

0-6807: Texas Gulf Intracoastal Waterway Master Plan

Background

This research establishes a baseline for the condition and use of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Texas (GIWW-T) (Figure 1). It looks at what is needed to restore and sustain the GIWW-T to its optimum level, the major operational concerns, the impacts of operational obstacles and a lack of dredging, and how the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) might be able to play a more active role in achieving the goal of a highly efficient and safe GIWW-T. TxDOT’s current role is to provide real estate for placement areas for dredged material; that role may need to be expanded.

The GIWW-T is one of the most highly utilized corridors in the U.S. inland waterway commerce network. Along the waterway, manufactured goods, farm products, machinery, petroleum products, and chemicals are transported within, into, and out of the region. It is an important economic development tool in Texas, especially along the coast.

What the Researchers Did

The researchers compiled information from a wide variety of sources to address the various topics listed in the “Background” section. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard were two very important government sources. Additionally, a working group of GIWW-T stakeholders was assembled and met with the researchers on three occasions to discuss the findings and direction of the research.



Figure 1. The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Texas.

The researchers developed the priority list of concerns about the condition of the GIWW-T. They then analyzed these concerns by determining baseline conditions, what would have to be done to address the concerns, and the attendant costs.

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The researchers assessed how TxDOT might get involved in addressing some of the needs of the GIWW-T users. The options ranged from a complete takeover of the GIWW-T to lobbying efforts to obtain a higher level of funding from Congress.

The project report provides a fundamental understanding of the GIWW-T, its importance, the primary concerns of the users, and options for addressing those concerns. A separate master plan document was produced for distribution to policy makers

What They Found

The biggest concerns of the users of the GIWW-T are the design and condition of the Brazos River Floodgates, the lack of designated mooring areas (places to pull over in bad weather or emergencies), the lack of fleeting areas (places to park a barge that is not in use), and the lack of maintenance dredging.

TxDOT does not have any readily available funding sources it can tap for addressing these concerns. Increasing the long-term ongoing funding for the GIWW-T would involve a higher level of appropriations from Congress or a new tax/fee structure in Texas. There are a number of one-shot funding sources TxDOT could use that would aid in addressing the more immediate concerns.

What This Means

The master plan developed for this project provides a menu of action items that are feasible for TxDOT to pursue at this time. They include:

- Urge the Corps to restart the study process required for the Brazos River Floodgates (required for congressional funding).
- Make funding arrangements for the replacement of the Brazos River Floodgates.
- Cooperate with environmental and conservation entities such as Ducks Unlimited to fund the placement of revetments along placement areas.
- Provide funding assistance for the creation of new fleeting areas.
- Stay actively involved in reviewing permit applications filed with the Corps for development along the GIWW-T.
- Keep the replacement of the Caney Creek bridge (FM 457) on the fast track.
- Begin exploring real estate options for the placement area with the least estimated remaining life (PA 86 in Brazoria County with an estimated remaining life of 12 years).
- Set up and maintain a webpage to periodically update and publish selected metrics.
- Continue to pursue funding through the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT).
- Apply to USDOT for Marine Highway project designation.

For More Information

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