

# **PRESENTATION**



# Public Hearing LP 197 Direct Connector

May 27, 2009



## LP 197 Direct Connector PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA

Exhibit Viewing & Registration  
Public Hearing Presentation  
Public Comment Session  
Adjourn Public Hearing



LP 197 Direct Connector  
INTRODUCTIONS

ELECTED OFFICIALS



LP 197 Direct Connector  
PREVIOUS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- Early Coordination Letters
- Public Meeting – March 31, 2004



LP 197 Direct Connector  
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICES

Houston Chronicle

Monday, April 27, 2009

Monday, May 11, 2009

Saturday, May 16, 2009

La Voz

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Galveston Daily News

Monday, April 27, 2009

Saturday, May 16, 2009



LP 197 Direct Connector  
SPEAKER INTRODUCTIONS

**Project Description & Geometric Design**

Danny Rios,  
Project Manager,  
S&B Infrastructure

**Environmental Studies**

Casey Hall,  
Project Manager,  
PBS&J

LP 197 Direct Connector  
REVIEW INFORMATION

TxDOT Houston District Office  
7600 Washington Avenue  
Houston, Texas 77007

TxDOT Galveston Area Office  
5407 Gulf Freeway  
La Marque, Texas 77568

LP 197 Direct Connector- PROJECT MAP





LP 197 Direct Connector  
EXISTING FACILITY DESCRIPTION

- LP 197
  - Four 12-foot travel lanes
  - 14-foot continuous left-turn lane
  - Existing right-of-way 160 feet wide
  - 60 mph recommended speed limit
- LP 197 merges with SH 146 west of the railroad
- LP 197 travelers currently use SH 146 to access IH 45



LP 197 Direct Connector  
NEED FOR THE PROJECT

- Inefficient transitioning at IH 45 / SH 6 / SH 146 interchange
- Interchange below design standards
- Traffic congestion and delays due to railroad
- Future truck traffic from terminal facility at Shoal Point
- Existing intersection within 100-year floodplain



LP 197 Direct Connector  
PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

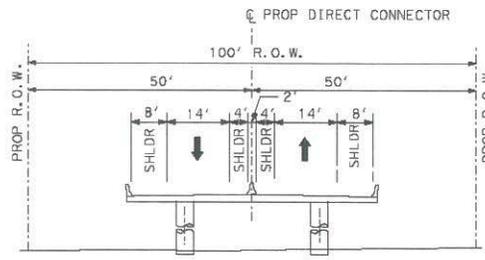
- Improve existing and future traffic conditions by providing non-stop connector ramp
- Avoid congestion and delays at the railroad crossing
- Provide alternate route for increased truck traffic
- Provide alternate route not within the 100-year floodplain



LP 197 Direct Connector  
DESIGN CRITERIA

- New elevated direct connector from IH 45 to LP 197 with two travel lanes
- Construction of a direct connector between the two existing roadways
- Elevated over railroad crossing

## LP 197 Direct Connector PROPOSED TYPICAL SECTION



**PROPOSED TYPICAL SECTION**

## LP 197 Direct Connector RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITION

- 11.09 acres of additional right-of-way
- No relocations or displacements of residences or businesses
- Utility adjustments required



## LP 197 Direct Connector CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE

- Estimated construction cost is \$55,000,000
- Construction of the project is contingent upon the availability of federal funds



## LP 197 Direct Connector ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
CONSTRUCTION OF DIRECT CONNECTORS  
IH 45/LP 197 DIRECT CONNECTORS  
GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS  
CSJ 0600-04-112

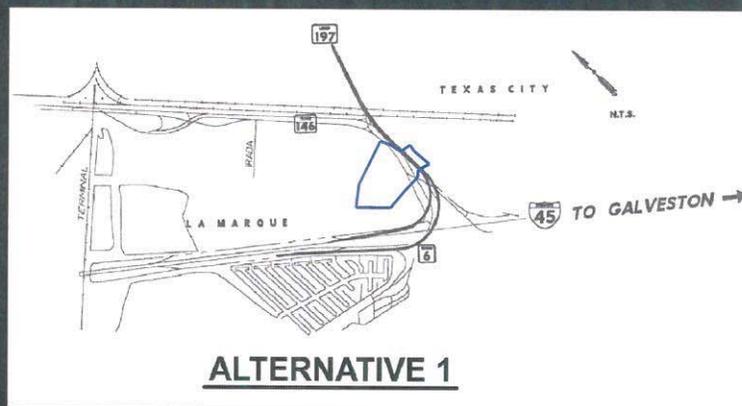
Revised March 2009  
Revised May 2007  
September 2006

