

# ONE to ONE

An Update on the Efforts of the LA 1 Coalition

Vol. 4 /Spring 1998

## We Got A Sip of TEA, But We're Still Thirsty

-by Executive Director Roy Francis

Let me give you the good news first. As you might have read in the newspapers, the U.S. House Transportation Committee recently approved its version of the six-year Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). In the House's version, the LA 1 Coalition was successful in obtaining the \$750,000 needed to conduct the engineering and environmental studies required to upgrade the highway system from Grand Isle to U.S. 90. A sum of \$1.5 million was also approved for engineering and survey work tied to the construction of a four-lane bridge over Bayou Lafourche in Leeville.

The bad news is that this sip of TEA is too small to quench our thirst. While the Coalition has been successful on the

House side, this House-approved bill still has to go to a conference committee composed of senators and representatives, including Louisiana Senator John Breaux and Representative Richard Baker. The Senate's draft of the transportation bill includes lump sums for all 50 states, but does not include funding for particular projects such as the Leeville bridge or other LA 1 improvements. And, once a compromise bill is reached, it must go to the President for his approval. Don't forget—the President has the line item veto power, which he recently used to cut \$200 million in funding to the Corps of Engineers' budget. These funding cuts impacted dredging at Port Fourchon and the Houma Navigational Canal Lock project.

The \$2.25 million in funding the

House has proposed is only a small portion of the total funding needed to upgrade the highway system. If finally approved, however, it will secure the credible engineering and environmental information that the Coalition needs to justify the estimated \$536 million in actual improvement projects. It is the critical first step.

I am pleased to hear that the Leeville Bridge, Port Fourchon, and the impacts to this region are being discussed in Congress. We have gained some ground, however it is a tough road ahead. We have to remain focused and relentless in our pursuit.

If you have any suggestions or comments, please contact me at (504) 448-4485. We need everyone's help. Thank you for your continued support.

## Coalition Pushes for TIMED Change

If there ever was a chance to make a TIMED change, a recent meeting of Governor Foster's task force on the state transportation development program was it. On March 5, LA1 Coalition Executive Director Roy Francis and Coalition Chairman Ted Falgout urged the newly-appointed 21-member panel to include Highway 1 improvements when considering future projects for the Transportation Infrastructure Model for Economic Development (TIMED) program.

"I think we really got our message across to members of the task force and impressed on them the strong connection between economic growth in our region

### "TIMED" PROJECTS

	Original Estimate	Revised Estimate
US 171 - Lake Charles to Shreveport	\$170 million	\$295 million
US 165 - I-10 to Alexandria to Monroe to Ark. Line	\$248 million	\$420 million
US 90 - Morgan City to Houma	\$210 million	\$211 million
US 167 - Alexandria to Ruston to Ark. Line	\$182 million	\$300 million
LA 3241 - I-12 to Bush	\$ 50 million	\$ 48 million
West Bank Expressway - Avenue D to Ames Blvd.	\$ 30 million	\$ 33 million
New Orleans Tchoupitoulas Street Corridor	\$ 35 million	\$ 55 million
Earhart Boulevard - Orleans Parish Line to Loyola Ave.	\$ 10 million	\$ 20 million
West Napoleon (Jefferson Parish)	\$ 25 million	\$ 53 million
LA 15 - Natchez, Miss. to Monroe	\$ 52 million	\$ 47 million
US 61 - Bains to Miss. Line	\$ 32 million	\$ 23 million
New Mississippi River Bridge at St. Francisville	\$ 50 million	\$150 million
Huey P. Long Bridge (widen to six lanes)	\$ 60 million	\$160 million
New Florida Avenue Bridge over Industrial Canal	\$ 32 million	\$ 75 million
Port of New Orleans	\$100 million	\$100 million
New Orleans International Airport	\$ 75 million	\$ 75 million
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1.361 billion</b>	<b>\$2.065 billion</b>

# Building Roads to the 21st Century

La. Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) Secretary Frank Denton didn't have all the answers, but his March 17 speech to members of The Chamber of Lafourche and the Bayou Region did have a positive message for those concerned about the condition of roads and highways in this state.

"If Louisiana wants to go into the 21st century, you can't do it without investing in the transportation infrastructure," Denton said to approximately 100 Chamber members gathered for the luncheon at the Larose Civic Center.

While the state's top transportation official couldn't commit to state funding of projects specific to improving LA1,

he did discuss the problem of road deterioration due to high truck traffic and proposed a cargo fee increase to fund road overlay projects. According to Denton, the impact of one 80,000-pound truck passing over pavement is equivalent to the passage of 9,600 automobiles, and Louisiana currently has one of the lowest cargo fees in the nation.

