



New Orleans Rail Gateway Program

Jefferson and Orleans Parishes
State Project No. H.005168

Avondale PEL Study Alternatives Meeting

April 16, 2024



Michael Baker
INTERNATIONAL

Thank you for attending today's public meeting for the New Orleans Rail Gateway Program Avondale PEL Study.

We hope you find this meeting interesting and informative.



Alternatives Development Meeting Format



- **The meeting follows an informal, or “open house” style format**
 - **Present an overview of the Alternative’s Development**
 - **Discuss the Alternatives developed with Study Team Representatives**
 - **Solicit input on the Alternatives developed**
 - **Learn how to receive Study information and participate in the decision-making process**



Tonight’s public meeting is an informal, open-house style or open forum format.

The meeting consists of:

- A video presentation of the alternatives developed,
- Opportunity to speak with Study Team Representatives,
- Obtain comments on the alternatives developed, and
- Let you know how to stay informed and involved.

To get the most out of this presentation, please refer to the materials that were handed out at the Welcome Table.

After you’ve listened to this presentation, review the project exhibits, talk with Study Team representatives, and give us your comments.

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

Public Private Partnership (P3)

The image displays a central photograph of a freight train crossing a large steel truss bridge over a body of water. Surrounding the photograph are logos for the participating organizations in the P3: Michael Baker International, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), Department of Transportation United States of America, Jefferson Parish Regional Planning Commission, Association of American Railroads, Kansas City Southern Lines, New Orleans Public Belt (NOPB), Norfolk Southern (NS), BNSF, CSX, Union Pacific, and Amtrak.

The New Orleans Rail Gateway Program, and this Avondale PEL Study are being advanced through a Public Private Partnership 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 solutions to reduce highway crossing delays and improve rail service.



Avondale PEL Study



- **Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study to evaluate the feasibility of consolidating some or all of the roadway-rail at-grade crossings at:**
 - Avondale Garden Road,
 - George Street,
 - Willswood Lane, and
 - Live Oak Boulevard

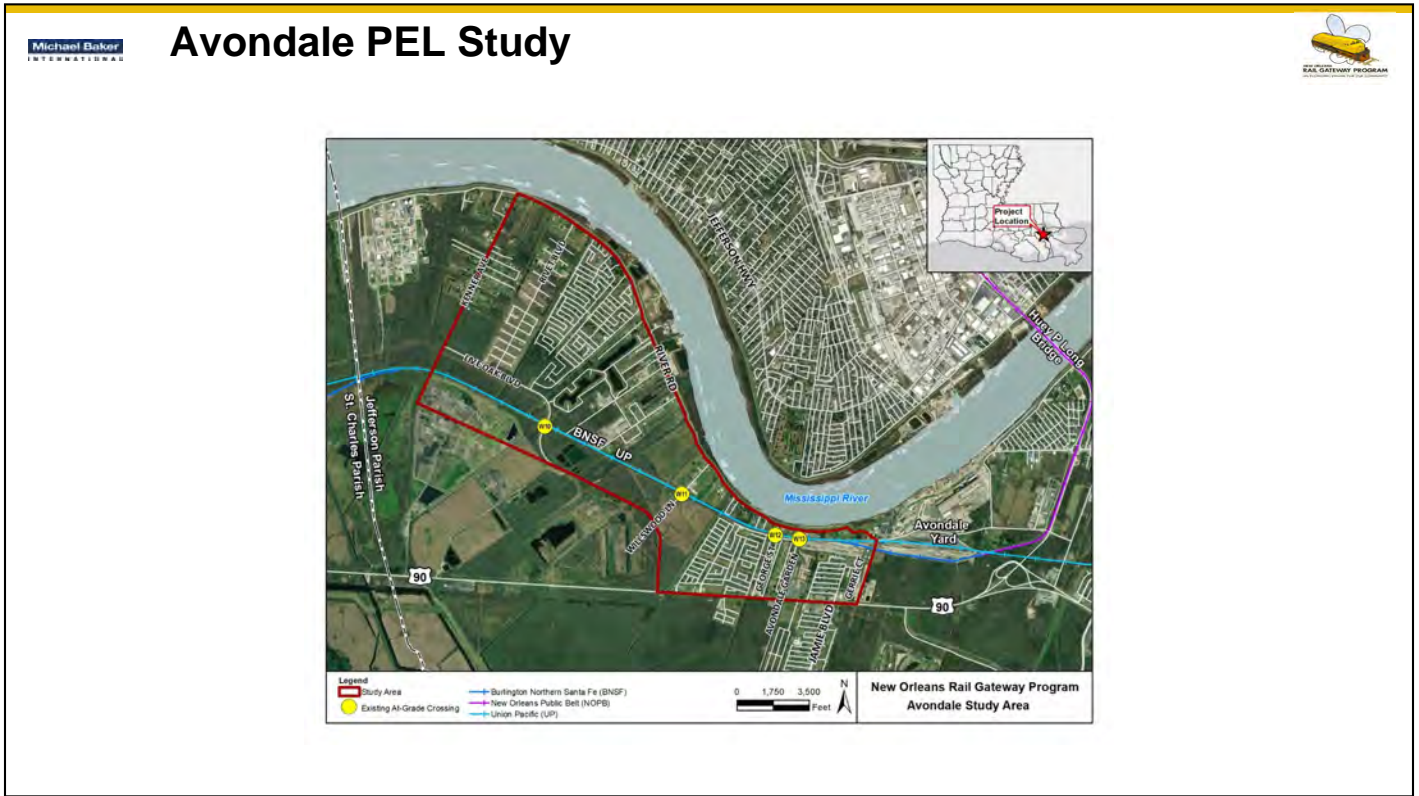
- **Replacing them with one, or possibly more, road-over-rail grade separations**



