



# Opinion: Dredging Houston Ship Channel is good for business and the environment

By Ric Campo, Roger Guenther and Rich Byrnes Dec. 18, 2020

**HOUSTON** – The Houston Ship Channel is the busiest waterway in the country and arguably one of the most strategic waterways in the world. The long-planned expansion and widening of the channel is an essential improvement for Houston and far beyond.

Despite COVID-related downturns, Houston’s imports and exports have been resilient, and as we recover that activity will lead the nation’s rebound. Our U.S. Army Corps of Engineers partner says the channel “creates value for the nation” and that’s never been truer.

The \$876 million channel expansion, set to begin in 2021, is also good for the environment. A wider channel is safer, lowering risks of collisions and related adverse economic and environmental impacts.

It will also make getting in and out of the port easier for big ships, and that will reduce delays for everyone. That efficiency translates to cleaner air as emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub> and other greenhouse gases will be reduced 3 percent to 7 percent per year due to less waiting and idling, and smoother flow of two-way traffic.

Water and habitat quality will benefit, too. Half of this project involves work that will bring environmental benefits by using dredged materials to build bird islands, marsh habitats and adding hundreds of acres of new water filtering oyster reefs.

The greater port (public and private terminals) moves more than 270 million tons of commerce each year, so a \$1 billion investment translates to 10 cents per ton over the project life. That’s arguably the best bang for the buck for any infrastructure project nationwide. Combined with the long-term Texas boom, that’s why Port Houston and industry partners are committing local capital to getting this done now.

Port Houston committed to do everything necessary, so the project complies with all federal and state requirements, and the port is already doing more to go beyond compliance. When TCEQ agreed the project meets state requirements, it recommended adopting best management practices for emissions reduction, which the port is incorporating into its plans.

This is a world-class project and needs world-class dredging companies. Those companies have adopted practices that include fuel efficiency and emissions-reduction initiatives, engine upgrades, developing dual fuel, LNG and hybrid electric technologies, environmentally friendly lubricants and even LED lighting. These are not “dirty old dredges” as some critical of the project have argued.

Some have even compared the channel to adding another refinery. It’s not. It does take horsepower to build it, which TCEQ has agreed fits in the state emissions plan. But once constructed in a few years, the channel emits no more, and in fact reduces emissions from ships.

A refinery emits for decades. TCEQ approvals were granted because the project’s emissions are within state limits and will be more than offset by reductions once the wider, deeper channel is operational.

Moreover, Port Houston is committed to environmental stewardship. Last year, Port Houston became the first port in the nation to use 100 percent renewable electricity, eliminating 250,000 tons of carbon over 10 years. We invest in hybrid-electric cargo equipment and replacing old lighting with LEDs. Public terminals emissions are down 55 percent over four years. Our recycling programs lead the industry.

The port works with others, too, for example with TCEQ and Environmental Defense Fund implementing emissions reduction strategies through truck engine replacements and electrifying vehicles.

From the channel to terminal projects, better efficiency also reduces emissions. Easily \$100 million is being spent toward efficiency efforts such as getting trucks through gates and terminals with less waiting (and idling). Every dollar is critical, and we allocate every outlay to the best returns.

Air quality and environmental stewardship are industry and community wide challenges, and everyone has a part to play. That is why Port Houston is engaged with top energy and transportation companies and universities aiming at setting standards for greenhouse gas reductions, decarbonization in shipping, hydrogen transitions in transport, and carbon capture, utilization, and sequestration.

The port also engages our communities including our Citizens Advisory Council, Healthy Ports Coalition, Air Alliance and EDF to build solutions together around shared goals.

All of this work involves many stakeholders and partners. The Ship Channel expansion owes thanks to the many elected officials, agencies and industry, labor, citizens, and NGOs who support it.

We can move forward working together. Improving the Houston Ship Channel benefits our economy, enhances safety, and betters our environment. It needs everyone's support. In fact, the sooner it gets built, the sooner we all benefit.

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#### **About Port Houston**

For more than 100 years, Port Houston has owned and operated the public wharves and terminals along the Houston Ship Channel – the nation's largest port for waterborne tonnage and an essential economic engine for the Houston region, the state of Texas, and the U.S. nation. The nearly 200 private and eight public terminals along the federal waterway supports the creation of nearly 1.35 million jobs in Texas and 3.2 million jobs nationwide, and economic activity totaling \$339 billion in Texas – 20.6% of Texas' total gross domestic product (GDP) – and a total of \$801.9 billion in economic impact across the nation. For more information, visit [www.PortHouston.com](http://www.PortHouston.com).

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