

January 29, 2013

Loop-It, LLC  
P.O. Box 427  
Shreveport, Louisiana 71162  
Ref: Response to Complaint Letter Regarding I-49 Inner City Connector  
Stage 1 Environmental Impact Statement (State Project No. H.003915)

Dear Loop-It, LLC Members:

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG) is in receipt of your letter dated December 17, 2012. We appreciate your input on this project and have listed individual responses to your complaints.

**Complaint Item 1:**

*Your team representing NLCOG blocked our participation and would not allow us to distribute our information at the December 12, 2012 meeting. Additionally, one of your representatives put hands on one of our group while taking action to remove members from the meeting at Mount Canaan Church. NLCOG has denied our rights to assemble and express our position at a public meeting on church property where you were a guest.*

**Response:**

We regret you feel your group was being blocked from participating and improperly treated while attending this meeting. During the December 11, 2012 meeting, attendees approached the project team expressing confusion as a result of your organization's handouts. Attendees were provided a packet of meeting materials from the project team to guide them through the meeting, after which they were also handed materials from your organization. This created confusion among the attendees as to what was being proposed and discussed at the meetings. To prevent this confusion from continuing and allow the public the opportunity to participate in the official project, the project team respectfully requested the opposition members to refrain from distributing materials inside the meeting room at the second meeting (Mount Canaan Church) and made available a table in the hallway outside the meeting room, but still within the meeting space to allow your members to distribute your materials to any and all attendees. If there was any touching of individuals, it was purely innocent in nature, as the room was loud and crowded and many of the attendees were elderly and in some cases, required some assistance in navigating the room.

**Complaint Item 2:**

*We further wish to challenge what we observe as NLCOG manipulating and abusing the public trust placed in your organization. We view NLCOG's process as designed to pit one neighbor against another; as not providing adequate information to the public about the destructive nature of the proposed project, as providing misleading information to the public; and as limiting our ability as citizens to have meaningful input about our concerns and possible better options. The project you propose wastes limited public resources and threatens efforts to improve prosperity for inner city residents.*

**Response:**

Please note that NLCOG is bound by federal law to follow the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Part of this process requires the various proposed build alternatives, as well as the No-Build Alternative, to be presented to the public for input. All known potential structural impacts for each build alternative were identified, including houses, business, churches, recreational areas, etc., as well as preliminary environmental impacts including wetlands, prime farmlands, and floodplains, and shared at these meetings as required by the process. Once a Preferred Build Alternative is selected as required for comparison purposes, additional studies will be completed including an air quality analysis, noise analysis, wetlands analysis, cultural resource survey, and other required documentation.

**Complaint Item 3:**

*In further public manipulation and restriction of our rights, we were told by a representative of NLCOG at the Thursday meeting that our write in ballots will not be counted as input and that the only acceptable input is the limited options on the ballot you provided to participants. Your ballot allows a "no-build" vote, however, we were instructed anyone voting for the no-build option is additionally required to vote for one of the four destructive build options that all run over our neighborhood and over wetlands. This requirement is a trick to get us to vote for something we do not want. We estimate that over 200 ballots were cast in favor of our loop it option, that we were told by NLCOG's representative, you will not report. We also believe that a "no-build" vote should not require a vote to build option and believe that all votes such cast should be counted as no-build.*

**Response:**

Three methods of public input were provided at all three of the Community Input Meetings: choice cards, written comment forms, and a court reporter to take verbal comments. Each method will have its own section in the meeting summary, which will be finalized once the comment period is over. The choice cards were not ballots, only an expression of preference. The project team wanted to provide a method by which to collate input to assist the team in gauging public preference, which is one factor in determining the preferred alternative. Every attendee was handed a choice card when they walked in and

encouraged to fill it out to provide the project team with their input. Giving one choice card per attendee was intended to assure each participant an equal voice.

In reference to not counting the submissions to which you are referring (per being advised by a representative of NLCOG), please note that we are not disregarding these. Since these *write-in ballots* that are referenced are primarily signatures on opposition flyers, not choice cards or written comments that require responses, the total number received will be reported in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The representative from NLCOG was attempting to explain that the signed flyers were not choice cards and while they will be included as part of the outreach effort, they would not be tallied in the choice card total.

In reference to the second part of Complaint 3, all choice cards with the words "No Build" circled are a preference for not building the project. As stated on the Frequently Asked Question handout, the project team will use the response from the first question to gauge the overall public support and opposition to the project provided by the meeting attendees. The draft EIS for this project will contain both a preferred build alternative along with the no-build alternative. The responses to the second question on the choice card will assist the project team in determining which alignment the public most supports as the preferred build alternative. If you prefer the no-build alternative, the second question on the choice card allowed you to voice which build alternative you would prefer, in the event the FHWA selects the build option. Not providing a build alternative preference would not give the public an opportunity to have their opinions heard should the project reach that stage.

Regarding the flyer that was attached to your letter, the Loop It option utilizing Louisiana Highway 3132 and Interstate 220 is actually the designated No Build Alternative. This No-Build Alternative will be presented along with the Preferred Build Alternative in the project EIS documentation.

We thank you for your comments in regards to the second round of Community Input Meetings and hope you feel your complaints have been addressed in the responses provided. We look forward to your continued participation in this process.

Sincerely,



Kent Rogers  
Executive Director

Cc: per attached

Ray LaHood, US Transportation Secretary  
US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Senator Mary Landrieu  
431 Dirksen  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Victor Mendez, FHWA Administrator  
Southeast Federal Center Building  
Room E85-336  
1200 New Jersey Ave. S.E.  
Washington, DC 20590-9898

Senator David Vitter  
516 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Sherri LeBas, Louisiana DOT Secretary  
1201 Capitol Access Road  
PO Box 94245  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-924

Congressman John Fleming  
416 Cannon HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Lisa Jackson, US EPA Administrator  
USEPA Headquarters  
Ariel Rios Building  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.  
Mail Code: 1101A  
Washington, DC 20460

Congressman Rodney Alexander  
316 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ron Curry, US EPA Region 6 Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Fountain Place 12th Floor, Suite 1200  
1445 Ross Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

Billy Pesnell, Attorney  
400 Travis Street, Suite 1100  
Shreveport, Louisiana 71101