The Avondale PEL Study is evaluating the feasibility of consolidating the roadway-rail at-grade crossings at:

- Avondale Garden Road,
- George Street,
- Willswood Lane, and
- Live Oak Boulevard

And replacing them with one, or possibly more, road-over-rail grade separations.



The Study Area encompasses the Waggaman and Avondale areas. These four at-grade crossings were identified as Projects W10 through W13 in a prior New Orleans Rail Gateway study.



Avondale Garden Road and George Street Crossings



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



The Avondale Garden Road crossing is a 6-track crossing departing the Avondale Rail Yard and Intermodal Terminal.

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

The trackage reduces to a 4-track crossing at George Street, which has two sets of crossbucks and lights and one set of gates.



Willswood Lane and Live Oak Boulevard Crossings



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

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



The Willswood Lane crossing is also a 4-track crossing.

The trackage further reduces to a 3-track crossing at Live Oak Boulevard.

Like George Street, the Willswood and Live Oak crossings have two sets of crossbucks and lights and one set of gates.



Avondale PEL Study Goals




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




The goals identified at the beginning of the study included:

- 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 Limit, and
- Improving intermodal connectivity.



Stakeholder Outreach




- **Scoping Meetings**
 - Local Officials – March 8, 2022
 - Virtual Public – March 9 thru April 15, 2022


- **Business & Trucking Interests**
 - Travel Survey – March 8, 2022

- **Jefferson Parish School District**
 - Bus Routes – April 2022


- **Civic Association Meetings**
 - Waggaman Civic Association – April 6, 2022 & April 5, 2023
 - S1 Civic Association – April 20, 2022 & April 19, 2023
 - Kennedy Heights Civic Association – May 5, 2022




Crossing Delays



Safety Concerns



Emergency Services
Access



Train Horn Noise

These Study Goals were introduced during Local Officials and virtual Public Scoping Meetings during March and April 2022.

