



New Orleans Rail Gateway Program
Jefferson and Orleans Parishes
State Project No. H.005168

Public Scoping Meeting
March 4, 2020



Thank you for attending today's public meeting on the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program.

Special Assistance



- **If you require special assistance due to a disability in order to participate in today's public meeting, please see a Study Team representative at the Welcome Table.**
- **Si necesita asistencia especial debido a una discapacidad para participar en la reunión pública de hoy, consulte a un representante del Equipo de Estudio en la tabla de bienvenida.**



If you require special assistance due to a disability in order to participate in today's public meeting, please see a Study Team Representative at the Welcome Table.



Purpose of Today's Meeting



- **Provide an open-house style (open forum) opportunity to learn about the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program and talk informally with Study Team representatives**
 - **Present an overview of the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Program**
 - **Summarize the status of the 2011 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**
 - **Describe the Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation Study**
 - **Explain how to receive Study information and participate in the decision-making process**
 - **Solicit input on issues of concern regarding this Study**



Today's public meeting is an informal, open-house style or open forum format.

We'll present an:

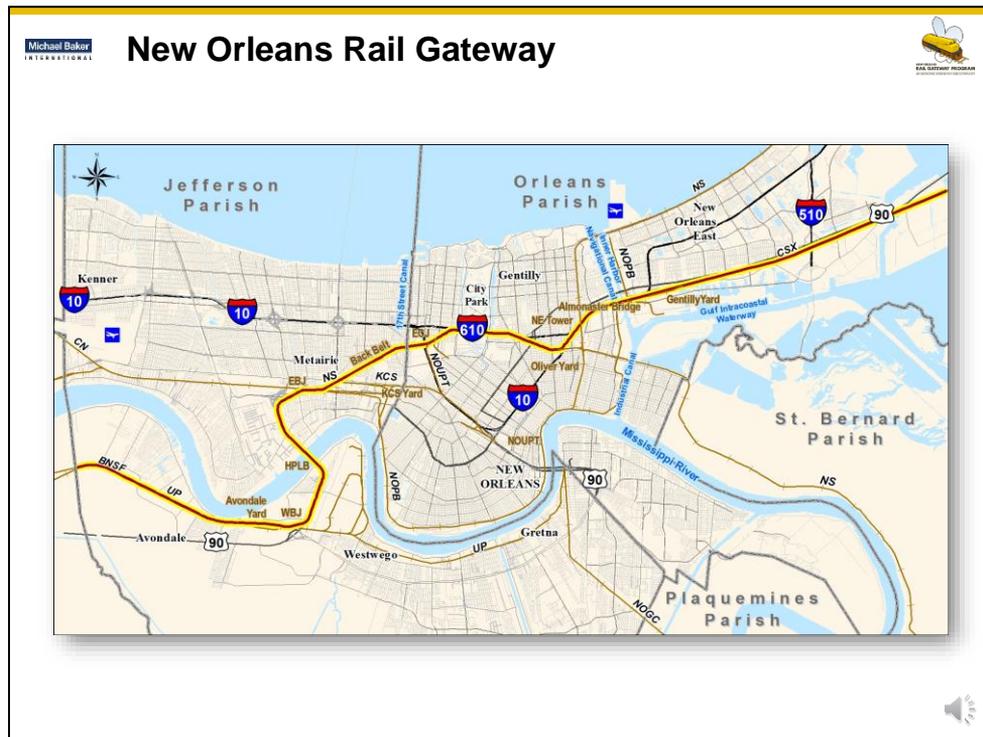
- Overview of the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program;
- Summarize the status of the 2011 Environmental Impact Statement;
- Describe the Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation Study; and
- Provide an opportunity for all interested parties to express their views.

In order to get the most out of this presentation, please refer to the materials that were handed out at the Welcome Table.

After you've listened to this presentation, review the project exhibits, talk with Study Team representatives, and give us your comments.

This public meeting is an important part of the transportation decision-making process and your input is encouraged and appreciated.

We hope you find this meeting interesting and informative.



