

a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Thursday, September 3, 1998, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. These meetings may adjourn early if all business is finished. Written material and requests make oral presentations should reach the Coast Guard on or before August 19, 1998. Requests to have a copy of your material distributed to each member of the committee or subcommittee should reach the Coast Guard on or before August 19, 1998.

ADDRESSES: MERPAC will meet on both days at the Calhoon MEBA School, 27050 St. Michael's Road, Easton, MD 21601. Send written material and requests to make oral presentations to Commander Steven J. Boyle, Commandant (G-MSO-1), U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, 2100 Second Street SW., Washington, DC 20593-0001. This notice is available on the Internet at <http://dms.dot.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For questions on this notice, contact Commander Steven J. Boyle, Executive Director of MERPAC, or Mr. Mark C. Gould, Assistant to the Executive Director, telephone 202-267-0229, fax 202-267-4570, or e-mail mgould@comdt.uscg.mil. For questions on viewing or submitting material to the docket, contact Dorothy Walker, Chief, Dockets, Department of Transportation, 202-366-9329.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Notice of these meetings is given under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App. 2.

Agenda of September 2, 1998, Meeting

The full committee will meet to discuss the objectives for the meeting. The committee will then break up into the following working groups: the working group on the International Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW); the working group on the National Maritime Center/Licensing Re-Engineering Team; and the working group on the Assessment of Proficiencies as Mandated by the Amended 1995 STCW Convention. At the end of the day, the working groups will make a report to the full committee on what has been accomplished in their meetings. No action will be taken on these reports on this date.

Agenda of September 3, 1998, Meeting

Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee (MERPAC)

The agenda includes the following:

- (1) Introduction.
- (2) Working Group Reports.
- (3) Other items to be discussed:
 - (a) Standing Committee—Prevention Through People

- (a) STCW developments
- (b) Outcome of committee's recommendations to USCG on one person bridge watchstanding proposal
- (c) Report from NMC on changes in licensing requirements for Offshore Supply Vessels
- (d) Other items brought up for discussion by the committee or the public

Procedural

Both meetings are open to the public. Please note that the meetings may adjourn early if all business is finished. At the Chair's discretion, members of the public may make oral presentations during the meetings. If you would like to make an oral presentation at a meeting, please notify the Executive Director no later than August 19, 1998. Written material for distribution at a meeting should also reach the Coast Guard no later than August 19, 1998. If you would like a copy of your material distributed to each member of the committee or subcommittee in advance of a meeting, please submit 25 copies to the Executive Director no later than August 19, 1998.

Information on Services for Individuals With Disabilities

For information on facilities or services for individuals with disabilities or to request special assistance at the meetings, contact the Executive Director as soon as possible.

Dated: July 29, 1998.

Joseph J. Angelo,

Director of Standards, Marine Safety and Environmental Protection.

[FR Doc. 98-21189 Filed 8-6-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910-15-M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Environmental Impact Statement: Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties, TX

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of Intent.

SUMMARY: The FHWA is issuing this notice to advise the public that an environmental impact statement will be prepared for a proposed transportation project in Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties, Texas.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. John Mack, P.E., Federal Highway Administration, Texas Division, 300 East 8th Street, Room 826, Austin, Texas 78701, Telephone (512) 916-5516.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The FHWA, in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Grand Parkway Association, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a proposal to upgrade the existing road network in Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties. A major investment study is underway to evaluate various modal options between U.S. 59 (S) and SH 288. The proposed action will occur within a corridor in Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties. The majority of this corridor crosses relatively undeveloped properties in Fort Bend and Brazoria Counties. Cities and towns in the region include, Sugar Land, Richmond, Rosenberg, Missouri City, Thompsons and Iowa Colony.

The Grand Parkway Association proposes to build a facility to provide improved transportation characteristics in the region, including improvement to the evacuation routes from coastal areas in Harris, Galveston, and Brazoria Counties.

Several alignment alternatives will be discussed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The DEIS will also include evaluation of the no action alternative. Alignment alternatives through and near urban areas as well as alignments through farmland will be evaluated in the DEIS.

Impacts caused by the construction and operation of the facility will vary according to the alternative alignment utilized. Generally, impacts would include the following: transportation impacts (construction detours, construction traffic, mobility improvement and evacuation route improvement), air and noise impacts from construction equipment and operation of the facility, water quality impacts from construction area and roadway storm water runoff, impacts to waters of the United States including wetlands from right of way encroachment, and impacts to residents and businesses based on potential displacements.

Letters describing the proposed action soliciting comments will be sent to appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies, and to private organizations and citizens who have previously expressed or are known to have interest in this proposal. A public scoping meeting will be held at August 20, 1998 at the George Ranch Historical Park, 5 miles south of US 59 on FM 762 in Guy Hall at 7:00 P.M. Public comments on the proposed action and alternatives will be requested. This will be the first of a series of meetings to evaluate alternatives, corridor alternatives and design alternative alignments. A public hearing will be held at a later time, with

copies of DEIS available for public and agency review and comment prior to the public hearing.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the Environmental Impact Statement should be directed to the FHWA at the address provided above.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Number 20.205, Highway and Planning and Construction. The regulations implementing Executive Order 12372 regarding governmental consultation on Federal programs and activities apply to this program.)

