHWA in February 2007, the PMP for this project is being developed. A draft of the PMP was approved on October 4, 2007. It is understood that a final PMP must be completed and approved by FHWA within 90 days of the date of this ROD. An Annual Financial Plan shall be developed and approved prior to the receipt of Construction Authorization. The PMP includes, however, an estimated budget for project development that will be updated at least annually as part of an annual update of the plan.

#### **5.0 Comments on the Final EIS**

This portion of the ROD includes comments received by the DOTD on the Final EIS for I-49, Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. The Final EIS was approved by the FHWA September 19, 2007. A Notice of Availability requesting comments on the Final EIS was published in the Federal Register with a comment due date of November 30, 2007.

All comments in response to the publication of the Final EIS were submitted by members of the public and were received on the following dates:

- Comment 1 on October 31, 2007;
- Comment 2, a series of questions and responses by electronic mail, from November 9 through 12, 2007; and
- Comment 3, which addresses several issues, on November 30, 2007.

Also, a notice that no comment was submitted has been posted on the USEPA website, and a message was sent by the US Coast Guard (USCG) to FHWA stating that the USCG had no comment.

Copies of the comments, the USEPA notice, and the USCG message are found in the **Appendix**. Responses are found in the succeeding paragraphs.

##### **5.1 Comment 1**

The substance of the Comment 1 is twofold:

1. that the State Representative representing the Westwego area will not approve of the elevated design, and
2. that the commenter hopes to see the highway built.

The comment is noted.

## **5.2 Comment 2**

Comment 2 is a series of questions regarding the property of the commenter and the possibility of impacts to the property by the project. No further response is required as those in Appendix A, Comment 2, were acknowledged as satisfactory by the commenter.

## **5.3 Comment 3**

Comment 3 includes ten separate issues. This response will address each issue as it occurs in the text of the comment. The issues are numbered below and in the comment text in the Appendix from 5.3.1 through 5.3.7 plus 5.3.8 that is subdivided into three parts.

### **5.3.1 Pending the recovery of the New Orleans area after Katrina, only the No-build alternative should be considered.**

Three conditions are presented as reasons for proposing the No-build alternative; the demographics of Southeast Louisiana have shifted, public services must recover, and coastal restoration and hurricane protection will do more damage to the wetlands than I-49. This comment is similar to Comment 41-1 in the Final EIS, to which the following Response B-1 was given.

#### **B-1: Use of Pre-Katrina Demographics and Traffic Projections**

The regional transportation model is the primary means of predicting 2030 conditions. It has not been adjusted to reflect changes that may result from Hurricane Katrina, many of which are highly speculative. Changes in the cumulative impacts of the project as a result of Katrina are likewise difficult to predict.

The Preferred Alternative is an upgrade to US 90 and is not directly related to traffic fluctuations resulting from Hurricane Katrina. If there is a need for additional capacity, or other change resulting from a change in regional conditions, it would be developed in the final design phase.

There has been no change in this condition.

### **5.3.2 Lack of Data regarding Impacts to Wetlands by Existing Highways**

The subject of a lack of data available in regard to the impacts to wetlands from the construction of other highways was raised previously in Comment 41-2 in the Final EIS, which included the following Response R-9:

#### **R-9: Damage to wetlands by existing highways**

There is no readily available source of data covering the damage to wetlands resulting from construction of specific roadway projects from which an answer to the question can be obtained. In relation to the alignment of I-49, or any other roadway being studied, the goal is to find the least damaging yet practicable alternative to meet the Purpose and Need of the roadway being studied. Because of the lack of source data, no attempt has been made to quantitatively assess damage to wetlands in the context of what may have been the least damaging yet

practicable alignment for some other Purpose and Need, but would be excessive for the one under study.

No change in this response would be appropriate. The EIS for this project is required to compare the alternatives for this project and to identify the least damaging, yet practicable alternative for this project.

### **5.3.3 Error in Table 7-1 of the Final EIS**

It is correct that in Table 7-1 of the Final EIS erroneously indicates that Response R-4 is in response to Comment 41-3. The correct citation should be Response R-9 as indicated in this comment and in Table 7-2 of the Final EIS. The preparers regret this error.

### **5.3.4 Need to Develop Environmental Indicator Sets**

The next issue is a suggestion that there should be a method to “provide data to analyze the pros and cons of the decision and hence validate the criteria.” As an example, or as a step toward accomplishment of that goal, a copy of US Government Accountability Office document Environmental Indicators (GAO-05-52) dated November 2004 is included.

Useful concepts are discussed in this document. From the perspective of this EIS, however, the guidance of the USACE and the EPA under the current requirements of the Clean Water Act are the basis for the analysis of the alignment alternatives of this project to identify the least damaging yet practicable alternative for this project.

