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October 8, 2020

Honorable R. D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Re: Interim Report to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Buffalo Bayou and Tributaries Resiliency Study

Dear Assistant Secretary James:

I appreciate and welcome the opportunity for members of our community to submit feedback on the Interim Report to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Buffalo Bayou and Tributaries Resiliency Study (Interim Report). This study is a vital next step in this process of broad flood mitigation efforts for the Houston area.

All parties involved in this study have stated that public comment is not only crucial as part of the National Environmental Policy Act review process, but also welcome as a gauge to determine the public's response to various proposed new flood control measures. I know that my constituents are eager to see the report and to participate in the process.

In our district, the issue of managing flooding is of paramount importance. It is important to me to amplify your efforts to receive public comment on the proposed alternative and to hear from my constituents about their views on these potentially transformative efforts.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has limited some of the methods by which the community might be able to learn about and participate in the shaping of alternatives presented in the Interim Report into a final plan. Many communications systems are delayed or hindered, including mail delivery, internet access, and the ability to gather. Usually, public information sessions would occur in person, with the opportunity for the public to ask questions and explore the project with staff outside of a formal presentation. Some members of the public who would attend these in-person sessions face real obstacles in getting the necessary information to participate, accessing the internet, and submitting their comments.



It is with those challenges in mind that I write to you to request a 30-day extension of the current 30-day review period. While the release of this Interim Report was necessary as soon as it became available, its release during the pandemic and in close proximity to the election, during which all members of Congress are prohibited from sending certain unsolicited communications to constituents (“the blackout period”), makes it difficult to ensure that interested parties are able to engage in the process and warrants an extension of the 30-day review period.

The public comment period is scheduled from October 2 to November 2, 2020. With election day on November 3, the timing precludes all members of Congress from assisting you in seeking the input of local communities because of the blackout period. Extending the public comment period beyond the election timeframe would allow us to assist in the effort to gather feedback from those affected by the study and to communicate more fully with our constituents. Based on our previous work together, I believe that USACE would appreciate and support efforts to reach as many interested parties as possible and to build consensus while keeping this project on schedule.

I am committed to coordinating with our critical partners, including local partners and the USACE Galveston District, to address water conveyance and flood mitigation issues. Unfortunately, the congressional blackout period precludes me from contacting many of my constituents who have great interest in these matters and who will be greatly affected by the decisions made as a result of this process. I would like to be able to help inform them, to facilitate communication with them, and to bring people together around this issue that is vital to our district’s future.

For these reasons, I request a 30-day extension of the public comment period for the Interim Report to December 2, 2020. I appreciate the dedication of the USACE to improving the well-being and resiliency of our region for decades to come. I look forward to continuing our work together on these and other matters, and send my sincere thanks for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lizzie Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress