

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

MISSION: To recommend policy and projects which will increase usage of Louisiana's transportation system and increase public understanding of the system's impact on the state's economic development.

At its meetings, the Committee continues to hear reports from the representatives of a wide variety of government, military, port, airport, rail, trade association, and other transportation officials. Highlights are listed below:

At the January 7 meeting, **Mr. Jacob Patnaik**, Chief of the U.S. Coast Guard's Engineering Division, and **Mr. Nick Mpras**, Chief of the Coast Guard's Bridge Administration Office, gave a presentation on the reconstruction of the Florida Avenue Bridge over the Industrial Canal. The bridge is being altered under the Truman-Hobbs Act in accordance with the "Order to Alter" issue of 30 July 1992 by the Commandant of the Coast Guard to provide for the reasonable needs of navigation. The new vertical lift span will provide 156 feet vertical clearance above high tide and a horizontal clearance of at least 300 feet.

On May 6, **Mr. Thomas Sands**, The then-interim Executive Director of the Millennium Port Authority, discussed the work plan for the Authority: (1) to look at acceptable means along the Mississippi River of increasing container handling capacity and related transportation infrastructure; (2) to look at coastal areas to determine those facilities that would be acceptable over time for developing increased container capacity and related transportation infrastructure; (3) to review the Sea Point project; and (4) to consider collateral projects. Mr. Sands said that while the development and enhancement of container port facilities on the river is the thrust of the Authority, an even greater economic development benefit to the state would be derived if value could be added to the cargoes in the containers in Louisiana before shipping them elsewhere. The purpose of the "collateral projects" item above is to provide some type of incentive for those port jurisdictions and the economic development organizations within their jurisdictions to be innovative in considering ways to add value to the cargoes. Mr. Sands stated that the Authority is active in the four areas summarized above, but funds are needed to hire the people to progress further.

On June 17, **Jim Bridger**, General Manager of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad, briefed the Committee on the activities of the Public Belt, which has a board of 16 Commissioners, with the Mayor serving as the President. The Public Belt contributes a great deal to the City of New Orleans and its economy. Mr. Bridger outlined the main points as follows: (1) The Public Belt is one of only two switching railroads in the country and the only Gulf port providing access to all six Class I railroads; (2) It serves as a key transportation and communication conduit for city officials and the Port of New Orleans; (3) The Public Belt is a uniform and impartial provider of rail service; (4) It serves as an alternate form of transportation, alleviating congestion and promoting growth; (5) It has had infrastructure improvements over the last five years in excess of \$13 million; (6) The Public Belt has an annual payroll of over \$6 million; (7) About \$2 million is spent annually on local goods and services; (8) It serves as an accessible partner to city agencies during major events and in times of crisis; (9) It is a fluid operator through key areas of the city

with an ever-expanding business portfolio; and (10) It is an organization with a strong sense of community and pride.

At its September 9 meeting, **Dr. Adam Prokopowicz**, University of New Orleans Intermodal Transportation Policy and Implementation Center and National Ports and Waterways Institute, made a detailed presentation on the “**Lower Mississippi River Corridor: Current and Future Challenges.**” His presentation covered key topics such as: (1) Competitive Environment and Trends: trade flows; major competitors; vessel calls to New Orleans and competitive ports by major categories; facility capacities; rail services; other competitiveness factors; and; (2) Transportation Costs: cost of port calls, vessel cost comparisons; individual cost items for vessel calls.

At the October 7 Committee meeting, **Captain Ronald Branch, U.S. Coast Guard Captain of the Port** and Commanding Officer of the Marine Safety Office, made a special presentation on the **new port security regulations.**

On October 21 **Congressman David Vitter** met with the Committee at a specially arranged meeting in the WTC Board Room to **discuss budgetary issues** confronting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Coast Guard, Customs Service, and other agencies and their impact on Louisiana's transportation system in connection with port and airport security and homeland defense. Congressman Vitter appreciated the opportunity to hear first-hand the views of many of the members of the committee and will bear them in mind as deliberations in the Congress proceed. (Similar meetings are being arranged in the future with other members of Louisiana's Congressional delegation.)

At the December 2 Committee meeting, **Jim Amoss, President of Sea Point, LLC**, updated the members on the **Sea Point container transfer facility** to be located in the Mississippi River 90 miles below New Orleans at Venice, (mile 12 above Head of Passes). Containers are transferred between large ocean-going container vessels and standard Mississippi River hopper barges for delivery to the Port of New Orleans and other ports on the Mississippi River inland waterway system. The project has been partially funded and is expected to be fully financed by mid-2003. Construction time is expected to take approximately two years from that date.