### **5.3.5 Combining the Sections of Independent Utility should Produce an Additional Alternative**

The issue recalls Comment 41-4 in the Final EIS that stated that the combining of the Sections of Independent Utility (SIU) 1 and 2 should have produced an additional alternative. The alignment suggested would go from Bayou Lafourche directly to Westwego with an extension of I-310 to join this alignment. An alignment similar to this was considered in the DEIS as Alternative U. It was also suggested that I-310 be fully elevated.

The Final EIS included the following Response D-1:

#### **D-1: Supports / Asks reconsideration of a Southerly Route**

Southerly routes, including, for example, Alternative U, as proposed, studied, presented, and discussed would bypass the urbanized area of Westbank St. Charles Parish to the south and provide only one interchange in that Parish. The interchange would be with an extension of I-310 that, in turn, would have an interchange with US 90 at the existing termination of I-310. To the west, the nearest interchange would be in Lafourche Parish and, to the east, at Nicole Boulevard in Jefferson Parish.

Alternative U was studied in depth, following a request by the St. Charles Parish Council, as the desirable example of a southerly alignment. It was not determined to be one of the alternatives included in the DEIS for SIU 1. It was generated as an alternative during the SIU 2 Public Information process and was eliminated

from consideration as a Build Alternative in both SIU's because it cannot be demonstrated to be the "least damaging, yet practicable" alternative as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Section 404 requires that no discharge of dredged or fill material can be permitted if a practicable alternative exists that is less damaging to the aquatic environment, or if the nation's waters would be significantly degraded. In the permit process, a project sponsor must show that steps have been taken

- to avoid wetland impacts where practicable,
- to minimize potential impacts to wetlands, and
- to provide compensation for any unavoidable impacts.

**Table 7-3** compares Alternative U with the project alternatives, and **Table 7-4** compares the estimated costs of Alternative U and the Preferred Alternative in the same links.

It should be noted that both tables were prepared prior to the refinement of the geometry and the revision of costs that took place following the decision to combine the SIU's. The relative differences presented in these tables, however, would remain.

**Table 7-3**  
**Comparison of Wetland Impacts of Alternative U with Project Alternatives**  
**3A/4A is the Preferred Alternative**

Alternative	U	3A/4A	3A/4B	3B/4A	3B/4B
Total Additional ROW (acres)	545	329	340	413	424
Wetlands per NWI, not field verified (acres)	453	181	196	268	276
% Wetlands of Total Additional Right-of-Way	83%	55%	58%	65%	65%

Within St. Charles Parish, in Links 3 and 4, Alternative U, and any other route that would travel south of US 90 to the east of I-310, would affect more wetland acreage than any of the possible alternatives. On the other hand, the combination of 3A and 4A, the Preferred Alternative in St. Charles Parish, is the least damaging to wetlands of all the alternatives examined as shown in **Table 7-3**.

In addition, although Alternative U is within the cost range of the Preferred Alternative, it can be divided into only two construction phases, not into several relatively small, more affordable phases as shown in **Table 7-4**.

Therefore, to summarize, Alternative U is not the least damaging, yet practicable alternative.

**Table 7-4  
Comparison of Construction Phases and Estimated Costs  
Alternative U with SIU 1 Preferred Alternative**

<b>Construction Phase</b>	<b>Alt. U</b>	<b>Alt. 2B/3A/4A</b>
US 90 in Lafourche - US 90/I-310 Interchange	\$378.6 million	
I-49/I-310 Interchange – US 90/US 90 Bus. Interchange	\$622.8 million	
US 90 in Lafourche - US 90 in St. Charles		\$260.9 million
US 90 in St. Charles - LA 3127		\$163.8 million
Realigned I-310 from I-49 - Existing I-310		\$ 42.2 million
LA 3127 - Willowdale Boulevard		\$177.8 million
Westbound I-49 - Northbound I-310		\$ 13.2 million
Southbound I-310 - Eastbound I-49		\$ 6.1 million
Willowdale Boulevard to South Kenner		\$ 75.0 million
South Kenner to US 90/US 90 Bus. Interchange		\$235.1 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1.011billion</b>	<b>\$974.1 million</b>

### 5.3.6 Questions Response D-1 in Final EIS

Comment on the subject of the validity of a southern alignment continues by taking issue with Response D-1 in the Final EIS that is reproduced in 5.3.5. Although conceding that Table 7-3 may be a correct reflection of the relative differences in wetland impacts, it is suggested that Table 7-4 does not reflect the cost of elevating the mainline. It also is concerned with the cost of fuel resulting from the alternatives.

