

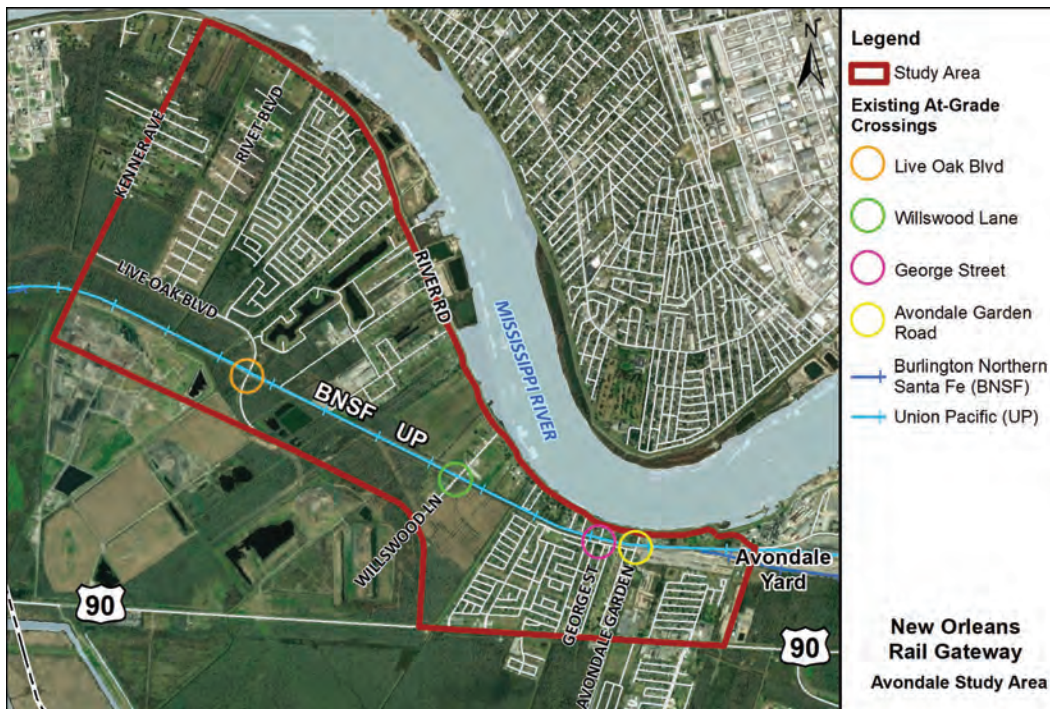
**NEW ORLEANS
RAIL GATEWAY PROGRAM**
AN ECONOMIC ENGINE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

AVONDALE PLANNING & ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES (PEL) STUDY

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in coordination with the USDOT Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and the railroads operating in the New Orleans metropolitan area are conducting a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study to evaluate the possible at-grade crossing consolidation, road-over-rail grade separation and/or closure of Live Oak Boulevard, Willswood Lane, George Street and Avondale Garden Road, which are all local roadways owned and maintained by Jefferson Parish.

These improvements are part of the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Program (Program) and were identified as Projects W10 through W13 respectively in a 2007 NORG Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis (2007 Study). The 2007 Study is available at www.dotd.la.gov/NORG.

The Project Goals established for the study include reducing vehicle delay due to rail traffic and Avondale Rail Yard switching operations; eliminating truck traffic from roadways posted as "No Truck Route" with a 5-Ton Weight Limit and improving intermodal connectivity.



State, Federal, and Local Sponsors



ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT & EVALUATION

A five-step process was used to develop and evaluate alternatives.

Step 1 – Determine Existing and Forecast Future Roadway Traffic Volumes

Step 2 – Determine Existing and Forecast Future Railroad Traffic Volumes and Resultant Roadway Traffic Delay

Step 3 – Evaluate if Conditions warrant grade separating the crossings

Step 4 – Inventory Environmental Features and Develop Grade Separation Alternatives

Step 5 – Evaluate effect on Environmental Features and Area Traffic and Identify Build Alternative Combinations

FHWA guidance identifies various warrant conditions (Step 3) to be considered in evaluating whether an at-grade crossing is a candidate for grade separation. Two of those warrant conditions are an average of 30 or more trains per day, and vehicle delay exceeding 30 vehicle hours per day (vhp). The Avondale Garden Road, George Street and Willswood Lane crossing exceeded these warrant conditions and were retained for further study. The Live Oak Boulevard crossing did not exhibit the number of train crossings or resultant vehicle delay required to consider grade separation and was eliminated from further study.

