

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

## New Orleans Rail Gateway Program

Jefferson and Orleans Parishes  
State Project No. H.005168

## Avondale PEL Study Virtual Public Scoping Meeting

March 9 – April 15, 2022



Michael Baker  
INTERNATIONAL

Thank you for taking the time to watch this virtual public scoping meeting presentation for the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program Avondale PEL Study.

## Purpose of the Virtual Scoping Meeting

- **Provide an opportunity to learn about the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program**
  - **Present an overview of the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Program**
  - **Describe the Avondale Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study**
  - **Solicit input on issues of concern regarding this Study**
  - **Learn how to receive Study information and participate in the decision-making process**



During this presentation you'll learn about the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program.

This presentation will:

- Present an overview of the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program,
- Describe the Avondale Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study,
- Request your initial thoughts and input, and
- Let you know how to stay involved.

This virtual scoping meeting is an important step in the transportation decision-making process and your input is encouraged and appreciated.

We hope you find this presentation interesting and informative.

## Why a Virtual Scoping Meeting?

- COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of things, including the way stakeholder outreach is conducted
- Maintains social distancing measures under changing Federal, State and Local guidance in response to the Delta and now Omicron variants



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of things, including the way stakeholder outreach is conducted.

This meeting is being conducted virtually so we can maintain social distancing measures under changing Federal, State and Local guidance in response to the Delta and now Omicron variants.



The New Orleans Rail Gateway is shown in bright yellow highlight.

- It begins on the West Bank near the St. Charles/Jefferson Parish line,
- Proceeds through Waggaman and Avondale easterly to the Avondale Yard.
- It then crosses the Mississippi River on the Huey P. Long Bridge (HPLB) then along the Back Belt through Old Metairie, and
- Enters the City of New Orleans at the 17th Street Canal.
- It then proceeds through the City, through the CSX Gentilly Yard and through New Orleans East to its terminus near Industrial Parkway.

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

## 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)**

Studies dating back to 1975 have been conducted by the Louisiana DOTD, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), 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.



A Public Private Partnership was formed between the

- Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development,
- Federal Railroad Administration,
- Federal Highway 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

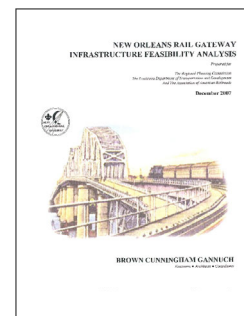
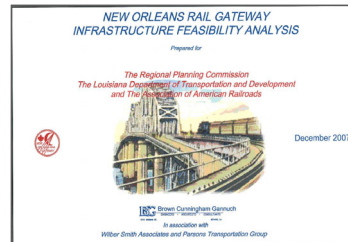
to collectively investigate possible solutions to that could reduce highway crossing delays and improve rail service.