In response, the costs in Table 7-4 do include an estimate for elevating the mainline in both Alternative U and for Alternatives 2B/3A/4A. It is true, however, that these calculations were made some time ago. The current base estimate for construction in 2006 dollars would provide the following comparables:

Segments 4 through 11 of the Selected Alternative, the equivalent connection to Alternatives 2B/3A/4A is \$1,453,547,365. The length of mainline interstate in these segments is 33.41 miles including 3.05 miles along I-310. The average cost per mile is \$43,506,356 per mile including related arterial roadways.

The length of mainline interstate in Alternative U, as considered in the EIS, is 28.69 miles including 5.61 miles along I-310. The addition of the proposed elevated section of I-310 to the Hale Boggs Bridge would be an additional 3.25 miles for a total proposal of 31.94 miles. This is only 1.47 miles shorter than the Preferred Alternative. Using the same average cost per mile, the total cost would be \$1,389,593,021.

The difference in length is 1.47 miles. This would not make a substantial difference in fuel usage.

The difference in cost in round numbers is about \$64 million or about 4% of the estimate for the Preferred Alternative. This difference would be reduced by the fact that, as more than double the number of wetland acres would be impacted (Table 7-3), more than double the estimated \$22 million cost for compensatory acres would be experienced.

An important financial consideration illustrated by Table 7-4 is that usable sections of Alternative U number only two while the Preferred Alternative can be divided into 8 segments between the same points.

One costing about 33% of the total including the extension of elevated I-310, or 37% of Alternative U, connects US 90 in Lafourche with the intersection of US 90 and LA 3127 and the other costing about 57% of the total including the extension of elevated I-310, or 63% of Alternative U, connects that point with the intersection of US 90 with US 90 Business. A third section extending the elevated portion of I-310 would cost about 10% of the total. The cost of these sections would make the alignment proposed in Comment 3 very difficult to fund. 57% of the total estimate is \$792 million compared to Segment 9, the most costly section of the Preferred Alternative. Segment 9 is estimated to cost \$413 million, but it is designed to be constructed in two stand-alone sections for a little over \$200 million each.

Alternative U is not the least damaging given the larger number of wetlands to be impacted.

Alternative U is not practicable given the difficulty foreseen in obtaining funding for a single construction phase estimated to cost \$792 million dollars in 2006 without allowance for design, construction supervision, or right-of-way acquisition.

### **5.3.7 Concerns regarding a Fully Elevated I-49 including the Misunderstanding of Comment 41-5 as shown by Response F-11 in the Final EIS**

The next issue raised relates to Comment 41-5 to the Final EIS, which commenter says was misunderstood, and Response F-11, which was meant to respond to that comment.

Comment 3 states that Comment 41-5 intended no opposition to elevating I-49. Rather, it was intended to support the elevation of connecting roadways such as I-310 and US 90.

Again the preparers regret an error in their understanding. It must be remembered, however, that the Draft EIS and the Final EIS are concerned with the proposed I-49 from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. It is not in the purview of this project to consider other links in the roadway system except at their points of intersection with I-49, its entrance and exit ramps, and its frontage (local access) roadways

### **5.3.8 Questions concerning Demographics and Traffic Projections**

Following a reproduction of Final EIS Responses B-1, C-1, and C-2, the following questions are posed:

**5.3.8.1 What does the traffic study consider?**

The Regional Transportation Model includes the links that represent the existing roadway network and all roadways that are programmed to be in operation for the time horizon being studied.

**5.3.8.2 Is the current Huey P. Long Bridge project included?**

The Huey P. Long Bridge project is included.

**5.3.8.3 Why is there no quantitative assessment of energy costs with a comparison among the alternatives?**

Generally, control of access freeways, including interstate highways, are more fuel efficient than arterial roadways because it is generally more probable that speeds can be sustained. This is especially true on roadways with little or no variation in grade, such as an elevated roadway over land with little relief as in the I-49 corridor. If distances are generally the same among alternative alignments in a project, there is little value to be gained from undertaking a cost comparison of possible fuel cost.

Alternative U, without the proposed extension of I-310 as an elevated roadway to the Hale Boggs Bridge, is 28.41 miles long. This is 4.72 miles or 14% shorter than the Preferred Alternative between the same points. This is not a great distance.

Also Alternative U has no interchange at LA 635, Willowdale Boulevard, or in Avondale which is a net reduction of three in comparison with the Preferred Alternative. Fewer interchanges generally result in more traffic on the local access roadways serving the corridor, for example US 90, because there are fewer opportunities to reach many destinations. This would be expected to result in more traffic on US 90 with Alternative U than with the Preferred Alternative and, therefore, more fuel would be consumed by more vehicles on an arterial roadway than on a freeway.

The comparison of traffic volumes on the I-49 mainline compared to those on US 90 for Alternative U was not a major consideration in the elimination of the alternative. The wetland impacts and practicability were the primary considerations.

