
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: GOVERNOR
FROM: RILEY
SUBJECT: I-59 CONTRAFLOW UPDATE: FEDS PUSHING FOR CONTRAFLOW
DATE 8/8/01
CC: RENICK

Leon Schaffer of MEMA called me yesterday to share the following regarding the I-59 contraflow situation.

Bob Chapman, MDOT's liaison on the contraflow, was at MEMA last Friday in preparation for Tropical Storm Barry. He mentioned contraflowing I-59 and Schaffer reminded him that LDOT and MDOT had said this would not be done until 2002 and then only if the hurricane was a Category 3 or above with an expected direct hit on New Orleans. Schaffer decided to see if he could use the situation to confirm MEMA's belief that MDOT is pushing LDOT's position due to federal threats of withholding of funds in the future. He bluffed Chapman by referring to federal pressure, to which Chapman responded, "Yeah, 10th floor and the FHWA are pushing hard. I'm between a rock and a hard place."

Schaffer again relayed to me how LDOT has not provided the impact study that it promised to conduct in June of 2000. Louisiana's Emergency Management Director has conveyed his apologies to MEMA on this matter three times. Although LDOT never provided the impact study that was to be conducted prior to the adoption of any contraflow plan, MDOT suddenly started pushing for the contraflow.

Schaffer reported that he, Robert Latham and others at MEMA surmise that the feds don't want to take a hit for not having a plan to evacuate New Orleans in the event of a direct hit or a category 3-5 hurricane. Washington doesn't have an answer, so it is using LDOT's contraflow plan to set Mississippi up as the scapegoat for the feds in the event of a major storm because the feds can say that we drug our feet. This is a state issue and the FHWA is appearing to put unnecessary pressure on MDOT by these shadow threats of withholding future federal monies unless Mississippi buys into the contraflow plan.

Schaffer reported that Governor Foster is going to write you, rather than call you as earlier reported, regarding this matter. We might need to consider whether you want to call a meeting with Butch Brown and/or the MDOT Commissioners and whether you want to make some phone calls to our Congressional delegation as to FHWA's threats and pressure to buy into this plan when its impact has not been determined.