

Addendum to the Final Independent External Peer Review Report - Houston Ship Channel Expansion Channel Improvement Project, Harris, Chambers, and Galveston Counties, Texas, Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement

Prepared by
Battelle Memorial Institute

Prepared for
Department of the Army
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Deep Draft Navigation Planning Center of Expertise
Mobile District

Contract No. W912HQ-15-D-0001
Task Order: W912HQ17F1034

December 5, 2017

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

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|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| DIFR | Draft Integrated Feasibility Report |
| EC | Engineer Circular |
| ECIP | Expansion Channel Improvement Project |
| EIS | Environmental Impact Statement |
| HSC | Houston Ship Channel |
| IEPR | Independent External Peer Review |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| USACE | United States Army Corps of Engineers |

1. INTRODUCTION

This is an addendum to the Final Independent External Peer Review (IEPR) Report for the Houston Ship Channel Expansion Channel Improvement Project, Harris, Chambers, and Galveston Counties, Texas, Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement (hereinafter: HSC ECIP DIFR-EIS IEPR) submitted on November 20, 2017, by Battelle. It was prepared to document activities associated with the IEPR Panel's review of the public comments on the HSC ECIP DIFR-EIS.

This addendum briefly details the IEPR process followed for this public comment review. At the end of the process, the Panel determined that there were no additional scientific or technical concerns that rose to the level of needing a Final Panel Comment.

2. METHODS

This section summarizes the activities associated with the review of the public and agency comments conducted for this project.

Battelle received electronic versions of the public comments from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on November 20-22, 2017. Prior to sending the public comments to Battelle, USACE prepared a list of the comment letters received. The Excel spreadsheet listed the letters by author and included a summary of the comments. In addition to this summary, USACE provided electronic copies of all public comments as reference, in the event the Panel wanted to review the complete version of any comment in detail. Battelle provided the Excel spreadsheet and the comments in their original full-text format to the panel members. USACE received 34 comment letters from various state and Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and members of the public.

In accordance with procedures described in the Department of the Army, USACE, Engineer Circular (EC) *Civil Works Review* (EC 1165-2-214),¹ Appendix D, Battelle focused the IEPR Panel's public comment review on assessing scientific and technical issues pertaining to the assumptions, data, methods, and models used in the project.

Each panel member was asked to independently determine whether the public comments contained any additional scientific or technical concerns about the project that were not previously identified, and that should be addressed by USACE in the HSC ECIP DIFR-EIS project documents. The Panel was charged with focusing on discipline-specific scientific and technical issues and not policy-related comments, per EC 1165-2-214, Appendix D.

Comments submitted by Federal and state agencies were provided to the Panel "For Information Only." Battelle understands that under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), USACE must address state and Federal agency comments as part of the consultation process; therefore, issues brought up by these agencies, and USACE's subsequent responses, were considered policy-related.

The HSC ECIP DIFR-EIS IEPR panel members received the public and agency comments from Battelle on November 20-22, 2017. The panel members reviewed comment letters from state agencies as well as

¹ USACE (2012). Water Resources Policies and Authorities: Civil Works Review. Engineer Circular (EC) 1165-2-214. Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Washington, D.C. December 15.

emails, letters, and comment cards from a variety of companies, non-profit organizations, and members of the public.

The panel members were required to answer one charge question about the public comments.

1. Do the public comments raise any additional discipline-specific technical concerns with regard to the overall report?

The panel members submitted responses to this charge question, and Battelle reviewed those responses to identify any issues, areas of potential conflict, and other overall impressions. Each panel member's individual comments were shared with the full Panel.

Based on the Panel's review, most of the public comments fell into the category of general support or opposition or were discussed in previous Final Panel Comments submitted in the HSC ECIP DIFR-EIS Final IEPR Report. Issues noted in the public comments, but already covered in previous Final Panel Comments, were related to identifying existing infrastructure that falls within the proposed improvement area; expressing confusion or concerns about how, or whether, the barge lanes along the main ship channel were considered in the plan formulation process; and expressing concern about the lack of detail relative to dredged material placement areas (particularly in upper reaches) and high potential for impacts of new placement areas on adjacent communities. The Panel did not repeat those concerns in this addendum. Battelle then discussed and confirmed via email that no additional scientific or technical concerns were identified that should be carried forward as Final Panel Comments.

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