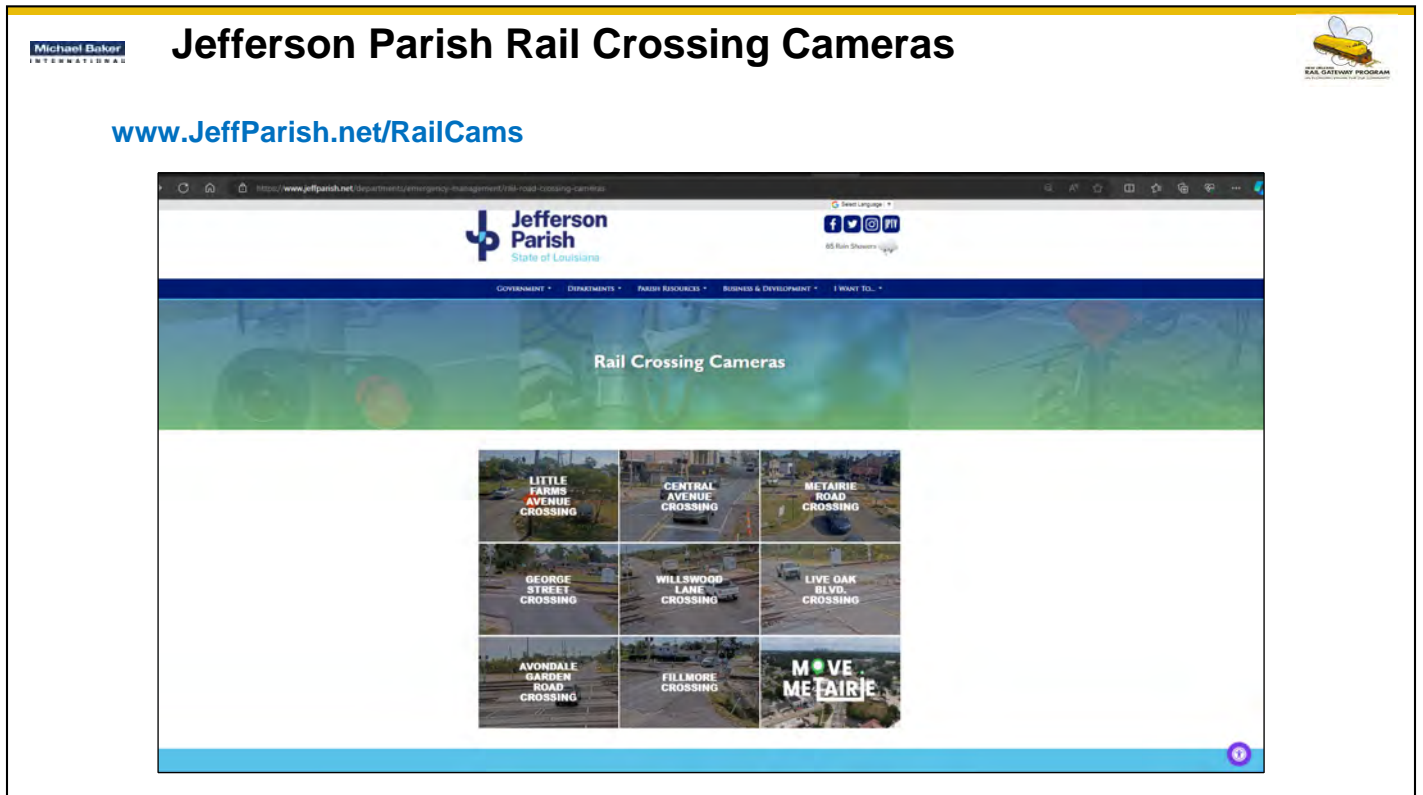
The study outreach also included:

- Distributing travel surveys to trucking companies to get an understanding of the trucking movements,

- Discussing the number of school bus crossings at the four crossings with Jefferson Parish School District representatives, and

- Providing study updates at multiple Civic Association meetings.

The issues of most importance we heard were crossing delays, safety concerns, emergency services access and train horn noise.



Jefferson Parish recognizes the long vehicle delay at several Jefferson Parish crossings.

In November 2022, real-time cameras were activated at seven crossing locations across the Parish, including these four crossings in Waggaman and Avondale. The cameras enable motorists to see if a train is crossing or stopped, so travel routes can be planned accordingly.



