

Public Informational Meeting held on New Haven Harbor Study

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Members of the New England District, the New Haven Port Authority and the Connecticut Port Authority held a Public Informational Meeting on the New Haven Harbor Navigation Improvement Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Jan. 24 at the Hall of Records, Hearing Room 200 Orange Street, New Haven, Connecticut.

"The feasibility study will evaluate whether navigation improvement so the existing federal navigation project at New Haven Harbor are warranted and in the federal interest," said New England District's Study Manager Barbara Blumeris. "The objective of the improvement project is to provide transportation cost savings and increase navigation safety."

The meeting was held in New Haven, Connecticut. About 28 people, to include three speakers, attended the meeting.

Mark Habel, Chief, Navigation and Environmental Studies Section, Planning Division served as the moderator and facilitator for the evening. He also went over the meeting procedures for the audience. Judi Sheffele, Executive Director, New Haven Port Authority and Evan Matthews, Executive Director, Connecticut Port Authority welcomed attendees. Blumeris presented the overview of the New Haven Harbor Navigation Improvement Study. Blumeris' detailed overview went over the purpose of the feasibility study, a discussion of the existing federal navigation channel, the study process, schedule, and cost sharing.

According to Blumeris, the three-year study will examine deepening the existing main ship channel from Long Island Sound to the head of deep draft navigation at the terminals seaward of I-95, together with the possibility of deepening the adjacent maneuvering and turning areas abreast the terminals. "The feasibility study will include analyzing various incremental channel depths and widths based upon need, as well as alternative dredging methodologies," she said. "In addition, the study will evaluate various dredged material disposal alternatives such as beneficial use, nearshore placement, open water placement, and upland placement."

New England District Marine Ecologist Todd Randall briefed the audience on the National Environmental Policy Act process. "NEPA is a federal law that requires the identification and analysis of potential environmental and socioeconomic effects before those actions take place," he said. "It is a statutory requirement triggered by major federal actions that could significantly affect the quality of the human environment."

Randall described NEPA as a "full disclosure" law with provisions for public access to and public participation in the federal decision-making process as well as a mechanism for evaluating potential environmental impacts and incorporating public involvement into the federal decision-making process.

Other parts of the overview included the purpose of the environmental impact statement, major steps in the NEPA/EIS process, the outline of the EIS, a time line from the scoping meetings to the record of decision and the ways that the public can participate in the process. Randall concluded by encouraging those present to provide comments on the proposed study by Feb. 23 and then provided them the information as to where they may submit their comments.

After the formal presentations, Michael Piscitelli, Deputy Economic Development Administrator, got up to speak. He said that the feasibility study is the next step of an important project that will make a better, safer harbor.

John Acampora of Clean Harbor had questions about the size of the project, which Habel answered for him.

When the registered speakers concluded, Charles Jones, a harbor pilot explained he has been bringing ships into the harbor for over 30 years. "Consider the size of the ships," he said. "More cargo can be loaded onto larger ships. It will save time and money. We need to do dredging, 37-feet is the safe draft we can bring in now to New Haven. The pilots are in favor of the dredging and widening of the channel."

Gateway Terminal submitted a written statement in favor of dredging. "GT strongly supports the proposed feasibility study regarding the potential to dredge New Haven Harbor to benefit the Port of New Haven and the region as a whole," they wrote. "Improving the conditions in the port of New Haven by dredging the harbor to a depth in excess of the current 35 feet is essential if we are to compete with the larger and much deeper ports in Boston, Providence, New York/New Jersey and Philadelphia. Proceeding with this feasibility study is a prudent and necessary first step."

The next meeting on the project, an alternatives informational meeting, will be scheduled in September.