An analysis was done, however, of the likely effect of Alternative U on the mainline traffic between LA 3127 and the Huey P. Long Bridge. It was projected that the ADT (Average Daily Traffic) west of Avondale, the area indicated as "i" on Exhibit 3-2 and Table 3-1 in the Final EIS would be 39,905 in 2030 under what was Alternative 5A in July 2005, but is now the Selected Alternative. Under Alternative U it was projected that the ADT in this area of the corridor would be 11,335 less in 2030. While no analysis exists for US 90, it reasonably can be assumed that the majority of these 11,335 vehicles would use US 90. In that case, US 90 in that area would have an ADT of approximately 11,800 in 2030 compared to an ADT of 27,168 projected for No-build or to an ADT of 479 projected with the Preferred Alternative.

## 6.0 Record of Decision Approval

Based on the analysis and evaluation contained in the proposed project's Final EIS; after careful consideration of all the identified social, economic, and environmental factors and input received from officials representing other agencies, organizations and the public; and the factors and project commitments and mitigation measures outlined above, it is the decision of the FHWA to approve the Selected Alternative as described below:

- Alternative 1B in Link 1 including improvements to the existing US 90 crossing of Bayou Lafourche and to portions of LA 182 and LA 307 with an improved interchange with LA 308 and a new interchange with LA 182;
- Alternative 2B in Link 2 including a new crossing of Bayou Des Allemands with a new interchange with US 90;
- Alternative 3A in Link 3 including an extension of I-310 and improvements to the intersection of US 90 and LA 3127 with new interchanges with LA 635 and LA 3127;
- Alternative 4A in Link 4 with a new interchange with Willowdale Boulevard;
- Alternative 5A in Link 5 including an improved interchange connecting I-49, US 90, and US 90 Business, with new interchanges in Avondale and at Lapalco Boulevard, and a new intersection of US 90 and LA 18 to facilitate travel between the I-49/Westbank Expressway corridor and the Huey P. Long Bridge crossing of the Mississippi River; and
- Alternative 6B in Link 6 with ramps to and from Segnette and Ames Boulevards and a full diamond interchange at Victory Drive.

January 24, 2008

Date

Wes Bolinger

Wes Bolinger

Louisiana Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration

## **APPENDIX**

I-49 South  
Route US 90  
Raceland to the Westbank Expressway

Comments Received in Response  
to the  
Publication of the Final EIS

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Comment 1, received October 31, 2007

From: i49support@gcr1.com  
Sent: Wednesday, October 31, 2007 4:29 PM  
To: I49South  
Subject: An I-49 Comment has been submitted

There is a comment waiting for your approval.

Comment: I see where we have had public meetings for over 4 years! John Alario will never let I49 connect to the overhead W.B. X'way.....  
You had proceed to plan B....  
Just my opinion....  
I hope to see this important project completed before I get to old to drive on it:)

Tom Inguagiato

1308Redwood Harvey, La 70058

Please go to the comment admin section of the site to view and approve.

Comment 2, a series of questions and responses, from November 9 through 12, 2007

From: i49support@gcr1.com  
Sent: Friday, November 09, 2007 1:36 PM  
To: I49South  
Subject: An I-49 Comment has been submitted

There is a comment waiting for your approval.

Comment: How can I get a map with enough resolution to see some detail? It is the Mosella, Paradis, Boutte areas that I am most interested in. A link would be great. Thanks.

Greg Cellos

120 Sellers Lane Boutte, La 70039

hadr@msn.com

Please go to the comment admin section of the site to view and approve.

From: i49support@gcr1.com  
Sent: Friday, November 09, 2007 2:42 PM  
To: I49South  
Subject: An I-49 Comment has been submitted

There is a comment waiting for your approval.

Comment: You've got an incredible volume of information here. Unfortunately I don't see what I am particularly interested in. The area south of plates 42 and 43 to where Hwy 3127 intersects Hwy 90. We own property in this area and would like to determine how we will be directly impacted. any assist will be greatly appreciated. Thanks again.

Greg Cellos

120 Sellers Lane Mosella, La 70039

hadr@msn.com

Please go to the comment admin section of the site to view and approve.

## Comment 2 continued

**From:** hadr cellos [hadr@msn.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, November 12, 2007 10:26 AM  
**To:** Costa, Louis  
**Cc:** mikeaghayan@dotd.la.gov; coanbueche@dotd.la.gov; noelardoin@dotd.la.gov;  
quangnguyen@dotd.la.gov; jamesyates@dotd.la.gov  
**Subject:** RE: Your Question

Mr. Costa,

Thanks for the information. Plate 53 however does not include the length of the south bound off ramp from I 310 onto Hwy 90. I would assume this would all be abandoned. Also it is not clear where the C/A RW ends on the south side of Hwy 90 to the west of I310 or where the proposed new RW would be relative to the abandoned ramps and along Hwy 90 to the west (and if it would be controlled access). As we own property on both sides of Hwy 90 in this area, this is of interest.