Alternatives Development Process



- **Process Involved Five (5) Major Steps**
 - **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**

The process for developing the alternatives follows five basic steps:

- Step 1 – Determine existing and forecast future roadway traffic volumes
- Step 2 – Determine existing and forecast future railroad traffic volumes and the blocked crossing roadway traffic delay
- Step 3 – Evaluate if conditions are met to grade separate the crossings
- Step 4 – Identify the area environmental features and develop the alternatives, and
- Step 5 – Evaluate the effect on environmental features and area traffic, and identify Build Alternative Combinations



Step 1 – Existing and Future Roadway Traffic Volumes



- Existing (2021) Traffic Volumes – August & November 2021
- Future (2048) Traffic Volumes – Forecast at 0.5% compound growth rate

Crossing Location	Functional Classification	Speed Limit (mph)	Trucks (%)	School Buses	2021 AADT	2048 AADT
Avondale Garden Road	Local Road	20	2	9	1,070	1,220
George Street	Local Road	20	2	14	1,910	2,190
Willswood Lane	Local Road	40	10	12	1,210	1,380
Live Oak Boulevard	Minor Arterial	40	6	17	3,610	4,130

NOTE: AADT – Average Annual Daily Traffic

This table shows the truck percentages, number of school bus crossings, and average annual daily traffic at the four crossing locations.

Avondale Garden Road has the least daily traffic and school bus crossing, while Live Oak Boulevard has the most.



Step 2 – Existing and Future Crossing Blockage & Delay



- Existing (2021) Train Volumes – FRA Crossing Inventory Forms
- Future (2048) Train Volumes – Forecast at 1.0% compound growth rate
- Spreadsheet analysis to calculate crossing occupancy times

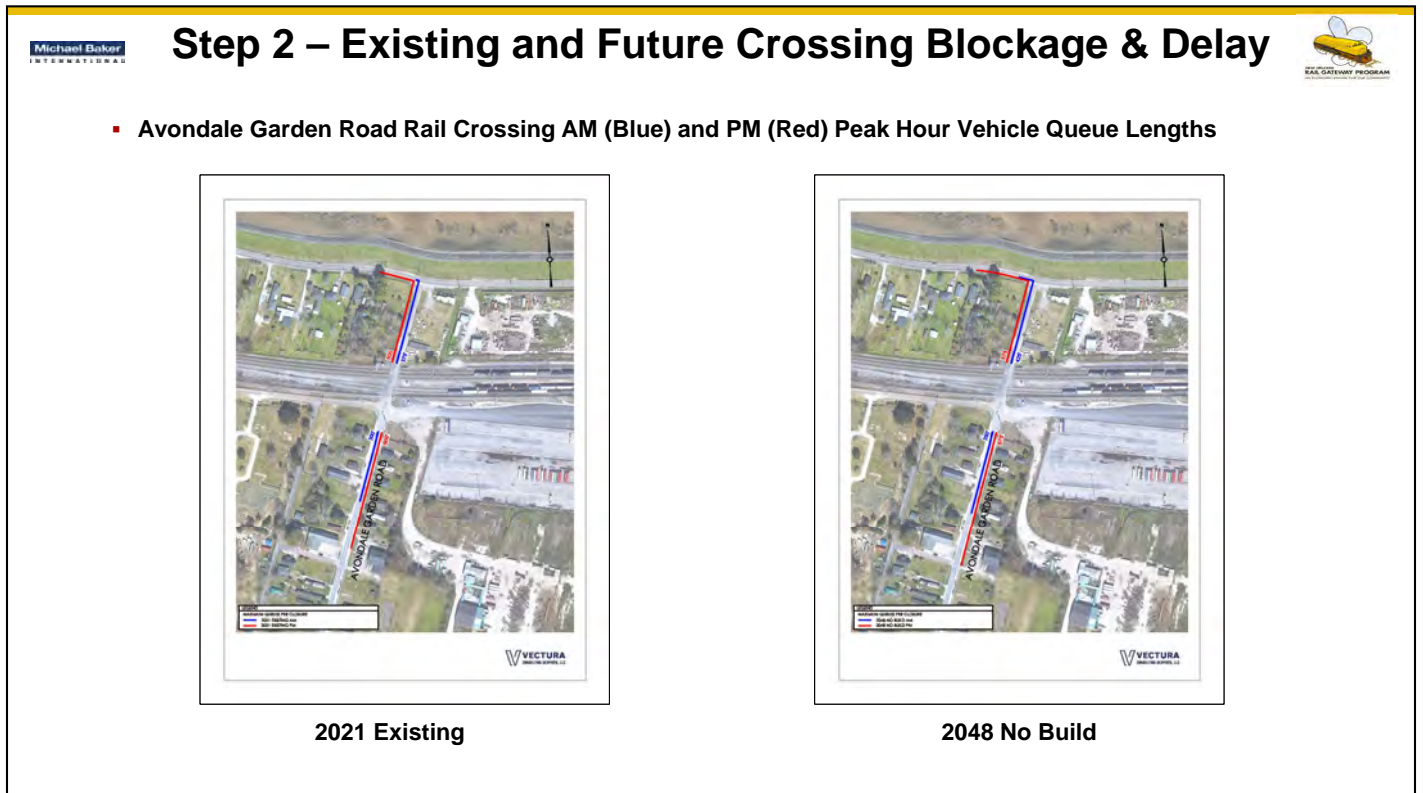
Crossing Location	Existing Year 2021					Year 2048 No Build				
	Trains Daily	Thru Trains (hpd)	Switching Moves (hpd)	Total Crossing Blockage (hpd)	Total Vehicle Delay (vhpd)	Trains Daily	Thru Trains (hpd)	Switching Moves (hpd)	Total Crossing Blockage (hpd)	Total Vehicle Delay (vhpd)
Avondale Garden Road	44	3.46	4.34	7.80	47.98	57	5.60	5.67	11.27	80.26
George Street	32	2.72	2.99	5.71	47.72	42	4.40	3.92	8.32	77.76
Willswood Lane	31	2.48	0.80	3.28	33.30	41	4.22	1.05	5.27	54.22
Live Oak Boulevard	14	1.82	-	1.82	20.96	18	3.17	-	3.17	30.27

