

2018 Port Freeport Bond Package Informational Campaign

**PORT
FREEPORT IS
GROWING**



Bigger, Deeper, Wider

2019 AAPA Communications
Awards Program

Classification: Overall
Campaign

Port Category: 2



SUMMARY

In February 2018, the Port Freeport Commission made the decision to seek voter approval to issue tax-supported bonds to fund the \$130 million local sponsor share of the cost to construct the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project, a federal authorized project to deepen and widen the Freeport Harbor Channel. After thorough financial analysis, this method of funding was found to be the most cost-effective and most importantly, achievable without raising the Port's total tax rate. This infrastructure project benefits all, private and public, facilities that are served by the Freeport Harbor Channel.

Due to the importance of the message and wide-range of audiences that reside within the Port Freeport Navigation District, executive leadership and the Public Affairs team, with the assistance from a strategic communications firm, created a comprehensive campaign to fully inform the community of the 2018 bond package and Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project. The plan included multiple press releases, a micro-website, printed informational materials, community presentations, media coverage, and use of brand ambassadors.

1) WHAT WERE THE ENTRY'S SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES OR OPPORTUNITIES?

History of Port Freeport and bond funding requests:

Trade has been an integral part of Brazoria County ever since the Brazos river was first discovered and charted by Captain Cabeza de Vaca in 1527. Throughout Port Freeport's history the voters of Brazoria County have understood the importance of having a safe, reliable channel that can support the movement of commerce. The voter's strategic decision to support the creation of a deep-water port and the later expansions have been a key driver to the economic growth in Brazoria County.

In 2003, Port Freeport began to lay the groundwork to widen and deepen the Freeport Harbor Channel by entering into a Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In 2014, Congress approved the Water Resource Development Act designating the Port as an "authorized project" to deepen the Channel to depths ranging from 51 to 56 feet mean lower low water.

The current channel, at a depth of 46 feet, is not designed to for the larger global vessels in service today. The new generation vessels that carry more cargo require deeper water and expanded areas for safe navigation. Deepening the Freeport Harbor Channel to 56 feet, making it the deepest in Texas, will enable Port Freeport to market the Port to a wider range of global vessels, including those that now transit the expanded Panama Canal. The deepening and widening of the channel will improve



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safety and efficiency, allowing carriers to not only dispatch larger vessels, but will also enable these vessels to load to a fuller capacity, thus reducing transportation costs and achieving greater economies of scale.

The taxpayers of the Navigation District have a long history of supporting the Port through bond issuances. In 1925, not only did the voters create the Navigation District, but they gave the Port taxing authority and authorized the issuance of the first ad valorem tax bonds to be used to divert the Brazos River. In 1951, tax bonds were issued to acquire land and construct the first dock and terminal facilities. In 1980, ad valorem tax bonds were again supported to acquire over 8700 acres of land, so the Port could be expanded. From 1987 to 1994, the Port tax rate was increased to support the local sponsor portion to deepen the channel to its current depth of 46 feet.

Many of the industry direct employers in our community selected this area for investment because there is a deep-water channel providing access to global markets. Without these companies, the opportunity for jobs and economic prosperity in the region would be greatly reduced.

After thorough financial analysis, it was determined that the community had a unique opportunity to fund the local sponsor share of the cost to construct of the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project with ad valorem tax supported bonds without raising the Port's total tax rate. This was possible largely due to the more \$26 billion invested or being invested in area refinery/petrochemical plant expansions. The tax abatements granted for many of those projects will soon begin expiring and that new value will be added to the tax roll from 2021 through 2028 which will support holding the total tax rate at its current level. Before the bond issue was presented to voters, the importance of the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project was discussed with the top taxpayers and our Port partners.

Internal and External Factors

The Port Freeport Navigation District spans approximately 87% of Brazoria County encompassing approximately 14 different communities with diverse characteristics and psychographics. To achieve the widest range of impact with the bond package informational campaign, a variety of resources and strategies would need to be employed, as well as the coordination between Port staff, commissioners and other community leaders. In addition, a focus on explaining key aspects of the bond package and project, particularly funding and the Port's capability to issue bonds without the need to raise the current tax rate, was paramount in the passage of the bond package, while at the same time when addressing specific communities, the message would need to be tailored to focus on the community's key issues.

Other challenges encountered throughout the campaign included addressing common misconceptions about the formation and functionality of the Port, correcting



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misinformation published by unreliable sources, and informing those communities furthest in distance from the Port. To address these challenges, the overall Navigation district was subdivided into categories and analyzed by the key challenges that may arise throughout the campaign with an individualized strategy for each subdivision.

2) HOW DOES THE COMMUNICATION USED IN THIS ENTRY COMPLEMENT THE ORGANIZATION'S OVERALL MISSION?

The mission of Port Freeport is to service its customers and stakeholders through the development and marketing of competitive world class navigational capabilities, technically advanced marine and multimodal terminal services and port-related industrial facilities while achieving profits and creating jobs as a leading economic catalyst for the Port and Texas Gulf Coast.

Port Freeport is continually expanding and improving its infrastructure. The deepening and widening enhancements to the Freeport Harbor Channel will improve safety and efficiency and allow carriers to dispatch larger vessels to our Port to achieve greater economies of scale. The benefits resulting from the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project in conjunction with the landside strategic initiatives will provide current and future port tenants additional advantages. When complete, Port Freeport will be the deepest port in Texas.

According to a Texas A&M Transportation Institute study, as of 2016, the Freeport Harbor Channel generated 126,000 direct, indirect, and induced jobs with a total annual economic impact of \$46.2 billion. Along with the recent industry investment in our area, the improvements to the Freeport Harbor Channel is expected to facilitate additional economic growth. A deeper channel and navigation improvements will enable Port Freeport to market the Port for a wider range of global vessels, expand our capacity and customer base, and potentially attract new liner services which will bring more jobs and economic opportunities to the entire region.

The Port Freeport Bond Program Informational Campaign was created to inform members of the community of the importance of Port Freeport, the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project, and the Port Freeport 2018 Bond Package and how the Port and the channel project would enhance the economic vitality of the region.



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3) WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMPONENTS USED FOR THIS ENTRY?

Goal:

To connect with as many members of the community as possible to inform them about the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project and purpose of the bond election.

Objectives:

- On average, at least (2) face-to-face presentation with the community per week from March 12 to May 5
- Create and maintain micro-site with current information and frequently asked questions
- Utilize local media resources to ensure accurate information is disseminated
- Engage Port Freeport employees, local community leaders, chambers and other organizations to act as brand ambassadors by assist with educating other community members of the importance of the bond package

Primary Audiences:

Residents of the Port Freeport Navigation District
Local industry

Secondary Audiences:

State and federal stakeholders
Port partners
Surrounding communities

4) WHAT ACTIONS WERE TAKEN AND WHAT COMMUNICATION OUTPUTS WERE EMPLOYED IN THIS ENTRY?

Strategy

Port Freeport's strategy was to educate the community through a variety of information channels while maintaining transparency, building trust with the community, and following proper regulations as designated by the State of Texas Attorney General.

Tactics

Background Information and Research

Executive leadership (Port Freeport Executive Director/CEO and other Port Directors) and the public affairs team worked together to compile accurate information regarding the technical details of the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project, the benefits of deepening and widening the channel, the financial strategy, feasibility, and effects of



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issuing the bond package, as well as any other additional information that would be pertinent to convey to the community and voters.

A thorough analysis of communities within the Port’s Navigation District was also completed during the initial planning phases of the campaign which included demographics and key issues of importance for each of the identified segments. In addition, a contact list of civic, industry, educational, political, and other organizations within the region was identified which were used in the dissemination of information throughout the campaign.

Printed Informational Materials

Port Freeport collaborated with Cooksey Communications to create a comprehensive informational piece, as well as a focused rack card to be distributed at meetings, presentations, and community events. Approximately 2000 copies of the informational brochure (<http://portfreeportbondelection.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/freeport-handout-pages-read-only.pdf>) and over 5000 copies of rack cards were distributed throughout the campaign at presentations, meetings, events, and through the local chambers and organizations.



IMPORTANT BOND ELECTION INFORMATION

ELECTION DAY: MAY 5, 2018
EARLY VOTING: APRIL 23 - MAY 1, 2018





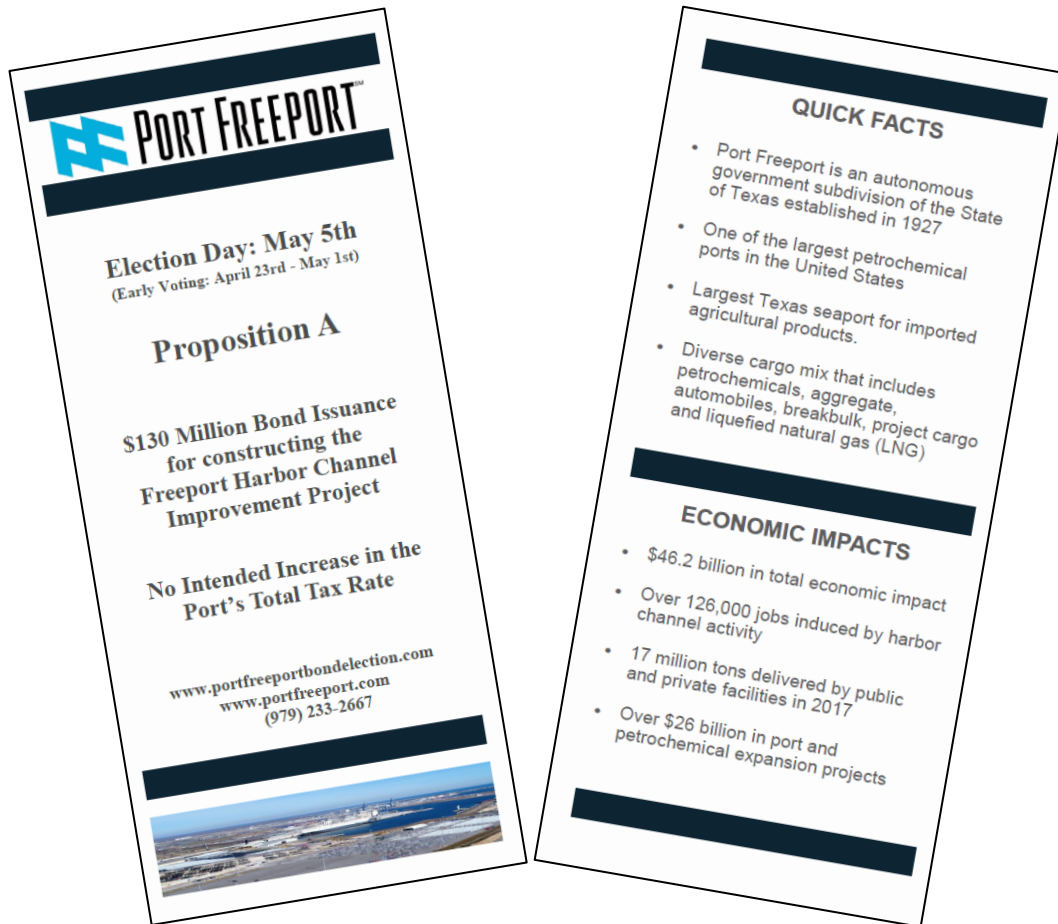
On May 5, 2018, residents in the Port Freeport Navigation District will vote on Proposition A, a \$130 million bond package, which will support the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project to deepen the channel from its current depth of 45 feet to a maximum level of 55 feet at its deepest point. The package is intended to be accomplished without an increase in the Port’s total tax rate of \$0.0401.

This project, when complete, will allow larger ships to access the port. This is expected to increase the Port’s capacity and its customer base, enabling the Port to market itself to a wider range of global vessels and potentially attract new liner services.

Enclosed is background information about the Bond Election and the Freeport Harbor Channel Improvement Project.

BOND ELECTION KEY FACTS

<b style="font-size: 1.2em;">\$130M BOND PACKAGE	<b style="font-size: 0.8em;">DEEPENS CHANNEL TO 55 FEET	<b style="font-size: 0.8em;">NO INTENDED TAX RATE INCREASE
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Community Presentations – [Click here to view presentation.](#)

From March to May, executive leadership for Port Freeport traveled throughout the Navigation District to deliver presentations on Port Freeport and the bond package. These presentations allowed leadership to directly reach over 1,320 people providing accurate information, creating relationships, and answering questions. The organizations included in these presentations were chambers of commerce, civic, industry, and political groups.

[Link to Calendars](#)

Bond and Project Specific Micro-website
<http://www.portfreeportbondelection.com>



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The Port Freeport Bond Election web page was created as a source for Port Freeport to share all information regarding the bond package and channel project. The website also housed information pertinent to the election and voting process and was written in English and Spanish.

Key components:

- Homepage
- About the Project
- Project Funding
- About Port Freeport
- Port Freeport's Strategic Vision
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Meetings and Events
- News and Media Resources

The page continues to be used and will be updated throughout the various phases of the project.

Press Releases

Port Freeport issued several press releases from the initial calling of the bond election through to the passage of the bond package and even beyond to the approval of the Channel Project's General Reevaluation and Review.

- February 16, 2018 – [PORT FREEPORT COMMISSIONERS CALL FOR \\$130 MILLION BOND ELECTION TO SUPPORT CHANNEL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT](#)
- April 3, 2018 – [VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE APPROACHING FOR MAY 5TH PORT FREEPORT BOND ELECTION](#)
- April 23, 2018 – [EARLY VOTING FOR PORT FREEPORT BOND ELECTION TAKES PLACE APRIL 23](#)
- May 7, 2018 – [VOTERS APPROVE \\$130 MILLION PORT FREEPORT BOND PACKAGE](#)

Media coverage

Local media coverage options are limited in Brazoria County to 3 local newspapers: The Facts, The County News, and The Bulletin with The Facts leading in readership. The public affairs team has a close relationship with key reporters for all news sources. Shortly after the bond election was called, leadership met with reporters and provided



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key information to assist in writing stories and maintained open communication throughout the entire campaign.

Frequently Asked Questions – [Link to FAQ's](#)

Throughout the bond package informational campaign, several recurring questions were asked by members of the community. In an effort to respond to these questions most efficiently, a Frequently Asked Questions section was created for the micro-site. As questions would arise, they were added to the webpage. These questions were also provided to staff and commissioners throughout the campaign to ensure that uniform responses were provided.

Social Media - <https://www.facebook.com/portfreeport/>: Port Freeport utilized social media channels including Facebook and LinkedIn prior to the bond election as a key resource for engaging with our community on a weekly and often daily basis. For the bond package informational campaign, social media channels acted as an additional communications outlet for press releases, as well as a platform for the public to ask questions.

Brand ambassadors

Port Freeport staff were engaged throughout the bond package informational campaign as brand ambassadors to increase the awareness in the community of the bond election and channel project, as well as to act as a liaison for any questions or concerns that may arise from community members. Weekly 5-Minute "Frequently Asked Questions" Workshops were held for each department where staff were briefed on any new information through talking points ([Talking Points](#)), provided informational materials for distribution, and were given the opportunity to ask any questions or provide information from the public. Weekly workshops continued post-bond election as a way for the Public Affairs team and directors to be engaged with each department and the community.

Brazoria County and the communities within the Port Freeport Navigation District are characterized by influential community leaders, strong Chambers of Commerce and active civic and industry organizations. Engaging the resources of these community powerhouses was key to furthering the reach of the bond package informational campaign.

Implementation

Timeline

February 2018: Port Freeport Commission calls \$130 million bond election

February 2018: Campaign research and strategic planning

March 2018: Production of informational materials



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March 15, 2018: www.portfreeportbondelection.com goes live

March - May 2018: Community presentations, press releases, and distribution of informational materials

May 5, 2018: Port Freeport \$130 million bond package is approved by voters

Staffing

While all port staff played a role as ambassadors of the Port, key players in the bond package informational campaign included all Port Freeport Executive Director/CEO, Port directors and the Public Affairs Team, as well as the Port Freeport Commission.