Thanks again, your work is appreciated.

Greg Cellos

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Subject: Your Question  
Date: Mon, 12 Nov 2007 06:43:20 -0800  
From: louis.costa@dmjmharris.com  
To: hadr@msn.com  
CC: MikeAghayan@dotd.la.gov; CoanBueche@dotd.la.gov; NoelArdoin@dotd.la.gov;  
QuangNguyen@dotd.la.gov; JamesYates@dotd.la.gov

Mr. Cellos;

The response to your question is Plate 53.

If your property does not appear on any of the maps or, if on a map, is not within a red required ROW line, it is not affected.

Thank you for your interest in I-49.

Comment 2 continued

**From:** hadr cellos [hadr@msn.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, November 12, 2007 4:52 PM  
**To:** Costa, Louis  
**Subject:** RE: Your Question  
Thank you, Lou. You've been most helpful.

Greg

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**Subject:** RE: Your Question  
**Date:** Mon, 12 Nov 2007 11:54:49 -0800  
**From:** louis.costa@dmjmharris.com  
**To:** hadr@msn.com  
**CC:** MikeAghayan@dotd.la.gov; CoanBueche@dotd.la.gov; NoelArdoin@dotd.la.gov;  
QuangNguyen@dotd.la.gov; JamesYates@dotd.la.gov; JeromeRyan@dotd.la.gov

Mr. Cellos

I realize that Plate 53 may be unclear since the exit ramp is cut off.  
Yes, the entire ramp is to be removed. The apparent limits of the control of access on US 90 are fully shown. The Control of Access is proposed to be removed on the ramp that would be removed.

On that subject, there will be public discussion of control of access when the engineering for that portion (currently referred to as Segment 6) is undertaken. There is no control of access on US 90 in this immediate area except as shown on Plate 53. I cannot address the ultimate disposition of the ROW being used for ramps. I suggest that you contact the DOTD District 02 Real Estate office at (504) 465-3468 for assistance in that regard.

For a more comprehensive view of the vicinity of US 90/LA 3127 intersection, although at a much less detailed scale, see Plate 91.

Lou Costa

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**From:** hadr cellos [mailto:hadr@msn.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, November 12, 2007 10:26 AM  
**To:** Costa, Louis  
**Cc:** mikeaghayan@dotd.la.gov; coanbueche@dotd.la.gov; noelardoin@dotd.la.gov;  
quangnguyen@dotd.la.gov; jamesyates@dotd.la.gov  
**Subject:** RE: Your Question

Mr. Costa,

Thanks for the information. Plate 53 however does not include the length of the south bound off ramp from I 310 onto Hwy 90. I would assume this would all be abandoned. Also it is not clear where the C/A RW ends on the south side of Hwy 90 to the west of I310 or where the proposed new RW would be relative to the abandoned ramps and along Hwy 90 to the west (and if it would be controlled access). As we own property on both sides of Hwy 90 in this area, this is of interest.

Thanks again, your work is appreciated.

Greg Cellos

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Comment 3 received November 30, 2007

This comment addresses several issues that are answered separately in Section 5.0 of the Record of Decision.

Page 1 of 7

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**Costa, Louis**

**From:** jeffnjara [jeffnjara@roux.org]  
**Sent:** Friday, November 30, 2007 11:37 AM  
**To:** I49South  
**Cc:** jeff@roux.org; 'Jeff Roesel'  
**Subject:** Comments on the FEIS for I-49 South

Comments on the FEIS for I-49 South Route US 90 October 26, 2007

Submitted by Jeffrey A Roux 10391 River Road Ama LA 70031

The New Orleans area must recover before anything other than the No-Build alternative is considered. The need which is supported by the projection data for the year 2030 must be questioned after Katrina.

It has also been well reported that the demographics of the Southeastern portion of the state have changed and shifted to the North Shore and toward Baton Rouge.

The housing, education, healthcare, and public security issues and recovery have to be well underway before confidence returns along with the people. Population/household estimates recently released reflect that the population is about 80% of the pre-Katrina level in the Metro Area.

Coastal restoration and hurricane protection levee plans need to be decided and funded prior to selecting a route for I-49. They are going to do much more damage to the natural environment during their construction and perhaps the phrase "least damaging, yet practicable" will have some meaningful quantifiable parameters defined.

**DAMAGE TO WETLANDS**

I presented the following question in my comments to the DEIS:

In several of the meetings on I-49 the question has been asked but no answer or document brought forth; "What is the documented damage to the wetlands caused by I-10/I-55/I-310/and elevated Hwy 90?" These highways have been around for a while and you don't hear a peep about the damage to the wetlands.