The New Orleans Rail Gateway is shown in yellow highlight.

- It begins on the West Bank near the St. Charles/Jefferson Parish line;
- Proceeds easterly through Avondale Yard and West Bridge Junction (WBJ);
- It then crosses the Mississippi River on the Huey P. Long Bridge (HPLB);
- At the base of the HPLB, it traverses East Bridge Junction (EBJ) to the Back Belt through Old Metairie, and
- Enters the City of New Orleans at the 17th Street Canal.
- It then proceeds through the City along the Back Belt, and across the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal to the Almonaster Bridge; and
- Continues easterly through the CSX Gentry Yard and through New Orleans East to its terminus near Industrial Parkway.



A network of rail lines connect the numerous rail yards and the Port of New Orleans to the Gateway.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

New Orleans Rail Gateway

- Six of seven Class 1 Railroads
- Fourth largest US rail gateway
- One of only three rail gateways that are both rail interchange hubs and major Mississippi River rail crossing
- Port of New Orleans



The map, titled "Class I Railroads of North America," shows the rail network across the United States. Red circles indicate National Rail Gateways, and blue triangles indicate Mississippi River Crossings. The New Orleans Rail Gateway is highlighted with both symbols. A legend in the bottom left identifies these symbols. A legend in the bottom right lists railroad abbreviations: BNSF, CNGTW, CP/SDO, CSX, FXE, and KCS/KCSM. The map also shows major cities like Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans.

The Gateway is a critical link in the national freight rail system.

It serves six Class 1 Railroads and three Amtrak passenger routes

Is the fourth largest US rail gateway

And is one of only three national rail gateways that are both rail interchange hubs and major Mississippi River rail crossings

Through the NOPB railroad, it links the Port of New Orleans to the national rail network



The challenges of a program like the NORG Program are many.

To tackle those challenges, a Partnership was formed between the:

- Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development;
- Federal Railroad Administration;
- New Orleans Regional Planning Commission;
- Association of American Railroads representing the six Class 1 Railroads operating in the New Orleans metropolitan area;
- New Orleans Public Belt Railroad; and
- Amtrak.

Referred to as “The Partnership”.



Previous Studies

- **Analysis of Alternatives in Alleviating Railroad – Community Conflicts in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana (FRA 1975)**
- **Old Metairie Railroad Project Final EIS (FHWA 1989)**
- **A Comprehensive Study of Problems in the Old Metairie Railroad Corridor in Jefferson and Orleans Parishes in Louisiana (FRA 1996)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway & Regional Rail Operations Analysis (DOTD 2002)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway Infrastructure Plan (AAR 2004)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis (2007 Study)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway Benefits Report (AAR 2008)**



Studies dating back to 1975 have been conducted by the Louisiana DOTD, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and the Class 1 railroads to identify ways to reduce rail congestion, highway crossing delays and improve rail service.

 **Previous Studies** 

- **Analysis of Alternatives in Alleviating Railroad – Community Conflicts in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana (FRA 1975)**
- **Old Metairie Railroad Project Final EIS (FHWA 1989)**
- **A Comprehensive Study of Problems in the Old Metairie Railroad Corridor in Jefferson and Orleans Parishes in Louisiana (FRA 1996)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway & Regional Rail Operations Analysis (DOTD 2002)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway Infrastructure Plan (AAR 2004)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis (2007 Study)**
- **New Orleans Rail Gateway Benefits Report (AAR 2008)**

The 2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis (2007 Study) evaluated the Gateway and potential Gateway-wide rail and roadway improvements that could reduce delay and improve rail service.



2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis



- **2007 Study Findings**
 - **Antiquated control systems and switches slow travel times through the Gateway**
 - **Flood gates limit emergency responsiveness**
 - **Almonaster Bridge requires frequent unscheduled maintenance**
 - **Current freight demand routinely causes delays to both rail and roadway traffic**
- **Future freight demand will increase negative community impacts and decrease regional economic competitiveness**



The 2007 Study found that:

- Antiquated control systems and switches slow travel times,
- Flood gates limit emergency responsiveness,
- Almonaster Bridge requires frequent unscheduled maintenance, and
- Current freight demand routinely causes delays to both rail and roadway traffic.

