Texans Make Their Pitch
For Superport Location

GALVESTON, Tex. — Some 50 persons testified here yesterday at a hearing before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concerning locating a superport, offshore unloading system, off the coast of Texas.

Three Texas Congressmen led off the persons testifying at the day-long hearing, which also included comments from environmentalists, court officials, chamber of commerce representatives and transportation and industry interests.

All of the speakers could not agree on location of a superport, however, and consideration was also given to developing an on-shore facility and constructing more than one port in the Gulf.

Texas Gov. Preston Smith, seeking re-election to a third term this year, was not present at the hearing but sent a representative who said the governor “place the full support of his office” behind the concept of an on-shore deep water port facility.

Lt. Gov. Ben Barnes sent a statement endorsing the superport concept, and no state elected official was present at the hearing.

U.S. Rep. Jack Rogers pushed a port of 70-foot depth, commenting that “consideration should be given to pros and cons of an onshore facility as well as an offshore port. It may well be that when the costs of storage facilities for bulk cargo in an offshore facility are considered, an onshore facility will prove to be economically superior.”

The Corpus Christi port was among the most enthusiastic, detailing studies already completed for building an onshore facility with depths of 72 feet capable of handling tankers of 275,000 deadweight tons.

Deadweight tonnage is measured by weight after cargo, crew and supplies are on board.

Texas has no channels deeper than 40 feet and existing channels are able to handle tankers and other vessels which average 47,000 deadweight tons.

Unusual Proposal

One of the more unusual proposals came from Robert H. Chitwood of Cities Service Oil Co. That company along with Continental Oil Co. and Phillips Petroleum Co. has been studying offshore developments.

“We believe the Gulf Coast areas will need at least two offshore crude oil unloading terminals by the mid-1970s in order to provide the benefits made possible by supertankers in a climate of rapidly rising oil import requirements.”

Chitwood said several types of facilities were considered in their studies, including a berthing system, a multi-buoy system, a single-point mooring facility and even an artificial island.

For the Gulf Coast, he believes the single point mooring or mono-buoy system is superior due to its safety, flexibility, low investment requirement, economy of operation, short construction time and its minimum environmental disturbance features.

And, he added, ten mono-buoy offshore unloading systems could be deployed along the Gulf Coast for the same investment required for a single artificial island superport.

Those who appeared stressed environmental considerations but two representatives of ecology groups were also on hand.

V. A. Kelly, Brazosport, of the Citizen's Survival Committee, said his group at the present time support the offshore port concept “with reservations.” The conservationist organization will be looking at the proposed port’s location, financing, governing jurisdiction and other issues, Kelly said.

Dr. Mason Guest of the Galveston Sierra Club outlined a number of considerations in building and operating a superport. He noted the predicted fuel energy crisis and rising transportation costs but said superport technology must be weighed against possible damage and the costs of oil spills.

While the world’s future food needs are also an issue, he told the packed hearing at the Moody Civic Center auditorium that one acre of marshland or estuary is comparable to five acres of corn.

Other words of caution came from Dr. Eliezer Ereli, law professor and executive director of the Texas Law Institute Foundation.

Ereli said the concept of one superport is against federal practice and theory inasmuch as it would mean that existing industry would relocate and new industry would gravitate to one area at the expense of others.

One superport also has drawbacks in safety — i.e., collisions and oil spills — and traffic control and transportation factors.

Numerous tankers will travel to and from a central point, raising accident possibilities, while the flow of inland water traffic may congest already crowded waterways, he said.

“A more viable concept than ‘winner takes all’... would be a series of offshore terminals,” he said.

Representatives of six ports were there: Brownsville, Freeport, Houston, Galveston, Corpus Christi and Port Arthur.

In addition to the mayor of Galveston, the Galveston Chamber of Commerce was represented along with chambers from Texas City-Lamar, Nederland and Houston.

Carl Leon Pickett of Pick Associates announced that his firm has begun a 100,-000-acre land acquisition at an unnamed site and a superport will be built 16 miles offshore.

Boasting an “undersea community” with a giant tube on the ocean floor for transport, the firm will develop a resort city to be called “Amber, Tex.”

That giant tube will carry fluid lines, various size conveyors for bulk ore, grains and containerized units providing transportation to and from the “undersea community.”

Pickett is a Houston real estate broker who failed to pay the $400 filing fee or submit a nominating petition to qualify for a spot on the May 6 primary ballot in the governor’s race. He has filed suit to be placed on the ballot.