The response was answered as Response ID R-9 on page 7-135 vice Response ID R-4 on page 7-134 as listed in the FEIS.

**"R-9: Damage to wetlands by existing highways**

There is no readily available source of data covering the damage to wetlands resulting from construction of specific roadway projects from which an answer to the question can be obtained. In relation to the alignment of I-49, or any other roadway being studied, the goal is to find the least damaging yet practicable alternative to meet the Purpose and Need of the roadway being studied. Because of the lack of source data, no attempt has been made to quantitatively assess damage to wetlands in the context of what may have been the least damaging yet practicable alignment for some other Purpose and Need, but would be excessive for the one under study."

The lack of data covering damage to the wetlands from these other roadways in our area begs to ask the question of the sponsor and agencies of the criteria often cited "Section 404 requires that a project be least damaging, yet practicable alternative." What was the damage done to the wetlands even if it was the only alternative? We can use subjective criteria to justify a decision yet we can't provide data to analyze the pros and cons of the decision and hence validate the criteria.

12/3/2007

Comment 3 continued

Page 2 of 7

In November of 2004 GAO issued a report on Environmental Indicators (GAO-05-52). The cover sheet and the summary of the report follow :

**GAO**

United States Government Accountability Office  
Report to Congressional Requesters

November 2004 **ENVIRONMENTAL**

**INDICATORS**

**Better Coordination Is  
Needed to Develop  
Environmental  
Indicator Sets That  
Inform Decisions**

GAO-05-52

**Highlights**

Accountability Integrity Reliability

12/3/2007

## Comment 3 continued

Page 3 of 7

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-52](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-52).  
To view the full product, including the scope  
and methodology, click on the link above.  
For more information, contact John B.  
Stephenson at (202) 512-6225 or  
[stephensonj@gao.gov](mailto:stephensonj@gao.gov).  
Highlights of GAO-05-52, a report to  
congressional requesters  
November 2004

## ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

### Better Coordination Is Needed to Develop Environmental Indicator Sets That Inform Decisions

GAO identified the purposes for developing environmental indicator sets and major challenges facing their development and use to inform decisions by interviewing key experts, surveying developers and users, and studying eight major indicator sets. GAO found that federal and nonfederal organizations develop environmental indicator sets for several purposes, including assessing conditions and trends, communicating complex issues, and supporting performance management activities. Some environmental indicator sets are limited to use within specific political jurisdictional boundaries, while others are confined to specific natural areas, such as watersheds, lake basins, or ecosystems. Similarly, some sets address specific resources, such as water quality or land use, while others focus on quality of life issues or sustainable development. The indicator sets GAO reviewed are primarily used to assist in strategic planning efforts, communicate complex environmental issues, and track progress toward environmental goals.

Environmental indicator set developers, both federal and nonfederal, commonly face several major challenges. Such challenges include ensuring that a sound, balanced process is used to develop indicators, which can require a resource-intensive effort to address the needs of potential users. Similarly, obtaining sufficient data on environmental conditions and trends and their causes is particularly problematic. Another key challenge in developing useful environmental indicator sets involves coordinating and integrating the various related federal and other indicator sets in order to advance knowledge about the environment. In this regard, the efforts of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Interagency Working Group on Indicator Coordination are promising, but they lack the long-term, stable institutional arrangements needed to ensure continued guidance and coordination of federal activity in this area. Moreover, indicator sets designed to link management activities, environmental and natural resource conditions and trends, and human and ecological health have difficulty because many such relationships are not well understood. To that end, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) continuing work to develop indicators to assist the agency's efforts to manage for results highlights this challenge. While EPA has made progress, its efforts to better understand such relationships over many years have been hampered not only by technical difficulties in establishing linkages between program activities and changes in the environment, but also by changes in leadership within the agency and the absence of a systematic approach, including clear expectations, milestones, and designated resources. Such institutional arrangements would enable the agency's senior management, Congress, and other stakeholders to monitor and assist EPA's efforts toward a complete and periodically updated *Report on the Environment*.

Environmental indicator sets assemble quantitative measures of conditions and trends (known as indicators) to assess the state of the environment and natural resources and to gauge progress toward specific goals. Such sets are now being developed to bridge the gap between needed and

12/3/2007

Comment 3 continued

Page 4 of 7

available information and to prioritize further data collection. The widespread development and use of environmental indicator sets has led federal and nonfederal entities to consider the benefits such sets provide when measuring performance and improving oversight of environmental programs. In this context, GAO was asked to identify (1) the purposes for which federal and nonfederal organizations are developing and using environmental indicator sets, and how they are being used; and (2) the major challenges facing the development and use of environmental indicator sets.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO recommends that the Chair of CEQ develop institutional arrangements needed to ensure a concerted, systematic, and stable approach to the development, coordination, and integration of environmental indicator sets.

