



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
GALVESTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 1229
GALVESTON, TEXAS 77553-1229

April 11, 2017

AGENCY: Department of the Army; Corps of Engineers; and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Joint Notice of Availability for the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project, Brazoria County, Texas - Draft Integrated General Reevaluation Report – Environmental Assessment

ACTION: Joint Notice of Availability

SUMMARY: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Galveston District (USACE) announces the release of the Draft Integrated General Reevaluation Report (DIGRR-EA) for the Tentatively Select Plan (TSP) of the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project, Brazoria County, Texas.

COMMENT PERIOD: The USACE will accept written public comments or questions on the DIGRR-EA from April 11, 2017 through May 11, 2017, a period of 30 calendar days. Comments must be post marked by May 11, 2017.

ADDRESSES FOR COMMENT SUBMITTAL: You may send written comments or questions to the USACE, Galveston District, Attn: Janelle Stokes, P.O. Box 1229, Galveston, TX 77553-1229, or you may email comments or questions to janelle.s.stokes@usace.army.mil. Comments concerning the USACE application for water quality certification may be submitted to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), 401 Coordinator, MC-150, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, Texas 78711-3087.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Authority: The lead agency for this proposed action is the USACE. The non-Federal sponsor for the study is Port Freeport. This report is an interim response to the study authority, Section 216 of the Flood Control Act (FCA) of 1970 (Public Law [P.L.] 91-611), as amended.

Background: This DIGRR-EA evaluates modifications to the recommended plan from the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project Final Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement dated September 2012 (2012 Feasibility Report). The plan was authorized for construction in Section 7002 of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014 Project). The study purpose is to determine what modifications to the WRRDA 2014 Project are necessary to facilitate the safe and efficient navigation of the Panama design vessel around the Dow Thumb and to the Velasco Container Terminal. Additionally, an economic update has been performed to determine whether the overall project as authorized is still in the Federal interest.

The DIGRR-EA study area is located on the middle Texas coast, bounded generally by the Brazos River on the west, Oyster Creek on the north and east, and the Gulf of Mexico on the south. The project area for this DIGRR-EA is a subset of the authorized project study area. It is located immediately south of the City of Freeport, in Brazoria County, Texas. This DIGRR-EA focuses

on the area affected by the first segment of construction modifications proposed within Reaches 2 and 3. The Environmental Assessment for the Freeport DIGRR-EA covers the impact areas of the TSP, which are outside the footprint of the WRRDA 2014 project and within the first segment of construction project area. The 2012 Feasibility Report divided the study area into four separable reaches (Reach 1 through Reach 4, as shown in **Figure 1**).

