

Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River



Photo by LT Brooke Cumbie-Lopez, Sector New Orleans Waterway Management Division

User Manual

Edition 2026



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[Vessel Traffic Services Locations | Navigation Center](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for reviewing the Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Lower Mississippi River (LMR) User Manual. This manual contains information that will help you understand the services provided by VTS LMR and satisfies the federal regulatory requirement of the Code of Federal Regulations, 33 CFR §161.4, that VTS Users carry the rules.

VTS LMR is standing by to help you transit the Vessel Traffic Service Area (VTSA) safely and efficiently. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at:

d08-dg-vtsneworleans-sups@uscg.mil

If you would like to send paper correspondence, please use the below address:

**Coast Guard Sector New Orleans
ATTN: Vessel Traffic Service
200 Hendee St.
New Orleans, LA 70114**

To make reports as required throughout this User Manual, please call the VTS LMR Watch Floor anytime at **(504) 365-2514**.

To contact the Sector New Orleans Command Center, please call **(504) 365-2200**.

Copies of this manual are available online at the USCG Navigational Center (NAVCEN) website or by contacting VTS LMR directly.

Caution: Information provided by VTS Lower Mississippi River is, to a large extent, based upon reports from participating vessels and can be no more accurate than the information received. The Coast Guard may not be aware of all hazardous circumstances within the VTS Area, and unreported hazards may confront the mariner at any time.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Mississippi River is approximately 2,348 miles long and is navigable for most of its length, although only small ships go above Baton Rouge, and most of the traffic north of mile 233.9 is tugs and tows. VTS LMR's area of operations extends from Port Hudson Light at MM 254.5 Above the Head of Passes (AHP) about twenty miles above Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the Southwest Pass, and those waters within a 12 nautical mile radius around the Southwest Pass Entrance Light at MM 20.1 Below the Head of Passes (BHP). AHP mileage is measured in statute miles, and the project depth of the river is 50 feet from MM 22 BHP to MM 175 AHP, and 45 feet from MM 175 AHP to MM 232.4 AHP and is maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The bottom and sides of the river are made up of soft mud. The current varies depending on the stage of the river. The current can be as little as 1 knot when the river stage is 1 foot in New Orleans or as much as 6.5 knots when the river reaches 17 feet. The river stage is

measured in several locations. From Pilottown to New Orleans, the gauge used as the standard reference for the height of the river is the Carrollton Gauge located at MM 102.8 AHP in New Orleans. This gauge reading is used to determine clearances on the Nine Mile Highlines (MM 104), Crescent City Connection Highway Bridge, and Huey P. Long Railroad and Highway Bridge. VTS LMR recommends a minimum of a two foot air gap for all vessels transiting under bridges in the VTS LMR VTSA. All vessels planning transits with an air gap of less than two feet must contact the VTS. Air gap information is available below at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS) website that provides real-time direct measurement of the vertical clearance in the Main Navigation Channel from the lowest steel on the bridge to the waterline on the Crescent City Connection Highway Bridge and the Huey P. Long Highway Bridge:

[PORTS: Lower Mississippi River PORTS - NOAA Tides & Currents](#)

DEFINITIONS

AIS	As defined in 33CFR164.46, Automatic Identification System means a maritime navigation safety communications system that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Provides vessel information, including the vessel's identity, type, position, course, speed, navigational status and other safety-related information automatically to appropriately equipped shore stations, other ships, and aircraft;▪ Receives automatically such information from similarly fitted ships, monitors and tracks ships; and▪ Exchanges data with shore based facilities
COTP	The U.S. Coast Guard officer commanding a Captain of the Port Zone
New Orleans Traffic	The voice call sign for the facility that coordinates the vessel traffic service operation.
Reporting Point	The geographic locations where a vessel is required to make a VMRS position report. For VTS LMR users, the reporting points can be found in this user manual along with 33CFR161.65(f).
VMRS	This is a mandatory reporting system used to monitor and track vessel movements and allow for VTS provision of relevant information and instructions. This is accomplished by a vessel providing information under established procedures as set forth in this part in the areas defined in Table 161.12(c) or in this User Manual.
VMRS User	A vessel, or an owner, operator, charterer, Master, or person directing the movement of a vessel that is required to participate in a VMRS as defined in

33CFR161.16.

Unless otherwise stated, the provisions above apply to the following vessels and VMRS users:

- Every power-driven vessel of 40 meters (approximately 131 feet) or more in length, while navigating;
- Every towing vessel of 8 meters (approximately 26 feet) or more in length, while navigating; or
- Every vessel certificated to carry 50 or more passengers for hire, while engaged in trade.

VTS A service implemented by the United States Coast Guard designed to improve the safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment. The VTS has the capability to interact with marine traffic and respond to traffic situations developing in the VTS area and provide all three essential VTS services; Information Service, Navigation Assistance Service and Traffic Organization Service.