Three alternatives were developed.

Alternative 1 (Avondale Garden Road Alternative)

New grade separated roadway connecting US 90 and River Road (LA 18). The existing Avondale Garden Road and George Street crossing would be closed under this alternative.

Alternative 2 (Willswood Lane Realignment)

Realign and grade separate the existing Willswood Lane, closing the existing crossing.

Alternative 3 (Willswood Lane Alternate)

New grade separated roadway connecting Live Oak Boulevard and River Road (LA 18). The existing Willswood Lane crossing would be closed under this alternative.

These three alternatives, in various combinations, resulted in five Build Alternatives. This table summarizes the potential environmental impacts and estimated costs of the five Build Alternatives. These alternatives would, to varying degrees, achieve the stated goals and would not adversely impact the surrounding roadway network. The No Build Alternative would not result in any impacts to wetlands or floodplains or require any relocations, and would have zero cost, but would not correct any of the stated goals.



Description	Build Alternatives					No Build
	1	2	3	4	5	
Avondale Garden Road Alternative						
Willswood Lane Realignment						
Willswood Lane Alternate						
Wetlands Impacts	Avoids	Avoids	Bridges	Avoids	Bridges	None
Floodplain Impacts	Impacts	Minimizes	Impacts	Impacts	Impacts	None
Relocations	Two Commercial	Avoids	Avoids	Two Commercial	Two Commercial	None
Total Estimated Cost	\$62.0M	\$57.2M	\$48.1M	\$119.2M	\$110.1M	\$0

ALTERNATIVES PUBLIC MEETING

A second public meeting for the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Avondale Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study was held on April 16, 2024 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the J.C. Simmons Community Center, 4008 U.S. Highway 90 in Westwego.

The public meeting was advertised in local newspapers, in press releases and public service announcements (PSAs) distributed to local media outlets, on door hangers placed on study area residences and businesses, in DOTD MyDOTD Email announcements, and on the NORG Program webpage. The technical presentation included an overview of the four existing at-grade crossings, project goals, stakeholder engagement since the 2021 virtual public scoping meeting, the five step alternatives development and evaluation of the alternatives developed, and the project timeline. Exhibits were available for review and comment forms were available to receive public comments.

The technical presentation, exhibits, and comment form were also posted on the DOTD NORG Program webpage at www.dotd.la.gov/AvondalePELStudy for access via personal computer, cell phone or tablet. Individuals could request to be added to the study mailing list directly from the webpage. The presentation with scripted narrative was available in both written (PDF) and audio (YouTube) formats. Those without Internet access could request hardcopies of the meeting materials.

A Summary of the Alternatives Public Meeting is posted on the NORG Program webpage and is also available for review at the Live Oak Library in Waggaman, the Edith S. Lawson Library in Westwego, and the Jane O'Brien Chatelain Westbank Regional Library in Harvey.

COMMENTS

20 comment forms were received at the meeting or post-marked/emailed by the April 30, 2024 close of comments. The comments included:

Most Important Study Goals

Study Goals	Very Important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important	No response
Reduce blocked crossing vehicle delays	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Remove truck traffic from weight restricted roadways	40%	0%	10%	0%	50%
Improve intermodal/container yard highway access	50%	10%	0%	5%	35%
Eliminate train horn advance warning	40%	15%	0%	5%	40%

Alternatives Ranking Preference (most preferred to least preferred)

- **Alternative 1** – Avondale Garden Road (AGR) Alternative (new roadway to the east; close George Street and AGR crossings)
- **Alternative 3** – Willswood Alternative (new roadway to the west; close existing Willswood crossing)
- **Alternative 2 / Alternate 5 (tie)** – Alternative 2 (Willswood Realignment - realign existing Willswood Lane; close crossing) / Alternative 5 - Both Alternative 1 and Alternative 3
- **Alternative 4** – Both Alternative 1 and Alternative 2

NEXT MEETING

This PEL Study is nearing completion. The study is anticipated to advance to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study phase in 2025. The NEPA phase will further refine the alternatives developed with a focus on the environmental impacts. The study and NEPA documentation will take at least a year to complete.

STAY INFORMED

The Avondale PEL Study contact list will be carried forward to the NEPA study phase. If you are not already on the Avondale PEL Study contact list and would like to be added, please contact the Project Team at:

- Information Line: (504) 488-6196
- Email: NORG@mbakerintl.com
- Mail: P.O. Box 56845, New Orleans, LA 70156-6845

New Orleans Rail Gateway Program

c/o Hawthorne Agency

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