

# ONE to ONE

An Update on the Efforts of the LA 1 Coalition

Fall 2003

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## LA 1 PROJECT PICKS UP PACE

### *Pre-Construction Activities Lay the Groundwork for Future Construction*

The Wilbur Smith and Associates team may not be pouring asphalt, but the work that the engineering firm continues to do along the LA 1 corridor will serve as the foundation for the successful highway construction project to come. According to Louisiana Department of Transportation Project Manager David Miller, the engineering, design, surveying and right-of-way acquisition process for highway pre-construction is proceeding on schedule, and local residents and workers should begin seeing some heightened activity in the area very soon.

Engineers and surveyors are now wrapping up the line-in grade study, which sets the final alignment of the new highway project based on projections made in the final Environmental Impact Statement.

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### *DOTD to Submit Federal Loan Application for LA 1 Project*

State transportation officials and LA 1 Coalition representatives are expected to visit Washington, D.C. before the end of this year to formally apply for a \$50 million federal loan to cover a portion of construction costs for an improved LA 1 and Leeville Bridge.

Through the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA), the U.S. Department of Transportation has \$2 billion available to loan individual states for specific highway projects. LA 1 supporters say that if Louisiana were to receive its first-ever loan from the TIFIA program, construction of a new fixed-level bridge and a portion of the new elevated highway system from Golden Meadow to Fourchon could be completed before 2007.

"Members of the Coalition have worked very hard over the past several years to bring the significance of our ailing highway to the national forefront and identify innovative funding for construction of a new roadway," explains LA 1 Coalition Roy Francis. "Combined with state and federal money, this TIFIA loan would provide a major funding piece to our \$550 million project. It would allow us to complete the first phase of construction in three years rather than by 2035 if we would rely on traditional funding sources alone."

If approved, Louisiana would not be required to begin paying off the TIFIA loan for eight years, and has 35 years to pay it in full. A loan decision could come as early as January.



*Existing Lift-Bridge over Bayou Lafourche at Leeville*



*Proposed New Fixed-Level Bridge over Bayou Lafourche at Leeville*

# Improvements Slated for Existing Roadway

Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili made a lasting impression on south Louisiana last year, as residents watched flood waters engulf their homes as well as designated hurricane evacuation routes like LA1. While the flood waters on the highway eventually receded, they left a trail of damaged embankment in their wake.

On December 10, La. DOTD will advertise for bids to stabilize nearly seven miles of damaged embankment on existing LA 1 from Leeville to Fourchon, according to DOTD Project Development Engineer Richard Savoie. The \$3.73 million project will be funded by \$3 million in federal funds appropriated for the highway in the last federal transportation bill and a state match. The emergency should work and overlay should begin in 2004.

“As our plans for an elevated highway are moving forward, we remain committed to making the existing LA1 as safe and reliable as possible. It is not only a critical industry link, but the only highway for thousands of residents and workers traveling in this area,” said State Representative Loulan Pitre who pushed for the stabilization work.



*The LA 1 Improvement Project has become a priority for DOTD Project Manager David Miller.*

## LA 1 EIS RECORD OF DECISION FEATURED IN NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION MAGAZINE

The LA 1 project garnered more public attention this summer as nationally distributed “Public Roads” magazine featured a one-half-page article on the timely approval of the project’s Environmental Impact Statement.

“As a result of prioritized environmental streamlining, the ROD (Record of Decision) was accomplished in approximately three years, which is about half the time it normally takes to process a project of this magnitude located in such an environmentally sensitive setting,” notes the article entitled “High Priority Project Approved in Louisiana.”

The article also quotes LA DOTD Secretary Kam Movassaghi on the significance of the LA 1 highway system.

“LA 1 traverses the Barataria-Terrebonne estuary, one the most diverse and fertile habitats in the world. This marshland...is a national treasure. No less important is that LA 1 is the access to another national treasure—the oil and gas reserves in the Gulf,” he says.



## Project Picks Up Pace

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Preparation of the preliminary construction plan is scheduled to begin by November, with crews going into the field to help plan the details of the future highway construction process.

Work crews will begin driving test-pilings along the new highway corridor immediately north and south of Leeville, as well as east toward Fourchon by January. In the meantime, transportation officials have been meeting with Department of Natural Resources officials and other state regulatory agencies to secure permits for the test pilings and actual construction.

The entire \$11.5 million pre-construction phase should be completed by September 15, 2004, and according to Miller, DOTD expects to advertise for construction bids for the new

fixed bridge at Leeville as early as the spring of 2004.

“The existing Leeville bridge is probably the most critical in the state because it is the only way in and out of Grand Isle and Fourchon,” Miller explains, citing the urgency of the bridge replacement. “If a catastrophic storm were to hit the area, we would more than likely lose that lift bridge.”