John R. Mack,

District Engineer, Austin, Texas.

[FR Doc. 98-21218 Filed 8-6-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910-22-M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Transit Administration

Environmental Impact Statement: Transportation Improvements Within the Desire Corridor in New Orleans, LA

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration (FTA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The FTA is issuing this notice to advise interested agencies and the public that an environmental impact statement may be prepared for transportation improvements in the Desire Corridor in New Orleans, Louisiana.

DATES: *Comment Due Date:* Written comments on the scope of the alternatives and impacts to be considered should be sent to Ed Bayer, RTA Manager of Planning, by September 11, 1998. *Scoping Meetings:* A public scoping meeting will be held on Thursday, September 24, 1998, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., and an interagency scoping meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 1, 1998, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. See **ADDRESSES** below. **ADDRESSES:** Written comments on the scope should be sent to Ed Bayer, Manager of Planning, Regional Transit Authority (RTA), 6700 Plaza Drive, New Orleans, Louisiana 70127-2677. Scoping meetings will be held at the following locations:

Public Scoping

Thursday, September 24, 1998, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., McDonough School

#15 (Cafeteria), 721 St. Philip Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70112

Interagency Scoping

Tuesday, September 1, 1998, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Regional Planning Commission, 333 St. Charles Avenue, Suite 1100, New Orleans, Louisiana 70130

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mrs. Peggy Crist, Director of Planning and Program Development, Federal Transit Administration Region 6, 524 East Lamar Boulevard, Suite 175, Arlington, Texas 76011-5704; Telephone: (817) 860-9663.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The FTA, in cooperation with the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), may prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for proposed transportation improvements in the New Orleans Vieux Carré (French Quarter) and adjacent neighborhoods. The transportation improvements are being defined in conjunction with a Major Investment Study (MIS) which will include the NEPA scoping process, the identification and evaluation of concept and scope alternatives, and the selection of a preferred design concept and scope alternative or alternatives. Subsequently, alternative alignments and designs that are consistent with the selected concept and scope may be addressed in an EIS. It is important to note that a final decision to prepare an EIS has not been made at this time. This decision will be made at the end of the major investment study, and will depend upon the nature of the selected concept and its expected impacts.

I. Scoping

A public scoping meeting will be held by RTA on Thursday, September 24, 1998, between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. in the cafeteria of McDonough School #15, 721 St. Philip Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70112. FTA and RTA invite interested individuals, organizations, and public agencies to attend the scoping meeting and participate in establishing the purpose, alternatives, time framework, and analysis approach, as well as an active public involvement program. The public is invited to comment on the alternatives to be addressed, the modes and technologies to be evaluated, the alignments and termination points to be considered, the environmental, social, and economic impacts to be analyzed, and the evaluation approach to be used to select a locally preferred alternative. People with special needs should call the Desire Corridor MIS hotline at (504) 945-8025. The building for the scoping

meeting is accessible to people with disabilities.

An interagency scoping meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 1, 1998, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Regional Planning Commission, 333 St. Charles Avenue, Suite 1100, New Orleans, Louisiana 70130. Federal, state, and local public agencies are invited to attend.

To ensure that a full range of issues is addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions should be directed to the RTA at the address provided above.

II. Description of Study Area and Its Transportation Needs

The Desire Corridor is located in the historic center of New Orleans, extending approximately three miles from Canal Street, bordering the central business district, eastward to the Industrial Canal, a major commercial waterway connecting the Mississippi River to the Intracoastal Waterway and Lake Pontchartrain. The Corridor is approximately one-half mile wide, from the riverfront north to Rampart Street/St. Claude Avenue. It includes the historic Vieux Carré (French Quarter), a world-renowned tourist center with related commercial activities, and two distinct residential areas, the Faubourg Marigny, and the Bywater neighborhoods. It is the home of the U.S. Navy Support Activity Center and the soon-to-be-completed New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA), and is adjacent to the Louis Armstrong performing arts center and St. Claude Medical Center (hospital).

Until 1948/49, the Corridor was served by the Desire and St. Claude streetcar lines, subsequently converted to bus lines. The area is currently served or crossed by the Riverfront streetcar line, nine bus routes, and a number of private shuttle bus operations and taxicab services. These services operate on narrow streets throughout the Corridor, or on a limited number of major arterials at the perimeter of the Corridor.

The French Quarter is the most congested area of the city and the region, with high volumes of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and limited on-street and off-street parking. These conditions, combined with the major festivals and conventions throughout the year, create a unique transportation environment for residents, employees, and visitors.