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PORT OF HOUSTON AUTHORITY RESPONDS TO LATEST PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR BAYPORT

HOUSTON – The Port of Houston Authority (PHA) today respectfully welcomed the decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to issue a new Public Notice with a 30-day public comment period on PHA’s proposed Bayport Container and Cruise Terminal. This new comment period is required by the Corps to allow the public to remark on two new components of PHA’s mitigation plan. These new features would compensate for the habitat and other ecological values that are perceived to exist on the property.

The PHA has developed plans to preserve two areas of habitat, 456 acres on the lower San Jacinto River and 500 acres on the Katy Prairie, in response to the comments of resource agencies and citizens. The PHA believes that this additional preservation of valuable habitat completes a package that more than compensates for the impacts from the proposed terminal facilities.

The Corps will consider public comments as it finalizes its Record of Decision (ROD), which is expected in September. The ROD will authorize one of three actions related to a construction permit for Bayport: 1) issuance of the permit, 2) issuance of the permit with modifications or conditions, or 3) denial of the permit. The Corps’ permit decision is expected to be announced in September.

“We support the Corps’ desire to work through all of the outstanding issues,” said Jim Edmonds, Chairman, PHA Commission. “Our commitment to additional environmental mitigation is yet another example of the port striving to exceed environmental standards and be responsive to our community stakeholders.”

The Corps released its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the proposed Bayport project in May. The FEIS evaluates issues related to the PHA’s planned facility, including potential impacts on air quality, water quality, noise, security, traffic and other environmental and social factors. The document reflects consideration of all public comments that were submitted following the November 2001 release of the Corps’ draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). The appendix to the FEIS includes all comments submitted on the DEIS and the Corps' response to those comments.

The PHA's design for the Bayport facility, includes several mitigation measures to compensate for environmental impacts. For example, the use of clean fuel and clean engine technology will help reduce air emissions. A three-mile long buffer zone around the facility will include a landscaped sight and sound berm that will be 20 feet tall. The buffer zone also includes part of an extensive stormwater collection system that will protect Galveston Bay. Lighting systems designed to use black light poles and specially designed fixtures will limit night-time impacts.

The PHA's Bayport plan also involves jurisdictional wetland replacement at a ratio of more than three to one to increase the habitats available for fish, waterfowl and other coastal wildlife. Furthermore, the beneficial use of dredged material will create an additional 200 acres of inter-tidal marsh.

"The Port Authority has drawn on expertise developed in other ports around the world to make the proposed Bayport facility environmentally sound," Edmonds said. "We will continue to review our development plans as new environmental technologies and techniques evolve."

The PHA is committed to meeting ISO 14001 standards upon the completion and opening of the Bayport facility. The PHA last year became the first U.S. port to achieve compliance with ISO 14001 standards through its environmental management system at the Barbours Cut Terminal and the Central Maintenance Facility.

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CONTACTS:

Felicia Griffin, Communications Manager
Office: (713) 670-2644 Cell: (713) 594-5620, fgriffin@poha.com

Argentina M. James, Director of Public Affairs
Office: (713) 670-2568 Cell: (713) 306-6822, ajames@poha.com

The Port of Houston Authority owns and operates the public facilities located along the Port of Houston, the 25-mile long complex of diversified public and private facilities designed for handling general cargo, containers, grain and other dry bulk materials, project and heavy lift cargo, and other types of cargo. Each year, more than 6,600 vessels call at the port, which ranks first in the U.S. in foreign waterborne tonnage, second in overall total tonnage, and sixth largest in the world. The Port Authority plays a vital role in ensuring navigational safety along the Houston Ship Channel, which has been instrumental in Houston's development as a center of international trade. The Barbours Cut Container Terminal and Central Maintenance Facility are the first of any U.S. port facilities to develop and implement an innovative Environmental Management System that meets the rigorous standards of ISO 14001. Additionally, the port is an approved delivery point for Coffee "C" futures contracts traded on the New York Board of Trade's Coffee, Sugar & Cocoa Exchange. For more information, please visit www.portofhouston.com