

Meeting Summary

Multi-State Coordination Conference GULF COAST STRATEGIC HIGHWAY / INTERSTATE 14

Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development Headquarters
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
December 1, 2008

Attendees

- Judge John Thompson, Chairman of Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition (GCSHC)
- Gary Bushell, GCSHC
- Elton Pody, GCSHC
- Randy Gilchrist, GCSHC
- Malcolm Morris, GCSHC
- Bonnie Lemoine, GCSHC
- William Ankner, Secretary of LDOTD
- Sherri LaBas, Deputy Secretary of LDOTD
- Amadeo Saenz, Executive Director of Texas DOT
- Butch Brown, Executive Director of Mississippi DOT
- Don Vaughn, Chief Engineer of Alabama DOT
- Don Arkle, Assistant Chief Engineer of Alabama DOT
- Michael Thomas, Transportation Planning Director of Georgia DOT (via telephone)
- Dan Gentry, Policy Analysis Bureau Chief of Georgia DOT (via telephone)
- Angela Alexander, State Transportation Planning Administrator of GDOT (via telephone)
- Dr. Stephen Roop, Texas Transportation Institute (TTI)
- Butch Babineaux, Wilbur Smith Associates

Meeting Summary

The Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition (GCSHC) initiated this meeting to discuss and coordinate planning activities and improvements along the proposed Gulf Coast Strategic Highway (GCSH) between El Paso, Texas to Natchez, Mississippi and the proposed Interstate Highway 14 between Natchez, Mississippi and Augusta, Georgia.

The following is a summary of the meeting:

- Secretary Ankner welcomed everyone and requested introductions. It was acknowledged that all five Departments of Transportation along the proposed east/west highway corridors were represented at the meeting (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia).
- Judge Thompson provided an overview of the purpose of the GCSH and its supporting coalition made up of local communities along the route. He noted that this coordination meeting was originally scheduled to occur in Baton Rouge several months ago but had to be cancelled due to Hurricane Ike.

- Coalition consultant Gary Bushell gave a presentation regarding the proposed GCSH including its background, purpose, benefits, implementation status and potential transportation improvements being considered along the corridor in Texas and Louisiana. A primary purpose of the GCSH system is to provide improved mobility and connections between the military installations located along the corridor and the strategic deployment Ports of Corpus Christi and Beaumont, while also promoting economic development and providing an alternative corridor to Interstate 10 to relieve congestion, improve metro area air quality and provide improved hurricane evacuation.
- Dr. Stephen Roop gave a presentation regarding the proposed Universal Freight Shuttle concept that is being developed by TTI and being considered for potential implementation along major corridors in Texas. Although this concept is only being considered in Texas at this time, this new technology for transporting freight could also be considered in other parts of the country with interested private investment.
- Butch Babineaux gave a presentation regarding the purpose and status of the ongoing US 190/IH 10 Feasibility Study, which is being conducted by a consultant team led by Wilbur Smith Associates under contract to TxDOT. The study area for this project, which generally follows the proposed GCSH corridor in Texas, extends along the IH 10 corridor from El Paso east to its connection with US 190 where it then follows US 190 to Jasper and then Texas SH 63 to the Louisiana state line. The primary purpose of the US 190/IH 10 Study is to evaluate the impacts and feasibility of highway and/or designated freight facility improvements through year 2040.
- Bill Ankner asked if the GCSHC was aware of the proposed El Camino Corridor that follows the US 84 alignment, which is parallel to the GCSH. Judge Thompson and Gary Bushell confirmed that they were very familiar with the El Camino Corridor and have had recent discussions with their Coalition representatives to coordinate their efforts and alleviate any perceived competition among the two proposed corridors. The proposed route in Louisiana follows LA 8 from the Texas state line to Leesville and Fort Polk then follows LA 28 eastward to Alexandria/Pineville and on to connect with US 84 near Archie. It then follows US 84 to the Vidalia-Natchez Bridge over the Mississippi River. It continues on US 84 until it reaches Interstate 59 at Laurel, Mississippi. The US 84 segment from Archie to Laurel is part of the El Camino Corridor.
- Bill Ankner suggested that the proposed GCSH and the I-14 Highway corridor should consider inclusion of passenger rail in addition to possible freight rail. He also suggested that corridor improvements should be designed to facilitate the future possibility of an automated highway system.
- It was indicated that even though several U.S. Senators have introduced legislation to designate I-14 as a federal high priority corridor, it would be difficult to implement without federal money attached to it and considering other higher priority improvement needs in the individual states. Several DOT representatives agreed that implementation of these proposed corridors will require a public/private partnership due to the lack of federal and state funds. Although an I-14 corridor study is being conducted by GDOT, they are not aware of anyone advancing this proposed corridor. Don Vaughn indicated that the Alabama DOT is not doing anything along the I-14 corridor and that they are focusing on improving US 80 across the state. Butch Brown indicated MDOT is improving sections of US 84 in Mississippi.

- Butch Brown suggested that consideration be given to looking at alternative alignments for the I-14 corridor in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia based on existing highway conditions and where the respective DOTs are already planning improvements. Gary Bushell stated he would make revisions to the GCSH map to reflect Butch Brown and Don Vaughn's comments.
- Butch Brown indicated that there is an ongoing east/west rail study being conducted north of the IH 10 corridor in Louisiana and Mississippi.
- Sherri LaBas provided Gary Bushell with updated construction cost estimates and other implementation information for the unimproved sections along LA 8/28 in Louisiana.
- Bill Ankner suggested that representatives of the five state DOTs hold a follow-up meeting to reconcile route alignment proposals. Once that is done the larger group should get together again.
- It was agreed that this meeting was very informative and future meetings should be held to continue the coordination of planning and implementation activities. It was also suggested that consideration be given to forming a Coalition made up of representatives from all five states involved.