## LP 197 Direct Connector ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

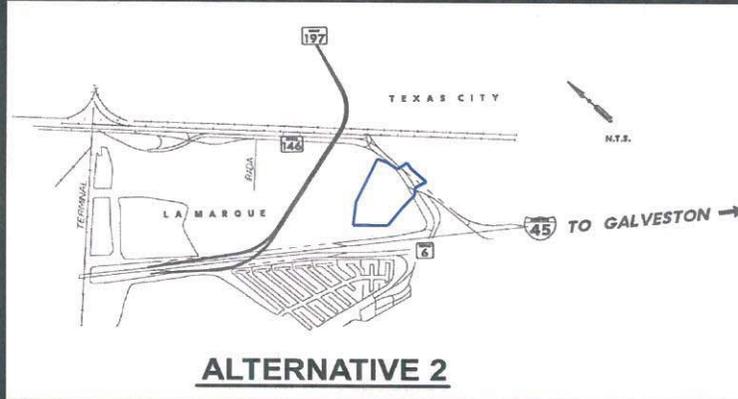
### Environmental Assessment

- Need & Purpose
- Alternatives
- Impacts
- Coordination
- Mitigation

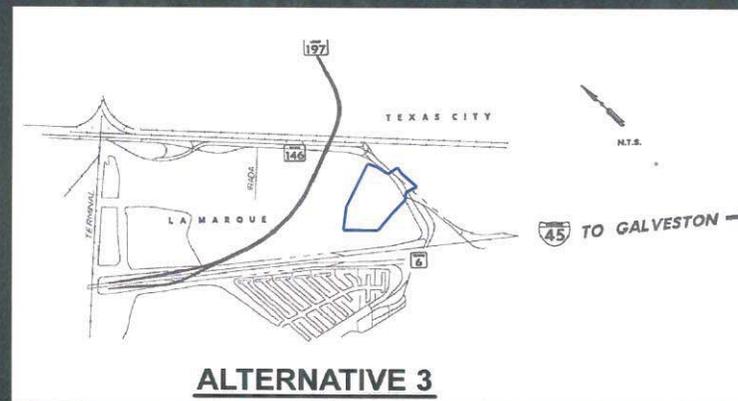
## LP 197 Direct Connector ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

ALTERNATIVE 3



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Waters of the U.S., including Wetlands

- 9.35 acres

Hazardous Materials

- 10 hazardous materials sites, including the MOTCO superfund site
- Petroleum and natural gas pipelines may require relocation



## LP 197 Direct Connector ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

### Vegetation

- 23 acres of grassland, 4 acres of scrub-shrub, and 9 acres of wetlands within project area
- Complete vegetation removal within project area would be minimized where possible and some impacts may only be temporary in nature

### Soils

- Agricultural Farmland Conversion Impact Rating determined no significant impacts

### Wildlife

- Measures taken to limit impacts
- No nests were identified during the field survey



## LP 197 Direct Connector ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

### Noise

- Alternative 3 is located further north of neighborhoods compared to other alternatives
- Implementation of Alternative 3 would not result in substantial traffic noise impacts

### Air Quality

- Traffic Air Quality Analysis was completed and local concentrations from the proposed project would not exceed national standards
- No sensitive receptors



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Cultural Resources

- Two potential historic resources –  
radio tower and railroad
- Not eligible for listing as NRHP
- No archeological resources



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Other Considerations

- Land use
- Social and Economic
- Indirect impacts
- Cumulative impacts



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Agency Coordination

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Marine and Fisheries Service
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
- Texas Historical Commission
- Galveston County Historical Commission



LP 197 Direct Connector  
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

What's Next?

- Public Hearing Summary Report
- Federal Highway Administration review of Public Hearing and Report
- Availability of Report to public
  - Fall 2009
  - [www.dot.state.tx.us](http://www.dot.state.tx.us)



LP 197 Direct Connector

## Public Comment Session

SPEAKER REGISTRATION CARD

LP 197 Direct Connector  
Galveston County, Texas

May 27, 2009

Please complete the information below and return this card to the sign-in table or a staff member to indicate your desire to speak at tonight's Public Hearing.

*Please Print*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

REPRESENTING: \_\_\_\_\_



LP 197 Direct Connector

## Elected Officials



LP 197 Direct Connector  
PUBLIC HEARING COMMENTS

Written Comments

- Place in comment box tonight
- Postmark or e-mail comments by **June 10, 2009**
  - Email comments to:  
[HOU-PIOWEBMAIL@DOT.STATE.TX.US](mailto:HOU-PIOWEBMAIL@DOT.STATE.TX.US)
  - Mail Comments to:  
Texas Department of Transportation  
Attn: Director of Project Development  
P.O. Box 1386, Houston, Texas 77251-1386



LP 197 Direct Connector  
PUBLIC HEARING COMMENTS

Oral Comments

- Submit speaker registration card
- Use microphone in center aisle and face court reporter
- Please only comment on issues relevant to LP 197 Direct Connector project
- Oral comments are limited to three (3) minutes
- Unused time may not be given to another speaker



LP 197 Direct Connector

**PUBLIC COMMENT  
SESSION**



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LP 197 DIRECT CONNECTOR  
PUBLIC HEARING  
ON  
MAY 27, 2009  
7:00 P.M.  
AT  
NESSLER CENTER  
2010 5TH AVENUE NORTH  
TEXAS CITY, TEXAS

COPY

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

1  
2 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Okay. Good evening,  
3 Folks. I'd appreciate it if y'all would take a seat.  
4 We'll start now.

5 My name is Gabe Johnson, and Texas  
6 Department of Transportation welcomes you to the public  
7 hearing at the Nessler Center for the Loop 197 two-way  
8 direct connector project. The total project scope is to  
9 construct the two-way direct connector from I-45 to Loop  
10 197 at the Port of Texas City at the Shoal Point.  
11 Today -- today's date is May 27th, 2009; and the time  
12 is, approximately, 7:00 p.m. At this time please turn  
13 off or silence any personal electronic devices for the  
14 remainder of this hearing.

15 The purpose of this public hearing is to  
16 present the recommended alternative for the direct  
17 connector and to receive public comments. This public  
18 hearing is being recorded by a certified court reporter  
19 for the formal record. You may have noticed sign-in  
20 tables as you walked in. If you haven't already done  
21 so, please sign in before you leave tonight. The  
22 sign-in sheets allow us to record tonight's  
23 participation. The public comment session will begin  
24 following the presentation and we will not answer  
25 questions during the presentation or public comment

1 session but we will be available to answer your  
2 questions following the comment period. Please feel  
3 free to view the exhibits on display tonight. They will  
4 also be available for viewing after the public comment  
5 session.

6 At this time we would like to recognize  
7 elected officials that are in attendance tonight. Mayor  
8 Matt Doyle. Mayor Doyle, thank you for coming.

9 And Commissioner Stephen Holmes, thank you  
10 for coming.

11 Any other elected officials that I don't  
12 have the name on the list?

13 If there are any other elected officials,  
14 please raise your hand. If not, thank you, gentlemen,  
15 for being here.

16 Early coordination letters were sent to  
17 resource agencies, businesses, private property owners  
18 and homeowners to solicit options, opinions and comments  
19 regarding the proposed improvements. A public meeting  
20 was held to further receive your input on this project  
21 on March 31st, 2004.