## 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)**

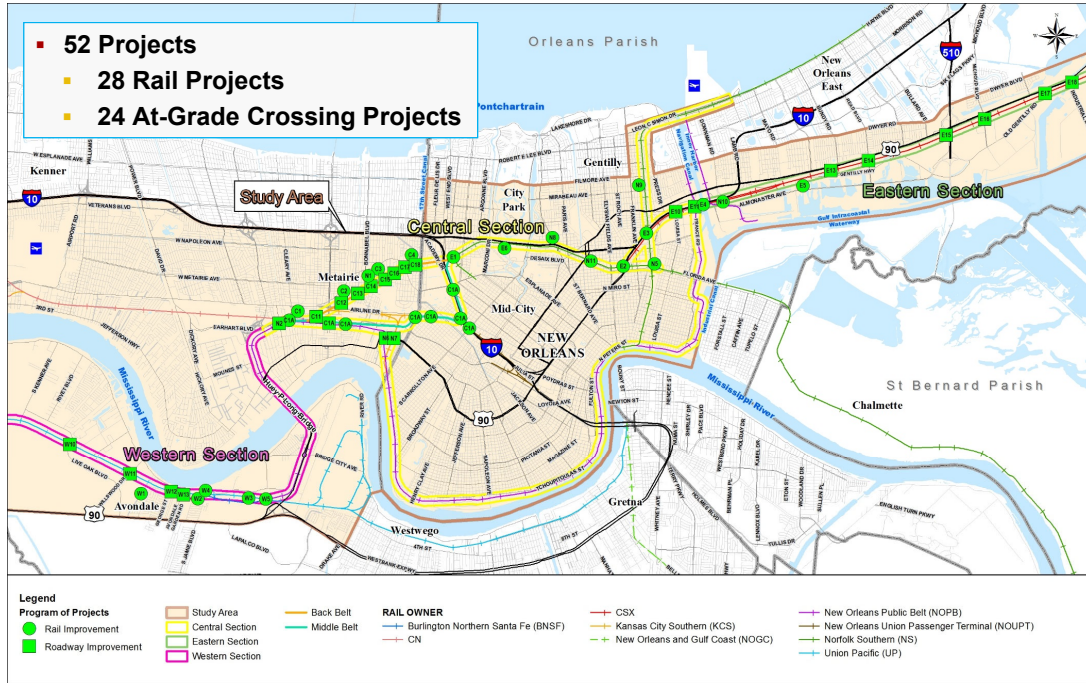


The Partnership conducted studies in 2004, 2007 and 2008.

The 2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis (2007 Study) evaluated the Gateway and potential Gateway-wide rail and roadway improvements.



## 2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis

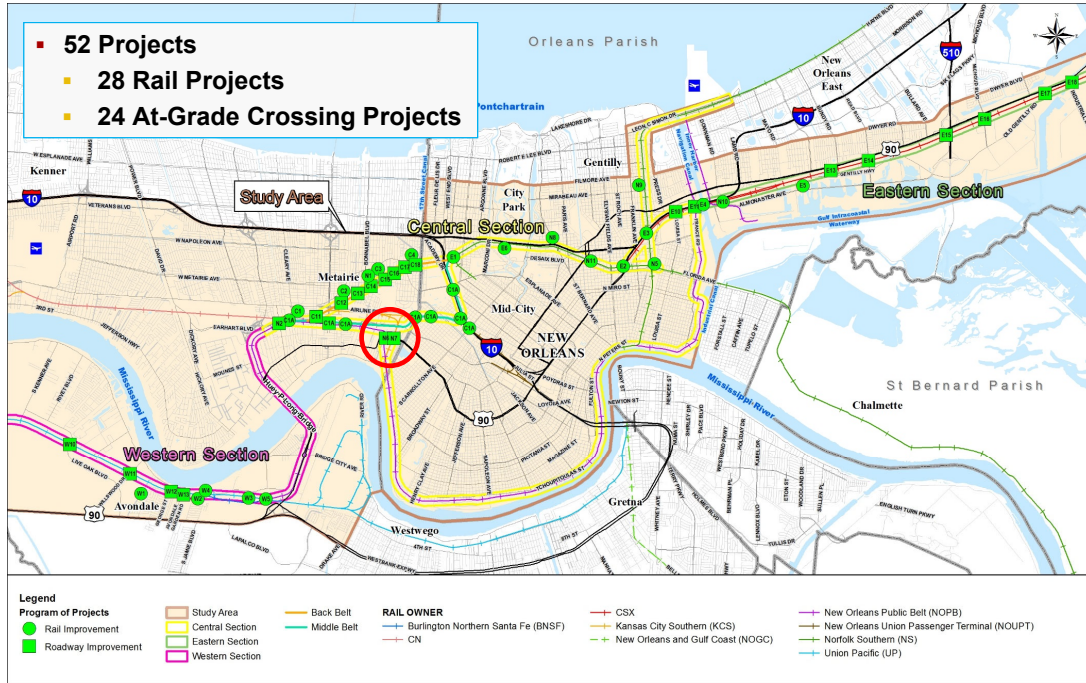


In all, 52 individual rail and roadway improvement projects (28 rail, 24 roadway) were identified throughout the Gateway and connecting rail lines.