Moreover, GAO recommends that the EPA Administrator establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability and identify specific requirements for developing and using indicators. CEQ and EPA generally agreed with GAO's recommendations

**DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES**

The following comment was made to the DEIS:

The combination of the 2 SIU's into a single EIS should have produced another alternative.

That alternative should have been a direct route from Bayou Lafourche to an appropriate point in Westwego/Marrero south of Hwy 90 in the wetlands with a connection that goes through Mosella to tie into I 310. The movement of I 310 and Hwy 3127 could still be considered other than the fact that the connection from I-49 to the Hale Boggs Bridge via I-310 should be elevated.

12/3/2007

## Comment 3 continued

Page 5 of 7

Why? It would be by far the shortest, cheapest, quicker to build, less disruptive, and probably overall “least damaging, yet practicable to the environment.” The President has proclaimed that the govt will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels by 20% in the next ten years. This would do that just by its length and continue to save fuel in the future. The total energy cost of this project compared to this alternative has not been looked at. I’m sure the construction costs would be far less than \$120+M per mile.

The following is presented in the FEIS:

“**Table 7-3** compares Alternative U with the project alternatives, and **Table 7-4** compares the estimated costs of Alternative U and the Preferred Alternative in the same links.

It should be noted that both tables were prepared prior to the refinement of the geometry and the revision of costs that took place following the decision to combine the SIU’s. **The relative differences presented in these tables, however, would remain.**

**Table 7-3**

**Comparison of Wetland Impacts of Alternative U with Project Alternatives  
3A/4A is the Preferred Alternative**

**Alternative U 3A/4A 3A/4B 3B/4A 3B/4B**

Table 7-4

**Construction Phases and Estimated Costs  
Alternative U with SIU 1 Preferred Alternative**

**Construction Phase Alt. U Alt. 2B/3A/4A**

**Total \$ 1.011 billion \$ 974.1 million**

-

Within St. Charles Parish, in Links 3 and 4, Alternative U, and any other route that would travel south of US 90 to the east of I-310, would affect more wetland acreage than any of the possible alternatives. On the other hand, the combination of 3A and 4A, the Preferred Alternative in St. Charles Parish, is the least damaging to wetlands of all the alternatives examined as shown in **Table 7-3**.

In addition, although Alternative U is within the cost range of the Preferred Alternative, it can be divided into only two construction phases, not into several relatively small, more affordable phases as shown in **Table 7-4**.

Therefore, to summarize, Alternative U is not the least damaging, yet practicable alternative.”

The #'s in Table 7-3 (not reprinted above) may reflect that the relative differences in Wetlands Impacts would remain the same but the #'s in Table 7-4 (not reprinted above) possibly do not reflect the costs associated with the elevating of the entire mainline of I-49. I would suspect that the difference in cost would be much greater for the preferred alternative. It would be nice to see a direct comparison of the costs.

**ELEVATION OF THE MAINLINE OF I-49**

My question related to the elevation of I-49 is below:

The repercussions and cost of the decision to elevate the mainline of I-49 are not discussed in detail.

For example, the catastrophic flooding will not stop at Bayou Lafourche, the I 310 connection, nor the Huey Long connection via Hwy 90. If first responders are going to use I-49 for rescue and recovery operations, the I-49 needs to be elevated all the way to an area south of New Iberia where the elevation starts to go up. The same goes for the responders coming from the eastbank across the Hale Boggs and Huey P Long Bridges. Not elevating these stretches is comparable to the problems with the underpass on I-10 in New Orleans, you won't be able to get to the elevated section other than from New Orleans.

The response in Section F-11 on page 7-121 follows:

12/3/2007

Comment 3 continued

Page 6 of 7

**“F-11: Questions elevated highway if connected to at-grade sections**

I-49 connects to at-grade roadways such as I-310 and US 90 to the east and the west. Flooding could make one or more of these roadways inaccessible. Comment 41-5 questions the value of elevating I-49 given these conditions.

This Environmental Impact Statement concerns I-49 from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway. While it is deemed prudent for evacuation purposes to elevate new interstate highways, many sections of this project are elevated to reduce natural environmental impacts or to improve traffic operations as well as to improve evacuation opportunities. As resources become available, consideration can be given to elevating other sections of the highway network constructed, or currently planned, as at-grade facilities.”

I didn't question the value of elevating I-49 in my comment, I questioned why not the major arteries of I-310 and Hwy 90 and the westward component of I-49. Remember New Iberia is at about the same Latitude as New Orleans. How far inland and how far latterly did the surges of Katrina and Rita have an adverse impact? Does the State's Master Transportation Plan record the impact of the elevation decision for future projects and the ensuing costs?