22 The appropriate environmental studies have  
23 been completed and the project has received approval  
24 from the Federal Highway Administration to go to the  
25 next step of the project development, which is the

1 public hearing.

2 Notice of this public hearing was  
3 advertised in English and Spanish in the following  
4 newspapers: Houston Chronicle, La Voz, and Galveston  
5 Daily News.

6 At this time I would like to introduce the  
7 people who will be presenting the project information to  
8 you this evening. Mr. Danny Rios of S&B Infrastructure  
9 will be presenting project description and geometric  
10 design and Ms. Casey Hall of PBS&J will be presenting  
11 the environmental studies that have been conducted.

12 The project schematic design and  
13 environmental assessments are available for review at  
14 the Texas Department of Transportation Houston district  
15 office and Galveston area office.

16 And now I would like to have Mr. Dan Rios  
17 present the project information and geometric design.

18 Mr. Rios.

19 MR. DANNY RIOS: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

20 The general project location of project  
21 limits are shown on this map highlighted in purple. The  
22 proposed project begins at I-45 north of the Texas City  
23 terminal railroad and continues to Loop 197. The total  
24 project length is, approximately, 2.5 miles. The  
25 existing Loop 197 facility is a four-lane roadway with a

1 continuous left-turn lane. The existing right-of-way is  
2 160 feet wide. The current speed limit on Loop 197 is  
3 60 miles per hour. West of the railroad, Loop 197  
4 merges with State Highway 146 at a T intersection and  
5 Loop 197 travelers currently have to use State Highway  
6 146 to access I-45.

7 The proposed project is needed for a  
8 number of reasons, which I will briefly explain. The  
9 transitioning of traffic at the existing I-45/State  
10 Highway 6/State Highway 146 interchange is inefficient  
11 and the interchange is currently below design standards.  
12 The at-grade railroad crossing on Loop 197 east of the  
13 intersection of IH-45 and State Highway 146 causes --  
14 causes traffic congestion and delays. The development  
15 of a terminal facility at Shoal Point southeast of the  
16 project area will increase future truck traffic, which  
17 will increase the transitional inefficiencies. And,  
18 finally, the current intersection of Interstate 45,  
19 State Highway 6 and State Highway 146 is located in the  
20 100-year floodplain.

21 The purpose of the proposed project is to  
22 address the needs summarized on the previous slide.  
23 First the proposed project will improve existing and  
24 future traffic conditions by constructing a continuous  
25 nonstop connector ramp from I-45 to Loop 197. The

1 proposed project will avoid congestion and delays at the  
2 at-grade railroad crossing. Finally, the proposed  
3 project will provide alternate routes for increased  
4 truck traffic created by the terminal facility at Shoal  
5 Point and an alternate route between I-45 and Loop 197,  
6 which is not within the 100-year floodplain.

7 I will now describe some of the design  
8 elements of the proposed project. The proposed  
9 improvements would include construction of a two-lane  
10 elevated direct connector from I-45 to Loop 197  
11 consist -- consisting of one southbound to eastbound  
12 lane and one northbound to westbound lane. New  
13 right-of-way will be required for the construction of  
14 the direct connector between the two existing roadways.  
15 The proposed elevated section would cross over the  
16 railroad.

17 This slide depicts the proposed direct  
18 connector typical section. The new lanes would consist  
19 of two 14-foot travel lanes each with a 4-foot-wide  
20 inside shoulder and an 8-foot wide outside shoulder.  
21 The proposed right-of-way is typically 100 feet. The  
22 design speed is 50 miles per hour. The actual speed  
23 limit will be decided during construction.

24 Approximately 11.09 acres of additional  
25 right-of-way would be required. There would be no

1 relocations or displacements of residences or  
2 businesses. Adjustments of several power transmission  
3 lines adjacent to the proposed right-of-way would be  
4 required. There are representatives here this evening  
5 at the right-of-way table that can assist you with  
6 information on the TxDOT process that will be followed  
7 for right-of-way acquisition. Brochures are also  
8 available to answer any questions you may have.

9           Based on the designs presented tonight,  
10 the estimated construction cost is \$55 million.  
11 However, construction of the project is contingent upon  
12 the availability of federal funds.

13           This concludes the engineering portion of  
14 the presentation. Now Casey Hall will discuss the  
15 project's environmental studies.

16           MS. CASEY HALL: Thank you.

17           Good evening. My name is Casey Hall, and  
18 I will present to you a summary of the environmental  
19 studies that have been conducted for the proposed  
20 project.

21           I just wanted to check. Can everyone hear  
22 us okay?

23           Okay. An environmental assessment has  
24 been prepared and received preliminary approval for  
25 further processing from the Federal Highway

1 Administration enabling us to hold this public hearing.  
2 We have copies of the document here this evening at the  
3 environmental studies table that you can view. You may  
4 also order copies of the document from TxDOT for the  
5 price of copying.

6 An environmental assessment is the  
7 appropriate type of document prepared for this type of  
8 project and is a decision document which describes the  
9 proposed project, the need and purpose, compares  
10 alternatives, evaluates impacts from those alternatives  
11 and incorporates coordination with the public and  
12 resource agencies, including mitigation of unavoidable  
13 adverse impacts.

14 Alternatives considered included a  
15 no-build alternative, which includes continued, routine  
16 maintenance and operation of the existing facilities.  
17 This was not found to address the project purpose of  
18 providing a safer, more efficient transportation route  
19 that meets current design standards.

20 Alternative one, as shown on the slide,  
21 utilizes TxDOT right-of-way for the majority of its  
22 alignment and would, therefore, result in minimal  
23 impacts to wetlands. Alternative one would construct an  
24 elevated direct connector requiring subsurface  
25 construction inside of the MOTCO superfund site slurry

1 wall. The approximate boundaries of the MOTCO superfund  
2 site are highlighted in blue on the map and the site is  
3 currently undergoing remediation.

