



NEW ORLEANS  
**RAIL GATEWAY PROGRAM**  
AN ECONOMIC ENGINE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

# the RIGHT TRACK

Official Program Newsletter

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) in coordination with the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and the railroads operating in the New Orleans metropolitan area through the Association of American Railroads (AAR), are conducting an engineering and environmental study to identify rail and roadway improvements, or "Program of Projects", to upgrade the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) and infrastructure in Jefferson and Orleans Parishes to increase Regional competitiveness and enhance economic growth.

## THE STUDY PROCESS

The three-year Study will follow a multi-step process involving three primary phases: 1) Scoping & Purpose and Need, 2) Alternatives Studies, and 3) Environmental Documentation. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared to evaluate the "Program of Projects" beneficial and adverse effects on the social, economic, and physical environment and identify measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse community and environmental impacts.

Through proactive coordination, public outreach and consensus building, decisions will be made at the end of each phase of study.

Scoping Public Meetings were held in February 2012. Alternatives Public Meetings will be held later this year and will be announced in print media, on television and radio stations, on the NORG webpage and through contact list mailings.

## GET ON-BOARD

Need more information, want to be added to our database, or just want to stay involved? Contact us or visit the project website:

- **Information Line:** (504) 488-6196
- **Mail:** P.O. BOX 56845, New Orleans, LA 70156-6845
- **Web:** [http://www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public\\_info/projects/norg/](http://www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects/norg/)

*If you require special assistance due to a disability in order to participate in these public meetings, please contact Mr. Dean Goodell, Intermodal Transportation Manager by mail, at Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, P.O. Box 94245, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9245, or by telephone at (225) 379-3031, at least five (5) working days prior to the public meetings dates.*

## WHY THE PROGRAM IS NEEDED

- Reduce vehicle congestion at street crossings
- Improve emergency evacuation conditions
- Improve vehicle and pedestrian safety
- Improve overall environmental quality
- Improve traffic reliability at the Almonaster Bridge
- Correct physical and operational deficiencies to improve rail traffic flow and better serve existing and future users of the Gateway



**FROM TOP LEFT:** Rail crossing near Central Avenue in Jefferson, Almonaster Bridge, and Flooding at the Back Belt overpass of I-10.

State, Federal, and Local Sponsors



# RAIL AND ROADWAY IMPROVEMENTS

The New Orleans Rail Gateway or “NORG” is made up of the rail corridor which traverses Jefferson and Orleans Parishes beginning on the West Bank of the Mississippi River near the St. Charles/Jefferson Parish line and ending in New Orleans East at Industrial Parkway near the Michoud Assembly Center.

Improvements will be evaluated along the Western Section of the existing Gateway from Live Oak Blvd. and across the Huey P. Long Bridge to East Bridge Junction (EBJ).

Through the Central Section from EBJ to the Almonaster Bridge, improvements will focus along three routes following the Back, Middle and Front Belts.

- The **Back Belt** of the current Gateway begins at the EBJ, continues through Old Metairie and Orleans Parish, and ends at the Almonaster Bridge.
- The **Middle Belt** begins at the EBJ, proceeds through Hollygrove, turns north along I-10, and ends at the East City Junction (ECJ) in Navarre where it rejoins the Back Belt and continues to the Almonaster Bridge.
- The **Front Belt** begins at the Huey P. Long Bridge, continues along the east bank of the Mississippi River, through the City of New Orleans, turns north following the Industrial Canal, and ends at the Almonaster Bridge.

East Section improvements will be evaluated from the Almonaster Bridge to the Industrial Parkway, at the eastern study limit.

Alternatives being studied include a No-Build Alternative and several Build Alternatives. The No-Build Alternative represents the highway and rail system as it currently exists or would exist after maintenance and minor improvements are performed. It serves as the baseline for comparing the Build Alternatives. To minimize community impacts, the Build Alternatives will focus on rail and roadway improvements, or “Program of Projects”, following existing rail corridors. **All alternatives will be presented for public review at a future Alternatives public meeting.**



# SCOPING MEETING COMMENTS

Even though this process is still in the early stages, the community has already been engaged. Meetings for both the public and local officials were held Tuesday, February 7th at Xavier University and Wednesday, February 8th in the East Bank Council Chamber of the Jefferson Parish Government Building. The number of attendees at both meetings totaled 86 people. During these meetings community members and officials had an opportunity to provide input on areas of particular concern to them. In particular, attendees shared the following:

- Concerns that improvements to the Rail Gateway would involve taking property adjacent to the corridor.

*The majority of improvements will occur within the existing right-of-way.*

- Concerns that improvements to the Rail Gateway would produce excessive noise, vibrations, or other nuisances for those properties next to the corridor.

*Negative effects like these will be considered during the analysis of community impacts, included in the decision-making process, and mitigated if necessary.*

- Suggestions that analysis of improvements should consider train flow optimization and filling in of the “dips” in both I-10 at Mound Ave. and Airline Dr. at Causeway Blvd. under railway bridges.

*Potential improvements to rail-related road geometry and structures like these will be considered during engineering analysis and will be incorporated into the decision-making process.*

- Concerns that the analysis will not include safety issues at vehicle/ train intersections in neighborhoods not near proposed Rail Gateway improvements.

*Roadway crossings that are part of the Program of Projects will be evaluated from the standpoint of increasing both rail and vehicular safety.*

- Concerns were expressed by the members of the Friends of the Lafitte Corridor that the NORG program of improvements would use the planned Lafitte Greenway Corridor for increased freight rail movements.

*The Lafitte Corridor is not part of the NORG study and no improvements are planned within the Greenway. The rail tracks in this Corridor have been abandoned south of N. Alexander St., providing no rail through connection to the south. These Greenway Corridor characteristics make it a relatively poor alternative to improve the movement of rail traffic in the area.*

- Concerns that the Carrollton Curve would produce a higher risk of train derailment.

*The Carrollton Curve segment of the Middle Belt includes changes to railroad track geometry and overhead roadway structures to accommodate the alternative. Train speeds in this segment are estimated to be approximately 20 MPH. Track and roadway improvements will meet or exceed the applicable design and construction standards, and the operating procedures will likewise meet all requirements.*

- Concerns that closure of crossings or removal of road segments adjacent to the Rail Gateway would negatively impact businesses that utilize rail spurs or roadways for their livelihood.

*At grade closures and roadway removals will be fully evaluated to ensure businesses are not negatively impacted.*

Railroad  
Sponsors





P.O. BOX 56845  
New Orleans, LA 70156-6845

## THE STUDY TEAM

- *Michael Baker Jr., Inc.* 
  - Project Management & Administration
  - Geospatial Database
  - Operations Planning and Forecasting
  - Environmental Studies
  - Draft/Final EIS & ROD
- *Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc.* 
  - Purpose & Need
  - Environmental Studies - Community Impact Assessment
- *Digital Engineering and Imaging, Inc.* 
  - Rail, Roadway, Structural and Traffic Engineering
- *The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.* 
  - Inter-Agency Coordination and Public Outreach
- *URS Corporation* 
  - Rail Simulation Modeling