

SURGE **FORWARD** **Envisioning an Alternative to the Ike Dike**

What do we mean when we say "Ike Dike"?

"Ike Dike" is shorthand for a \$57 billion project with several components, including: (1) a gate structure stretching across the mouth of Galveston Bay, (2) a 17-foot wall to enclose parts of the city of Galveston, (3) 43 miles of double sand dunes along Bolivar Peninsula and Galveston Island.

How much will this cost and who will pay for it?

The projected cost is \$57 billion, a number that increases every few months. 35% of this cost, plus an additional \$100 million in annual maintenance costs, will be covered locally, likely through property tax increases organized by the Gulf Coast Protection District, which includes Harris, Galveston, Chambers, Jefferson, and Orange Counties.

How does the Ike Dike fall short?

- The timeline for completion is 20 years away, and we need climate protections and adaptation now.
- The project protects against storm surge from a Cat. 3 storm, ignoring that more Cat. 4+ storms are to come.
- The project claims it will prevent chemical spills during major storms but ignores the need for a transition away from fossil fuels and does nothing to address the everyday pollution that many communities are forced to bear.
- The project does not protect against flooding and potentially creates new flood risks for nearby communities.
- During roughly a decade of construction, the project will create new air pollution burdens for communities near the Ship Channel, while doing nothing to reduce sources of industrial pollution they face everyday.
- Environmental risks of the project have not been adequately studied but include irreparable harm to Galveston Bay's water quality, fish and oyster populations, and endangered sea turtles.
- Over a third of the immense cost will be paid locally, and no plans have been made to impose costs on the industrial facilities that pose the greatest risks during storms.
- The gates across Galveston Bay, the project's centerpiece, are too small for boats to pass.

What's the alternative? (Or what else could we do with \$57 billion?)

Rather than seek out silver bullets that fall short of their target, our leaders must embrace infrastructure projects and policy changes to address our region's combined risks from major storms, industrial pollution, and infrastructure disinvestment. The answers are in front of us:

- **Work with nature.** Natural systems work to protect us from flooding and soak up carbon, while giving us a cleaner environment to enjoy our lives in and a region we can be proud to pass on to future generations. Stop building homes and businesses within the 100-year floodplain and on the coast, and preserve and restore large expanses of wetlands, prairies, and coastline. Invest in nature-based systems like parks that can take on floodwater and oyster-terrace that buffer storm surges. Our local leaders, developers, and state government all have power to act, and federal funding opportunities will make an unprecedented investment possible.
- **Make industry safer.** Make industries comply with existing rules, adopt safer rules for facilities handling harmful chemicals, and enforce violations when these rules aren't followed. Require facilities to adapt to withstand Category 4-5 storms and invest in their own climate protections. Federal, state, and local governments share power to act, and advocates can encourage their action through legal strategies.
- **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by shifting rapidly to clean energy sources, like community solar and offshore wind, and investing in public transportation. The Inflation Reduction Act and other recent federal funding bills have opened up unprecedented opportunities to make these investments, and our local and state leaders must not leave any money on the table.
- **View engineered solutions as our last resort.** The real lesson from the Dutch is to invest in nature and supplement with dikes, not the other way around. This project depends on largely engineered components because the Army Corps of Engineers was in charge of designing it. More people must be at the drafting table, including landscape designers, urban planners, climate scientists, and community leaders.
- **Listen to the most impacted communities.** Help residents most vulnerable to flooding and storm surges make their homes safer, and move people out of harm's way if needed. Whether agreeing to invest \$2 billion in sanitary sewer infrastructure or \$60 million in local ditch maintenance, these government commitments began with community members and organizational partners speaking up about the problems they saw in their neighborhoods and fighting to be heard. We call on leaders at all levels to start with deep listening and ask us: ***With \$57 billion, how would you protect our region from climate change? What and who would you protect?***

Recommended reading/listening

- Houston Chronicle: ***Brace for the Storm (Ike Dike flyover)*** <https://tinyurl.com/ikedikeflyover>
- City Cast: ***The Case Against the Ike Dike*** <https://tinyurl.com/CCikedike>
- CITE Digital: ***Surgin ahead*** <https://www.ricedesignalliance.org/cts-review>
- Bayou City Waterkeeper: ***Our Solution To Flooding Has Always Been Here*** <https://tinyurl.com/5CWsolution>

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