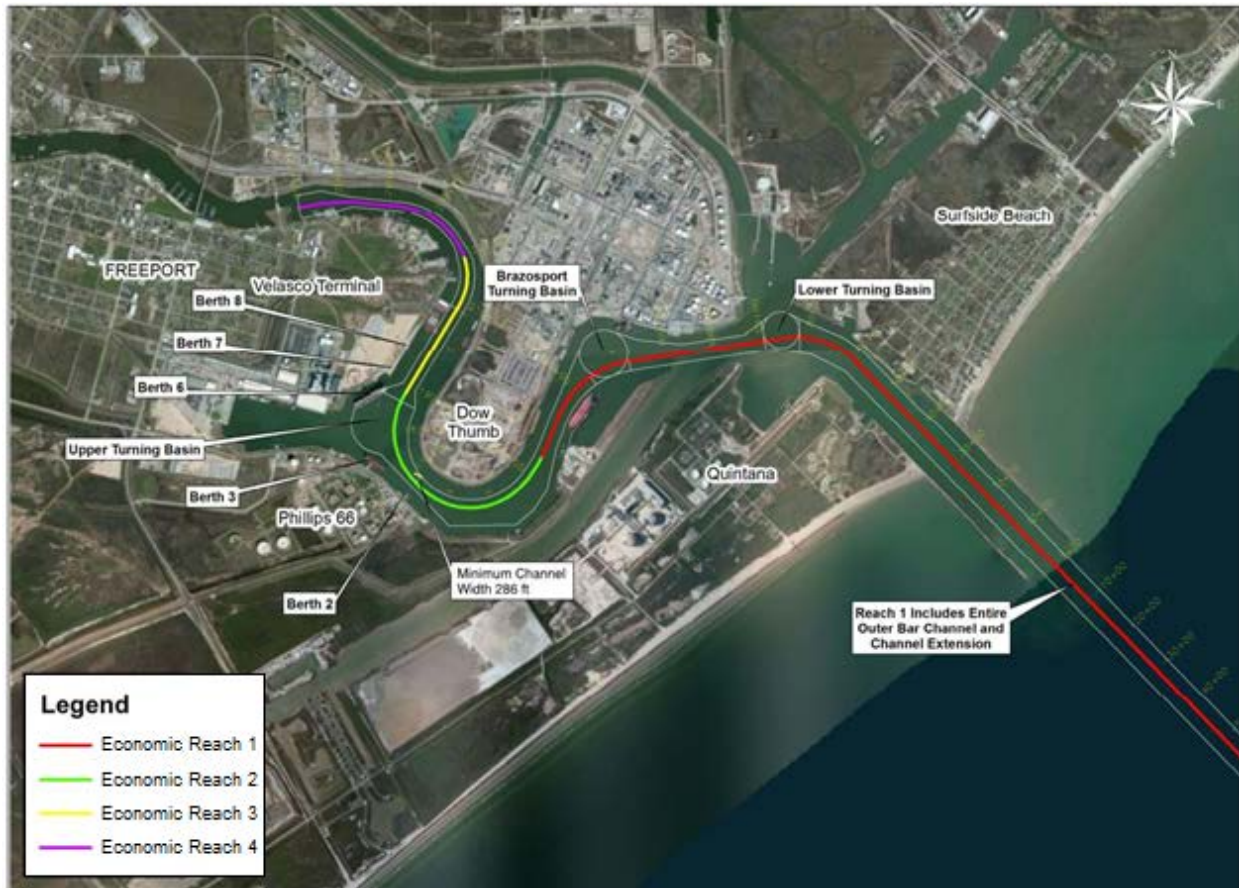


Figure 1 - First Segment of Construction Project Area (Reach 2 and Reach 3)

Authorized Project: The 2012 Feasibility Report identified the locally preferred plan (LPP) as the recommended plan, which was comprised of the following improvements referenced in mean lower low water (MLLW) datum:

- Deepen the Outer Bar Channel into the Gulf of Mexico to 58 feet [Reach 1];
- Deepen from the end of the Jetties in the Gulf of Mexico to the Lower Turning Basin to 56 feet [Reach 1];
- Deepen from the Lower Turning Basin to Station 132+66 near the Brazosport Turning Basin to 56 feet [Reach 1];
- Enlarge the Brazosport Turning Basin from 1,000-foot diameter to 1,200-foot diameter (Reach 1):

- Deepen from Station 132+66, above the Brazosport Turning Basin, through the Upper Turning Basin to 51 feet [Reach 2];
- Deepen and widen the lower 3,700 feet of the Stauffer Channel to 51 feet and 300 feet wide [Reach 3];
- Dredge the remainder of the Stauffer Channel to 26 feet (previously authorized to 30 feet) [Reach 4];

General Reevaluation Trigger:

Panamax Concerns - Shortly after the 2012 study was concluded, Port Freeport, and the Brazos Pilots expressed concerns regarding the ability of Panamax vessels to reach the Velasco Container Terminal in Reach 3. The channel narrows around the Dow Thumb in Reach 2 (**Figure 2**) and the Panamax vessel has issues safely transiting around the Dow Thumb. The study area for this general reevaluation is limited to the area shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 – Channel Constriction

The decision was made to proceed with a general reevaluation study to examine different scenarios of ship passage around the Dow Thumb to the Velasco Container Terminal. The non-Federal Sponsor requested the modifications be investigated at the existing channel depth of 46 feet MLLW, with intent to eventually construct the project authorized under WRRDA 2014, to its full dimensions.

