

DRAFT PURPOSE AND NEED

Proposed Connector between Airline Highway (US 61) and Interstate 10 in St. John the Baptist Parish

State Project No. 70-48-0101

Federal Aid No. HP-TO21(517)

RPC Contract No. PSLC-STJ

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to provide enhanced and improved access between the US 61 (Airline Highway) corridor north to I-10 and I-55, for (1) general commercial and non-commercial traffic in the Parish, and for (2) the Port of South Louisiana.

NEED FOR THE PROJECT

General Commercial and Non-Commercial Access

Interstate 10 is a major east-west roadway for traffic crossing St. John the Baptist Parish. One of only two interstate facilities within the parish, (the other being I-55, which intersects with I-10), I-10 not only services vehicular traffic passing through St. John the Baptist Parish, but also serves to some degree traffic which originates and terminates from within the Parish. The interstate offers Parish residents and businesses limited-access route to the rest of the continental U.S. via the interstate system.

Parish officials and parish residents have expressed their desire for quicker and more direct routes to I-10 from the US 61 corridor. The intent is to provide reliable access for residents and area citizens to employment, shopping, businesses and medical services. Additionally, better access routes are desired in order to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and to provide travel time savings, benefits which will accrue to those living, working, and/or traveling to and from the developed areas of the Parish. As it stands currently, with approximately fifteen miles of roadway within St. John the Baptist Parish, I-10 has two exits or access points: the Belle Terre exit (Hwy 3188) and the US 51 exit. Compounding the access issue is that west of Belle Terre the next access point is eleven (11) miles away in St. James Parish (the interchange with LA Hwy 641).

The enhanced and improved access is also needed to enable emergency vehicles to reach destinations more promptly. This entails not only response to major disasters or incidents, but also day to day response operations, as well by police, fire, and EMT vehicles. There have been concerns from parish officials that emergency vehicles are often dispatched to highway incidents along I-10, but once they are on

I-10, they have no quick way to respond to other emergencies occurring in the developed areas of the Parish. This is due to the isolated nature of I-10 between the Belle Terre and Gramercy exits, as well as a long divided, elevated stretch between those two exits.

Finally, the enhanced and improved interstate access is needed to assist in hurricane evacuation. In the threat of impending hurricanes, an evacuation of all of St. John the Baptist Parish is often either recommended or mandatory. While smaller state roadways can be used to travel to safer points west or north, the primary evacuation routes utilize the higher capacity interstate system, with evacuees heading north on I-55 or west on I-10. By enhancing or improving access to the interstates in this area, vehicular traffic will be more directly routed to the interstate system, helping to prevent congestion on the local lower capacity roadways. It should also be noted that prior to previous hurricane events, access to I-55 was hampered due to storm surge and high waters flooding the at-grade US51 / I-10 / I-55 interchange area. Physical improvements to the interstate access in this area are needed to ensure full access to both I-10 and I-55 from US 51 in advance of hurricane events.

Port Access

The Port of South Louisiana and local officials have expressed a need for better access for Port truck traffic to facilitate continued the recent trend of economic growth of the Port and the region as a whole. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina and its impact on the New Orleans metro area, continued growth of the Port and the associated commercial/industrial component of the Parish are seen as vital to the economic recovery of the region. However, one of the impediments to further development has been access to the interstate for Port-related traffic. While port facilities exist along a 54-mile stretch of the Mississippi River, the main focus of port activities and need for port access has been focused in the Reserve area. Unfortunately, Reserve has no direct connection to the interstate system. Interchanges with I-10, the nearest interstate highway, lie either eight miles to the east at Highway 3188 or twelve miles to the west at Highway 641. Access to I-10 from the port facilities at Reserve via either of these routes is rather cumbersome, using one of three state highways to access US 61, then traveling either west or east along this congested commercial thoroughfare to the state highways linking to I-10. A more direct access route to I-10 will facilitate Port-related traffic.

Secondarily, Parish officials and citizens have expressed the strong desire to lessen the impact of Port truck traffic on local roads. In particular, they would like to lessen the amount of truck traffic currently passing through residential areas, such as the Belle Terre area, but they would also like to lessen the impact of truck traffic as it affects current congestion levels on US 61. A more direct access route to I-10 will help to accomplish both of these goals.