
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: GOVERNOR
FROM: RILEY
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON I-59 CONTRAFLOW FOR EVACUATION OF NEW ORLEANS IN HURRICANE
DATE: 7/13/2001
CC: RENICK

Meeting of Mississippi Agencies

Pursuant to your instructions following our meeting with Butch Brown regarding the proposed contraflow of I-59 to evaluate New Orleans in the event of a major hurricane, I arranged for a meeting of MEMA, DPS/MHP, the National Guard, Health Department and MDOT representatives. I explained that we as a state want to help our neighbors in Louisiana, but as state administrators, our priority rests with protecting and safely evacuating/sheltering Mississippians. Representatives expressed several concerns to MDOT:

- Louisiana did not consult with Mississippi in the development of this plan and they aren't dedicating any personnel resources to assist in Mississippi. MDOT only considered transportation issues in the development of the proposed plan and did not consider other issues.
- An evacuation is often made of New Orleans prior to that of the Gulf Coast. How will we be able to handle our own evacuees when New Orleans citizens will have a "head start?" General Lipscomb said that Camp Shelby will receive evacuees from Louisiana twice as fast as those from the Gulf Coast due to Louisiana's early evacuation.
- MHP, MDOT and National Guard personnel will need to be diverted from Highway 49 to I-59, due to the magnitude of I-59 traffic, which could endanger the flow of traffic on Highway 49 from the Gulf Coast. Colonel Huggins stated that MHP manpower resources throughout the state would be stripped just in order to properly man the contraflow of I-59 to Hattiesburg. Huggins and General Lipscomb are both concerned that we won't have enough resources to adequately provide manpower to oversee the evacuation of the Gulf Coast. General Lipscomb stated that even if the Guard used non-law enforcement personnel to augment MHP's manpower at traffic points, this would impede the Guard's response to local law enforcement agencies on the Coast.
- The Guard has several combat engineer units in the general vicinity of I-59. Restricted southerly flow on I-59 could impede the response capabilities of these units. Restricted access on I-59 would preclude those armory locations from utilization as pre-planned shelters and/or alternate staging areas.

- A bottleneck will be created in Forrest County/Hattiesburg due to Highway 49 and I-59's junction. This traffic congestion will block operations at the Guard's staging area at Camp Shelby.
- Does MS have adequate shelter space to handle New Orleans and the Coast? Louisiana citizens know exactly what hotels or shelters they are going to and their early arrival will result in inadequate shelter space for Mississippians. Based on prior experiences, the National Guard anticipates that 40-50 buses from Louisiana will show up at the Camp Shelby gates seeking shelter. Representatives feel that DHS, the Salvation Army and the Red Cross should be included in future discussions due to their sheltering roles.
- Colonel Huggins said that you can not close off access (i.e., exit/entrance ramps) on I-59 between the state line and Hattiesburg or Laurel because of evacuees needing gas and emergency vehicles needing access.
- Robert Latham stated that he understood that MDOT opposed the proposed contraflow a few months ago. He suggested that the FHWA may be threatening to withhold some federal funding if MDOT doesn't agree to the proposed contraflow.
- No one has considered how to address the emergency needs on the Gulf Coast after the storm hits which will necessitate the transport of personnel from traffic control to the Gulf Coast.
- How does Mississippi recover the expense of these operations/resources if a federal disaster declaration is not made for Mississippi? Only Louisiana would be eligible to recover expenses.

MDOT representatives responded that the agency is only planning to contraflow I-59 to Hattiesburg in 2002. In the event of a major storm this year, Louisiana traffic would be contraflowed only to the Mississippi state line (i.e. not in Mississippi), which would result in a 60-mile que in the southbound lane of I-59/I-10 from New Orleans to the state line.

Representatives inquired as to if Louisiana had considered other options. Mr. Latham said that Louisiana has not considered "vertical evacuation" of New Orleans residents by sheltering them in the business district's high rises. He said that this would get people out of the storm surge and that the buildings could withstand the winds.

Colonel Huggins wants to know why Louisiana is not going to contraflow I-10 out of New Orleans to I-12 east, which could be contraflowed to I-55, which could be contraflowed to the Mississippi state line. Colonel Huggins said that we could consider diverting the contraflow in the south-bound lanes of I-59 over to Highway 11 and either contraflow Highway 11 or leave it with north/south traffic, but he pointed out that Highway 11 is a small rural two-lane highway which would require a great deal of personnel resources for traffic control.

Colonel Huggins and Robert Latham requested direction from you as to if Mississippi is to agree to the contraflow plan.

LDOT Explanation/Response

I requested that MDOT contact LDOT for documentation/reasoning in the need for I-59 to be contraflowed and for an explanation of other options considered by LDOT and why these options are not feasible. LDOT provided the following background:

- First, the Mandatory Evacuation of New Orleans can only be called by Governor Foster or the affected Parish President.
- Second, this mandatory evacuation will only be recommended by LA Office of Emergency Preparedness, LA State Police, and LDOT in the event that the hurricane approaches New Orleans from the east or southeast and is a slow-moving Category 3 or any Category 4 or 5 storm.
- Third, this specific type of hurricane will cause a tidal surge that will breach New Orleans' levees, flooding the city with up to 28 feet of water.
- Fourth, this would be a catastrophic event greater than Hurricane Camille and could result in the drowning of over 100,000 citizens.

LDOT provided the steps that they have taken to reduce the storm impact on Mississippi. These steps included Louisiana increasing the number of shelters in the state, initiating contraflow on I-10 west out of New Orleans as the first contraflow, diverting I-10 contraflow traffic towards Baton Rouge on I-12 (this action always to be considered first before utilizing contraflow on I-59; however, LDOT said that the decision will ultimately depend on condition of I-12 and the direction of the storm), and planning for the contraflow of I-55 in the event that LaPlace floods preventing access to LA 3127 as the principal route to Baton Rouge. **Correspondence from LDOT states that "it is anticipated that Louisiana's contraflow of I-59 into Mississippi would be needed as absolutely the Last Resort, after all the other means have been exhausted."** LDOT also stated that it will offer and expect to accommodate a Mississippi Gulf Coast contraflow evacuation into Louisiana via I-10/I-12 in similar hurricane situations.

7/19/01 MS/LA Bi-State Hurricane Evacuation Study Meeting

I will be attending a meeting next Thursday, July 19, at Percy Quinn State Park, along with representatives of MEMA, LA Office of Emergency Preparedness, MHP, LA State Police, MDOT, LA Department of Transportation, FEMA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Department of Transportation. The meeting has been called to discuss regional and interstate evacuation plans, review regional hurricane evacuation behavior history, discuss existing state and local plans, discuss transportation issues (including contralaning) and to discuss short-term plans for the 2001 hurricane season.

Please advise as to any information that you would like for me to convey to Colonel Huggins or Robert Latham, as well as any additional information that you would like on this matter. Depending on the information gained at Thursday's meeting, I think it might be a good idea for you to contact Governor Foster to express our desire to help our fellow man, but our priority for/duty to Mississippians, as well as the concerns raised by our agencies, especially regarding the magnitude of resources required and the recovering of expenses related to the evacuation.