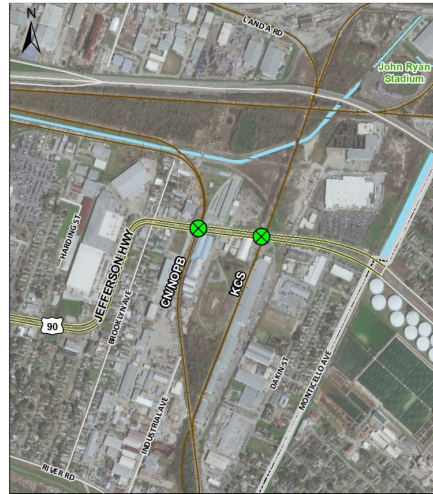
# Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation NEPA



Engineering and environmental studies are already underway for improvements to Jefferson Highway (US 90) in Jefferson.

## Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation NEPA

- **Consolidate the two (2) crossings to a single location and possibly grade separate the consolidated rail crossing**
- **Goals**
  - Reduce vehicle congestion and delay
  - Support Hospital expansion and Regional economic development
  - Improve safety
  - Increase freight fluidity through the NORG and the Port of New Orleans

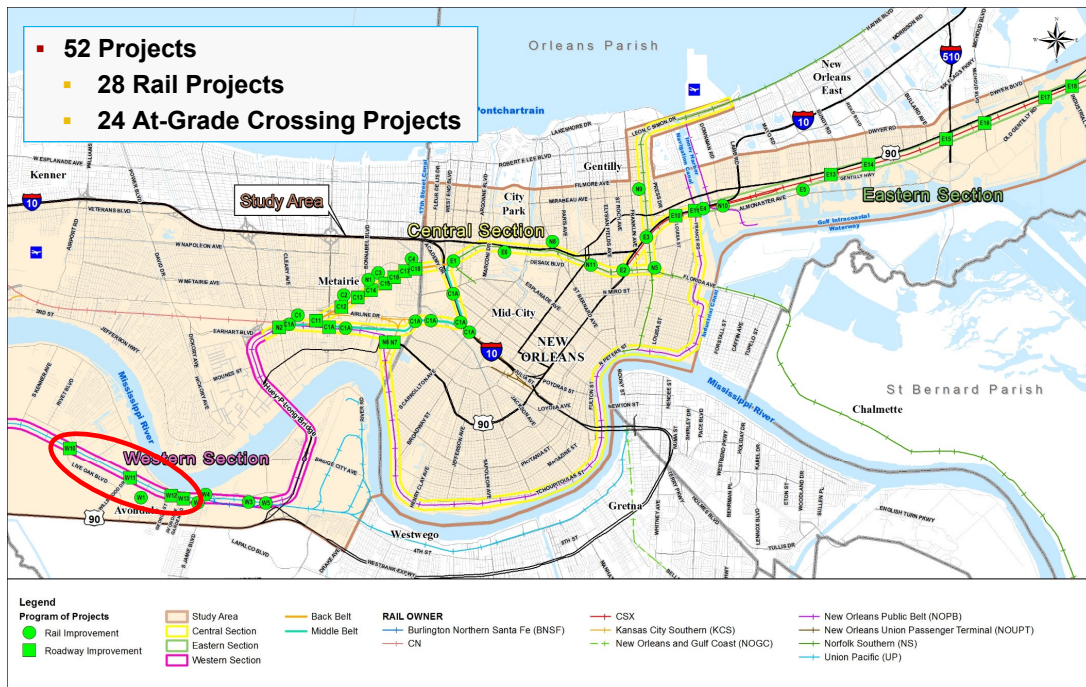


The Jefferson Highway Rail Crossing Relocation study is evaluating consolidating the two at-grade highway-rail crossings between the Ochsner Health Foundation Hospital and Monticello Avenue to a single location and possibly grade separating that consolidated rail crossing.

