

Mississippi River - Gulf Outlet New Lock and Connecting Channels

Community Impact Mitigation Plan

Executive Summary

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers proposes to replace the existing lock at the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC) or Industrial Canal in New Orleans. The facility is located in the midst of a highly developed and densely populated part of the city. In fact, the areas adjacent to the IHNC are among the oldest and most established neighborhoods in New Orleans and include two nationally designated historic districts, Holy Cross and Bywater.

The magnitude of the project and the estimated duration of the implementation phase are such that it is likely to have a significant impact on the neighborhoods, historic resources, residents, and businesses located therein. This was recognized by not only the Corps but also the U.S. Congress when they provided specific guidance to the Corps in the FY91 Appropriations Act to address the impacts on the local community. In addition, Congress provided specific authorization in the Water Resources Development Act of 1996 for a comprehensive community impact mitigation plan that would address the direct and indirect impacts on the affected communities.

Construction activity associated with lock and bridge replacements generates both adverse and beneficial impacts to the neighborhoods in the area. Even with the innovative engineering of a new lock and the development of the tentatively selected plan north of Claiborne Avenue, there will still be significant impacts on the affected communities, although there will be no relocation of residents. While it is virtually impossible to eliminate all impacts associated with the construction of the lock project, it is possible to mitigate their effect on the community and its resources. The development and selection of the north of Claiborne Avenue plan including the community impact mitigation plan complies with both the spirit and intent of the Congressional guidance in the FY 91 Act and Congressional authorization in the FY96 Act.

The community impact mitigation plan being recommended as part of the lock project represents a departure from traditional Corps of Engineer environmental analysis and mitigation planning and was developed through a broad-based community participation process in the form of a neighborhood working group. Participants in the process from the community maintained their strong opposition to the project during the discussions, but still provided valuable input toward the formulation of the community impact mitigation plan. The plan insures that communities adjacent to the project remain complete, liveable neighborhoods during and after construction of the project. It also minimizes residential and business disruptions while meeting the goals of improving waterborne commerce.

The plan includes direct impact minimization actions that will be taken by the Corps in cooperation with local government, community groups, and residents. It also includes measures to indirectly compensate for those impacts which direct impact minimization cannot properly address.

The plan costs an estimated \$33,000,000 to implement. It addresses the impacts relating to noise, transportation, cultural resources, aesthetics, employment, community and regional growth, and community cohesion. It also includes features intended to serve as compensation to the neighborhood for impacts that are not quantifiable. Implementation of the plan will begin prior to construction and will continue throughout the project construction period. The plan includes, in part, job training, business assistance programs, street and house improvements, community facilities, cultural and historical markers and displays, and new roadways.

Section 844 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, PL 104-303, dated October 12, 1996, authorized implementation of the community impact mitigation plan as follows:

"(c) Community Impact Mitigation Plan. -- Using funds made available under subsection (a), the Secretary shall implement a comprehensive community impact mitigation plan, as described in the evaluation report . . . that, to the maximum extent practicable, provides for mitigation or compensation or both, for the direct and indirect social and cultural impacts that the project described in subsection (a) will have on the affected areas referred to in subsection (b)."

This authorization reaffirms Congress' intent to mitigate project impacts on the community.

To adequately implement the plan and to ensure that all of the stakeholders are involved in the implementation process, we are proposing that a Partnering Agreement be entered into among all concerned residents, local interests, and officials. The agreement would commit all concerned to work together for the benefit of the community and to determine how the \$33 million would be expended. Details of this would be developed through continued discussions with all concerned once the project is approved for construction funding.

Some of the mitigation measures proposed herein will greatly assist to achieve the goals of the Holy Cross Neighborhood set forth in a report entitled "The Holy Cross Neighborhood: Planning for Community Development", prepared, in cooperation with the local residents of Holy Cross, by the College of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of New Orleans in 1995. The same is true for the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood, documented in a similar report in May 1996 entitled "Citizen Planning for Community Development in the Lower Ninth Ward" prepared in the same manner as the other report. The community improvements authorized with this project will definitely supplement the efforts by the locals to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. The executive summaries of these two reports are at Exhibits IX and X.

The above efforts indicate that the locals have initiated a community policy-making initiative that is required for the area to be designated an "Empowerment Zone", which could mean \$100 million in Federal grants and \$250 million in tax incentives for over 10 years. A project of the magnitude of the Industrial Canal Lock Replacement, which would create tremendous economic development and activity for the City of New Orleans, can only help to gain approval from Housing and Urban Development for these funds, which the City did not receive in the 1995 selection process. The neighborhoods affected by this project are included in what is called the New Orleans Enterprise Community, which is the designated area for possible use of these "Empowerment Zone" funds. The Clinton administration has recently asked Congress to approve another round of "Empowerment Zone" grants.

Based on our analysis, the recommended community impact mitigation plan complies with the spirit and intent of the specific Congressional guidance provided in conjunction with the FY 1991 Appropriations Act. The plan recognizes the historical nature of the area, avoids or minimizes adverse impacts upon the quality of the human environment to the extent that is practicable, and restores the quality of the human environment in the project area.