**DEMOGRAPHICS AND TRAFFIC PROJECTIONS**

The following are comments in the FEIS:

**“B-1: Use of Pre-Katrina Demographics and Traffic Projections**

The regional transportation model is the primary means of predicting 2030 conditions. It has not been adjusted to reflect changes that may result from Hurricane Katrina, many of which are highly speculative. Changes in the cumulative impacts of the project as a result of Katrina are likewise difficult to predict.

The Preferred Alternative is an upgrade to US 90 and is not directly related to traffic fluctuations resulting from Hurricane Katrina. If there is a need for additional capacity, or other change resulting from a change in regional conditions, it would be developed in the final design phase.

**C: Purpose and Need**

**C-1: Route already selected**

The US 90 corridor between I-10 in Lafayette and I-10 in New Orleans was designated by the US Congress as the route of I-49 South. Alternative alignments studied for any section of the proposed project are, by definition, in the US 90 corridor to the extent possible given design standards and environmental legislation. The alignment presented at the Public Hearing in March 2007 is the Preferred Alternative. Pending material information to the contrary, the project sponsors prefer this alignment over the alternatives that have been identified and considered. The purpose of the Comment Period, including the Hearing events, is to determine if any material information to the contrary is forthcoming. Once all comments are reviewed, changes may be made in the alignment prior to the selection of a Build alternative or of the No-Build alternative.

12/3/2007

## Comment 3 continued

Page 7 of 7

**C-2: Purpose and Need relative to Cumulative Impacts**

The overall theme of the Economic Development discussion of Section 5.24.1.2 Cumulative Impacts of the Preferred Alternative is consistent with the Purpose and Need as it states that I-49 South will address existing and foreseeable transportation infrastructure demand along the US 90 corridor. That need is a function of economic growth and development that has already happened or is in the planning pipeline. I-49 South does not induce or proactively cause growth. Growth in the corridor has and will continue to occur based on economic forces and irrespective of whether the I-49 South project is implemented. The I-49 South project is a reaction to existing and foreseeable transportation demand and is intended to supply the infrastructure to accommodate that demand. To clarify, the phrase "aid and abet" in Section 5.24.2.2 of the DEIS has been changed to "induce or proactively cause".

The traffic study conducted in 2002 does not state what the regional transportation model considered. Is the expansion of the Huey Long Bridge in the model? The only place I saw it in the FEIS was in the discussion of the construction priorities. New developments started before Katrina in Westwego and Marerro are well underway and aided by the shortage of housing in the area. The retail businesses on Manhattan have grown tremendously.

No where in the document is there any quantitative assessment as to the overall energy savings of one alternative over another. Given our dependence on fossil fuels and the rising costs, why not? This is why a direct route south of Hwy 90 should have been evaluated in greater detail from the beginning. After Katrina it was more important because it is a route that could be built cheaper and faster and provide the evacuation/rescue and recovery needs a lot sooner and being much shorter, provide fuel/energy savings.

12/3/2007

## USEPA Notice

EIS Data | National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) | US EPA

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/oeca/webeis.nsf/EIS01/BFE692A62799DA...>



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Last updated on Monday, December 10th, 2007.

### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

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## EIS Data

### EIS Filing Information

I-49 South Project, from Raceland to the Westbank Expressway Route US 90, Funding, Coast Guard Bridge Permit, US Army COE Section 10 and 404 Permits, Jefferson, Lafourche, and St. Charles Parishes, LA			
<b>EIS Number</b>	20070432	<b>State</b>	LA
<b>Document Type</b>	Final EIS	<b>Lead Agency</b>	FHW
<b>Federal Register Date</b>	10/19/2007	<b>Contact Name</b>	Carl M. Highsmith
<b>EIS Comment Due/ Wait Peroid Date</b>	11/30/2007	<b>Contact Phone</b>	225-757-7615
<b>Website</b>			
<b>Amended Notice Date</b>			
<b>Amended Notice</b>			
<b>Supplemental Information</b>			

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### EPA Comment Information

<b>Comment Letter Date</b>	11/28/2007	<b>Rating, if Draft EIS</b>	
<b>Summary Paragraph</b>	No formal comment letter was sent to the preparing agency.		

**USCG Message**

-----Original Message-----

From: Bart.A.Marcules@uscg.mil [<mailto:Bart.A.Marcules@uscg.mil>]  
Sent: Wednesday, December 19, 2007 9:11 AM  
To: Mahoney, Robert  
Cc: Frank, David Civilian  
Subject: FW: FEIS comments I-49 Raceland to Westbank Expressway

Good Morning,

After reviewing the FEIS and briefing Dave Frank the USCG has no comments.

V/R

Bart Marcules

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