The first phase of construction in the LA 1 improvement project, estimated at \$150 million, includes the new fixed-level bridge over Bayou Lafourche at Leeville and eight miles of two-lane elevated highway from the bridge to Fourchon.

# Chairman's Report

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



## *To Toll or Not to Toll? There Should Be No Question.*

Should users of LA 1 south of Golden Meadow be charged a toll in order to enjoy a safe, much improved, elevated highway? This has been the topic of considerable discussion in recent months.

In order to put this matter in proper perspective, I must take you back several years. Prior to 1995, it was extremely difficult to convince anyone that we should invest hundreds of millions of dollars to access a Gulf which was being called the "Dead Sea" because a steady decline in oil and gas activity was projected.

But when Congress passed the Deepwater Royalty Relief Act in 1995 and technological advances enabled oil and gas companies to discover and economically produce huge amounts of energy in deep waters off the Louisiana coast, things changed seemingly overnight.

All of a sudden, coastal Louisiana was called to action to be a support base for a huge amount of activity originating from federal waters off of our coast. Of course we were eager to play this role—it meant record low unemployment, an economic boom to this region, and other benefits derived from billions of dollars pumped into our economy.

Nowhere was the impact of this surge of activity more pronounced than on LA 1 south of Golden Meadow, where this single, two-lane highway is the only road connecting the mainland to the Gulf and Port Fourchon. The port has tripled in both size and business since 1995, creating the need for one thousand trucks a day to travel on LA1 to deliver critical supplies and equipment to this intermodal hub.

Yet, this surge of economic activity led to the sobering realization that our highway infrastructure would have to be upgraded if we were to continue to adequately accommodate this bounty

from beneath the sea. It also became evident that upgrading our infrastructure would not be an easy task, largely because of one major factor—inequitable revenue sharing.

When oil and gas development was within our state and just off our coast, the state received its share of the revenues to maintain infrastructure. Now, with the overwhelming majority of activity in federal waters, the federal government is collecting billions of dollars and not sharing with the landside states. This results in a huge inequity for impacted states, one that our Congressional delegation has been working very hard to correct.

Given this huge inequity in revenue-sharing and the clear understanding that we cannot sustain the level of activity that is being demanded of us without major highway infrastructure upgrades, the Greater Lafourche Port Commission and other stakeholders teamed up to form this LA 1 Coalition. Our sole mission is to support highway improvements between U.S. 90 and the Gulf along the LA 1 corridor.

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***At this point in time, unless we toll this structure, we will not be able to build this highway within the time frame that Mother Nature has set for us.***

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Since 1995, we turned a highway with seemingly only local significance into the "Poster Child" of critical coastal energy infrastructure at risk. We have created national awareness, resulting in LA1's Congressional designation as one of only 44 National High-Priority Corridors. And we have secured nearly \$15 million in federal and state funds to advance our project.

While these achievements are truly

impressive, much larger sums of money are necessary if we are to address our most critical highway needs. And time is our greatest enemy, because each day, this major artery called LA1 becomes more vulnerable to destruction as it winds through the most rapidly deteriorating estuary in the world.

No one likes to pay a toll, and the thought of local users bearing the brunt of the costs is made even more painful knowing that this thread of a highway contributes to our entire nation, not just our region. However, while I and every Louisianian should resent having to pay to access the Gulf, the facts are clear. At this point in time, unless we toll this structure, we will not be able to build this highway within the time frame that Mother Nature has set for us. I believe it's a smart and safe bet that we will have the toll removed in 30 years, rather than that we have 30 years before a major hurricane hits and our existing highway is destroyed.

Tolls will allow us to proceed without interruption on the most critical highway sections, and allow us to jump to the front of the \$10 billion backlog line of Louisiana highway projects. It sends the signal to the Washington that we are serious about this project, a message that will open doors to very favorable federal loans and, quite possibly, a fair share of federal offshore revenue so that tolls can be removed.

Louisiana, unlike its neighbor Texas, has looked very grimly at tolls in the past. In this particular case, a toll should be viewed as an investment in our future and an insurance policy on this region's economic stability.



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*The strength of the LA 1 Coalition lies in  
the support of our members.  
If you have any comments or suggestions  
about any item in the newsletter, please  
call us at (985) 448-4485.*

**Latest Facts Can Be Found on  
LA 1 Coalition Web Site**

The LA 1 Coalition's web site was recently updated to include all of the latest facts on American energy consumption, oil and gas production in the Gulf, Port Fourchon's role as a support hub of the industry and the highway's significance to offshore energy production. Revised highway improvement plans are also included, as well as past issues of "One to One."

If you haven't visited in a while, give us a click today at **www.la1coalition.org**. And feel free to e-mail us with ideas on how we can further improve the site for supporters like you.

**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 (985) 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. Editor: Jennifer Armand