



The crew and officers of the USS Comstock salute the battleship USS Iowa as their ship arrives in the Port of Los Angeles on August 27, 2019.
photo: US Navy | Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Hector Carrera

Bid to move USS Iowa (BB-61) resurfaces in effort to more easily attract tourists to waterfront

By Donna Littlejohn
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How do you move a World War II battleship?

Not easily. Or cheaply.

Still, a move for the Battleship USS *Iowa* has been actively talked about and planned for several years and now is getting a renewed push as San Pedro examines how its waterfront attractions can be better connected for visitors and locals alike.

Arguably San Pedro's most popular and unique tourist attraction, the move, which would cost "north of \$20 million" according to a Port of Los Angeles official, would take the historic vessel from its berth near the Vincent Thomas Bridge about a mile south on the waterfront to tie up in the Southern Pacific Slip where the port's commercial fishing boats are based.

That also would put it adjacent to the more southern portions of the new West Harbor waterfront development now underway.

The issue will be brought up, said the battleship group's CEO, when the Port of Los Angeles hosts a community meeting to discuss the recently-released waterfront's draft connectivity plan from 6-8 p.m. Thursday at the port headquarters, 425 S. Palos Verdes St., San Pedro.

The proposed Waterfront Connectivity Plan, released to the public in late June, emerged from the San Pedro neighborhood councils when asked to weigh in on what will be most needed as the waterfront community experiences wide-ranging changes, including new developments that will bring more residents to the town.

For Jonathan Williams — co-founder, president, and chief executive officer of the National Museum of the Surface Navy, Battleship IOWA Museum and president of L.A. Fleet Week Foundation — moving the Iowa is a crucial piece of that overall effort.

"We've been a tourist destination on the waterfront" since the ship arrived in 2012, Williams said.

Indeed, the so-called Battleship of Presidents draws tens of thousands of visitors every year and has made Los Angeles top regional tourism lists for several years.

But increasingly, Williams added, the floating attraction, which anticipates opening the only national museum onboard dedicated to the nation's surface Navy in 2025, seems to be getting lost in moving pieces of San Pedro's growing waterfront tourist destination map.

Several fences have gone up along Harbor Boulevard to set apart the former Red Car trolley line, and in connection with the growing cruise terminal next door and a small park now being built along the street. The area, which also borders the cruise terminal's parking lots, is within what is a security maritime designation that has brought some of the added barriers.

But it feels as if the ship is becoming isolated, Williams said, and is becoming harder to see. It's not well connected, he said, to what will be the new West Harbor waterfront attraction to the south, set to open now in 2025. It's also not visually well connected to San Pedro's historic downtown shopping and dining district.

The Iowa, Williams said, "is now the No. 4-ranked (attraction) on Trip Advisor for all of L.A. It's time to highlight the tourist destination San Pedro has fought so hard for."

But moving the ship to the SP Slip is a costly and complicated prospect.

Mike Galvin, director of Waterfront and Commercial Real Estate at the Port of Los Angeles, said discussions have been ongoing with the Iowa about the potential move since around 2018-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted much of that as the focus has been on funding coming from the port's Public Access Investment Plan that allocates money for waterfront public access projects.

"The Iowa (move) was one of the priorities that came up from the neighborhood councils and chamber," Galvin said. "So now the connectivity plan is resetting the table for those priorities."

The plan is expected to be voted on by the port's five-member commission by the end of this year after further public comment is received.

Moving the Iowa would require dredging at the SP Slip, though Galvin said that would not displace the commercial fishing fleet. But planning and preparations could take more than three years for the move, he said.

He agreed that the fencing in front of the Iowa now has posed a tourist impediment. A playground and park also continues to be built on Harbor Boulevard adding to the visual impediments to the battleship's location.

"There are probably five fences between the promenade (on Harbor Boulevard) and the *Iowa*,"

Galvin said, “so it’s not exactly inviting to that location.”

It’s current spot, Williams said, leaves visitors — even when they do find it — feeling isolated and with no obvious links to other tourist attractions in the immediate area. So, he said, they often tour the ship and then simply leave.

Williams had hoped the Iowa could be moved by the time the Navy museum opens in 2025, but acknowledges it will probably take too long now to get through all the preliminaries.

Galvin said it would take more than three years to do all the preparation work that would include designs and the bid process, along with environmental surveys.

But the new location, Williams said, would put the *Iowa* in an ideal spot with the walkable connection to the new West Harbor waterfront development. It would, he said, increase overall tourist dollars for the area having the ship near the waterfront development that also will include and San Pedro Fish Market.

“In Long Beach,” he said, “people don’t spend one hour (seeing an attraction) they spend 7 or 8 hours. Right now, people coming to the Iowa see a fence” and very little connection to any other visitor spot. What if you took the *Midway* (aircraft carrier in San Diego) and put it behind fences and hid it behind a cruise terminal? A relocation (of the *Iowa*) will result in everybody benefitting, from the community to West Harbor to us.”

This article by the Long Beach Press-Telegram about the Battleship IOWA Museum was published on September 24, 2023, and is being shared with the SSHSA Southern California Chapter Membership as an update on the status of the USS Iowa.