



**For immediate release
September 26, 2017**

Nation's Vital Houston Ship Channel Impacted

HOUSTON – Today, Port Commission Chairman of the Port of Houston Authority Janiece Longoria stressed the importance of restoring and improving the Houston Ship Channel due to its importance to the future of the Houston region, state and nation. In comments to the Port Commission during its regular monthly meeting, she highlighted impacts of Hurricane Harvey and in her remarks stated, “We are in desperate need of additional relief to properly dredge the channel so that it can accommodate normal commerce at its authorized depth and width.”

Chairman Longoria presented satellite images of the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel taken days before and after the devastating rains inundated the Gulf Coast. “The floodwater coming through our system deposited tons and tons of silt into the Houston Ship Channel and throughout Galveston Bay,” she said. “While the Channel is open and commerce is flowing with some restrictions, the Houston Ship Channel needs significant dredging to address these storm damages.”

Additional images presented during the meeting showed dramatic shoaling at the entrances of the port’s three major terminals. “There has been ten feet of sediment collected as a result of massive amounts of floodwater that has carried this silt into the channel, “ Chairman Longoria noted. “Again, this seriously restricts commerce to and from our facilities.” Port Houston’s two container terminals, Barbours Cut and Bayport together are responsible for nearly 70 percent of the container cargo in the gulf.

Chairman Longoria and Executive Director Roger Guenther both stressed during the meeting that maintaining the Houston Ship Channel’s depth is critical to commerce. A study conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute determined that a loss of one foot of depth in the channel costs the U.S. economy as much as \$281 million dollars per year.

Chairman Longoria added that the impact of Hurricane Harvey highlights the importance of the channel as a critical component of the national economy. “We must also look at improvements to this waterway that make it more resilient and reduce the impacts of future weather events,” she stressed. “We believe that rather than just returning the channel to its pre-storm depth and width, we must enhance its efficiency and we must build in resiliency, to make it better for ever- growing demand.”

The Chairman stated also that part of the channel’s recovery is to “harden this asset to make it better for the future,” which may include a channel that is deepened and widened.

Actions taken by the Port Commission today underscored the importance of improving and protecting Port Houston. In a proactive measure for Hurricane-Harvey related dredging expenses for its general

cargo terminals, the Commission authorized an additional payment not to exceed \$2 million to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Additionally, the Commission agreed to renew an agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard to exchange and share information and data in order to enhance maritime safety and security. It also awarded contracts to fortify communication capabilities for telephones, data center and inter-terminal connectivity.

About Port Houston

For more than 100 years, the port has owned and operated the public wharves and terminals of the Port of Houston – the nation’s largest port for foreign waterborne tonnage and an essential economic engine for the Houston region, the state of Texas, and the nation. It supports the creation of nearly 1.175 million jobs in Texas and 2.7 million jobs nationwide, and economic activity totaling almost \$265 billion in Texas – 16 percent of Texas’ total gross domestic product – and more than \$617 billion in economic impact across the nation. For more information, visit Port Houston’s website at: www.porthouston.com.

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