

## **MINUTES**

Regional Planning Commission Freight Roundtable

April 29, 2020

Location: Online Webinar

### **Attendees**

Kristi App, JW Allen  
Jerry Becnel, JW Allen  
Wes Bolinger, FHWA  
Chris Bonura, NOPB  
Derek Chisholm, AECOM  
Larry Collins, LED  
Leslie Couvillion, RPC  
Sean Duffy, Big River Coalition  
Lynn Dupont, RPC  
Kelly Fuller, Stolthaven Terminals  
Janet Galati, JEDCO  
Dean Goodell, LA DOTD  
Matt Gresham, Port NOLA  
Randy Guillot, Triple G Express  
Patricia Haver, NOPB  
Tom Haysley, RPC  
Jim Henderson, New Orleans Cold Storage  
Stephen Holliday, LA DOTD  
Ben Johnson, New Orleans Chamber of Commerce  
Jeff Kever, T Parker Host  
Kevin Keller, HDR Inc.  
Annalisa Kelly, JEDCO  
Jack Koban, FUGRO  
Janine Mansour, Port Nola  
Matthew Martinec, City of Gretna  
Stuart McAvoy, UPS  
Carlos McCloud, FHWA  
Kate Moore, St. Tammany Corp.  
Jim Murphy, MARAD  
Babak Naghavi, Hardesty Hanover  
Nestor J. Navarro Jr., Navarro Group  
Jake Nickens, St. Tammany Corp.  
Anthony Odak, Stone Oil  
James Parker, New Orleans Terminal  
Amelia Pellegrin, Port Nola  
Laura Phillips, FHWA  
Jim Poe, Kiewit Corp  
K. Michael Price, New Orleans Terminal  
Drew Ratcliff, CRPC  
Jeff Roesel, RPC

Jason Sappington, RPC  
Jessica Steverson, LED  
Howard Swanson, Hardesty Hanover  
Adam Tatar, RPC  
Guang Tian, UNO  
Candace Watkins, City of Kenner  
Ed Webb, World Trade Center  
Peter Webb, Consultant  
Thomas Wells, WS Nelson  
Randall Withers, LA DOTD  
Maggie Woodruff, RPC  
James Amdal, UNO  
Erin Butler, U.S. Export Assistance Center  
Chris Collins, LA DOTD  
Doree Magiera, HDR Inc.  
Laura Bryan, City of New Orleans  
Benjamin Fontenot, LED  
Stephen Holliday, LA DOTD  
Courtney Maciasz, LED  
Lisa McDoneld, Kiewit Corp  
Roy Quezaire, Port of So. Louisiana  
Sandy Sanders, Port of Plaquemines  
Megan Shea, BNSF  
Lenny Unbehagen, Nunez  
Jason Wilson, EDA

## 1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Karen Parsons, Principal Planner at the RPC and the Regional Freight Coordinator welcomed the group. Due to Covid-19 Stay at Home Orders in Louisiana this meeting is the first online Freight Roundtable Table for all 8 parishes hosted on the web using Go to Meetings services. The freight roundtable still intends to be quarterly to gain updates from partners, timely issues and concerns. The RPC is underway developing a Regional Freight Profile and intends to start the process of a Regional Freight Plan this Fall 2020. The Regional Freight Plan will identify regional needs and trends and maximize RPC's capability to solve freight related problems.

## 2. **Union Pacific Railroad: Key Investments and Dispatching Improvements for Regional Efficiency**

Speakers: Tyson Moeller, UP General Director Network Development  
Drew Tessier, Senior Director UP Public Affairs, Arkansas & Louisiana

Mr. Moeller and Mr. Tessier presented on the Union Pacific impact here in the region. The Union Pacific is the largest Class 1 railroad company operating in Louisiana. The company has been around for more than 150 years, with over 7000 locomotives, and has unique port and border access across the United States. Thirty eight percent (38%) of freight begins outside of the U.S.. In general, the UP spends \$80 to \$100

million annually on capital investment in Louisiana and employs over one thousand employees in this state alone. Much like all railroad companies, the UP is a very capital intensive company, and are looking to spend over \$3.1 billion in their 2020 Capital Plan to improve capacity, safety and resilience of their system.

