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## Metropolitan View

# Carlos Marcello: Land Investor First Class

### By ALLAN KATZ

Carlos Marcello has been wasting his talents all these years. He should have been an investment counselor.

A handsome return on their investment to Marcello and other land speculators is part of the significance of the decision of the U.S. Dept. of Transportation and the State Highway Department this week to begin engineering studies for a new Mississippi River Bridge at Luling, St. Charles Parish.

The bridge at Luling is part of the plans for I-410, the controversial proposed outer loop around New Orleans, which will stretch on the West bank from Luling in St. Charles Parish to another bridge located below Chalmette in St. Bernard Parish.

If built, I-410 will bisect Churchill Farms, which is several miles of swampland, owned by Marcello for years.

**FEDERAL AND STATE** government plan to spend some \$450 million on the two bridges and the highway, not to mention what will be poured into developing secondary roads and levees to make the unimproved swamplands habitable.

Marcello, who has been identified by countless congressional committees, investigators and writers as a racketeer figure also is apparently a superb investor. If I-410 is built, regardless of what else Marcello might be called, he should also be recognized as entrepreneur of the century hereabouts. Government, in effect, will spend hundreds of millions of dollars to make the

swampland he and other investors hold more valuable.

Recently, a group of New Orleans businessmen, including state Sen. Michael H. O'Keefe, president pro tem of the Louisiana Senate, considered buying Churchill Farms but backed off when U.S. Atty. Gerald J. Gallinhouse said he wouldn't tell them it was okay. Apparently, Marcello didn't make them an offer they couldn't refuse. But, if I-410 is built, whoever owns Churchill Farms will have a lot of fun.

**THE GO-AHEAD** by state and federal officials for the I-410 link is a tremendous victory for the state's highway lobby, the developers and speculators. It will open hundreds of thousands of acres on the West Bank to development.

The decision, at the same time, is a crushing setback to ecologists and advocates of good planning.

The ecologists note that I-410 would zip through one of our few remaining wildlife habitats.

And, the planners point out that I-410 does not scratch where New Orleans itches.

**ACCORDING TO ONE** traffic study, the Luling bridge could be expected to be carrying 10,000 cars a day by 1990. The present Greater New Orleans Mississippi River Bridge carries 80,000 cars a day now and is expected to be carrying 120,000 cars a day by 1990.

At present, during peak hours, the Westbank expressway and the Pontchartrain Expressway are not highways

but elongated parking lots on which thousands of cars sit bumper-to-bumper, moving at five miles an hour or less.

I-410 will not relieve this congestion. It will enable speculators to sell their land to developers who will build new suburbs that will pump more cars onto the existing inadequate highway system here.

**THE RECENT RIVER** Area Study noted that bridges at Chalmette and

the Jefferson Highway which grows worse everyday, depreciating the property values of those who made their investments there rather than in St. Charles Parish.

**IN NEW ORLEANS**, while the highway lobby speaks of half a billion dollars for I-410 it is estimated that repair of the horrendous street system would cost \$100 million. For the \$450 million the feds plan to spend on I-410, they could repair the streets of New Or-

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Luling would do nothing to cope with existing traffic problems here and raised the suggestion that perhaps the two bridges, if they are to be built, should be moved closer to the city.

It seems remarkable that by the time they have finished with I-410, state and federal governments will have poured in well in excess of half a billion dollars. Meanwhile, the Westbank Expressway and Pontchartrain Expressway resemble clogged drainpipes at peak hours.

And, Airline Highway and the Jefferson Highway are in a state of decay. Pity the poor people who poured their life savings into property adjacent to

Mayor Moon Landrieu bounces like a ping-pong ball between New Orleans and Washington, lobbying for revenue sharing. Revenue sharing would bring New Orleans about \$12 million a year.

Trying to repair New Orleans' fiscal needs with \$12 million is like trying to repair a leak in a space vehicle with bubble gum. New suburbs, not old cities or old suburbs, are obviously our national priority.

**THE I-410 BATTLE** is not over, happily. It has merely been formally joined. A source in the Department of Transportation (DOT) says that only permission to do engineering studies has been granted. He says that there is much opposition to I-410 within DOT and adds, "We are extremely skittish about this."

After the engineering studies are completed, a design hearing must be held and an environmental impact statement prepared. Citizens have the right to intervene through the courts, if they choose. It will be interesting to see what happens.

The man in the center of all this is Congressman Hale Boggs, the leading proponent of I-410.

Critics of I-410 find it ironic that Congressman Boggs should be fighting for suburban development as his district through reapportionment has steadily moved into the inner city to find constituents more attuned to his moderate-to-liberal voting record than are suburbanites.

**THE IRONY OF I-410** is that it won't

help the inner city at all and will in fact just bring more cars onto city streets. Boggs, who has earned the position of majority leader and could one day be Speaker of the House, has done many things to help New Orleans but I-410 is not one of them.

In fairness to Boggs, at the time he proposed I-410, it was an alternative to the embattled riverfront expressway. Rather than lose the federal funds when the riverfront expressway went down the drain in the late 1960s, recognizing that no one wanted a bridge through his neighborhood, Boggs came up with an outer beltway proposal that would give us two bridges at sites where they weren't controversial.

At the time, no one objected. The congressman was congratulated for saving the federal funds at the last moment. Everyone sighed relief. Now, a few years have passed and perspectives have changed.

**LOOKING AT THE** proposal with hindsight, it was reasonable. Looked at now with foresight, it bids fair to add to our traffic mess while not coming to grips with any of our present or future problems.

Looked at another way, the Department of Transportation, the state Highway department and the highway lobby have never been known for their foresight. Their specialty has been pouring new concrete while old concrete cracks, buckles and becomes potholed.

The only one who gets an "A" for foresight is Carlos Marcello.