VTS Measure A VTS may issue measures (to multiple vessels) or directions (to a single vessel) to enhance navigation and vessel safety and to protect the marine environment, such as, but not limited to;

- Designating temporary reporting points and procedures;
- Imposing vessel operating requirements; or
- Establishing vessel traffic routing schemes

VTS User A VTS User means a vessel or an owner, operator, charterer, Master, or person directing the movement of a vessel within a VTS Area that is:

- Subject to the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act;
- Required to participate in a VMRS; or
- Equipped with a required Coast Guard type-approved Automatic Identification System (AIS)

VTS Special Area A VTS Special Area means a waterway within a VTS area in which special operating requirements apply.

VTS Area The geographical area encompassing a specific VTS area of service. This area of service may be subdivided into zones for the purpose of allocating responsibility to individual Vessel Traffic Centers.

VTC The shore-based facility that operates the vessel traffic service for the VTS area.

PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS and RESPONSIBILITIES

VTS and VMRS Users Must:

- Comply with all established VTS measures or directions issued by VTS LMR.
- If unable to safely comply with a measure or direction issued by the VTS, deviate only to the extent necessary to avoid endangering persons, property or the environment. Report the deviation to the VTS as soon as practicable.
- Monitor the VTS radio frequency at all times while operating within the VTS Area and respond promptly when hailed.
- Carry onboard and maintain for ready reference a copy of the VTS Regulations, as outlined in this User Manual.
- Notify the VTS or Sector New Orleans Command Center of any of the following:
 - Marine casualty as defined in 46 CFR; Part 4.05-1;
 - Involvement in the ramming of a fixed or floating object;
 - A pollution incident as defined in 33 CFR, Part 151.15;
 - A defect or discrepancy of any aid to navigation;
 - A hazardous condition as defined in 33 CFR, Part 160.203;
 - Improper operation of vessel equipment required by 33 CFR, Part 164;
 - A situation involving hazardous materials for which a report is required by 49 CFR 176.48; and
 - A hazardous vessel operating condition as defined in 33 CFR, Part 161.2.

Master's Responsibilities:

The safe operation of a vessel remains the responsibility of the vessel master. If, in a specific circumstance, a VTS User is unable to safely comply with a measure or direction issued by the VTS, the VTS User may deviate only to the extent necessary to avoid endangering persons, property or the environment. The deviation shall be reported to the VTS as soon as practicable.

AUTOMATED IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM (AIS) CARRIAGE

The implementation of AIS carriage was initiated and completed in a phased approach in 2003-2004. AIS shall be carried and be fully operational and properly configured in accordance with 33 CFR 164.46. The below information provides details on the specifics of AIS class devices:

- (1) AIS Class A device. The following vessels must have on board a properly installed, operational Coast Guard type-approved AIS Class A device:
 - (i) A self-propelled vessel of 65 feet or more in length, engaged in commercial service.
 - (ii) A towing vessel of 26 feet or more in length and more than 600 horsepower, engaged in commercial service.

- (iii) A self-propelled vessel that is certificated to carry more than 150 passengers.
- (iv) A self-propelled vessel engaged in dredging operations in or near a commercial channel or shipping fairway in a manner likely to restrict or affect navigation of other vessels.
- (v) A self-propelled vessel engaged in the movement of:
 - (A) Certain dangerous cargo as defined in 33 CFR 160, subpart C, or
 - (B) Flammable or combustible liquid cargo in bulk that is listed in 46 CFR 30.25-1, Table 30.25-1.

(2) AIS Class B device. Use of a Coast Guard type-approved AIS Class B device in lieu of an AIS Class A device is permissible on the following vessels if they are not subject to pilotage by other than the vessel Master or crew:

- (i) Fishing industry vessels;
- (ii) Vessels identified in paragraph (1)(i) of this section that are certificated to carry less than 150 passengers and that-
 - (A) Do not operate in a VTS or VMRS area defined in 33 CFR 161, and
 - (B) Do not operate at speeds in excess of 14 knots; and
- (iii) Vessels identified in paragraph (1)(iv) of this section engaged in dredging operations.

NOTE: Under 33 USC 1223(b)(3) and 33 CFR 160.111, a Coast Guard Captain of the Port (COTP) may restrict the operation of a vessel if he or she determines that by reason of weather, sea conditions, other hazardous circumstances, or the condition of such vessel, the restriction is justified in the interest of safety. In certain circumstances, if a COTP is concerned that the operation of a vessel not subject to 33 CFR 164.46 would be unsafe, the COTP may determine that voluntary installation of AIS by the operator would mitigate that concern. Fishing industry vessels include fishing vessels, fish processing vessels, and fish tender vessels as defined in 46 USC 2101.