The study goals include:

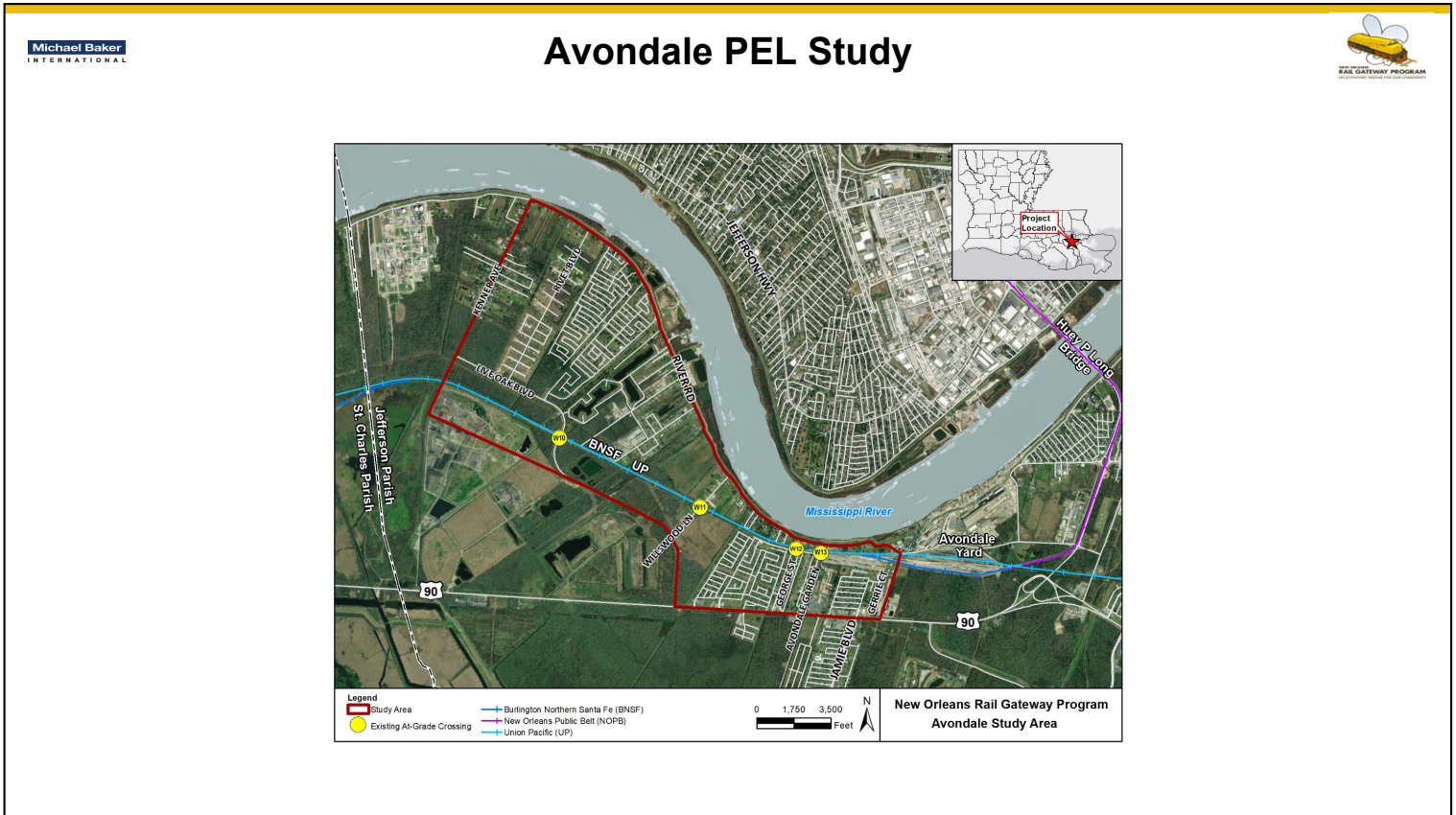
- Reducing vehicle congestion and delay,
- Supporting hospital expansion and regional economic development
- Improving safety, and
- Increasing freight fluidity through the Gateway and the Port of New Orleans.

# Avondale PEL Study



DOTD is initiating a similar study in the Avondale and Waggaman area.





The Avondale PEL Study will evaluate the at-grade highway-rail crossings at Live Oak Boulevard, Willswood Lane, George Street and Avondale-Garden Road.

These crossings were identified as Projects W10 through W13 in the 2007 Infrastructure Feasibility Analysis.

## What is a PEL Study?

- **PEL – Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL)**
  - **Study approach used to identify transportation issues, along with environmental considerations;**
  - **Used to make planning-level decisions such as identifying and prioritizing future projects, developing the purpose and need for a project, determining project size or length, and/or developing and refining a range of alternatives; and**
  - **Study information is carried forward into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. NEPA is the next phase of study.**

So what is a PEL Study?