Project Description: The Tentatively Selected Plan consists of widening the channel at the Dow Thumb to 400 feet, and constructing a bend easing and turning notch to the existing channel depth (46 feet MLLW) (**Figure 3**). Channel Widening to 400 feet from approximately Sta. 142+28 to Sta. 184+20 would require dredging of about 7.5 acres of submerged bottom. The widening may require removal of the underwater berm around the perimeter of the Dow Thumb. A stability wall could be inserted into the terrestrial portion of the Dow Thumb at the waterside toe of the HFPP levee to provide foundation reinforcement. Bend Easing would be constructed at the west end of the HFPP North Wave Barrier from Sta. 147+00 to Sta. 160+00, requiring excavation of approximately 16.4 acres of emergent land and 7.5 acres of submerged bottom. Prior to constructing the bend easing, the wave barrier could be relocated through a re-designation of a segment of the Old Quintana Road, which is of higher elevation, to serve as the wave barrier. Old Quintana Road currently serves as the wave barrier for the east side of the North Wave Barrier. This could be required prior to construction of the bend easing; no modifications to the existing road are anticipated. The Turning Notch would be constructed at the Upper Turning Basin (Sta. 175+00 to 182+00). Construction of the turning notch would require dredging of about 8.3 acres of submerged bottom.

Construction of the TSP would generate approximately 1.7 million cubic yards (MCY) of material. Placement options were evaluated to determine the best placement alternative for all material from the TSP, both new work and operations and maintenance. These alternatives considered possible beneficial use of dredged material, as well as traditional Placement Areas (PAs). The least cost

placement plan for the TSP provides for the new work going to PA 1 and approximately 2.7 MCY of maintenance over the 50-year period of analysis going offshore to the Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Area (1A) designated for maintenance.