MARINE CASUALTY

Any owner, operator, charterer, master or person directing the movement of a vessel which is subject to the vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act (reference 33 CFR 26.03) is required to notify the VTS or Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Command Center, as soon as practicable, of the following:

- a. Marine Casualty (as defined in 46 CFR 4.05-1)
- b. Collision
- c. Allision
- d. Pollution spill (as defined in 33 CFR 151.15) or Hazardous Material (49 CFR 176.48)
- e. Aid to Navigation discrepancy, outage or damage
- f. Hazardous conditions (as defined in 33 CFR 160.203)
- g. Improper operation of vessel equipment required by 33 CFR 164
- h. Hazardous vessel operating condition (as defined in 33 CFR 161.2)

Even though notification may be made verbally to the VTS of the incident, submission of a Coast Guard form CG-2692 "Report of Marine Casualty" may still be required. For further instructions on how to submit a CG-2692, contact the Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Command Center at 504-365-2200.

SPECIAL AREAS

Three Special Areas exist in the VTS LMR VTS Area. A Special Area is a waterway within a VTS area in which special operating requirements apply. The three Special Areas are:

- **Algiers Point.** Encompasses an area in the heart of the New Orleans Harbor VMRS. The boundaries of the VTS Special Area are MM 93.5 AHP to MM 95.0 AHP. This is only a Special Area during periods of high water, which is when the Carrollton Gauge reads 8.0 feet or above on a rising stage or 9.0 feet or above on a falling stage, or under any other water conditions the Captain of the Port (COTP) deems necessary. The requirements associated with the Algiers Point Special Area are:
 - No vessel shall enter or get underway without prior approval of the VTS and must abide by any direction or measure issued by the VTS.
 - A vessel awaiting a VTS direction to proceed must keep clear of other vessels transiting.
 - Vessels shall not enter the Special Area if a hazardous vessel operating condition or circumstance exists, as defined in 33CFR161.2, without prior approval from the COTP.
 - Vessels shall not meet, cross, or overtake any other vessel in the Special Area without prior approval from the VTS. If the VTS approves the maneuver, before executing the maneuver, vessels shall communicate on the designated bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone frequency intended navigation movements and any other information necessary in order to make safe passing arrangements.

- **Eighty-one Mile Point.** The boundaries of the Eighty-one Mile Point Special Area are MM 177.5 AHP to MM 179 AHP. This is only a Special Area during periods of high water, which is when the Carrollton Gauge reads 8.0 feet or above on a rising stage or 9.0 feet and above on a falling stage, or under any other water conditions the COTP deems necessary. The requirements associated with the Eighty-one Mile Point Special Area are:
 - To permit ready maneuverability and safe handling, vessels are prohibited from transiting with insufficient power. Insufficient power is defined in this section as being unable to maintain a speed of at least 3 miles per hour.
 - Vessels shall not enter the Special Area if a hazardous vessel operating condition or circumstance exists, as defined in 33 CFR 161.2, without prior approval from the COTP.
 - Vessels shall not meet, cross, or overtake any other vessel in the Special Area without prior approval from the VTS. If VTS approves the maneuver, but before executing the maneuver, vessels shall communicate on the designated vessel bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone frequency the intended navigation movements and any other information necessary in order to make safe passing arrangements.

- **Wilkinson Point.** The boundaries of the Wilkinson Point Special Area are MM 233.8 AHP to MM 236 AHP. This is only a Special Area during periods of high water, which is when the Baton Rouge Gauge reads 35.0 feet or above on a rising stage or 38 feet and above on a falling stage, or under any other water conditions the COTP deems necessary. The requirements associated with the Wilkinson Point Special Area are:
 - All downbound traffic will transit the Wilkinson Point Special Area between sunrise and sunset (daylight) only. Upbound traffic will transit between sunset and sunrise. Exceptions to this rule must be coordinated with the VTS.
 - Towing vessels must include horsepower and type of propulsion in the initial sailing plan report to the VTS.

RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

VTS LMR radio channels have been divided into three permanent and one temporary/as needed geographical zones. The permanent zones are:

- Ch. 1005 (05A): MM 254.5 to 109.0 AHP
- Ch. 12: MM 109.0 to 86.0 AHP
- Ch. 11: MM 86.0 to a 12-mile radius around Southwest Pass Entrance Light at 20.1 miles BHP

The temporary zone is only utilized during high water operations in Baton Rouge, when the Baton Rouge Gauge reads 35 feet and rising. The temporary zone is:

