



# New Orleans Rail Gateway Program

## Fact Sheet

### Facts about New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG):

- It is the fourth largest rail gateway in the country and is a key link in the national transportation system.
- The NORG stretches from Avondale via the Huey P. Long Bridge extending through the City of New Orleans.
- The system provides a vital link in the east/west distribution of freight rail traffic and allows access to Mexico and Canada.
- It services the Port of South Louisiana and the Port of New Orleans.
- And six of the seven national Class 1 railroads, NOPB and Amtrak.
- Freight is exchanged between the carriers through the numerous rail yards throughout the Region

### Why are upgrades needed?

- Antiquated control systems and switches slow travel times through the Gateway
- Eliminate system choke points that inhibit rail operations
- Almonaster Bridge requires frequent unscheduled maintenance
- Current freight demand routinely impacts highway traffic
- Future freight demand will impact regional economic competitiveness

### What are the Goals of the Study (Purpose)?

The goals of the Study are to identify various rail and roadway improvements that will:

- Reduce vehicle congestion
- Improve emergency evacuation
- Improve vehicle and pedestrian safety
- Improve overall environmental quality
- Correct rail and roadway physical and operational deficiencies
- Promote regional economic competitiveness

### What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 establishes a basic framework for encouraging environmental protection in the United States. There are two primary objectives of NEPA:

- Ensure that agencies consider every significant aspect of a proposed project's environmental impact.
- Inform and involve the public of potential impacts and alternatives.

The NEPA process is a set of activities to gather information on, analyze, and document the potential human and environmental effects and mitigation of the proposed project.

### When is the NEPA Process Required?

NEPA is required when a Federal action is taken that may have impacts on the human and natural environment. Federal actions are those that require Federal funding, permits, policy decisions, facilities, equipment, or employees.

### The Study

In 2011, a study, put together by a public-private partnership between the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), DOTD, the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission and six Class 1 railroads represented by the Association of American Railroads began. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), numerous technical assessments and a Record of Decision (ROD) will be prepared. The engineering / environmental study is anticipated to be completed in 2015.

### How many freight trains currently operate along the Gateway?

The number of freight trains operating along the rail corridors varies by day and location. Approximately 20 – 25 freight trains traverse the Back Belt daily.

## How much is freight traffic expected to increase?

Commodities are forecast to increase at a compound annual growth rate of 1.8%, from approximately 42 kilotons today to 69 kiloton in 2038. Train counts are still being determined, but are expected to increase to 30 – 35 freight trains daily in 2038 between East Bridge Junction (EBJ) and Elysian Fields.

## What are the top commodities being transported through the Gateway?

Commodities transported by rail are categorized by Standard Transportation Commodity Codes (STCC) on waybills and other shipping documents. The top five commodities, by STCC code classifications, are Chemicals or Allied Products, Farm Products, Hazardous Materials, Food or Kindred Products, and Miscellaneous Mixed Shipments.

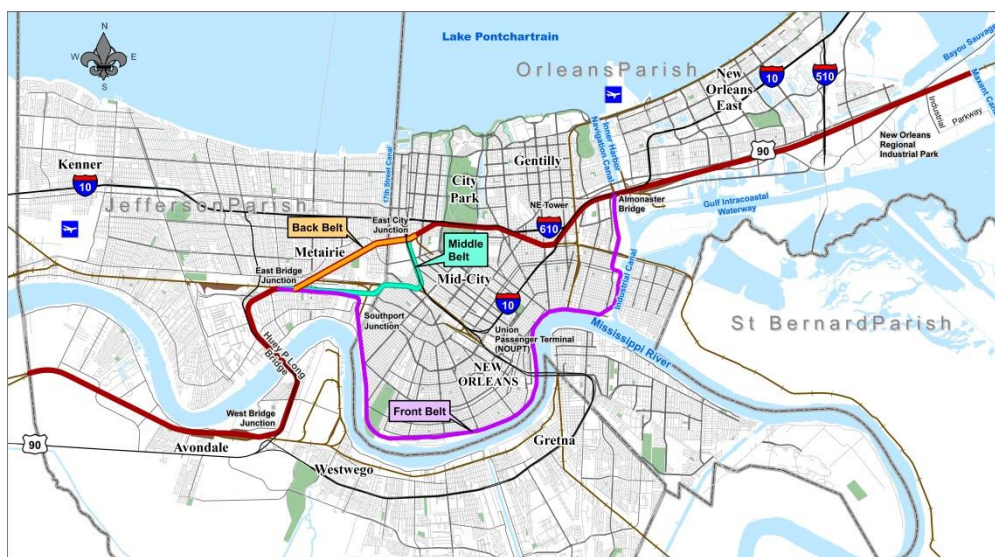
## Alternatives

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. The Build Alternatives being studied include:

- **Back Belt** - Elevate the existing rail corridor to eliminate at-grade crossings
- **Middle Belt** - Creates a new route between East Bridge Junction and East City Junction by linking existing, but lightly used, rail lines through a more industrial area
- **Front Belt** - Improve the existing rail corridor along the Mississippi River
- **Couplet** - Combination of the Back Belt and Front Belt alternatives



The Front Belt and Couplet alternatives have been eliminated from further study due to limited engineering opportunities, uncontrolled pedestrian access and shut downs during major events.

All alternatives will be presented for public review at a public meeting in summer 2014.

## When will a final decision be made and who will make it?

No decisions will be made until engineering and environmental studies have been completed, and public meetings and Public Hearings held, impacts and appropriate mitigation/enhancements identified, and the EIS is prepared and distributed for public review.

The final decision on the alternative ultimately selected will be made by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), but not until all comments received are fully evaluated. FRA's decision will be documented in the Program's Record of Decision.

## How to stay involved?

- Visit the Program Website [http://www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public\\_info/projects/norg/](http://www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects/norg/)
- Call Information Line: (504) 488-6196
- E-Mail: [norg@mbakercorp.com](mailto:norg@mbakercorp.com)
- USPS Mail: P.O. Box 56845, New Orleans, LA 70156-6845
- Future meetings will be announced through mailings, notices, advertisements, and press releases