Future freight demand will increase negative community impacts and decrease regional economic competitiveness.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL **2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis** 

- **Evaluated possible West Bank improvements**



Along the West Bank, grade separating at-grade crossings would improve highway traffic flow and alleviate fouling the Avondale-Garden Road crossing.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL **2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis** 

- **Evaluated possible West Bank improvements**
- **Evaluated possible improvements east of Almonaster Bridge**



The map displays the New Orleans East area, including Jefferson, Orleans, and St. Bernard parishes. It highlights the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MOBILE) and the Almonaster Bridge. A red line indicates a rail route along the river, and a yellow line shows a highway route. The map also shows various local roads and waterways.

New Orleans East improvements would also include grade separating crossings to improved highway traffic flow.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL **2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis** 

- **Evaluated possible West Bank improvements**
- **Evaluated possible improvements east of Almonaster Bridge**
- **Evaluated possible improvements to the Back, Front and Middle Belts**
 - **Front Belt improvements were determined infeasible**



Improvements to the Front, Back, and Middle Belts were also evaluated.

Front Belt Improvements were determined infeasible due to the adjacent development and numerous at-grade crossings.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL **2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis** 

- **Evaluated possible West Bank improvements**
- **Evaluated possible improvements east of Almonaster Bridge**
- **Evaluated possible improvements to the Back, Front and Middle Belts**
 - **Front Belt improvements were determined infeasible**
 - **Back Belt improvements considered eliminating or grade separating most at-grade crossings**



Back Belt improvements included grade separating numerous highway-railroad crossings to improve highway traffic flow and provide additional rail capacity.

2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis

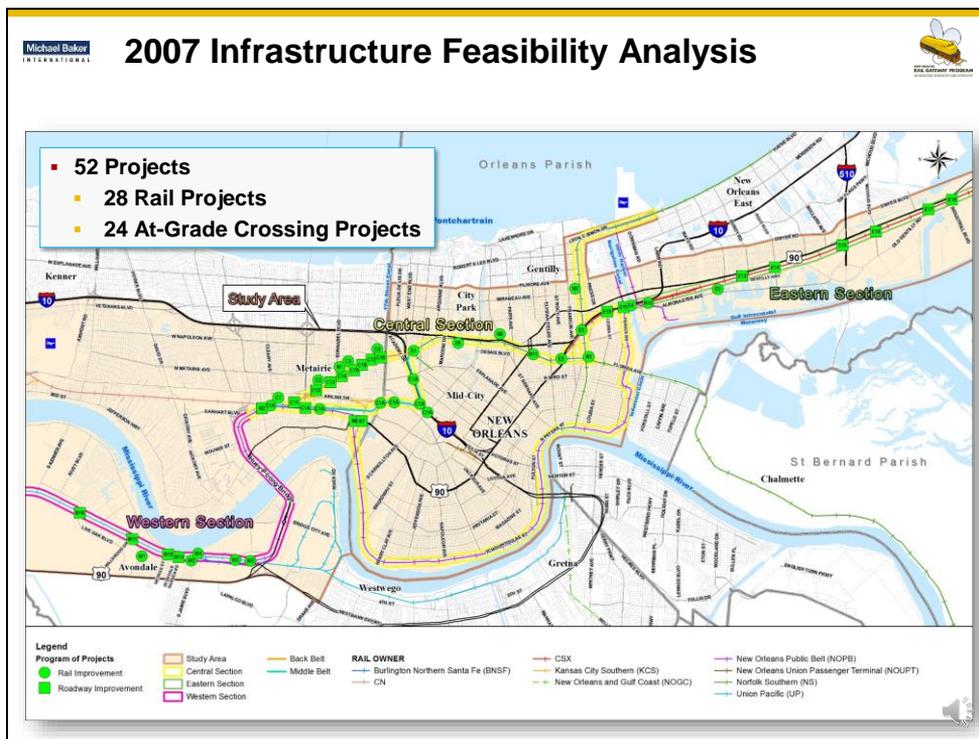
- Evaluated possible West Bank improvements
- Evaluated possible improvements east of Almonaster Bridge
- Evaluated possible improvements to the Back, Front and Middle Belts
 - Front Belt improvements were determined infeasible
 - Back Belt improvements considered eliminating or grade separating most at-grade crossings
 - Middle Belt improvements evaluated the “Carrollton Curve”