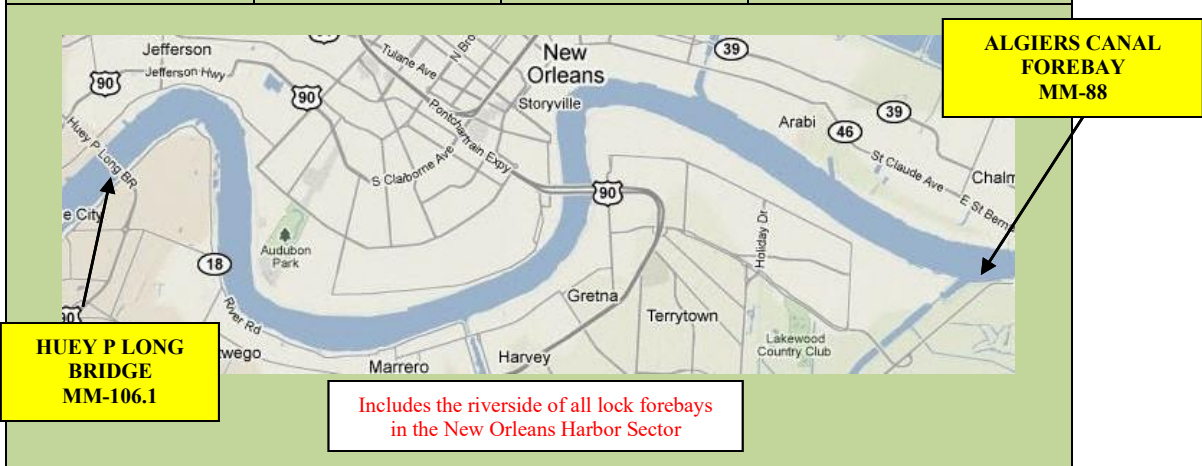
- Ch. 1063 (63A): MM 255 AHP to MM 219 AHP

The bridge-to-bridge radio frequency, Ch. 67, is also monitored by VTS LMR.

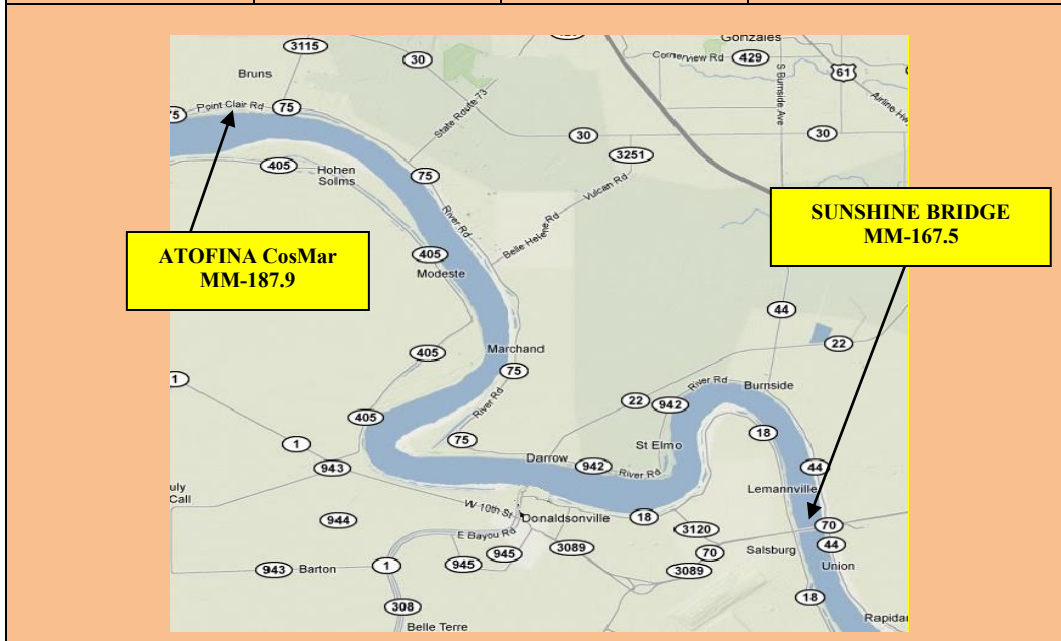
Channel 16 (156.80 MHz) exemption for VTS users: A listening watch on channel 16 is not required on vessels subject to the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act who are also participating in a Vessel Traffic Service system when the watch is maintained on both the vessel bridge-to-bridge frequency and a designated VTS frequency (47 CFR 80.148 (b)).

VTS LMR Vessel Movement Reporting System Areas (VMRS)

AREA	CALL SIGN	RADIO CHANNEL	BACKUP COMMUNICATION
New Orleans Harbor: MM-88 to MM-106.1	New Orleans Traffic	12 VHF-FM	Telephone: 504-365-2514



AREA	CALL SIGN	RADIO CHANNEL	BACKUP COMMUNICATION
81 Mile Point: MM-187.9 to MM-167.5	New Orleans Traffic	1005 (05A) VHF-FM	Telephone: 504-365-2514



There are currently two permanent (New Orleans Harbor and Eighty-one Mile Point) and one temporary/as needed (Wilkinson Point, activated when the Baton Rouge Gauge is over 35 feet as indicated in the Waterways Action Plan Baton Rouge Annex) VMRS Areas that require vessels to check-in and out with VTS LMR.

