



## The American Waterways Operators

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Jill Bessetti  
Vice President – Southern Region

September 8, 2026

Mr. Doug Blakemore  
Bridge Administration Branch Chief  
U.S. Coast Guard Heartland District  
500 Poydras St.  
New Orleans, LA 70130

Re: Drawbridge Operation  
Regulation; San Bernard River,  
Brazoria County, Texas (USCG-  
2025-0070)

Dear Mr. Blakemore:

The American Waterways Operators is the tugboat, towboat and barge industry's advocate, resource, and united voice for safe, sustainable, and efficient transportation on America's waterways, oceans, and coasts. As the largest segment of the nation's 45,000-vessel domestic maritime fleet, our industry plays a vital part in America's supply chain and national security, moving the nation's commerce on U.S. inland and intracoastal waterways, the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf Coasts, and the Great Lakes. On behalf of our over 300 members, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Coast Guard's proposed rule to authorize remote operation of the Union Pacific Railroad Drawbridge that crosses the San Bernard River at mile 20.7.

AWO appreciates the Coast Guard's incorporation of our recommendation that the bridge be maintained in the open-to-navigation position in the event of an operational failure and the change to 24-hour operations as outlined in the proposed regulation. This approach appropriately prioritizes the safety and right of way of vessel traffic and reflects the Coast Guard's commitment to responsible oversight of remotely operated bridges. This is a meaningful improvement that addresses one of our core concerns regarding the risks posed by remote bridge operations.

Recognizing this operational improvement, AWO reiterates two safety recommendations raised in our previous comments and one additional recommendation that was not addressed in this proposed rule. We encourage the Coast Guard to consider the following recommendations in future Coast Guard actions:

## **Bridge Remote/Automated Operation Request Guide**

We encourage the Coast Guard to begin posting information submitted through the Bridge Remote/Automated Operation Request Guide to the Federal Register. While we understand the sensitivity of certain information contained within this guide, AWO believes “Section 4: Remote Operations Plan” and “Section 5: Contingency Plan” provide valuable insight for navigation stakeholders in the evaluation of these notices.

### **Incident Investigation**

The growing number of incidents and near-misses involving remote and movable bridge operations underscores the need for comprehensive safety protocols and operational guidelines. We request the Coast Guard fully investigate and document incidents involving remote and movable bridge operations. We offer our continued support to help the Coast Guard coordinate best practices for vessel operators to minimize risk before authorizing further requests for remote or automated bridge operations.

In addition to the recommendations above, we urge the Coast Guard to clearly define which radio channel vessel operators will need to use when requesting a bridge opening and the location of the bridge in question in a final rule, if one is issued. The notice states that VHF-FM Channel 10 is used in the background and discussion sections, while the proposed regulatory text directs operators to use VHF-FM Channel 9. The notice also locates the bridge at mile 20.7; however, the proposed regulatory text does not reiterate this location as is noted in other bridge operation regulations. These distinctions are critical so that operators and regulators understand the proper authorized operations and where the bridge is located.

AWO looks forward to seeing these recommendations addressed in future Coast Guard actions as the agency continues to strengthen its framework for movable and remote bridge operations and oversight. We remain committed to working collaboratively with the Coast Guard and bridge owners and operators to promote the safe and efficient movement of vessels on America’s waterways.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed rule. AWO would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information as needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Bessetti", with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Jill Bessetti**

Vice President – Southern Region  
The American Waterways Operators