



Texas Department of Transportation

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November 12, 2007

CONTACT: FERRY

Galveston-Port Bolivar Ferry Operation
SH 87
Galveston County

Mr. Patrick F. Doyle
Galveston County Commissioner
Holbrook Annex
601 Tremont, Suite 101
Galveston, Texas 77550

Dear Commissioner Doyle:

I truly appreciate your taking the time to communicate with me regarding the Galveston-Port Bolivar Ferry Operation. During the last two fiscal years, the Galveston-Port Bolivar Ferry operation completed 21,010 round trips which carried 1,843,101 vehicles and 23, 247 round trips which carried 2,002,617 vehicles respectively.

The decline in the number of trips completed is due to a shortage of qualified crewmembers. Traffic operations were scaled back in late December 2006 for this reason. Unfortunately, consistency in ferry service has been difficult due to the continuing decrease in staffing. Your letter states that only two vessels are in operation. A review of vessel operations indicates that at least three vessels have been in operation almost every day during the last year, and during the summer on many days four vessels were in operation. On holidays such as July 4, five vessels operated. The difference in service is not less vessels, but less shifts. For example the third vessel operates one shift instead of the previous two shifts.

As your letter stated, shortages of qualified crewmembers is the reason for the cutbacks. The offshore oil industry is compensating marine crewmembers at salary levels much higher than what TxDOT is compensating which has resulted in a high crewmember turnover at the ferry operation. Each vessel is required to have USCG qualified crewmembers. The ferry operation has made extensive efforts to recruit, hire, and train crewmembers. This is a time consuming process.

Contracting qualified crewmembers is also difficult; TxDOT is fortunate to be able to utilize these crewmembers to avoid further loss in service. Without these contract crewmembers, the decline in service would be greater. However, the contractor crewmembers your letter refers to are a short-term solution.

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I have sent suggestions to Austin to assist in alleviating the staffing shortage. Currently, TxDOT's Human Resources Division is working on helping to alleviate the staffing shortage.

As you know, the ferry operation is in the "non-busy season" maintenance cycle and traffic levels are greatly reduced. This cycle includes sending vessels to the shipyard and major overhauls. This is normal. Without extensive maintenance, the fleet cannot be safely operated and meet United States Coast Guard (USCG) requirements. Construction on a sixth vessel will begin soon, which will help ferry management balance the requirement to perform maintenance and to simultaneously provide needed service.

If you should have questions regarding this matter, please contact Mr. Michael W. Alford, P.E., Director of Maintenance, at (713) 802-5551.

Sincerely,



Gary K. Trietsch
District Engineer
Houston District

cc: Mr. Michael W. Alford, P.E.