AREA	CALL SIGN	RADIO CHANNEL	BACKUP COMMUNICATION
Wilkinson Point: MM-255 to MM-219	New Orleans Traffic	1063 (63A) VHF-FM	Telephone: 504-365-2514

Check-In Requirements

****NOTE:** This User Manual sets specific requirements for vessels in the VTS LMR VTSA who are getting underway within a VMRS Area in less than 15 minutes.

VTS LMR requires VTS Users to provide the below information upon their check-in to the New Orleans Harbor and Eighty-One Mile Point VMRS Areas (and the Wilkinson Point VMRS when activated) as specified by the check point locations to follow.

When entering a VTS LMR VMRS Area, a vessel must report:

- Vessel name and type
- Position

- Destination and ETA
- Intended route
- Time and point of entry
- Dangerous cargo on board

Towing vessels must also provide:

- Number of barges
- Status of Barges (loaded or empty)
- Unusual Conditions that could impact navigation

Check-Out Requirements

When a vessel has checked in to a VTS LMR VMRS Area, it must also check out by providing its name and position when:

- A vessel arrives at its destination; or
- When leaving a VMRS Area

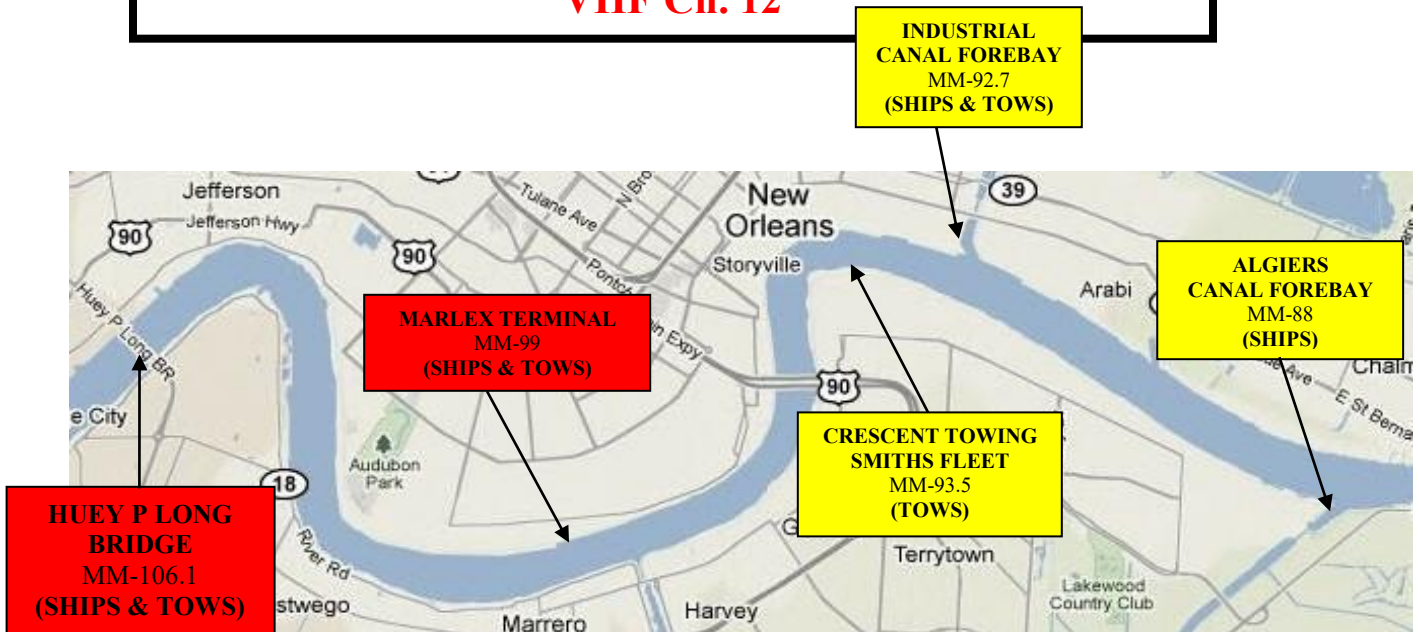
New Orleans Harbor VMRS Check In/ Check Out Points:

33 CFR 161 Table 161.65(f)

VESSEL TYPE	1ST CHECK IN POINT	2ND CHECK IN POINT
Upbound Ships	Algiers Canal Forebay MM 88	Industrial Canal Forebay MM 92.7
Upbound Tows	Industrial Canal Forebay MM 92.7	Crescent Towing Smith Fleet MM 93.5
Downbound Ships & Tows	Huey P. Long Bridge MM 106.1	Marlex Terminal MM 99.0

*Note: Yellow and red boxes correspond to make visual identification easier for users of this Manual. Yellow boxes are for upbound check in locations and red boxes are for downbound check in locations.