The map displays the New Orleans area with various parishes labeled: Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines. It shows major highways like I-10, I-55, and I-125. A red line indicates the proposed 'Carrollton Curve' route, which bypasses the city center by heading east from the East Bridge Junction (EBJ) area, crossing the Mississippi River, and then heading west to the East City Junction (ECJ) area. Other features include Lake Ponchartraine, the Almonaster Bridge, and various local streets and landmarks.

Middle Belt improvements included creating a new route between East Bridge Junction (EBJ) and East City Junction (ECJ) by linking existing, but lightly used rail lines through Jefferson and Orleans Parishes.

Commonly known as the “Carrollton Curve”, this route was first identified in 1955 and would reroute trains to the Earhart Expressway/I-10 corridor to provide additional rail capacity.



In all, 52 individual rail and roadway improvements projects (28 rail, 24 roadway) were identified.

The large majority are concentrated in the Central Section of the Gateway where the Back and Middle Belt alternatives were evaluated.



2011 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)



- Decision to commence an environmental study and prepare an EIS for the entire NORG based on the 2007 Study

- July 2011 – Commenced Study

- February 2012 – Local Officials, Resource Agency and Public Meetings

- 2012 – 2014 – Numerous “Small” Group Meetings (e.g. Local Officials, Neighborhood Associations, Business Leaders)

- **Significant challenges became apparent as the study progressed**



Based on the 2007 Study findings, “The Partnership” moved forward with a Gateway-wide environmental study to prepare Environmental Impact Statement for the entire Gateway.

Studies commenced in July 2011 and Local Officials, Resource Agency and Public Meetings were held in February 2012.

Between 2012 and 2014 numerous “small” group meetings were held with local officials, neighborhood associations and business interests.

Significant challenges became apparent as the study progressed.



Significant Challenges



- **Lack of consensus and polarized public opinion to the feasible alternatives identified in the 2007 Study**
- **2007 Study did not include increased passenger service from 5 to 62 trains daily into NOUPT**
- **Increased passenger service would adversely effect the improvements warranting additional studies**
- **Insufficient Federal and State funding to conduct the necessary Gateway-wide comprehensive studies**



Initial stakeholder outreach indicated a lack of consensus and polarized public opinion to the 2007 Study alternatives.

The 2007 Study projected freight growth but held Amtrak passenger service at the current five trains daily.

Previously prepared passenger rail corridor planning studies identified 62 passenger trains daily into the New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal (NOUPT). This increase would most likely adversely affect the improvements being evaluated.

A re-evaluation of both the passenger service projections and improvements was warranted.

At this time there is insufficient Federal and State funding to conduct the necessary studies.



NORG Moving Forward...



- **Decision to temporarily suspend the Gateway-wide EIS study**
- **The Gateway-wide EIS study will resume when:**
 - Necessary Federal and State funding is secured
 - Possible alternatives are discussed with elected officials to gauge community support
 - There is consensus to move the study forward
- **In the Interim:**
 - DOTD and FRA will continue studying smaller individual projects, as funding is secured, that **provide public benefit** and can be **constructed independent of any other Gateway improvements**
 - Railroads can be expected to continue advancing projects that improve rail operations



These challenges significantly slowed the study while possible remedies were considered.

After much deliberation, the DOTD and FRA mutually agreed to temporarily suspend the EIS study until additional funding is secured to re-evaluate passenger train forecasts and possible alternatives. Discussions with elected officials will then be held to gauge community support and Gateway-wide studies will continue when there is consensus.