Outsourcing

A contracted strategic communications firm assisted with the graphic creation for the information pieces, micro-site, and PowerPoint presentation.

Post-bond election initiatives

With the passage of the bond package, Port Freeport remains committed to keeping the community informed of all aspects of the project, including bond issuance and construction timeline. Materials such as informational brochures, presentation, and the micro-site continue to be key communication tools for the community. In addition, the Public Affairs team continues to foster the relationships that were formed throughout the bond campaign to ensure that all communities are informed of the progress at Port Freeport.

5) WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS OUTCOMES FROM THIS ENTRY AND WHAT EVALUATION METHODS WERE USED TO ASSES THEM?

Objective:

On average, at least (2) face-to-face presentations with the community per week from March 12 to May 5 (8 weeks)

Result:

Public Affairs staff worked diligently to connect with over 40 local organizations to book opportunities to provide presentations. From March 12 to May 5, 34 presentations were given to over 1,320 members of the community resulting in an average of 4 presentations per week.

Objective:

Create and maintain micro-site with updated information and frequently asked questions

Result:

On March 15th, www.portfreeportbondelection.com was launched providing visitors with



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accurate and up-to-date information on the channel project and bond election, including the calendar of speaking engagements that the community could participate in. Visitors were directed to the website through Port Freeport's main home page, and the website was listed on all printed informational materials. Public Affairs staff played a key role in the development and maintenance of the website.

Objective:

Utilize local media resources to ensure accurate information is disseminated

Result:

Between February 15 and May 7, Port Freeport received local media coverage with several articles written to highlight the Port Freeport bond issue:

February 19, 2018 (The Facts) – [Port puts \\$130M bond issue before voters](#)

February 21, 2018 (The Facts) – [OUR VIEWPOINT: Port bond plan will help keep economy strong](#)

February 22, 2018 (The County News) – [Port Freeport plans bond election](#)

March 29, 2018 (The Facts) – [CEO: 'Ships have gotten bigger'- Port Freeport officials seek \\$130M bond support](#)

April 6, 2018 (The Facts) – [Port Freeport seeks bond support](#)

April 24, 2018 (The Bulletin) – [Port Freeport floats bond issue for channel deepening](#)

May 6, 2018 (The Facts) – [Port bond passes: Taxpayer funds will help pay for channel deepening project after port voters give go-ahead](#)

These articles, as well as the Letters to the Editor, were instrumental in reaching a large audience spanning the entire Navigation District, ultimately playing a role in the passage of the bond package.

Objective:

Engage local community leaders, chambers and other organizations to assist with educating other community members of the importance of the bond package

Result:

Local community leaders, chambers of commerce, and organizations played a large role in showing their support and disseminating correct information throughout the community in the forms of Letters to the Editors and passing resolutions in support of the bond issue. Greater Angleton Chamber of Commerce, Brazosport Chamber of Commerce and The Economic Alliance of Brazoria all approved resolutions in support of the Port Freeport Bond Package.



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Excerpts from Letters to Editor:

April 28, 2018 (Alfred Wise, Brazoria) – *“The Port Freeport tax bond...will improve the harbor’s ability to serve the many needs of the companies’ continued access to deep water, thereby lowering costs of transportation of their products.”*

May 4, 2018 (James Saccomanno, Freeport) – *“The port has continued to be the foundation for all of the chemical industry that has developed over the years...Support the port because it supports you. Vote yes.”*

May 4, 2018 (Jesse Hibbetts, Lake Jackson) – *“Port Freeport is a very valuable asset to our communities and the state of Texas. It is very important the port bond issue be passed...For future growth, deepening of the harbor is a necessity. It will help maintain jobs, create more jobs and bring in future business.”*

Summary

The outreach efforts and shared vision between the Port, its partners and the community resulted in the passage of the bond issue on May 5, 2018, followed shortly thereafter with the approval by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers of the General Reevaluation and Review of the Channel Project. With this win, Port Freeport can move forward with the project and create a legacy of continued economic opportunity and prosperity for the region that can support future generations just as others did before. In addition, throughout the bond package informational campaign, relationships were initiated and fostered which has increased awareness and overall trust of Port Freeport and its vision for the future.