4           Subsurface construction might compromise  
5 the integrity of the confining layers or the MOTCO  
6 constituents of concern necessitating further  
7 remediation efforts. Alternative one also has an  
8 unfavorable alignment for heavy truck traffic traveling  
9 to and from the city of Texas City port facilities.

10           Alternative two avoids direct impacts to  
11 the MOTCO superfund site and is elevated to minimize  
12 wetland impacts but does not have the most suitable  
13 geometry for accommodating heavy truck traffic at  
14 highway speeds. The distance between the IH-45 main  
15 lanes and the Loop 197 main lines requires a smaller  
16 transition curve radius in the direct connector. Heavy  
17 trucks would have to downshift, decelerate, then  
18 accelerate and then merge with the 65-mile-per-hour  
19 interstate and highway traffic on the main lanes.

20           This alternative is close to the  
21 neighborhoods of Omega Bay, Bayou Vista, La Marque and  
22 Hitchcock and the geometry of this alternative  
23 transitioning of truck traffic, which would increase  
24 noise levels in these neighborhoods.

25           Alternative three is located north of

1 alternative two and utilizes a portion of the existing  
2 Loop 197 right-of-way. This alternative avoids the  
3 contaminated portion of the MOTCO superfund site, uses  
4 an elevated section over wetlands, meets current safety  
5 and operational standards and improves driving  
6 conditions on a designated hurricane evacuation route.  
7 This alternative also accommodates proposed future  
8 expansion of IH-45.

9           Alternative three provides suitable  
10 geometry for heavy truck traffic to maintain speed  
11 within a flat curve radius, thus, providing a smooth  
12 merge and transition to IH-45 main lanes.

13           Alternative three provides the safest and  
14 most efficient circulation and access for the local  
15 traffic compared to the other alternatives. In  
16 addition, comments received from the general public  
17 indicated a preference for alternative three, among the  
18 build and no-build alternatives. For these reasons, and  
19 in consideration of design and safety constraints,  
20 alternative three is presented this evening as the  
21 recommended alternative.

22           I will summarize the impact analysis that  
23 was performed as part of the environmental assessment.  
24 A total of 9.35 acres of waters of the U.S, including  
25 wetlands, were identified within the proposed

1 right-of-way. Of this, 2.19 acres are subject to  
2 Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and 7.16 acres  
3 are subject to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. In  
4 order to minimize these impacts, elevated sections will  
5 be used over the wetland locations.

6 Ten hazardous material sites, including  
7 the MOTCO superfund site, are within the project area  
8 and can have potential impacts to the proposed project.  
9 The contaminated area within the MOTCO site has been  
10 avoided to minimize environmental impacts. The project  
11 area also contains numerous petroleum and natural gas  
12 pipelines, some of which may -- may require relocation.

13 The proposed project area contains 23  
14 acres of grassland, 4 acres of scrub-shrub vegetation  
15 and 9 acres of wetlands. However, due to the elevated  
16 project design, complete vegetation removal would be  
17 minimized where possible and some impacts would only be  
18 temporary in nature. An agricultural farmland  
19 conversion impact rating form was completed and the  
20 score did not result in significant impacts to  
21 environmental soils.

22 A cursory nest survey for migratory birds  
23 was conducted during the environmental investigations.  
24 No nests were identified within the survey area.  
25 Appropriate measures will be taken to avoid impacts to

1 migratory birds. No long-term impacts to wildlife are  
2 anticipated.

3           Alternative three is located further north  
4 than the other alternatives and, therefore, further away  
5 from the neighborhoods of Omega Bay, Bayou Vista, La  
6 Marque and Hitchcock. Additionally, the geometry of  
7 alternative three creates a smoother transitioning of  
8 truck traffic. These factors would reduce noise levels  
9 to these neighborhoods from the proposed project.

10           Truck traffic would be moved from SH 146  
11 to the Loop 197 direct connector; and based on findings  
12 of traffic noise analysis, implementation of alternative  
13 three did not result in substantial traffic noise  
14 impacts. Noise impacts associated with the proposed  
15 expansion of IH-45 from F.M. 1764 to the Galveston  
16 causeway will be evaluated as part of the IH-45 project.

17           A traffic air quality analysis was  
18 completed. Based on results of this analysis, local  
19 concentrations of carbon monoxide would not exceed  
20 national standards and no sensitive receptors were  
21 identified in the survey area.

22           A study was performed to identify  
23 potential project impacts to historic and archeological  
24 resources within the study area. Two potential historic  
25 resources were identified, a radio tower and the

1 railroad which was built in 1857. However, these sites  
2 are not eligible for the National Register of Historic  
3 Places listing. No archeological resources were  
4 identified by the survey. Therefore, no impacts to  
5 prehistoric or historic resources are anticipated.

6 Impacts to land use, social and economic  
7 resources, indirect and cumulative impacts are expected  
8 to be minimal.

9 TxDOT has coordinated with resource  
10 agencies throughout the environmental process. These  
11 agencies have provided review, input and concurrence on  
12 the assessment of impacts.

13 So, what's next in the environmental  
14 process? TxDOT will prepare a public hearing summary  
15 report to address the oral and written comments received  
16 at tonight's hearing and within the public comment  
17 period, which ends on June 10th, 2009. This report will  
18 be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration for  
19 review as well as any changes as a result of tonight's  
20 hearing.

21 Following the Federal Highway  
22 Administration approval, this report will be available  
23 upon request. You may send your request to the address  
24 listed on the agenda and comment form. The report will  
25 be available in the fall of 2009 and may also be viewed

1 on TxDOT's webpage.

2                   Following the Federal Highway  
3 Administration final review, a finding of no significant  
4 impact will be requested.