PEL is an acronym for Planning and Environmental Linkages.

It is a study approach:

- Used to identify transportation issues, along with environmental considerations,
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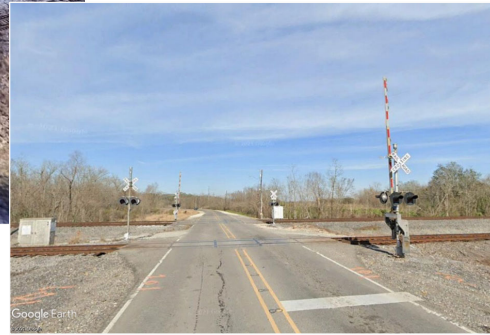




## Live Oak Boulevard Crossing



- **3-track crossing**
- **2 sets of crossbucks and lights**
- **1 set of gates**



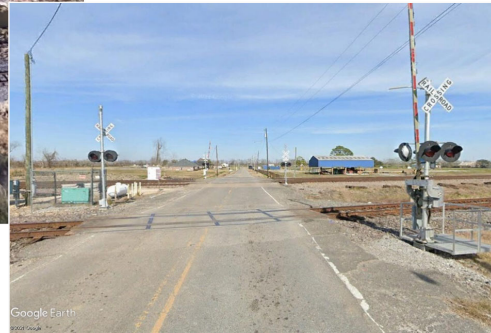
The Live Oak Boulevard crossing is a 3-track crossing with two sets of crossbucks and lights and one set of gates.



## Willswood Lane Crossing



- 4-track crossing
- 2 sets of crossbucks and lights
- 1 set of gates



The Willswood Lane crossing is a 4-track crossing. It also has two sets of crossbucks and lights and one set of gates.

## George Street Crossing



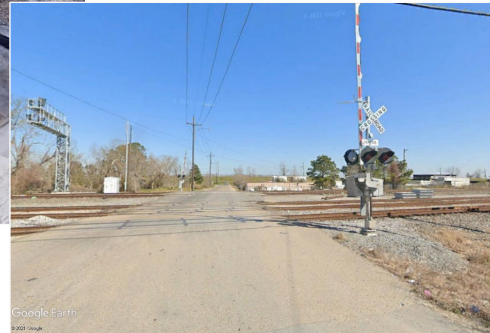
- 4-track crossing
- 2 sets of crossbucks and lights
- 1 set of gates



The George Street crossing is also a 4-track crossing. Like Live Oak and Willswood, it has two sets of crossbucks and lights and one set of gates.

## Avondale Garden Road Crossing

- **6-track crossing**
- **1 set of crossbucks, lights and gates**
- **Adjacent to the Avondale Rail Yard & Intermodal Terminal**



The crossing at Avondale Garden Road increases to 6-tracks as it approaches the Avondale Rail Yard and Intermodal Terminal.

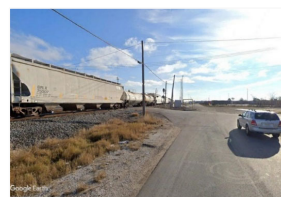
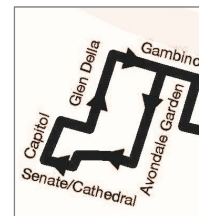
There is only one set of crossbucks, lights and gates at this crossing.



## Avondale PEL Study



- **On average, 31 freight and passenger trains cross these roadways each day**
- **Vehicle delays of possibly 10 minutes or longer for trains to clear the crossings**
- **Busing for Area Schools**
  - Cherbonnier-Rillieux Elementary
  - Emmett Gilbert School of Excellence at Ford
  - Strehle Community School
- **Jefferson Transit – Avondale W1 Bus Route**
- **Safety**
  - **Train-Vehicle Crashes (1977 – 2007) (FRA)**
    - 27 crashes (9 injury, 2 fatality)
    - No train-vehicle crashes since 2007
  - **Vehicle-Vehicle Crashes (2017 – 2019) (DOTD)**
    - 4 crashes (no injury or fatality)



On average, 31 freight and passenger trains cross these roadways each day resulting in vehicle delays of possibly 10 minutes or longer for trains to clear the crossings.