VTS LMR
New Orleans Harbor VMRS CHECKPOINTS
VHF Ch. 12

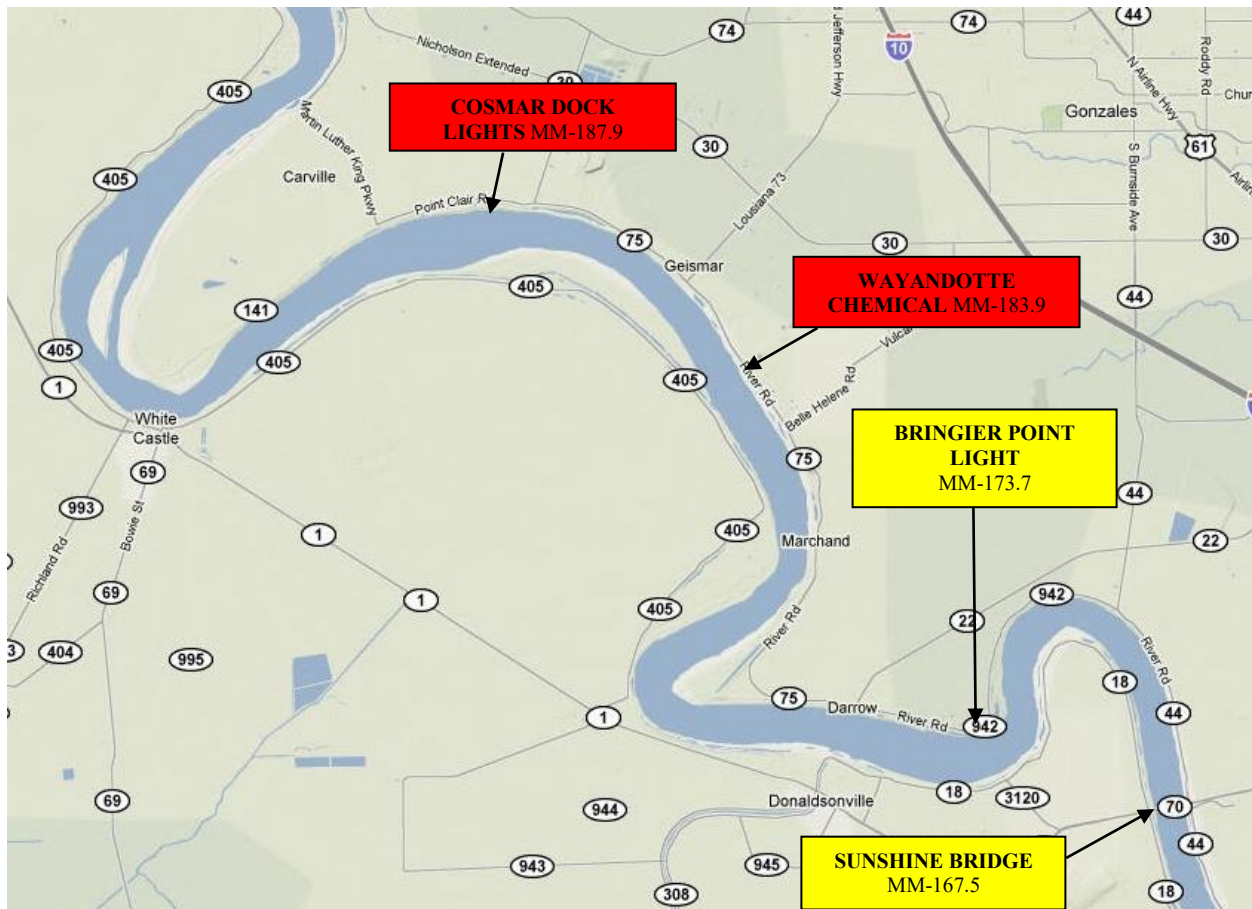


Eighty-One Mile Point VMRS Check In/Check Out Points:

33 CFR 161.65(e)

VESSEL TYPE	1 ST CHECK IN POINT	2 ND CHECK IN POINT
Upbound Ships and Tows	Sunshine Bridge MM-167.5	Bringer Point Light MM-173.7
Downbound Ships and Tows	CosMar Light MM-187.9	Wyandotte Chemical Dock Lights MM-183.9