NOTE: hpd – hours per day | vhpd – vehicle hours per day

Blocked crossings due to thru train and switching moves were calculated using existing and forecast train volume data.

Switching moves exceed thru trains at the Avondale Garden Road and George Street crossings due to their proximity to the Avondale Rail Yard.

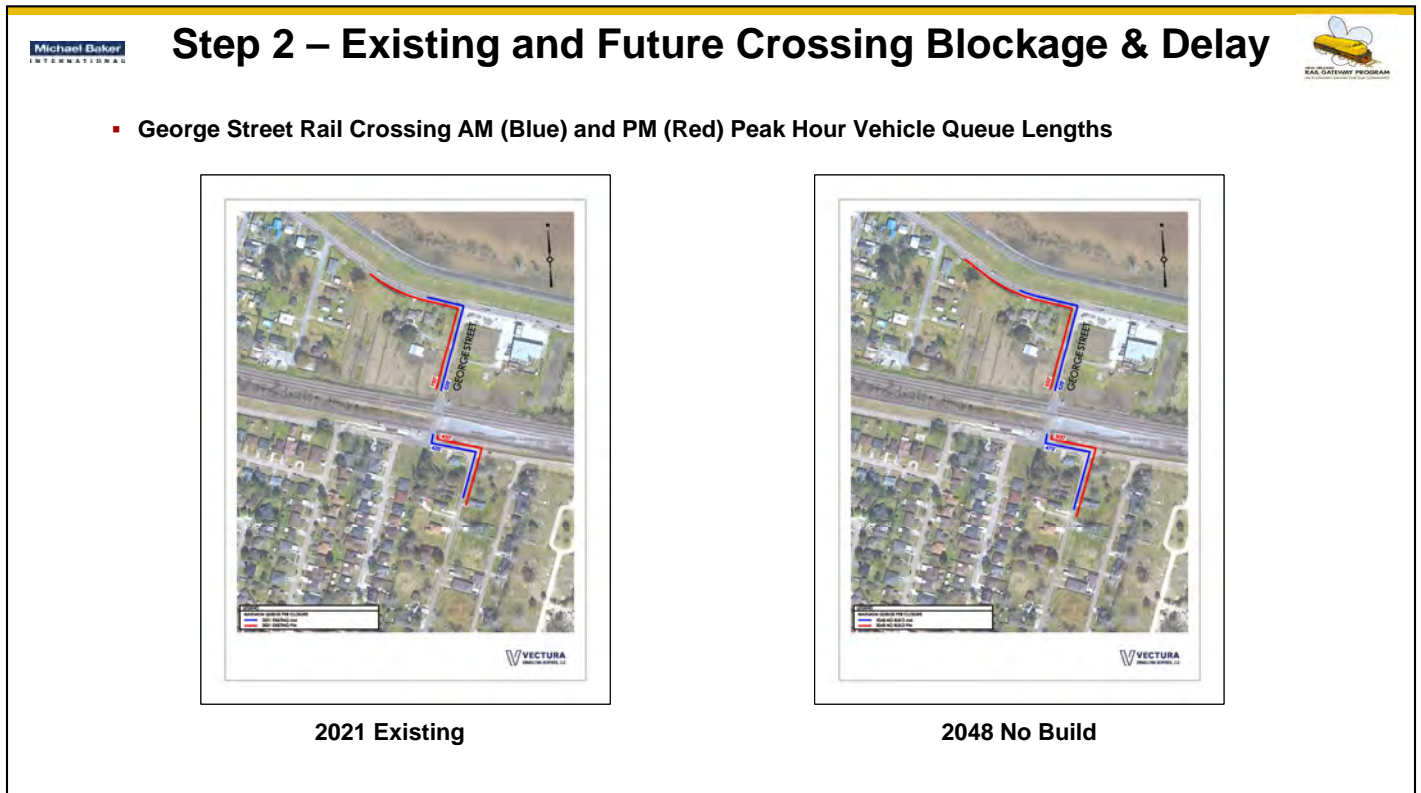
On average, the number of hours vehicles are delayed at these crossings each day varies from approximately 21 hours at Live Oak Boulevard (in 2021) to approximately 80 hours at Avondale Garden Road (in 2048).