DOTD and FRA will continue studying, as funding is secured, smaller individual projects that provide public benefit and be constructed independent of any other Gateway improvements.

In the meantime, DOTD and FRA will continue discussing the re-evaluation of both the projected passenger service and possible improvements while encouraging the communities to work together to achieve consensus to enable the study to move forward.

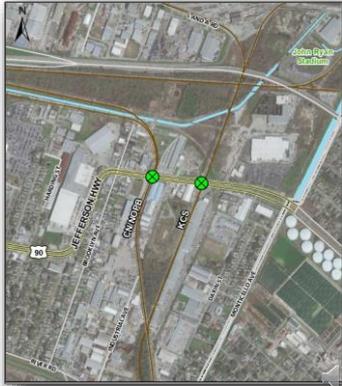
It is expected that the railroads will continue advancing some projects to improve rail operations.

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INTERNATIONAL

Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation Study



- **Selected because of its strong public benefit**
- **Jefferson Highway (US 90)**
 - Part of the National Highway network
 - Carriers 25,000 vehicles per day + two transit routes
 - Delivers police, fire and ambulance emergency services
 - Key route for hurricane evaluation
 - Limited walking and bicycling opportunities



The first smaller project to be studied is the Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation between the Ochsner Hospital and Monticello Avenue, in Jefferson Parish.

This project was one of the 2007 Study's identified improvements and was selected because of its strong public benefit.

Jefferson Highway, also known as US 90, is part of the National Highway network. It:

- Carries 25,00 vehicles per day plus two transit routes
- Delivers police, fire and ambulance emergency services
- Is a Key route for hurricane evacuation; and
- Has limited walking and bicycling opportunities

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Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation Study

ENVISION JEFFERSON 2040
Jefferson Parish

- **Supports**
 - **Envision Jefferson 2040**
 - Economic Development District
 - **Ochsner Health Foundation Hospital Expansion**
 - **Growth in Retail & Residential Housing**
 - **Other on-going and planned area transportation improvements**

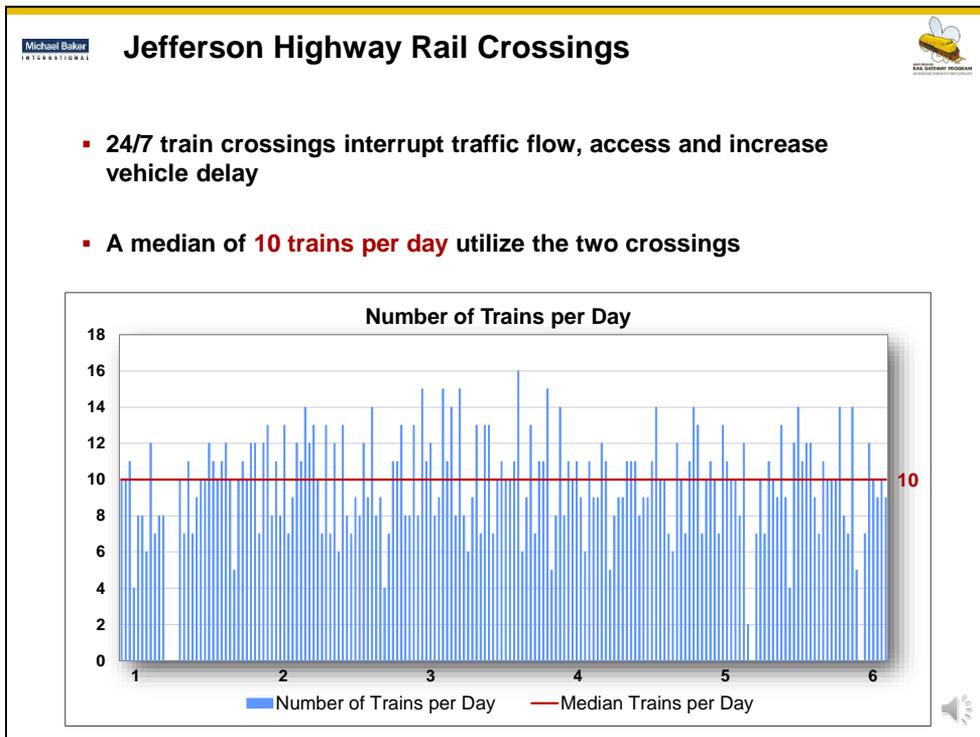


ENVISION JEFFERSON 2040
Jefferson Parish



This Project:

- Supports Jefferson Parish's Envision Jefferson 2040 Comprehensive Plan and is within an identified Economic Development District,
- Supports the Ochsner Health Foundation Hospital Expansion,
- Supports anticipated growth in area retail and residential housing, and
- Supports other on-going and planned area transportation improvements.



The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad operates trains 24 hours per day, seven days per week, across the two at-grade rail crossings between the Ochsner Hospital and Monticello Avenue.

This graph illustrates the number of trains crossings at these two locations over a six month period.

These train crossings interrupt traffic flow, access and increase vehicle delay.

A median of 10 trains per day utilize these two crossing.

Jefferson Highway Rail Crossings

- **24/7** train crossings interrupt traffic flow, access and increase vehicle delay
- Over 50% of the trains are **one mile in length or longer**

Length of Train (Miles)	% of Trains
0 - 0.5	17%
0.5 - 1.0	27%
1.0 - 1.5	31%
1.5 - 2.0	22%
2.0 - 3.0	3%

Trains lengths vary from single locomotives to unit trains approaching almost three miles in length.

Over fifty percent of the trains are one mile in length or longer.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL **Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation Goals** 

- **Increase economic competitiveness and improve air quality by reducing vehicle congestion and delay**
- **Support Hospital expansion and Regional economic development**
- **Improve safety by eliminating one or both at-grade crossings**
- **Decrease crossing maintenance costs**
- **Increase freight fluidity through the NORG and the Port of New Orleans**



The goals identified for the study include :

Increasing economic competitiveness and improving air quality by reducing vehicle congestion and delay;

Improving safety by eliminating one or both at-grade crossings;

Supporting Hospital expansion and Regional economic development;

Decreasing crossing maintenance costs; and

Increasing freight fluidity through the Gateway and the Port of New Orleans.

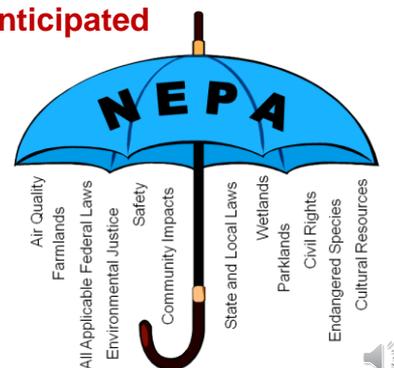
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)



- **NEPA requires Federal Agencies to**
 - Consider environmental impacts of their proposed actions, and
 - Inform the public about their decision-making

- **Three types of NEPA documents**
 - Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
 - Environmental Assessment (EA)
 - Categorical Exclusion (CE)

- **An Environmental Assessment (EA) is anticipated but will be confirmed after further study**



The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) declared the Nation's policy on protecting the environment. NEPA requires Federal agencies to use all practicable means within their authority to protect the environment and establishes a process for analyzing and disclosing the impacts of Federal actions on the environment.

Three types of documents are prepared to satisfy the NEPA requirements.

- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared when it is known that the Action will have a significant effect on the environment
- An Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared for Actions in which the significance of the environmental impact is not clearly established. Should environmental analysis and interagency review during the EA process find a project to have no significant impacts on the quality of the environment, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is issued.
- Categorical Exclusions (CEs) are issued for Actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the environment

At this time, an Environmental Assessment is anticipated. The appropriate NEPA document will be confirmed after engineering and environmental studies are completed.



Engineering and Environmental Studies



Engineering Studies

- Rail & Roadway Operational Performance
- Rail & Roadway Conceptual Engineering
- Capital cost, operations and maintenance estimates



Environmental Studies

- Socio-Economics
- Air Quality, Noise & Vibration
- Hazardous Materials
- Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Wetlands and Water Resources



Engineering studies will evaluate rail and roadway operations performance, identify physical improvements and prepare capital cost, operations and maintenance estimates.