The picture at the top shows a bus crossing the tracks at George Street. At least one of the three area schools use these crossings.

Jefferson Transit's Avondale – W1 buses travel through the Kennedy Heights neighborhood with a stop at Capitol & Cathedral, but their route does not cross the tracks.

As report by the FRA, there have been 27 crashes are these four crossings since 1977, with 9 being injury and 2 being fatality crashes. There have been no other train-vehicle crashes since 2007.

DOTD crash data for the 3-year period from 2017 - 2019 recorded 4 vehicle-vehicle crashes at the crossings. Vehicle to vehicle crashes are not recorded in the FRA data.



## Avondale PEL Study Goals

- **Reduce vehicle delay due to rail traffic and Avondale Rail Yard switching operations**
- **Improve safety**
- **Eliminate truck traffic from roadways posted as “No Truck Route” with a 5-Ton Limit**
- **Improve intermodal connectivity**



The goals identified for the study include:

- Reducing vehicle delay due to rail traffic and Avondale Rail Yard switching operations,
- Improving safety,
- Eliminating truck traffic from roadways posted as “No Truck Route” with a 5-Ton Limit, and
- Improving intermodal connectivity.

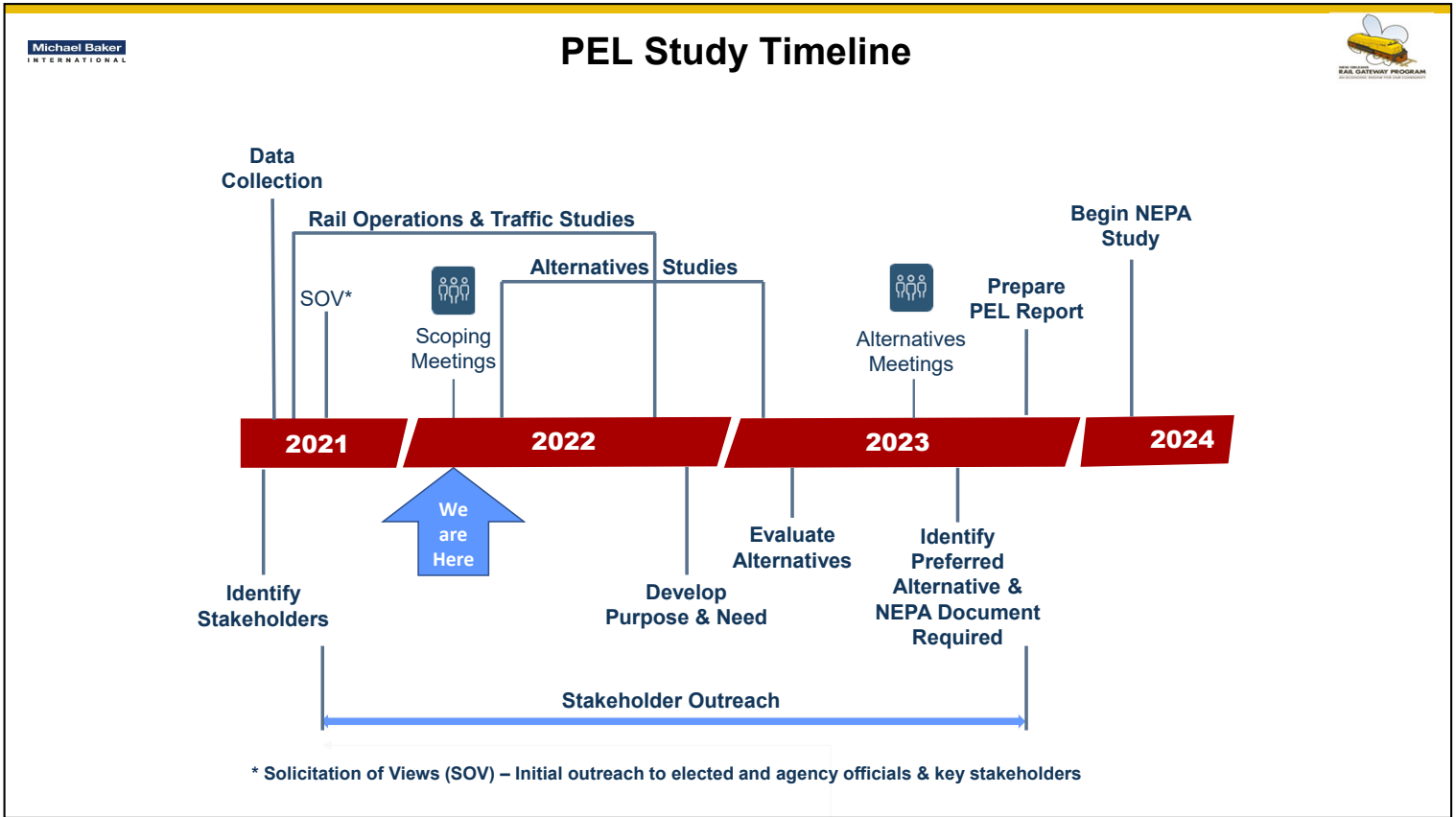
## PEL Engineering & Environmental Studies