The morning and afternoon peak hour traffic was determined, as part of the Step 1 Traffic Analyses, to be from 6:45 AM to 7:45 AM and 4:30 PM to 5:30 PM, respectively.

These figures illustrate the maximum length that traffic could back up at Avondale Garden Road in the morning (in Blue) and in the afternoon (in Red).

These queues were calculated based on projected traffic volumes. It was noted during field observations that drivers at times altered their travel route upon seeing a train blocking the crossing. Therefore, actual queues in the field may appear less than those shown on this slide due to drivers altering their behavior to avoid congestion.



These figures illustrate how far the traffic could back up at George Street in the morning (in Blue) and in the afternoon (in Red).

As with Avondale Garden Road, these queues were calculated based on projected traffic volumes. Actual queues may appear less than those shown on this slide due to drivers altering their behavior to avoid congestion.

Step 2 – Existing and Future Crossing Blockage & Delay

- Willswood Lane Rail Crossing AM (Blue) and PM (Red) Peak Hour Vehicle Queue Lengths

2021 Existing

2048 No Build

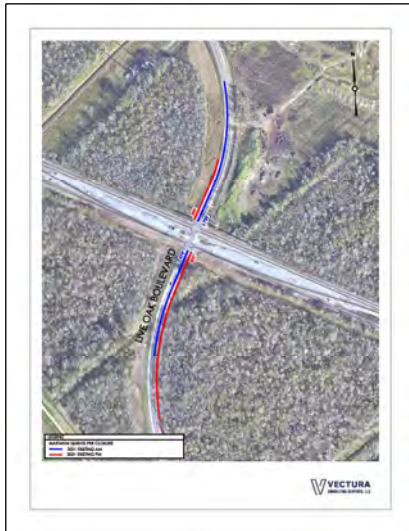
These figures illustrate how far the traffic could back up at Willswood Lane in the morning (in Blue) and in the afternoon (in Red).



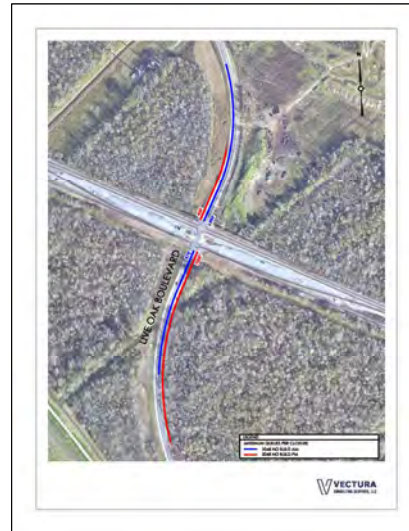
Step 2 – Existing and Future Crossing Blockage & Delay



- Live Oak Boulevard Rail Crossing AM (Blue) and PM (Red) Peak Hour Vehicle Queue Lengths



2021 Existing



2048 No Build

These figures illustrate how far the traffic could back up at Live Oak Boulevard in the morning (in Blue) and in the afternoon (in Red).