The environmental studies will evaluate direct, and indirect impacts to the social, economic, and physical environment. The evaluation will take into account both beneficial and adverse affects and identify measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse community and environmental impacts.

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Alternatives to be Considered

- CN/NOPB & KCS at-grade rail crossings are less than 700 feet apart
- Combine the two crossings into a single crossing at either the CN/NOPB or KCS crossing location
- Grade separate the combined crossing with a roadway overpass

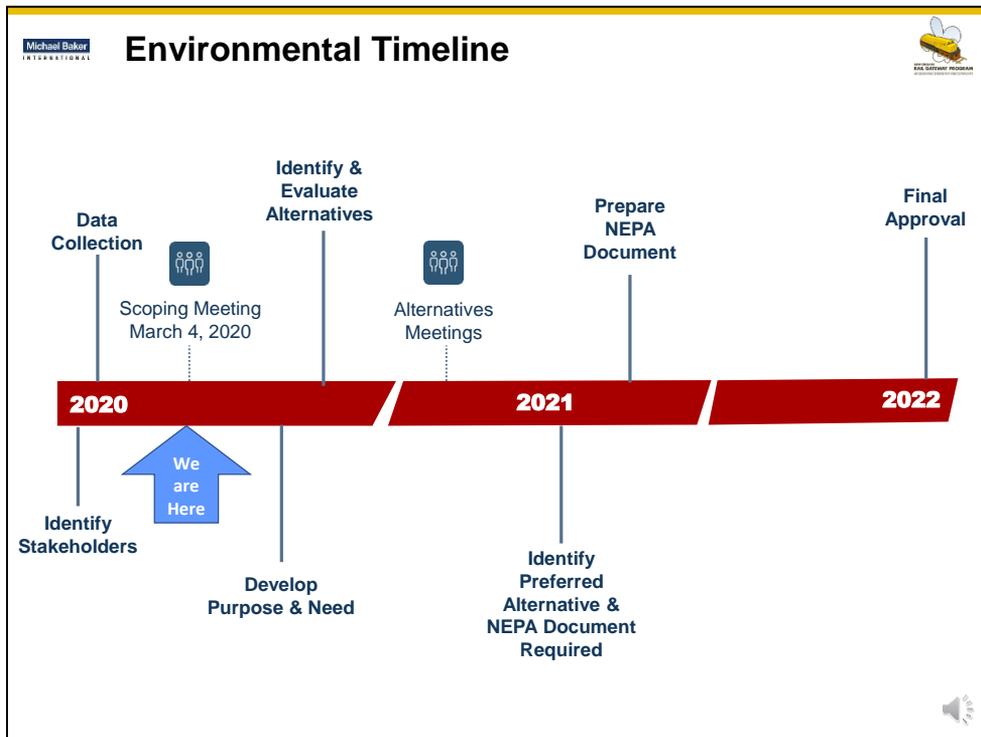


Two at-grade highway-rail crossings, a Canadian National (CN) crossing leased by the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad (NOPB) and a Kansas City Southern Railway (KCS) crossing, are less than 700 feet apart at this location.

This study will evaluate combining these two crossings into a single crossing at either the NOPB or KCS crossing location.

The study will also evaluate grade separating the combined crossing at these two locations with a roadway overpass.

This study will coordinate with the Earhart/Dakin Street Connector project.



The study is anticipated to take about three years to complete. A public meeting, similar to this one, is planned about a year from now to present alternatives and solicit public input.

If you signed in tonight, you will be added to the mailing list to receive study information and future public announcements. Public meetings will also be announced through newspaper notices, mail and e-mail notices, press releases and on the NORG webpage.