5                   Thank you for your attention. I will now  
6 turn it back over to Mr. Johnson.

7                   MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you, Ms. Hall.

8                   Now we'll begin the formal public comment  
9 session. Only registered speakers will be called upon.  
10 Please raise your hand if you would like to speak for  
11 the record tonight and have not completed a speaker  
12 registration form. So, please raise your hand if you  
13 would like to speak and my folks will help you out and  
14 take the cards and that'll give you an opportunity to  
15 speak to us here.

16                   We will collect any additional speaker  
17 registration cards after we hear from our elected  
18 officials who are present tonight and wish to make  
19 public comment. And at this point I would like to  
20 recognize the first speaker and elected officials and  
21 we -- they do have a choice to speak either verbally or  
22 written but I'll extend that courtesy now.

23                   So, Mayor, your name is here first. Mayor  
24 Matt Doyle.

25                   MAYOR MATT DOYLE: Gabe, thanks for

1 letting me be here tonight and I appreciate y'all being  
2 here to do this public hearing. I just want to thank  
3 you for working on this project. It's an important  
4 project not only to the city of Texas City but the  
5 county and the state. Not to mention the truck traffic  
6 we currently have but in 2014 when the Panama Canal  
7 opens -- it finishes its widening, which will almost  
8 double the capacity of it, I will assure you that this  
9 port area not only as vibrant as it is now it will  
10 become even more vibrant. And I think the important  
11 part about that, too, is as we look towards the economy  
12 and how the stimulus is going to take place, it's going  
13 to be very important for us to be prepared for these  
14 projects.

15           The -- but even if that was not to happen,  
16 we have a great deal of truck traffic in the city of  
17 Texas City and throughout the petrochemical area.  
18 You know, we do produce 7 percent of the fuel that is  
19 consumed in this nation every day. So, it is important  
20 for us to be able to move traffic through our community.  
21 And what you've designed here moves traffic, trucks,  
22 heavy trucks that don't have to go through the  
23 community, basically right into the facilities and right  
24 back onto the highway. And by raising it you've really  
25 made -- the noise detriment to the area have declined

1 that in a great way.

2 So, I just -- I'm here on behalf of the  
3 citizens of Texas City in support. The commission and  
4 the mayor support this, and I appreciate you being here.

5 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you, Mayor, for  
6 your comment.

7 As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of  
8 this comment session is to receive your comments on the  
9 issues relevant to the project, the proposed project.  
10 Both written and oral comments will be considered  
11 equally. If you would like to comment but do not wish  
12 to comment orally or if you would like to comment in  
13 more detail, you may submit a written comment. Written  
14 comments must be postmarked by June 10, 2009. Comment  
15 forms are available at the sign-in table and may be  
16 turned in tonight, e-mail or mailed to the address on  
17 the slide.

18 I want to go ahead and start by calling  
19 names, the speakers, as they have arrived and requested  
20 to speak. The names of the speakers will be called  
21 in -- in order and as they are received, as I said.

22 When your name is called, please come to  
23 the microphone. Use the microphone in front of the room  
24 and please face our court reporter so that she can make  
25 an accurate record of your comments. Please state your

1 name for the record and who you may be representing. A  
2 time display on the screen will indicate the start of  
3 each speaker's three minutes. The timer will count down  
4 your remaining time. When the clock is at zero, your  
5 speaking time is over. Once the three-minute period is  
6 over, we ask that you allow the next speaker to present  
7 their comment.

8 The comment session will adjourn after all  
9 who have registered to make oral comments have been  
10 given the opportunity to speak. TxDOT representatives  
11 and members of the consultant team will be available to  
12 answer any questions following the comment session.

13 So, I'm going to begin with the next  
14 speaker. Is Mr. Walter Miller.

15 MR. WALTER MILLER: My name is Walter  
16 Miller. I'm representing a gentleman that --

17 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Can you speak up a  
18 little louder or raise --

19 MR. WALTER MILLER: My name is Walter  
20 Miller. I'm here on behalf of Richard Hominga.

21 And it's more of a question instead of a  
22 comment. And my question is: When is this project  
23 anticipated to begin?

24 MR. GABE JOHNSON: The purpose of the  
25 public hearing is not to respond, but you asked me a

1 question. And I want to say basically we covered that  
2 in the presentation, that subject to the availability of  
3 the funds, the federal funds that comes available to  
4 TxDOT.

5 MR. WALTER MILLER: So, that's at any time  
6 in the future?

7 MR. GABE JOHNSON: That's anytime in the  
8 future.

9 MR. WALTER MILLER: Great. Thank you.

10 MR. GABE JOHNSON: And next speaker is  
11 Mr. Jack Cross.

12 MR. JACK CROSS: I want to thank TxDOT for  
13 the planning on this project. I think this is one of  
14 the most important industrial highway projects that I've  
15 seen in the 54 years that I've lived in Texas City.

16 Texas City is an environmentally friendly  
17 city. We take the environment seriously. We -- we have  
18 a lot of parks and we -- we just try to do what's right.  
19 This is actually going to help the environment, not hurt  
20 it, because can you imagine what would happen with all  
21 these trucks going up to the old Y with Bayou Vista,  
22 Hitchcock and so forth? You can't -- not only the  
23 traffic but the pollution coming out of these trucks.

24 If this port is built -- and it will be  
25 built like Matt -- Matt said -- we're gonna have a

1 greater environmental wetland because the port people  
2 and the Corps has already come to an agreement that they  
3 would use the grate steel to restore Swan Lake, build up  
4 the levy across the front of it and restore -- build new  
5 hundreds of acres of wetland.

6 I'm all for this project.

7 I do applaud the environmental people for  
8 their concern and for all the work they do but this is  
9 not a losing project for them.

10 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you for your  
11 comment, sir.

12 Next speaker is Ms. Evangeline Whorton.

13 Ms. Whorton.

14 MS. EVANGELINE WHORTON: I am Evangeline  
15 Whorton, and I speak this evening as the chairman of  
16 Scenic Galveston. I've been very angry tonight and I'm  
17 sorry for that, many outbursts.