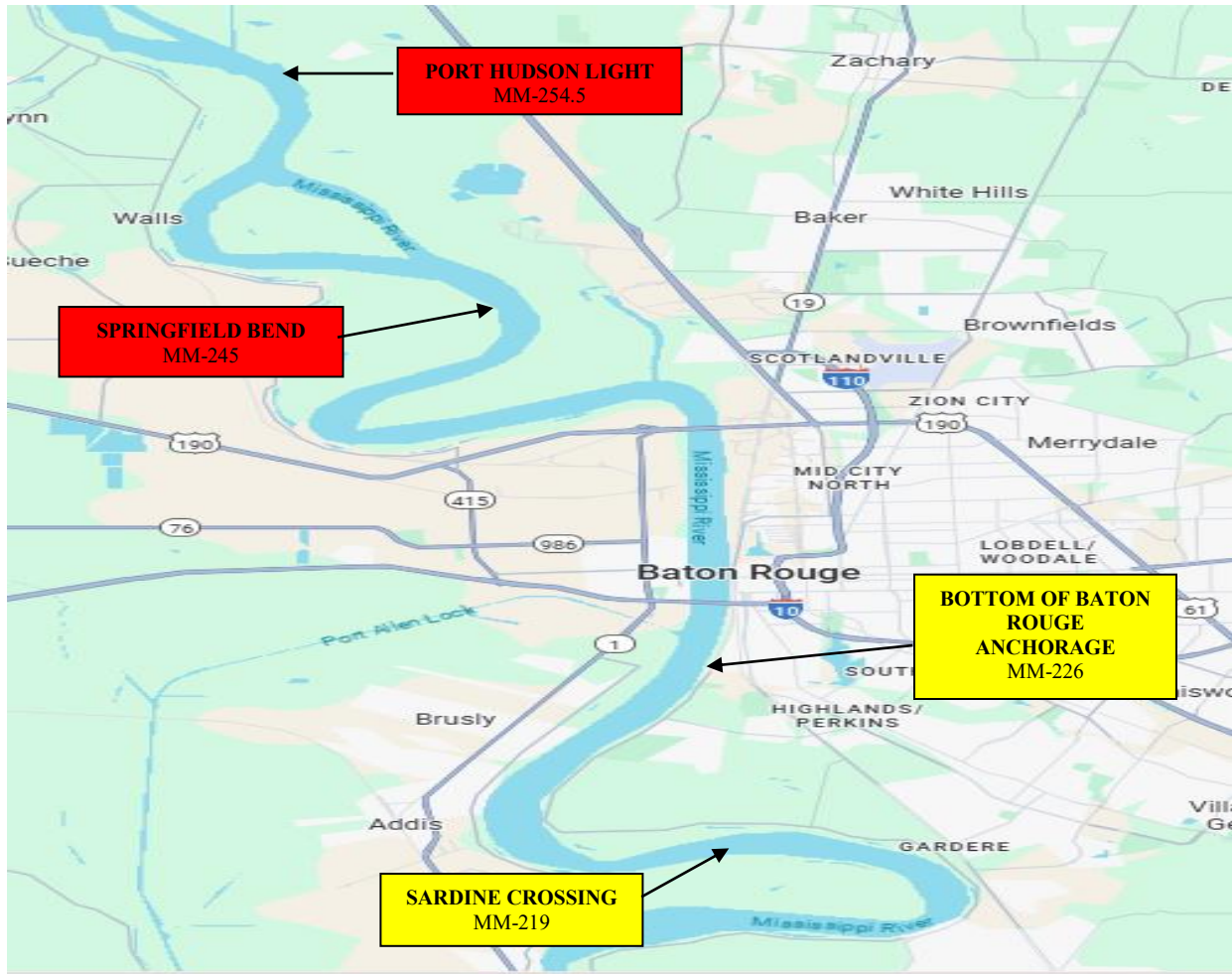
VTS LMR
Eighty-One Mile Point VMRS CHECKPOINTS
VHF Ch. 1005 (05A)



Wilkinson Point VMRS Check In/Check Out Points:

VESSEL TYPE	1 ST CHECK IN POINT	2 ND CHECK IN POINT
Upbound Ships and Tows	Sardine Crossing MM-219	Bottom of Baton Rouge Anchorage MM-226
Downbound Ships and Tows	Port Hudson Light MM-254.5	Springfield Bend MM-245

VTS LMR
Wilkinson Point VMRS CHECKPOINTS
VHF Ch. 1063 (63A)



Special Operations in the Algiers Point Special Area (33 CFR 161.65)

Routine Operations: Algiers Point

Routine Operations exist when the river stage is between 2.5 and 8 feet on the Carrollton Gauge in New Orleans. River stages greater than 8 feet are considered high water operations, and river stages less than 2.5 feet are considered low water operations.

All vessels, with the exception of ferries, are required to check in with the VTS prior to entering the New Orleans Harbor VMRS. The Algiers Ferry is not required to check in prior to each crossing; however, this does not diminish the Coast Guard's jurisdiction over the ferry's operation or VTS LMR's responsibility to monitor and direct ferry traffic if necessary to ensure safety. It is the responsibility of the ferry captain to remain aware of the traffic situation around Algiers Point by maintaining a watch on VHF-FM Channel 12 and Channel 67.