Public Outreach



- **Proactively engage the Stakeholders**
 - **Public Meetings**
 - **Newsletters**
 - **Mailings and E-Mail Notices**
 - **Press Releases**
 - **NORG Program Webpage**
 - www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects
 - **Special Assistance**

If you require special assistance due to a disability in order to participate at future public meetings, please contact

NORG
c/o The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.
P.O. Box 56845
New Orleans, LA 70116

or by telephone at (504) 488-6196,
at least five (5) business days prior to the public meeting dates.



Public involvement initiatives including public meetings, newsletters, mailings and e-mail notices, press releases and a NORG Program Webpage will be used throughout the study. Project information and opportunities for public participation will be announced using these media.

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL **Stay Involved!** 

▪ If you signed in at the Welcome Table, you will receive study information and future meeting announcements

 NEW ORLEANS RAIL GATEWAY
JEFFERSON AND ORLEANS PARISHES, LOUISIANA
Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation Project
Scoping Meeting Comment Form

Please Print Clearly

Name	Street or P.O. Box	City, State, Zip
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The purpose of today's scoping meeting is to present the environmental and location study and to solicit your input concerning important social and environmental issues. Please answer the following questions.

- How did you hear about the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Program?

- Do you live or work along Jefferson Highway between Oschner Health Foundation Hospital and Monticello Avenue?
 Live Work Neither
- How frequently do you travel through the section of Jefferson Highway between Oschner Health Foundation Hospital and Monticello Avenue?
 Daily Multiple times per day 1-2 times per week 3-4 times per week Less than 4 times per month
- Why do you travel through the section of Jefferson Highway between Oschner Health Foundation Hospital and Monticello Avenue?
 Commute to work Shopping School Oschner Health Foundation Hospital Visiting family/friends
 Entertainment Other (please specify) _____
- How often do you experience traffic congestion or delays along Jefferson Highway between Oschner Health Foundation Hospital and Monticello Avenue?
 Every time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely Never
- How often do you encounter a delay due to train traffic at the at-grade rail crossings on Jefferson Highway?
 Every time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely Never
- Please estimate how much time the congestion and delay caused by train traffic adds to your travel time.

- Do you ever take an alternative route to avoid the at-grade rail crossings on Jefferson Highway?
 No Yes, please list alternate roads you use _____
- Do you have safety concerns at the at-grade rail crossings on Jefferson Highway?
 No Yes, please explain _____
- Do you feel that grade separating the at-grade rail crossings on Jefferson Highway would benefit you?
 Not at all Somewhat A great deal

State Project No. H.005168
FAP No. DE-9208(500) March 4, 2020

- Comment at today's meeting**
 - Oral Comment Station
 - Written Comment Station
- Comment by Mail**
 - NORG
c/o The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.
P.O. Box 56845
New Orleans, LA 70116
- All comments must be post-marked no later than March 18, 2020**
- DOTD Website**
www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects
 - Public Meeting Handouts
 - Comment Form
- Telephone Inquiries - (504) 488-6196**



We want your comments on the information presented today.

If you want to comment at today's public meeting, you can make a verbal statement at the Oral Comment Station or you can complete the Comment Form that was handed out when you signed in, and deposit it in the box at the Written Comments Station.

If you prefer to send us your comments, please mail them to:

NORG
c/o The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.
P.O. Box 56845
New Orleans, LA 70116

All comments must be post-marked no later that March 18, 2020 to become part of the public record.

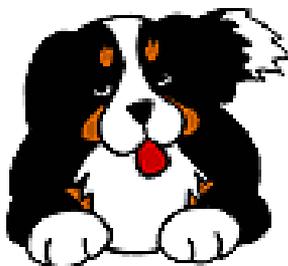
Please complete your full name and address information. Anonymous comments cannot be fully considered.



Thank you for Attending!



THANK YOU



- Your input is important
- Give us your comments
- Ask us questions – We're here to assist you



This public meeting is an important part of the transportation decision-making process and your input is encouraged and appreciated.

After this presentation, please review the project exhibits, talk with Study Team representatives, and give us your comments.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask one of the Study Team representatives. We're all wearing name badges.
Remember, the only bad questions are the ones not asked!

Thank you again for attending today's public meeting!