This idea was nothing new to trucking company representatives like Joe Leonard of Cajun Trucking, who said he recognizes the problem of inadequate funds and the need for road improvements in order to ensure the safety and efficiency of his business. This is especially true in the well-traveled route along LA 1 to

Port Fourchon.

Following his prepared statement, Denton fielded questions and comments from the audience, many of whom were Coalition members and sponsors of the meeting. A number of Coalition members were also provided an opportunity to address the group about their business and why they have joined the LA 1 Coalition effort. As Stephen Smith of T. Baker Smith & Son, Inc. pointed out, "Our employees and our families rely on LA 1 to get to work during the week and to camps at Fourchon and Grand Isle on weekends. Improving the highway has an impact on all of us in some way."

## WASHINGTON UPDATE

Coalition Executive Director Roy Francis and Chairman Ted Falgout met with the U.S. Energy Department's Richard Furiga and congressional staff members during a Mardi Gras visit to Washington, D.C. According to Francis, the meeting with Furiga, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategic Petroleum Reserves, was very successful. "He really seemed to identify with our cause, and share our belief that infrastructure improvements are energy issues. South Louisiana is, after all, providing energy for the nation," Francis said.

He and Falgout also met with congressional staff members from the Louisiana delegation and Marilyn Marshall, legislative director for Rep. Barbara Cubin of Wyoming. Cubin is Chairman of the House Energy & Mineral Resources Committee, which would consider any OCS-related legislation.

## Gulf Oil Leases Sell High, But Will Louisiana Get a Bigger Piece of the Pie?

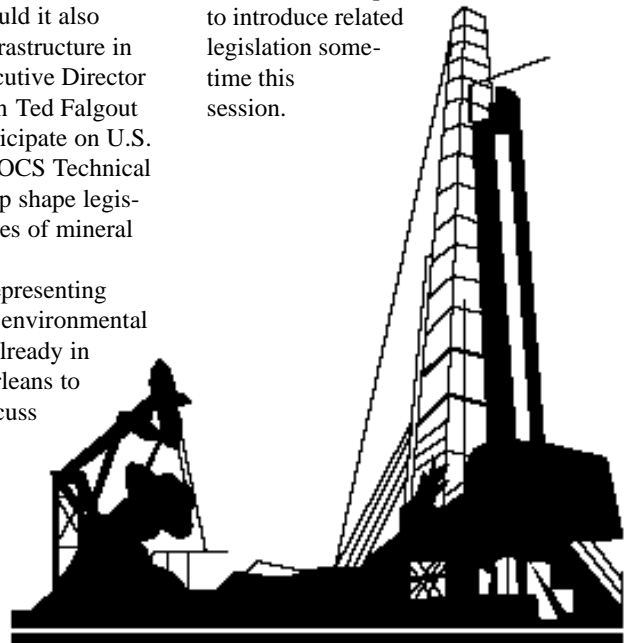
On March 18, petroleum companies posted more than \$810 million in high bids for drilling rights to 794 tracts off the coast of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama—some of the highest bids offered for Gulf of Mexico drilling rights since the boom days of 1985.

This signifies a continued commitment by major oil and gas producers to deepwater drilling, but could it also mean more money for infrastructure in Louisiana? Coalition Executive Director Roy Francis and Chairman Ted Falgout have been selected to participate on U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu's OCS Technical Task Force, created to help shape legislation regarding state shares of mineral lease revenues.

Task force members representing industry, government and environmental interests have met twice already in Baton Rouge and New Orleans to share information and discuss strategy. According to Landrieu, she will look to the task force to provide expert input concerning the impacts of increased oil and gas activity in the Gulf of Mexico.

"It stands to reason that some increased benefit from the economic boom in the Gulf should accrue to the states and local governments that support it," she said in letter to task force members.

The task force expects to meet approximately every other month, and Landrieu hopes to introduce related legislation sometime this session.



# Chairman's Report

-by Ted Falgout, Executive Director, Greater Lafourche Port Commission

These are exciting times for our highway infrastructure needs. Washington is in a fervor over the largest transportation bill ever to hit Congress. It is through this Coalition's efforts that we may be getting some initial funding to start our major improvement efforts. Our three-level approach (national, state and local) is paying off dividends. There are few in this state who have not heard of us, and our Washington effort is gaining momentum daily.

It is unfortunate that we cannot focus just on the "big picture" improvements, but must expend considerable efforts on the day-to-day problems of keeping our highways opened and in usable condition.