Step 3 – Grade Separation Warrants



▪ **FHWA Warrant Guidance – when grade separation should be considered**

Warrant Condition	Avondale Garden Road	George Street	Willswood Lane	Live Oak Blvd
An average of 30 or more trains per day	+ 44 (57)	+ 32 (42)	+ 31 (41)	- 14 (18)
Vehicle delay exceeds 30 vehicle hours per day (vhp) with consideration for cost effectiveness	+ 58.74 (80.26)	+ 57.65 (77.76)	+ 40.42 (54.22)	- 14.71 (19.37)
Other Warrant Conditions	- Not Met	- Not Met	- Not Met	- Not Met

NOTE: Values 2021 (2048)

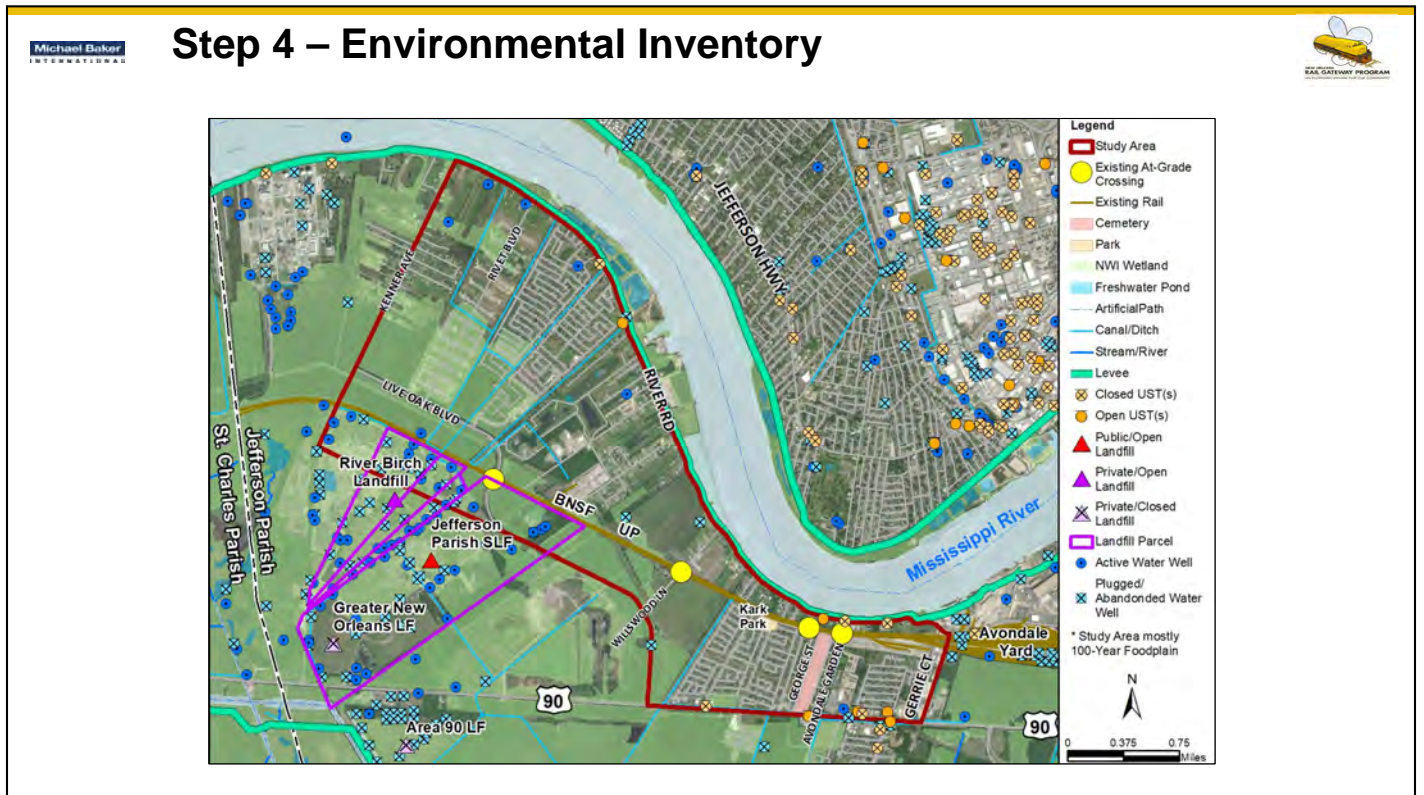
- **Whenever a new grade separation is constructed, consideration should be given to the possibility of closing one or more adjacent crossings provided:**
 - Acceptable alternate access across the rail line exists within one (1) mile measured along the track
 - The median trip length normally made over the crossing would not increase by more than 2.5 miles
- **Avondale Garden Road and George Street crossings both satisfy this Guidance**