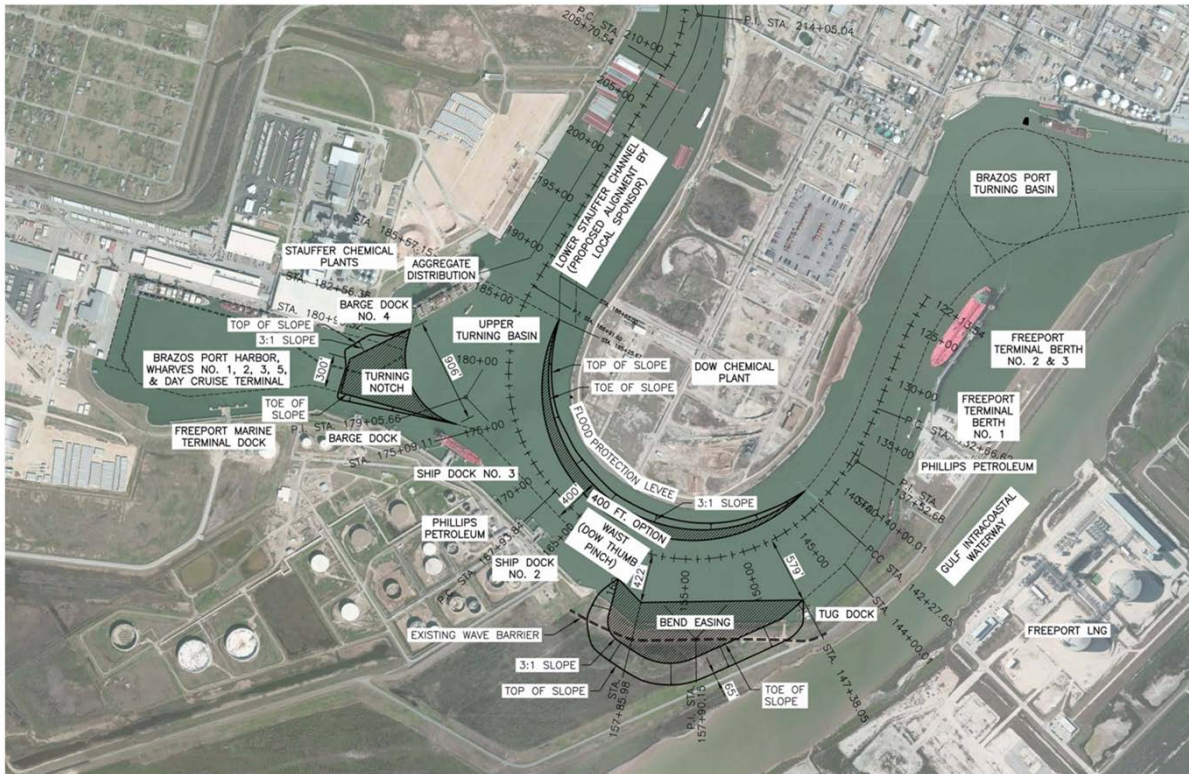


Figure 3 – Tentatively Selected Plan

Project Impacts and Environmental Compliance: The TSP would result in no significant environmental or historic property impacts and therefore no mitigation is required. The impact analysis determined there would be no effects to existing salinity, long-term water quality, threatened or endangered species, essential fish habitat, wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, or prime farmlands, and historic properties, and that there would be no negative socio-economic effects. Temporary and minor impacts to water quality, turbidity, benthic organisms and noise would occur during dredging and placement activities in the project area.

Construction of the TSP would not be expected to violate National Ambient Air Quality Standards, but a General Conformity Determination will be required because emissions of NO_x are estimated to exceed the current applicability threshold. However, the emissions are well within emissions budgets in the most recent State Implementation Plan (SIP).

Clean Air Act: General Conformity Determination. Pursuant to Section 176 of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, the USACE has prepared a document entitled “Draft General Conformity Determination, Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project, Brazoria County, Texas” (Appendix J of the DIGRR-EA). During the USACE public comment period, the USACE will consult with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the EPA seeking concurrence that emissions from the TSP are conformant with the SIP for the Houston-Galveston-

Brazoria ozone nonattainment area. Once written conformation is received from TCEQ, the USACE will prepare a Final General Conformity Determination for the project.

Clean Water Act: This public notice is also issued for the purpose of advising all known interested persons that there is pending before the TCEQ a decision on water quality certification. The USACE is requesting §401 State Water Quality certification from the TCEQ for this action. A Clean Water Act §404(b)(1) evaluation of the proposed action, provided in the Appendix F of the DIGRR-EA, describes the effects of the TSP. The USACE has determined that construction of the TSP will not violate water quality standards. The TSP is the environmentally preferable alternative. Any comments concerning this application may be submitted to the TCEQ at the address shown on the first page of this notice. A copy of the public notice, with a description of work is available for review in the TCEQ's Austin office.

Texas Coastal Management Plan: Texas Coastal Zone consistency certification is required. The USACE has prepared a Consistency Determination that evaluated the TSP for consistency with the Texas Coastal Management Plan and has concluded that it is fully consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the Texas program (Appendix G). The DIGRR-EA and Texas Coastal Consistency Determination have been submitted to the General Land Office for review.

Public Interest Review Factors: The decision whether to implement the TSP will be based on an evaluation of the probable impacts, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefits, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the TSP, must be balanced against reasonably foreseeable detriments associated with the TSP. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered. These include, but are not limited to: water and sediment quality, air quality, historic properties, protected species, hazardous materials, and in general, the welfare of the people.

Solicitation of Comments: The USACE is soliciting comments from the public, Federal, State, and local agencies and officials, Indian tribes, and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Comments will be used in preparation of the FIGRR-EA.

Compact disc copies of the DIGRR-EA are available for viewing at the following libraries:

- Brazoria Library, 620 South Brooks, Brazoria, TX 77422
- Clute Branch Library, 215 North Shanks Street, Clute, TX 77531
- Danbury Branch Library, 1702 North Main, Danbury, TX 77534
- Freeport Library, 410 Brazosport Blvd, Freeport, TX 77541
- Lake Jackson Library, 250 Circle Way, Lake Jackson, TX 77566
- West Columbia Branch Library, 518 East Brazos, West Columbia, TX 77486

The document can also be viewed or downloaded from the Galveston District website: <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil/Business-With-Us/Planning-Environmental-Branch/Documents-for-Public-Review/>