A prime example is the closure of Highway 308 north of Larose. The Coalition brought this particular site to

the state's attention in October 1997 after DOTD lowered the tonnage rating on the bridge. Virtually nothing was done by DOTD until it was determined that the bridge was in immediate need of closure. This has resulted in our major truck route to the port being closed for twice as long as necessary and emergency job letting by DOTD, which is normally much more costly. Hopefully, this poor example of highway management will become the exception rather than the

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***"The existing closure of Highway 308 is the best reminder of the need to continue to push our highway priorities to the forefront."***

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rule, and the Coalition can play a part in improving this unfortunate situation.

A recent LSU study, conducted for the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS) and entitled "An Analysis of Louisiana Highway 1 in Relation to

Expanding Oil and Gas Activities in the Central Gulf of Mexico," clearly concludes that the ability of LA 1 to provide an "adequate" level of services needed to support expanding offshore oil and gas activities will decline significantly and become increasingly strained. It also concludes that existing truck traffic and future increases has and will continue to result in more rapid deterioration of LA 1 and, hence, the need for more frequent pavement rehabilitation.

The existing closure of Highway 308 is the best reminder of the need to continue to push our highway priorities to the forefront. To think that the proper attention to our highway needs will be forthcoming because we "deserve" better is a bit naive. We must be active and demand better!

## Deja Vu, Anyone?

Recently, Coalition members came across a 1981 environmental assessment conducted by Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. that established and evaluated alternative four-lane routes for LA1 between Larose and U.S. 90. It was interesting to learn that as far back as 17 years ago, the need to upgrade the highway was identified and studied by at least one government agency, but apparently nothing has happened since.

After reviewing a copy of the study, Coalition Executive Director Roy Francis and Chairman Ted Falgout met with the Burk-Kleinpeter engineering firm in New Orleans to determine the cost of updating the study and including the Highway 24 to Highway 316 route as an alternative. Francis, Falgout and Loulan Pitre, Secretary of the Coalition Board, then met with DOTD officials to learn whether or not the agency could act in an oversight role if the Mid Continent Oil and Gas Association agreed to fund a study update. The idea of private funding for a transportation study such as this was new to DOTD, so agency officials said that they would have to get back to the Coalition with an answer to the proposal.



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## Coalition Pushes for TIMED Change

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and a reliable highway system," Francis explained. "We focused on the fact that needs have changed since TIMED was first authorized in 1989, and funding for new projects like ours is not only a good idea but essential if economic growth is to continue."

In their presentation, Coalition members pointed out that Port Fourchon is now the center of oil production in the Gulf of Mexico, and the closest port to the largest domestic oil field. As transportation to and from this area grows, so does the need for approximately \$536 million in improvements to LA 1—the only two-lane state highway linking Port Fourchon with coastal Louisiana.

Louisiana voters approved a four-cent gasoline sales tax in 1989 to fund TIMED, a program designed to improve and expand state roads so that no resident is more than 20 minutes from a four-lane highway. The 15-year program and its funding will expire December 31, 2004, but at least 11 of the originally approved highway projects will not be finished by then. For this reason, Governor Foster has asked the task force to review

current projects, consider new projects for inclusion and make a recommendation about extending the life of the program.

"For years, our region of the state has been at a disadvantage in the competition for state highway money because of the relatively low amount of traffic congestion and the fact that the state DOTD does not consider economic development as a funding priority," Francis commented. "However, since TIMED is focused on the economic impact of highway expansion, we should have a much better chance of receiving at least some of the funding we are requesting."

Task force members are expected to make their recommendations to the Governor in the upcoming months. However, before any change to TIMED can be made, including projects and program extension, the constitutional amendment must be put to the voters once again. Transportation officials hope that, by including projects that voters are most concerned about, the program has a better chance of surviving.

## LA 1 COALITION MEMBERS

As of March 31, 1998

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## Board Meeting Review

The Coalition's Board of Directors met February 10 at Charlotte Bollinger's home and welcomed two new directors—Bobby Fanguy and Trey Boucvault. Invited guest was Jim Porter, President of the Mid Continent Oil and Gas Association, who updated the Board on the status of major oil and gas companies' support.

According to Porter, four of the majors are very close to pledging financial support to the LA1 Coalition and others active in the Gulf of Mexico will likely follow. He went on to say that the oil companies would rather contribute to a highway improvement study than to government relations work, and that possibility was discussed at length by board members present.

### For Your Information...

If you would like to receive additional copies of "One to One" or more information on the LA 1 Coalition, call Roy Francis, Executive Director, at (504) 448-4485 or write to us at P.O. Box 2048-NSU, Thibodaux, LA 70310. Our office is located on the campus of Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, LA, within the offices of the South Louisiana Economic Council. The LA 1 Coalition is a non-profit 501-c4 corporation.