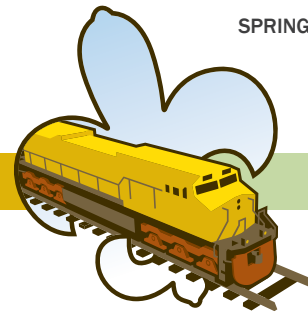


the RIGHT TRACK



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



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Nationally freight tonnage is expected to increase by roughly 60% by 2020 as congested highways continue to push freight traffic onto railways. By 2038, the railways in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes are expected to carry over 69.2 million tons of freight (a 65% increase from 2011 levels). Future railway traffic will compound existing delays, thereby decreasing regional economic competitiveness.

The New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) serves the economies and industries of the Greater New Orleans region and the United States as a whole, providing a trans-American freight corridor with connectivity to and across the Mississippi River. This corridor benefits the residents of New Orleans and is utilized by thousands of trains per year. Six Class One rail companies and one public authority own trains and tracks within the corridor, which serves as one of only three major trans-American rail crossings of the Mississippi River in the United States. Additionally, New Orleans serves as a hub for three

Amtrak long-distance passenger trains and the location for the regionally significant Port of New Orleans.

All of these trains traverse this important corridor through an urban area containing more than 400,000 people. The map on page 4 identifies the locations of three “belts” that represent the main rail pathways through the urban area. As the trains traverse Orleans and Jefferson Parishes on these belts, they interact with trucks, automobiles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

- Currently, the trains encounter automobiles and trucks at 21 at grade (street level) crossings along the New Orleans Rail Gateway, with the vast majority of these crossings being local streets.
- On an average day, more than 100,000 cars cross train tracks throughout the rail gateway.
- Based on average delay per day, these interactions lead to delays of about 30 hours for trains, 110 hours for automobiles, and 12 hours for trucks.

The result of this program will be a series of roadway and rail improvements that will mitigate or minimize these community issues.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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- **Email:** NORG@mbakercorp.com

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the New Orleans Rail Gateway commenced in the Fall of 2011. Since then, the joint efforts of the consultant team have included:

- A variety of rail, roadway, and community information gathering activities.
- Coordination with federal, state, and local governments and freight railroad companies.
- An in-depth community assessment for the entire 22 mile corridor.
- A series of community meetings have introduced the project to local residents and interested stakeholders.
- Surveyed surrounding neighborhoods for potential historic resources and within rail corridors for potential environmental resources.
- Developed extensive modeling of automobile traffic along with freight rail and passenger rail traffic to predict the future congestion along the corridor.
- Developed engineering layouts for the western, central and eastern sections of the rail corridor describing various potential track improvements, including a variety of proposed overpasses, roadway extensions, and potential railway crossing closures.

PROJECT DELAYS

Unfortunately, this project is running behind schedule for a variety of reasons:

- The original schedule made assumptions on the availability of data that describes the current operations of the roadways and railroads. However, obtaining this proprietary and confidential data took much longer to obtain than anticipated.
- Field work took longer than projected due to stringent railway requirements and the complex relationships between property owners.
- Additional, unforeseen, intersection and roadway analyses were required by project partners to better understand roadway and railway usage and waiting to reach consensus on passenger train growth forecasts.

CURRENT ACTIVITY

Engineering

- Awaiting responses to working plans of Middle Belt from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and Class 1 railroads.
- Anticipating responses to working plans of Back Belt from DOTD and Class 1 railroads.
- Front Belt working plans developed, but determined to be fatally flawed due to pedestrian safety and built environment issues.

Inter-agency Coordination

- Awaiting responses to forecast model results of rail operations and freight movements from DOTD, FRA, and Class 1 railroads and agreement on passenger rail growth forecasts.

Environmental Analysis

- Majority of field work has been completed; however further field visits to certain private properties will be required once all alternatives are fully developed.

Public Outreach

- See the article on page 3 for more details on how the consultant team is interacting with members of the public.

NEXT STEPS

Milestone	Target Date
Alternatives Development & Review	Summer 2013 - Winter 2014
Field Studies	Fall 2013 - Spring 2014
Alternatives Outreach Meetings	Summer 2014
Community Planning Meetings/ Charettes	Fall 2014

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The NORG project development process follows the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) as amended, utilizing the specific guidance of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Very generally that process calls for the identification, development and evaluation of alternatives to address the rail and roadway congestion problems experienced with the current situation. Input from stakeholders, area citizens and businesses is a required and key component in the evaluation phase. No alternative will be selected for implementation until the public has had the opportunity to review and comment on them. This has not yet occurred, but it is anticipated to happen in 2015.

Because the NORG actually involves three rail routes, the Front, Middle and Back belts, there is no one project or solution that will address all of the problems currently being experienced by the public, and vehicular and rail traffic. Therefore, many proposed improvements across the 22-mile NORG corridor are currently being evaluated. It uses a three-part approach.

1. How effectively does an alternative address the specific problem in a particular location?
2. What are the potential impacts to the surrounding area, and roadway and rail networks?
3. How cost-effective is this alternative?

There are three layers of consideration in regards to potential impacts of each alternative.

1. Wherever possible, the consultant team first strives to develop alternatives that avoid adverse impacts.
2. When it is not possible to avoid an impact, the consultant team works to minimize the impact.
3. Finally, the team will mitigate those remaining impacts. Mitigation measures seek to directly address remaining impacts. A pedestrian bridge over railroad tracks or a noise wall are examples of potential mitigation measures that might be employed along the NORG corridor.

Currently, the NORG consultant team is developing and evaluating numerous individual project improvements for the Back and Middle Belt alternatives stretching from Avondale to New Orleans East. Once developed and evaluated by the consultant team, the alternatives will be reviewed by the DOTD, Regional Planning Commission, FRA, FHWA, Jefferson and Orleans Parishes, and the Class One Railroads. Following these reviews, the alternatives will be presented to the community at public meetings which are anticipated to be held in the summer of 2014. It is important to note that no decisions regarding the NORG program have been made. This will not occur until after the public has had the opportunity to review and comment on those alternatives.

See our study process flow chart on the project website:

http://wwwapps.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects/home.aspx?key=50

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public outreach is an integral part of the environmental process for the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Program. Public scoping meetings were held February 7, 2012 at Xavier University and February 8, 2012 at the East Bank Council Chamber of the Jefferson Parish Government Building to inform the public about the commencement of the study and to solicit input. Since that time, the NORG Consultant Team has attended several neighborhood association meetings in Orleans and Jefferson parishes upon request to discuss the study's progress. Alternatives Outreach Meetings are set to occur in Summer 2014 followed by Community Planning Meetings/Charettes in Fall 2014. Your continued input is needed and encouraged throughout the study's duration. Comment forms are available on the project web page.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Find the answers to your most Frequently Asked Questions on the project website:

http://wwwapps.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects/home.aspx?key=50

For additional information, please phone or email the consultant team:

504-488-6196 or NORG@mbakercorp.com

PROGRAM MAP

