

Future of Barksdale entrance still fuzzy

Written by Sean Green

Tuesday, 12 February 2013 17:11 - Last Updated Thursday, 14 February 2013 09:15

Still months away from decision about new entrance onto base

Bossier Parish is still several months away from the decision about a new entrance to Barksdale Air Force Base.

The parish, Bossier City, and the base are all hoping to see an entrance from I-20 and I-220 interchange directly onto the east side of the installation.

“When you look at the base, to the west of the runway, everything is built up but they have thousands of acres on the runway to the east and this would go right into that,” said Bossier Parish Administrator Bill Altimus.

The reason for the location of this entrance is due to accessibility of those traveling east/west from I-20 or north/south from I-220.

“It's just a normal place to put it because you're on a major interstate,” said Altimus. “It's a natural location when you consider the amount of traffic that it could handle.”

The groundwork for the entrance was originally done 37 years ago and now the old plans have been resurrected.

“When you're coming off I-220, you can see the ramps just go off into nothing,” said Altimus.

The plans were first developed in 1975, but the U.S. Department of Defense nixed the plans.

“My understanding is the original plan was to go all the way through the base and connect to the

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interloop (into Shreveport). DOD put the end to the plans to keep the general public off the base," said Bruce Easterly, parish engineer.

"Everything was done in preparation, but that decision was made it was stopped right then and there," added Altimus.

The design developed then has come back into play in order to save money. Cost for ramps and entrance is expected to total \$50 million.

Altimus said he is unsure of the savings of using the original plan, but that it would be "significant savings."

"If it could be used, you're in the ballpark (of \$50 million). If it has to be redesigned, it's going to run the cost up and I don't know how much that would be," said Altimus.

One major hurdle is that design standards have changed in the 30-plus years since the original gate was envisioned. To move forward with this plan would require design exception from the Department of Transportation and Development.

Officials hoped funding for the new entrance would come from the transportation bill MAP-21. However, its short shelf life and financial condition of the parties involved will complicate matters.

"That is the policy and plan of the U.S. Department of Transportation, but it's two years. It could be state action, but we may be talking a couple years out, so what's the state of Louisiana, what's Congress thinking, what's the state of DOD? Who knows – it's up in the air at that point," said Altimus.

URS, environmental agency contracted to provide work at all military facilities, expects to have a rough draft of the civil environmental study presented to DOTD and the Federal Highway

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Administraton soon.

“They're already in on Barksdale side of things and since we have experience with them, we engaged them to do the public side,” said Altimus.

From there, he expects a final decision in approximately eight months.

“By fall of this year, we should have a way to go.”