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Contact: Suzie Canales, Citizens for Environmental Justice, suziecanales@att.net
Kelly Haragan, University of Texas School of Law Environmental Clinic, (512) 587-9318
Ilan Levin, Environmental Integrity Project, (512) 637-9479

Community Groups File Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Statement for
Corpus Christi Harbor Bridge Project

State Agency Analysis Fails to Examine Threats from Building Highway Through Corpus
Christi’s Minority and Lower-Income Neighborhoods

CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS – Community and environmental groups filed detailed comments citing major flaws in the Texas Department of Transportation’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the planned U.S. Highway 181 Harbor Bridge Project, which would adversely impact Corpus Christi’s lower-income, Northside and Ship Channel neighborhoods.

The groups – Citizens for Environmental Justice, the Environmental Integrity Project, and the Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter – and the University of Texas School of Law Environmental Clinic, cited numerous deficiencies with TxDOT’s analysis, including that the state agency failed to consider the detrimental impacts of the proposed relocation of the Harbor Bridge and US 181 through Corpus Christi’s Northside neighborhoods, which were historically designated as the neighborhoods for Corpus Christi’s black residents. The detrimental impacts include more traffic and air pollution, loss of parkland, and cutting off these neighborhoods from the rest of the city.

“Today, Corpus Christi has one of the largest concentrations of major oil refineries next to residents in the United States. The Ship Channel is now home to six refineries, the Port, and numerous petrochemical and power companies,” said Suzie Canales. “The people living next to these facilities have endured repeated environmental assaults, marked by explosions, releases of toxic chemicals, and fires and violations of environmental laws so severe that corporations were criminally prosecuted. The proposed highway and bridge project will further isolate these neighborhoods and add to their pollution burden.”

Kelly Haragan, University of Texas Law School Clinical Professor said: “Much of the analysis in the Draft EIS is extremely cursory and discusses only regional, or even national impacts, rather than providing the required detailed analysis of the impacts to the neighborhoods most affected by this Project. Conclusions in the Draft EIS are based on outdated planning data and fail to consider the traffic and pollution impacts of raising the Harbor Bridge to allow larger ships to access the Port.”
Ilan Levin, an attorney with the non-profit Environmental Integrity Project said: “These neighborhoods were developed prior to industrialization and they have rich history of well-attended schools, vibrant churches, restaurants, locally owned businesses, and community activism. Over time, new industrial sources such as refineries and Port industries encroached on these neighborhoods, and the interstate sliced the communities and isolated many residents. Today, state and local officials have an opportunity to do the right thing, by more carefully considering the alternatives to the planned bridge expansion.”

The comments are in response to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”) which is a requirement of federal anti-pollution laws. Some of the major deficiencies cited in the groups’ comments include:

- TXDOT failed to take a hard look at the environmental consequences of the proposed action, particularly the consequences affecting Corpus’ minority and low-income Northside neighborhoods;
- The Draft EIS fails to evaluate impacts of off-highway local circulation patterns and induced demand;
- The Draft EIS fails entirely to consider the impacts from raising and increasing the span of the Harbor Bridge;
- The Draft EIS fails to adequately consider the direct, indirect, and cumulative air pollution impacts to the Hillcrest and Washington-Coles neighborhoods;
- The Draft EIS fails to adequately consider the socioeconomic and environmental justice impacts of the project;
- The Draft EIS fails to consider impacts related to emergencies/evacuations in the Ship Channel neighborhoods;
- The Draft EIS fails to adequately consider the hazardous materials impacts of the project;
- The Draft EIS fails to include consideration of impacts associated with dredging of the Inner Harbor;
- The Draft EIS fails to adequately look at the flood related impacts of the project;
- The Draft EIS fails to take a hard look at the project’s endangered species impacts; and
- The Draft EIS fails to consider the impacts of de-construction of the existing Harbor Bridge and highway.

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