- **Study closing all four (4) at-grade crossings and replacing them with one, or possibly more, bridges (road-over-rail grade separations)**
  - Rail Operations Analysis
  - Traffic Studies
  - Road-over-Rail Alternatives Studies
  - Environmental Inventory
  
- **Location and number of bridges will be evaluated as part of the study**
  
- **These studies will be presented at a future meeting**



The Avondale PEL Study will evaluate the feasibility of closing these four public crossings and replacing them with one, or possibly more, overpass (road-over-rail) grade separations. A rail operations analysis, traffic and alternative studies and an environmental inventory will be performed.

The location and number of grade separation(s) will be evaluated as part of this study and presented at a future meeting.



The study is anticipated to take about 2½ years to complete. A virtual meeting, like this one, is planned for mid-2023 to present the alternatives developed and solicit comment.



## Solicitation of Views (SOV) Responses

Regulatory/Resource Agency Responses	
Affiliation	Comment
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Certain birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The birds listed (list provided) are of particular concern because they appear on the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) list or warrant special attention in the project location.
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	The proposed project area will not impact prime farmland and therefore is exempt from the rules and regulations of the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)
US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	The site is indicative of the occurrence of waters of the United States, including wetlands. Several potentially required permits were identified.
Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)	Our office cannot offer an opinion concerning effect determination. However, we are not aware of potential concerns at this time. This opinion could change once we receive additional information concerning this project.
Louisiana Dept of Environmental Quality (LDEQ)	No objections based on the information provided. General comments provided for information.
Louisiana Dept of Wildlife & Fisheries (LDWF)	A Bald Eagle nest is located adjacent to the study area. No other impacts to rare, threatened, or endangered species or critical habitats are anticipated.
Louisiana Dept of Natural Resources (LDNR)	There are oil, gas or injection wells in the project area. The DNR water well database indicates that there are also registered water wells located in the vicinity of the project area.
Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry (LDAF)	No objection or further comment at this time.
Louisiana Office of Public Health	No objection at this time.

Over 100 letters were sent to Federal-, State- and Local- officials, regulatory & resource agencies, transit agencies, and other interested parties to inform them of the study and solicit their initial comments.

Eleven responses were received from Federal-, State- and Jefferson Parish regulatory & resource agencies. Several agencies identified required permits or identified environmental resources in the area.

None indicated any objections or concerns with the project at this time.



## Solicitation of Views (SOV) Responses

### Regulatory/Resource Agency Responses (cont'd)

Affiliation	Comment
DOTD Office of Public Works and Water Resources	Coordinate with the Jefferson Parish Floodplain Administrator to assure compliance with the Parish's requirements for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and ensure that appropriate permits are obtained.
Jefferson Parish Dept of Floodplain Management and Hazard Mitigation	No objection provided there is no flooding created where there was previously no flooding prior to construction.

### Local Officials and Interested Parties Responses

Affiliation	Comment
Jefferson Parish	Resolution No. 138145, expressing support for the Avondale PEL Study, was adopted August 25, 2021.