In the near future Union Pacific is looking to buy new locomotives and extend train lengths. Recently the UP has initiated their Unified Plan which focuses on moving cars and minimize car dwell times. The Unified Plan goal is to improve freight movement efficiency and also strategically move less locomotive cars. This enables the UP to use funds in other areas and increase reliability for customers. The UP also has invested in high-tech railroading to compete in rapidly changing freight world and installed over 34,000 commercial fiber miles. The company is also using high-tech drones for safety and compliance purposes. UP has invested over \$2.9 billion in Positive Train Control (PTC) installation that uses Global Positioning Systems and sophisticated communications to control trains and avoid collisions. This is a federal mandated requirement of all Class I railroads, but privately invested expense.

Mr. Moeller and Mr. Tessier highlighted some key Union Pacific projects of interest for this region. The New Orleans Gateway CTC Project has been concluded which transformed the regions section of railways. Until recently, the New Orleans Gateway had between eight to nine handoffs of permissions for trains that had to get through the regional track system. This was conducted on a non-digital system in a wooden tower (with a wooden handle) to make the handoffs possible. The project took the better part of twenty years to negotiate internally between all railroad companies, including all six Class 1 companies, the New Orleans Public Belt, and Amtrak. The upgraded Gateway is now operated by remote electronic controllers and in total was a \$20 million investment to ensure that this region maintains it's strong rail infrastructure.

As of April 2020, the UP has begun to see the impacts of the Covid-19 affecting rail supply chains. The UP is broken up into 3 groups – Bulk, Industrial, Premium. The general volume the company was moving was growing between 2018 to 2019, however looking ahead at numbers for 2020 the company anticipate with the impact of the Covid-19 virus on global markets, the company's financial and volume numbers will be below 2008-2009 recession lows. UP is seeing most of the commodities slow down in fuels and imports coming from China, and some effects from bio fuels. The company foresees a dip between April and June for overall demand of commodities. Reliability of the supply chain system is maintaining a competitive edge despite the slow down. This ability to maintain reliability in the Southern Louisiana region is due to the Gateway improvements that improved the rail through dwell moving trains through the region, which once took upwards of 14-16 hours, and now trains are taking 9-12 hours. Resiliency of the system has overall improved as well with the additional electronic controls now in place. The company's 2020 commodities outlook, which was set up before the Covid-19 virus outbreak, included that bulk is looking good except coal, industrial sand going down, and plastics, construction materials, and petroleum products going up. Premium auto sales will also go up by end of May or early June. Overall, railway investments and improvements are critical for the U.S. supply chain and are proving to be a more fuel efficient and Green House Gas GHG reducing mode of transportation versus the trucking industry.

Mr. Moeller and Mr. Tessier also highlighted some of the Union Pacific regional public private projects. This includes outsourcing their public affairs office which has increased the companies bandwidth to work with

the public in such areas as Quiet Zones and construction management. Other public facing projects have been to improve the rail crossing along LA 18 and LA 23 in Gretna which improves mobility for vehicles, reduces the need for oversized trucks, and will have air quality improvement benefits. The Union Pacific is working with the Plaquemines Port to improve rail connectivity in the future.

Questions were taken at the end of the presentation. A question was brought up regarding the Gretna Bypass, to which RPC conducted an initial environmental assessment resulting in a (preferred alternative) and a Finding of No Significant Impact or FONSI. It is estimated the full construction project is upwards to \$270 million. At this point there has not been preliminary engineering or identified funding to go forward. The UP is working with local ports and other railroad companies to move forward from environmental study stage to engineering/design, which could take about 1.5 years for engineering study to be conducted once approved. Another question was raised about the Union Pacifics involvement in re-establishing a rail crossing between the UP Avondale Yard and T Parker Host terminal. As far as Moeller and Tessier could report, the UP is still under negotiations and construction has begun, however there is potentially setbacks in the construction timeline at this time.

