



16519/18-0020

MEMORANDUM

30 MAR 2018

From: M. M. Dean, CAPT
CG Sector Miami

Reply to: (b) (6)
Attn of: (b) (6)

To: CGD SEVEN (dpw/dpb)

Subj: WAMS 07301: INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY MILE 925-1005

Ref: (a) Aids to Navigation Manual – Administration, COMDTINST M16500.7A
(b) District Seven WAMS 07301 memo of 24 October 2017
(c) Representative Brian J. Mast memo of 05 October 2017
(d) Coast Guard Seventh District SOP, Annex N

1. In accordance with references (a) and (b), Sector Miami completed a Waterway Analysis and Management System (WAMS) review of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) from miles 925-1005. The WAMS also included a focused review of the rail bridges over the St Lucie River and Loxahatchee River as requested in reference (c). For this WAMS, those bridges are referred to as the St Lucie River Railroad Bridge and Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge. Two electronic surveys were developed and advertised in the Local Notice to Mariners. The first survey focused on the ICW and only garnered two responses. The second survey focused on the St Lucie River and Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridges and received 3,640 responses. The primary theme of the responses by mariners was requesting equal time for boats and trains and highlighting the dangers of numerous boats in close proximity to each other while waiting for these railroad bridges to open. However, the majority of responses were from non-boaters concerned about increased train service thru their towns and congestion as automobiles wait for trains to pass.

2. The proposed expansion of the Brightline Railway passenger service from Miami to Orlando, consisting of 16 round trips daily from 0600-2100, will result in increased railway traffic and longer wait times for mariners at both the St Lucie River and Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridges. Increased railway traffic density due to expansion of the cargo handling port facilities in Port Everglades will also contribute to the increased railway traffic and longer wait times for mariners. The Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) owns both bridges and is undertaking numerous upgrades, which include developing a mobile phone application and electronic signage to notify boaters of bridge closings times. Both bridges are remotely operated from a dispatcher in Jacksonville, Florida.

3. The St Lucie River Railroad Bridge has a single track with a speed limit of 35 mph. Freight and passenger trains crossing this bridge will result in the bridge lowering up to 50 times a day to allow trains to cross. There are two highway bridges in close proximity to this railroad bridge, one of which is also a drawbridge. Tidal currents in this area can approach four knots and make transiting through these two bridges challenging. There will be longer wait times for boaters based on the low speed limit and the distance to passing siding tracks that allow north and south bound trains to share the single-track system. It takes approximately 20 minutes to cycle this bridge to allow a train to pass.

Brightline's proposed schedule, with 16 daily round trips, will result in this bridge being in the closed position, for potentially 10.6 hours more than the current state, at the same time when boating traffic is highest. These increased wait times may create problems for vessels trying to stem the current and avoid other vessels in the queue. Affected waterway traffic will be both commercial and recreational because of the numerous marinas and yacht repair facilities west of this bridge. In addition, the St Lucie River is the eastern access for the Okeechobee Waterway, which stretches across Florida to Fort Myers on the west coast, and is transited by both recreational and commercial vessels.

4. The Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge is a two-track line that will allow trains to travel in each direction simultaneously once the westbound track is repaired. FEC plans to retrofit a non-movable section of the bridge, with an above grade truss, which will allow for the usage of an alternate navigable span for those vessels that have an air draft of eight feet or less when the bridge is in the down position. This alternate navigable span will greatly reduce the number of vessels having to wait for bridge openings at the Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge. This bridge also has a highway bridge in close proximity with only 25 feet of vertical clearance that limits the type of vessels who utilize it. The overall number of closures to allow trains to pass should be less than the St Lucie River Railroad Bridge due to the multiple tracks across the bridge. Affected waterway traffic west of the bridge is recreational, with residential dockage and no marinas.

5. The marine casualty investigation into the Tug W.P. Scott vs St Lucie River Railroad Bridge collision in October 2017 (MISLE ID# 6289935) identified unexpected currents from Lake Okeechobee water releases to be a causal factor. The water releases cause a current even during a slack tide. A safety recommendation from that investigation is to advertise the outflows in the Local Notice to Mariners and for it to be mentioned in the Coast Pilot. I support approval of this safety recommendation.

6. After a complete review of the ICW, its significant thoroughfares and the coastal access areas adjacent to it, I recommend no changes to any federal or private aids to navigation. NOAA has been notified to remove the Capron Shoal buoy from the applicable section of the Coast Pilot because it was disestablished in May 2017. Charts 11476, 11475, 11474, and 11467 were reviewed and are accurate.

7. To promote parity between the needs of FEC, Brightline Railway, and mariners, I recommend modifying both the St Lucie River Railroad Bridge and the Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge regulations to be similar to those on the New River Railroad Bridge found in Title 33, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 117.313. However, I do not recommend a bridge tender at the Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge. A bridge tender at Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge is not necessary because the boaters are recreational and the air draft of eight feet will minimize the affected traffic. Having a bridge tender at the St Lucie River Railroad Bridge would drastically improve the communication between mariners and allow them to know how long they will have to wait for a bridge opening. Furthermore, while the regulations established should provide equitable usage times for the waterway users, they do not have to be exactly the same as those established for the New River Railroad Bridge. This change would also provide for better accountability because currently under 33 CFR 117.299 and 117.317, the St Lucie River Railroad Bridge and Loxahatchee River Railroad Bridge could remain in the closed position for hours at a time without any future accountability.