Jefferson Parish adopted a Resolution on August 25<sup>th</sup> supporting the study.





## We Want to Hear From You Too!



- **Please complete the Comment Form on the Avondale Webpage**

NEW ORLEANS RAIL GATEWAY  
JEFFERSON AND ORLEANS PARISHES, LOUISIANA  
Avondale Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study  
Virtual Scoping Meeting Comment Form

Please Print Clearly

Name	Street or P.O. Box City, State, Zip	Email Address

The purpose of today's virtual scoping meeting is to present the Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) study and to solicit your input concerning important transportation issues. Please answer the following questions.

- How did you hear about the New Orleans Rail Gateway (NORG) Avondale PEL Study and this Virtual Scoping Meeting (check all that apply)?  
 Door Hanger  Newspaper  TV/Radio Announcement  MyDOTD Email  Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you live, work or travel through the Avondale or Waggaman areas (check all that apply)?  
 Live  Work  Travel through  None of these
- How frequently do you travel across the following at-grade rail crossings (where railroad tracks and motor vehicle roadway intersect at the same level or grade)?  
Live Oak Blvd  Daily  Multiple times per day  1-2 times per week  3-4 times per week  Less than 4 times per month  
Wilwood Ln  Daily  Multiple times per day  1-2 times per week  3-4 times per week  Less than 4 times per month  
George St  Daily  Multiple times per day  1-2 times per week  3-4 times per week  Less than 4 times per month  
Avondale Garden Rd  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 across these at-grade rail crossings (check all that apply)?  
 Commute to work  Shopping  School  Visiting family/friends  Entertainment  Access to River Road  
 Access to U.S. 90  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- How often are you delayed due to train traffic at these at-grade rail crossings?  
 Every time  Most of the time  Some of the time  Rarely  Never
- When you are delayed, on average, how long have you waited for the train to clear the crossing? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes
- What is the longest amount of time you've been delayed at one of these at-grade rail crossings?  
 less than 1 minute  between 1 but less than 5 minutes  between 5 but less than 10 minutes  10 minutes or longer  
At which crossing(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you ever take an alternative route to avoid these at-grade rail crossings?  
 No  Yes, please describe the alternate roads you take \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you have safety concerns at these at-grade rail crossings?  
 No  Yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

State Project No. H.005168.2 March 9 to April 15, 2022

- **Complete & Submit Online**
- **Print, Complete & USPS Mail to:**
  - NORG – Avondale PEL Study  
c/o The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.  
P.O. Box 56845  
New Orleans, LA 70116
- **Download, Complete & Email to:**
  - [NORG@mbakerintl.com](mailto:NORG@mbakerintl.com)
- **Include your contact information to receive future study information**
- **Comment forms must be received or postmarked no later than April 15, 2022 to become part of the public record**

We want to hear from you too!

If you want to comment about the study or this presentation, please complete the Comment Form on the Avondale PEL Study webpage. The Comment Form can be submitted online and can also be printed or downloaded.

Comment forms must be received or postmarked no later than April 15, 2022, to become part of the public record.

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

## Stay Involved!



- **Provide your contact information to receive:**
  - Newsletters
  - Public Meeting & Other Notices
  
- **Contact us:**
  - Telephone - (504) 488-6196
  - Email - [NORG@mbakerintl.com](mailto:NORG@mbakerintl.com)
    - Subject: Avondale PEL Study
  - USPS Mail
    - New Orleans Rail Gateway Program  
Avondale PEL Study  
c/o The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.  
P.O. Box 56845  
New Orleans, LA 70116
  
- **Visit the DOTD Avondale PEL Study web page**  
[www.dotd.la.gov/AvondalePELStudy](http://www.dotd.la.gov/AvondalePELStudy)



Please provide your contact information to receive newsletters, public meeting and other notices.

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

You can contact us any time during the study by telephone, email and USPS Mail as listed here. This contact information is also available on the DOTD Avondale PEL Study Web page.

Study information as it is developed will also be posted to the DOTD Avondale Webpage.

**Thank you for Watching!**

**THANK YOU**



Thank you again for taking the time to watch this virtual public scoping meeting presentation for the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program Avondale PEL Study.

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