18 In 2004 I sat in on a meeting at Bayou  
19 Vista where the issue of truck traffic impacting Bayou  
20 Vista and the Texas City Y were discussed. A few months  
21 later I attended a public hearing at the Nessler Center  
22 on alternative proposals for redevelopment of Loop 197,  
23 which included a direct, elevated connector to service  
24 the port of Texas City and Shoal Point transport via  
25 Loop 197. There were many citizens present and it was

1 agreed that an alternative direct connector would be  
2 acceptable with ramp development over the railroad track  
3 to take an immediate northeasterly curve in the vicinity  
4 of the rail itself and tie into I-45 much further north  
5 of the Texas City Y. We left the hearing thinking that  
6 a workable solution had been achieved.

7           Going back for background information,  
8 Scenic Galveston in 2002 was awarded a Federal NOAA  
9 Coastal Impact Assistant Program Revenues Award,  
10 generated by offshore leases for the sole purpose of  
11 acquiring 1500 acres of premier wetlands, *Spartina*  
12 *patens* meadows and original native prairies on the  
13 Virginia Point Peninsula to be used for conservation  
14 only. That's in quotes.

15           Not with nontaxpayer dollars the proposed  
16 habitat conservation preserve called the Virginia Point  
17 Peninsula Preserve, or VPPP, was purchased from the  
18 University of Texas real estate division for \$2 million.  
19 The lands we acquired land on the 5 miles of the  
20 Galveston Bay coastline northward to Loop 197 and then  
21 east from Swan Lake to the Union Pacific Railroad line  
22 on the west which became collectively from west  
23 Galveston Bay a contiguous I-45 corridor habitat  
24 conservation preserve of almost 3,000 acres joining with  
25 the Virginia Point Peninsula Preserve.

1                   In February of 2009 notice went out to  
2 adjacent property owners on Loop 197 that an overhead  
3 elevated ramp connector was proposed for Loop 197.  
4 The Virginia Point Peninsula Preserve owned by Scenic  
5 Galveston fronts Loop 197 with its entrance at Campbell  
6 Bayou Road. It serves as well as an entrance to trucks  
7 and services using the Gulf Coast Waste Disposal  
8 Authority.

9                   Looking from Loop 197 to the Gulf, these  
10 lands make up a spectacular preserve and beauty with  
11 many diverse species of animals, birds, marine life and  
12 plant communities in a coastal environment that is fast  
13 disappearing on the Texas Gulf Coast.

14                   Scenic Galveston strongly opposes  
15 overdevelopment of Loop 197 with an elevated concrete  
16 connector ramp along the perimeter of SG's habitat  
17 property preserve, especially the 25-foot-high retaining  
18 walls planned at the Virginia Point Peninsula Preserve  
19 entrance.

20                   There were no alternatives in the February  
21 notice recently received from TxDOT that -- TxDOT, just  
22 drawings of a 20-foot-high retaining wall and elevated  
23 Loop 197 schematic, which clearly shows that this  
24 conductor would begin at the entrance to our property  
25 and then curve on the north side of present Loop 197 as

1 direct connector ramps at the intersection --

2 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Ms. Whorton, I have to  
3 remind you your time is over. Please conclude your  
4 remarks.

5 MS. EVANGELINE WHORTON: In February of  
6 2009 we only received -- and I'll repeat that -- one  
7 proposed schematic drawings of an elevated connector  
8 following the path of the current Loop 197 roadway, with  
9 a concrete ramp marring the view sight and entrances to  
10 both the Virginia Point Peninsula owned by Scenic  
11 Galveston and the heavily used entrance for the Gulf  
12 Coast Waste Disposal Authority.

13 As chairman of Scenic Galveston with well  
14 over \$10 million invested in our contiguous reserves  
15 along the I-45 and Loop 197, I reserve the right to  
16 question why our VPPP must be fronted by such an  
17 insensitive project. Traffic at ground level is not a  
18 problem now. It should not be in the future.

19 Thank you very much.

20 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you for your  
21 comments, ma'am.

22 And next speaker is Lalise Mason.  
23 Ms. Lalise Mason.

24 MS. LALISE MASON: I'll try not to be  
25 redundant some of what was said.

1 I'm Lalise Mason. I'm on the executive  
2 board of Scenic Galveston where I serve as chairman of  
3 the land habitat restoration committee for our  
4 2700-plus-acre nature preserve complex in the I-45/Loop  
5 197 corridor.

6 I'm a primary point of contact in this  
7 specific regard with all of the relevant state and  
8 federal resource agencies who technically and  
9 financially support our work, including those that have  
10 regulatory oversight with construction projects in this  
11 locale.

12 Scenic Galveston is by far the largest  
13 landowner in the area in the proposed project in terms  
14 of both acres and linear adjacency to TxDOT right-of-way  
15 along Loop 197 and I-45. We own nearly all the  
16 mile-long Loop 197 east side between GH&H rail line and  
17 Carbide Marsh, GCW 40-acre facility that our chairman  
18 just referenced. We also own, approximately, 2 miles in  
19 each direction along I-45 between the Texas City Y  
20 exchange and Santa Fe rail overpass, ahead of the  
21 railway causeway to Galveston. Added up we have 5 miles  
22 of shared boundaries with TxDOT.

23 However, I stand here today as members of  
24 our organization have publicly and privately done  
25 numerous times in the past to ask TxDOT to work with us,

1 not against us, in long-term planning and project  
2 design. For those -- these borders we share in the  
3 natural and scenic amenities (phonetic) and to be  
4 Galveston stewards to the benefit of our local citizens.  
5 Had this interaction happened early on in the design  
6 process for Loop 197 connector maybe the need for this  
7 public hearing would have been obviated. I'd much  
8 rather be someplace else tonight. I'm sure you would,  
9 too.

