



NoPort News

A newsletter of the North Carolina International Terminal

All the news that prints to fit.

February 1, 2010

Reconnaissance Arrogance

We have reported that the Wilmington District of the US Army Corps of Engineers is conducting the reconnaissance study for the channel improvements required for the proposed North Carolina International Terminal in secret. That secrecy is so important to the District that they have defied our Congressman, Mike McIntyre.

If this study determines that there is a “Federal interest” in the channel dredging, the planning process would proceed. If not, the project stops, and we all live happily ever after.

The Wilmington District has advised us that the study report will not be disclosed until it has been approved by the South Atlantic Division, expected to happen in June. There will be no opportunity for public scrutiny or scrutiny by other Federal or State agencies. Upon Division approval the report would be final, and would represent the position of the Corps of Engineers. Comment then would be futile.

With the report and its conclusions so fixed, Congress and the sponsoring North Carolina agency would be asked to appropriate several million dollars for a full feasibility study. The first opportunity for public participation in that study would not come until the release of the draft environmental impact statement, many years into the study.

We asked Congressman Mike McIntyre to obtain the release of the reconnaissance study before it became final, while some opportunity to comment remained. Mr. McIntyre, by letter of January 14, 2010, so requested the Wilmington District to make the report available to NoPort Southport and the public.

The Wilmington District denied the Congressman’s request. By letter of January 22, 2010, the Wilmington District confirmed that the study would be withheld from public view until after approval of the South Atlantic Division was received.

Those letters are posted on our Web site, www.noportsouthport.org. Click on “Corps of Engineers Studies” on the menu, then “Reconnaissance Study.”

What are we to conclude from this resolute secrecy? Secrecy breeds suspicion, and we are suspicious. Only a transparent process can give us confidence in the integrity of the decision.

That suspicion was reinforced when we learned that the Wilmington District has requested the State Ports Authority to sign a letter of intent to participate as local sponsor for the next step in the planning process. Five months before the release of the report that determines that there would be a next step.

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