During routine operations, VTS LMR Watch Operators are continuously monitoring for potentially unsafe or dangerous navigation or maneuvering situations, and in such cases may issue VTS Directions or Measures as necessary to prevent a collision, allision or other accident.

High Water Operations: Algiers Point

High Water conditions exist when the river stage is 8 feet on the rise on the Carrollton Gauge in New Orleans. Routine operations resume when the Carrollton Gauge reads 9 feet with expectations that it will continue to fall, or as directed by the COTP.

High Water operations are associated with a high river stage where VTS LMR actively controls traffic at Algiers Point. During periods of high water operations, the VTS uses voice radio communications to regulate the movement of all VMRS users within the Algiers Point Special Area.

Vessel movements of light boats and excursion vessels are not normally regulated; however, these vessels are required to check in with the VTS prior to getting underway or a change in route or destination.

The same requirements for the Algiers Ferry as stated in the above Routine Operations section apply for High Water Operations.

More specific requirements for High Water Operations in the Algiers Point Special Area are listed below:

- Meeting Situations or Overtaking Situations. The Algiers Point Special Area shall not have instances of vessels meeting, crossing, or overtaking during high water periods; exceptions will be granted only by VTS LMR. There are only two routine exceptions to the meeting situations in the Algiers Point Special Area:

- Single barge tows where the total length of the tow and barge is 300 feet or less.
- Small ships (not carrying hazardous cargo) 300 feet or less.
- Dangerous Maneuvering Situations. If any vessel is maneuvering dangerously, in a manner which could result in a collision, allision, or other accident, which may include underpowered tows, VTS LMR shall take actions to mitigate the situation. Such actions may include:
 - Alert riverfront installations and facilities of a potentially dangerous situation.
 - Directing vessel movement through VTS Directions (e.g. requiring tug/pilot assistance prior to transiting the Algiers Point Special Area, breaking down a tow, mooring in a location other than the intended destination, etc.).

Dangerous maneuvering situations shall be reported to the VTS LMR Watch Supervisor and the Sector New Orleans Command Center.

- Underpowered Tows. As stated in the Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Waterway Action Plan, towing in any formation by a vessel with insufficient power to permit ready maneuverability and safe handling is prohibited. VTS LMR may direct vessel movement if a tow has insufficient power to transit Algiers Point safely.

High Water Trigger Points and Actions:

When necessary, the Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Captain of the Port institutes various actions based on high water trigger points on the Carrollton Gauge. These trigger points and their associated operating requirements are found in the Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Waterways Action Plan, a copy of which can be found at the link below:

<https://linktr.ee/WWMNOLA>

When necessary, the Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Captain of the Port also institutes various actions for the Mississippi River near Baton Rouge based on high water trigger points on the Baton Rouge Gauge. These trigger points and their associated operating requirements are found in the Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Waterways Action Plan Baton Rouge Annex, a copy of which can be found at the link below:

<https://linktr.ee/WWMNOLA>

Restricted Visibility at Algiers Point

In the interest of safety, VTS LMR may close Algiers Point to navigational traffic due to reduced visibility.

When this occurs, VTS LMR will initiate voice broadcasts on VHF-FM Ch. 12 and transmit a message via the GovDelivery message system stating “Due to reduced visibility in the vicinity of Algiers Point, the Mississippi River at Algiers Point is closed to all traffic. For updates on conditions in this area contact the Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River on VHF-FM Ch. 12 or call 504-365-2514.

Note: If such a situation occurs that warrants passage around Algiers Point during such a period, an exemption must be granted by the VTS. All available assistance from the VTC will be rendered to such vessels if an exemption is granted.

General, Emergency, and Quarantine Anchorages

VTS LMR manages the General, Emergency and Quarantine anchorage areas within the VTS Area on behalf of the Captain of the Port (COTP). General Anchorage can be utilized as needed by commercial vessels, and Quarantine Anchorage can be used in the same manner except when required by the United States Public Health Service for quarantine inspection. However, vessels carrying cargos of particular hazard as defined in 33 CFR 126.10 or cargos of petroleum products in bulk may not be anchored in the General Anchorage or the Quarantine Anchorage without permission from the Captain of the Port. Emergency Anchorage shall not be occupied by a vessel unless expressly authorized by the Captain of the Port, and no vessel may anchor in Emergency Anchorage exceeding 24 hours without the authorization of the Captain of the Port. Contact VTS LMR at 504-365-2514 for questions related to the use of these anchorages. VTS LMR monitors vessels at anchor throughout the VTSA, in case U.S. Coast Guard intervention is necessary to ensure safety. All anchorages throughout the VTS LMR VTSA can be found in 33 CFR 110.195.