10 I appreciate TxDOT promptly sending us  
11 electronic drawings for the proposed Loop 197 project  
12 several weeks ago when I requested them. Unfortunately,  
13 now we have a chance to study it carefully the project  
14 is even more intrusive to our quiet enjoyment of and  
15 future restoration entrance work planned for our  
16 preserve lands than we had anticipated. We do  
17 appreciate TxDOT's avoidance of our lands per se in  
18 terms of eminent domain at this juncture; but part of  
19 the reason we purchased the 1500-acre Virginia Point  
20 Preserve from the University of Texas a few years back  
21 was the unique opportunity to have a public front to the  
22 preserve that was away from I-45 and all of the elevated  
23 concrete structure that predated our land acquisition  
24 there. Now it seems I-45 is coming to us anyway and  
25 we're pretty disheartened.

1                   Some history, our environmental  
2 consultant, Frank Thompson, and I met with TxDOT project  
3 engineer Jim Peacock (phonetic) in around 2000 when we  
4 were considering purchase of the portion of Virginia  
5 Point lands immediately along Loop 197. At that time  
6 TxDOT suggested that the roadway configuration highway  
7 infrastructure along Loop 197 would likely remain much  
8 as we see it today. I have inquired of my partner if he  
9 remembered the conversation as I do and he concurred  
10 wholeheartedly.

11                   I'm going to run over time. My husband  
12 chose not to speak.

13                   Subsequently to our great chagrin we heard  
14 about the connector plan. Many of our neighbors then  
15 attended the two public hearings held previously for  
16 this project but it seems nobody at TxDOT has paid  
17 attention to our longstanding objection to this Loop 197  
18 layout. I need to tell you that we are not against the  
19 connector. We fully appreciate the need for it. We are  
20 against the grade separation along Loop 197, period.

21                   Texas City is presumably full of disturbed  
22 lands that could probably accommodate any needed grade  
23 separated highway-rail configuration in a less intrusive  
24 manner. In both previous hearings alternatives were  
25 proposed by TxDOT that we and many other parties

1 preferred. There are few natural or scenic areas in  
2 Texas City. Why would TxDOT choose to be party to doing  
3 irreparable harm to ours, this one, by placing enormous  
4 and presumably well-lit at night concrete bridges in  
5 front of it?

6 I was going to eliminate this next  
7 paragraph. And in spite of the fact that I'm over time  
8 something was said about the environmental assessment  
9 by -- by this young lady at the end of this table. And  
10 I'm going to leave it in because it's something that's  
11 concerning us greatly.

12 Some additional history, it's a bit of an  
13 aside.

14 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Ms. Mason, I'm going to  
15 need to remind you, you need to conclude your remarks.  
16 Your time is over.

17 MS. LALISE MASON: I shall, but I'm going  
18 to finish.

19 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you.

20 MS. LALISE MASON: In reading the  
21 environmental assessment document you sent over last  
22 week, I'm astonished to see that this Loop 197 connector  
23 project plans have, since about 2004, been embedded  
24 inside more ambitious and conceptual widening plans for  
25 I-45. Planning about which we have heard nothing.

1                   In the mid 1990s, when we began buying  
2 lands in the I-45 corridor, we had meetings with both  
3 TxDOT and Parsons Brinckerhoff towards the I-45 master  
4 plan that was ultimately produced. At that time, as we  
5 began buying land in the corridor, we were similarly  
6 assured as with Loop 197 that while I-45 would almost  
7 certainly be adding lanes, which we appreciate, this  
8 work would affect us not at all and specifically would  
9 occur within the existing TxDOT right-of-way not  
10 requiring taking of Scenic Galveston new and proposed  
11 preserve lands. We subsequently made numerous land  
12 planning and habitat restoration decisions based on that  
13 advice from TxDOT as codified in your report.

14                   So, while we recognize that things change  
15 and also that only the Loop 197 connectors are on the  
16 table at this time, I continue to remain concerned that  
17 months or years from now we will open the mail and  
18 discover that a widening and a condemnation of our now  
19 largely restored wetlands are planned along I-45 after  
20 all and, in fact, the Loop 197 connectors were the  
21 proverbial tip of the iceberg. I hope not.

22                   MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you for your  
23 time.

24                   MS. LALISE MASON: I'm not done.

25                   MR. GABE JOHNSON: You have exceeded --

1 MS. LALISE MASON: Back -- no. I am  
2 almost done.

3 Back to the Loop 197 --

4 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Ma'am, you have  
5 exceeded your time. You exceeded it twice.

6 MS. LALISE MASON: Back to the Loop 197  
7 project, we strongly object to this proposed layout for  
8 the connector project. We will continue to do so,  
9 probably in Austin after this hearing is over. I  
10 understand no construction documents have been prepared  
11 as yet. We encourage you to hold off moving forward  
12 until some community consensus can be reached on the  
13 public imperative for this project and specifically for  
14 this routing. We also have many questions about  
15 cumulative and future impacts of the Loop 197 connectors  
16 in terms of future expansion projects that might have --

17 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Ms. Mason, I have to  
18 ask you -- Ms. Mason, I have to ask you to stop because  
19 you have exceeded your time.

20 MS. LALISE MASON: I have one sentence  
21 left.

22 MR. GABE JOHNSON: I ask you to please to  
23 write your comments -- you can submit your written  
24 comments and I promise you your written comments will be  
25 documented. It will be part of the response. Be part

1 of the response.

2 MS. LALISE MASON: Okay. I'm going to  
3 leave you -- I'm going to leave you --

4 MR. GABE JOHNSON: I promise you that  
5 today.

6 MS. LALISE MASON: I'm going to leave you  
7 with a notion of cumulative impacts because you guys are  
8 doing something and you're not addressing it.

9 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you for your  
10 comment. I appreciate that.

11 And next speaker is Mr. Brandt Mannchen.

12 MR. BRANDT MANNCHEN: My name is Brandt  
13 Mannchen, B-R-A-N-D-T M-A-N-N-C-H-E-N; and I represent  
14 the Houston Sierra Club.