A final question was asked regarding the Union Pacific grade crossings and closures. The UP works hand-in-hand with LADOTD, who controls not only where tracks will be closed along state highways but all Louisiana public safety monies. The company is also a key player in the Operation Lifesaver Group that meets with school bus drivers, works with fracking companies, manufacturing and farming companies (such as sugar cane harvesters) that need to cross Union Pacific tracks. One of the biggest issues they find in addressing crossing safety issues is when oil wells spring up and suddenly larger trucks need to cross tracks, but have not planned accordingly with the rail companies. The Operation Lifesaver Group is working towards addressing these issues.

### **3. Interstate 12 Improvements – LA21 to LA 59**

Speaker: Jacob Fusilier, LA DOTD Senior Project Manager P.E., PMP

Mr. Fusilier gave an overview of the I-12 interstate widening program of projects in St. Tammany Parish from LA 1077 to LA 59. The purpose overall is to increase vehicle capacity from 4 to 6 lanes. The scope of work includes rehabilitation of roadways as necessary. The project also includes adding auxiliary lanes between LA21 and US 190 and widening the I-12 bridges over LA 21, Tchefuncte River, US 190, Ponchitolawa Creek and the Tammany Trace.

The LADOTD has been faced with a significant amount of challenges regarding this project. These include: that there is a significant amount of funding required, the schedule is extremely expedited to conduct engineering and scope to qualify for funding, the need to minimize impacts to the St. Tammany Trace, and the permitting issues that are due to the the condensed project schedule timeline. The I-12 bridge in St. Tammany Parish is a bottleneck point which causes regular traffic delays and is also impacted by flooding. The project design schedule originally began in 2016, but was suspended in 2017 due to lack of funding. St.

Tammany Parish secured a \$25 million federal grant in 2018 to widen I-12 at the Tchefuncte River. This funding allocation reinitiated the project in February 2019. In addition to the the federal funding, St. Tammany Parish also put up \$7.2 million in local funds to help provide the state match. This funding was enough to revitalize the LA21 to US 190 segment and pairs well with the adjoining sections to improve traffic.

The LADOTD targeted Federal redistribution funds in August 2018 to fund the US 190 to LA 59 segment. To qualify for this match St. Tammany Parish put up another \$8 million in local funds. There were schedule requirements to ensure the project would move forward. On April 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, the LADOTD received a notice to proceed and had until August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 to finalize the design. This is typically a 16 month project timeline, but was truncated to just 4 months. The LADOTD came up with an expedited process to meet this timeline by allowing design review comments to be logged and then met after each plan submittal stage in roundtable format to go through reviews with the design team. The US 190 to LA 59 final plans were delivered August 2019 and received redistribution funding in November 2019. LA 21 to to US 190 final plans were delivered February 2020 and is scheduled to be awarded April 2020. The final segment from LA 1077 to LA 21 is scheduled to have final plans delivered in November 2020.

The LADOTD construction timeline has started as of March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 when the contractor received the Notice to Proceed (NTP) from U S190 to LA 59. Assuming the LA 21 to US 190 project is awarded by end of April, the NTP for this section would be issued as early as July 2020. The Final segment, LA 1077 to LA 21, will likely not be released for award until after the other two segments are finished.

Mr. Fusiler concluded his presentation recognizing this very unprecedented collaboration between St. Tammany Parish and the LADOTD. The Regional Planning Commission also recognizes the hard work and collaboration. A final question was asked about a road closure on I-90 and if it was related to this project. Mr. Fusiler confirmed that, yes, the LADOTD is driving test piles right now and it's causing some delays. There was also discussion that there has been no ribbon cuttings announced as of yet due to Covid-19 related Stay at Home orders, but there may be one later in the Summer 2020.

### **Thank you/Adjourn**

Karen Parsons thanked all the speakers and announced that although the next Freight Roundtable is scheduled for Wednesday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> at 8:30am, it has yet to be confirmed whether it will be a webinar or an in-house meeting.

### **Meeting Adjourned**

*Minutes by Marin Tockman, RPC Graduate Assistant*