15 There's a lot of information that is  
16 crucial for the public and decision makers to have so  
17 that they can review, comment on and understand the  
18 proposal. We believe a number of the issues have not  
19 been included in the environmental assessment and I'd  
20 like to mention a few of those.

21 What are the connected impacts between the  
22 proposed Shoal Point terminal facility and this  
23 particular Loop 197? One of the bird surveys of the  
24 project location and the species of birds found during  
25 site visits using past data and species lists, the only

1 thing there are four birds --

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can't hear you.

3 MR. BRANDT MANNCHEN: -- four birds are  
4 mentioned and those are only nesting birds. Nothing  
5 about birds that don't nest there but exist there.

6 The number of acres of wetlands that will  
7 be saved by elevating the sections and where circulation  
8 will be affected, where water will go that is displaced  
9 and how many acres of the hundred-year floodplain will  
10 be displaced by Loop 197, the quantity and life quality  
11 water from runoff in proposal and the cumulative actions  
12 of the impacts this will have on freshwater brackish and  
13 saltwater wetlands in the bay system, the basin and post  
14 project flood elevation and the hydraulic study and  
15 mitigation plan to offset construction impacts, and  
16 emissions inventory for all air pollutants for the  
17 proposal and all cumulative actions. The impacts of air  
18 pollutants on water quality, shellfish, fin fish and  
19 other aquatic organisms, the amount of greenhouse gas  
20 emissions from the proposal and all cumulative actions  
21 and a noise analysis with real noise monitor levels and  
22 an estimate of future noise levels due to this proposal  
23 and all cumulative actions.

24 These are just some of the things that we  
25 would like to see in the document because this is the

1 only chance the public has to comment. And if those  
2 studies are done later, the public has no opportunity to  
3 read them and then comment on them and have them on the  
4 record. So, we would encourage you to complete those  
5 documents, have a public comment period for them so that  
6 the public can review, comment on and understand the  
7 full environmental impacts of the proposal.

8 Thank you.

9 MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you for your  
10 comments, sir.

11 And next speaker, the name is familiar and  
12 a famous name, too. Former mayor Charles Doyle.

13 MR. CHARLES DOYLE: Thank you,  
14 Mr. Johnson.

15 I'm Chuck Doyle, and I served in -- as  
16 elected official here in Texas City for 28 years, and  
17 I've lived here with my family for 56 years. And I'm  
18 proud of my son who is now mayor and one who's county  
19 commissioner.

20 I also served as the president of the  
21 Houston-Galveston Area Council of Governments and was on  
22 your task force for transportation planning before there  
23 was a Houston-Galveston Area Council. So, I commend you  
24 for the excellent job you've done here.

25 This is a very important corridor for the

1 economic development of our area. I'm chairman of the  
2 board of Texas First Bank. We have 18 locations in  
3 every city of Galveston County.

4 Other plans that have been looked at in  
5 the past -- this is not the first time we've looked at  
6 improving the transportation into Texas City. We had  
7 Texas Copper that was proposed here at one time. We've  
8 had other events when we worked on gateways, when we had  
9 Tex Tin torn down but we also salute Tex Tin because  
10 first week in June we'll celebrate the 65th anniversary  
11 of the landing in Normandy. And this was the only tin  
12 smelter in the northern hemisphere and it was very  
13 important in the war.

14 Environmental issues have been addressed  
15 by Jack Cross and I heard also from Scenic Galveston.  
16 I'm not on their board. I'm not a participant in their  
17 organization, but I would assume I'm part of it because  
18 I think we gave the first acres given to them or among  
19 the first as a part of Scenic Galveston.

20 I commend them on what they've done. It's  
21 a beautiful entry into Galveston. We need a better  
22 gateway into Texas City. Of the three alternatives that  
23 you have presented here this evening and worked on for I  
24 don't know how long but a long time, you've given  
25 appropriate consideration to the cities of La Marque,

1 Tiki Island and Bayou Vista as well as Texas City, the  
2 people living there and the nuisance that could be  
3 caused by an improper transportation corridor. You've  
4 given consideration that I saw outlined in an excellent  
5 manner by you, ma'am, to the environment; and we, too,  
6 are interested in the environment. That's why we wanted  
7 Tex Tin torn down. That's why we built more parks for  
8 our environment than anyone else in the area.

9           And all we ask is that you continue to  
10 offer economic development for Galveston County because  
11 of Ike and Wall Street, all of us have had a tough time  
12 trying to pull our communities together and get up off  
13 of our knees after being knocked down many times here  
14 and this is the kind of development that leads to future  
15 development and the super port that could come to Texas  
16 City as we continue to develop our own industrial  
17 facilities.

18           And I thank you and commend you for your  
19 work.

20           MR. GABE JOHNSON: Thank you, sir. Thank  
21 you for your comment.

22           If there isn't any other speakers that  
23 have registered and put their name on a card, we will  
24 now close the hearing. It's, approximately, 7:47 p.m.;  
25 and the hearing is adjourned.

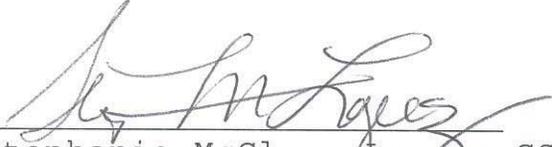
1                   Have a safe trip. Thank you for your  
2 participation.

3                   (Hearing closed.)  
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1 STATE OF TEXAS

2  
3 I, Stephanie McClure Lopez, a Certified  
4 Shorthand Reporter in and for the State of Texas, do  
5 hereby certify that the above and foregoing contains a  
6 true and correct transcription of all portions of the  
7 above-referenced public comments to be included in the  
8 transcript of said public comment section, and were  
9 reported by me.

10 Given under my hand and seal of office on  
11 the 1st day of June, 2009.

12  
13   
14 Stephanie McClure Lopez, CSR  
15 CSR No. 3483; Expiration: 12-31-09  
16 P.O. Box 1617  
17 Giddings, Texas 78942  
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