Federal Highway Administration guidance identifies warrant conditions to be considered in evaluating whether an at-grade crossing is a candidate for grade separation.

Only two of FHWA's warrant conditions are applicable to the Waggaman and Avondale crossings, the average number of trains per day and the daily vehicle delay due to blocked crossings.

Only the Avondale Garden Road, George Street and Willswood Lane crossings exceed these warrant conditions. The Live Oak Boulevard crossing does not exhibit the number of train crossings or resultant vehicle delay required to consider grade separation.

The Guidance also indicates that consideration should be given to closing adjacent crossings, given certain criteria, when a grade separation is contemplated. The Avondale Garden Road and George Street crossings satisfy the listed distance criteria. The Willswood Lane crossing does not.



Numerous environmental features are scattered throughout the Waggaman/Avondale area.

The dominant environmental features within the Study Area are residential and commercial development, wetlands, floodplains, and the Greater New Orleans, Jefferson Parish & River Birch landfills south of the railroad tracks.



Step 4 – Avondale Garden Road (AGR) Alternative






Legend

- Avondale Garden Road Alternative
- Bridge
- Bulb Out
- Centerline
- Cul-de-sac EOP
- Existing R/W
- RR Crossing
- Removal
- Required R/W
- Remove Pavement
- Existing Rail
- Cemetery
- 100-year Floodplain
- NWI Wetland
- Freshwater Pond
- Parcel
- Park
- Canal/Ditch
- Levee
- Closed UST(s)
- Open UST(s)
- Active Water Well
- Plugged/ Abandoned Water Well


- **New grade separated roadway connecting US 90 and River Road**
- **Closes the existing George Street and AGR at-grade crossings**
- **Adds access from AGR to the Realigned Alternative**
- **Relocates access to the Intermodal Yard via a new Access Road**
- **Expands Jefferson Parish's Bicycle/Pedestrian Access**

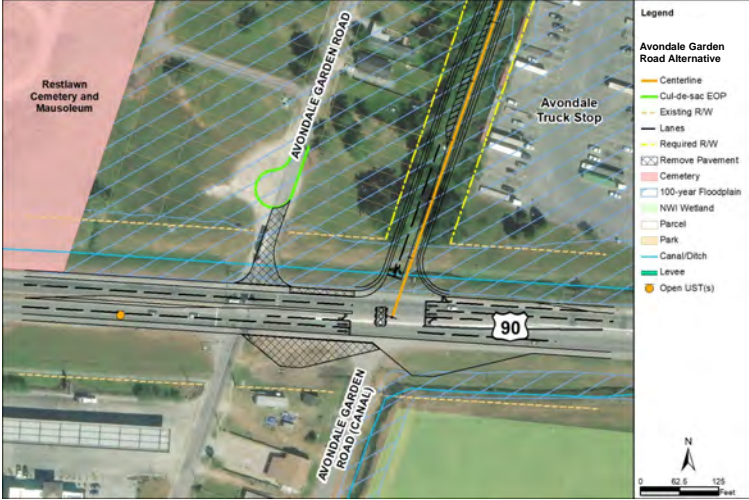
The Avondale Garden Road Alternative would:

- Construct a new grade separated roadway between the AGR residential properties and the Truck Stop and Container Yard, connecting US 90 and River Road,
- Close both the existing George Street and AGR at-grade crossings,
- Add a new, direct connection from AGR to the Realigned Alternative and relocate access to the Intermodal Yard via a new Access Road, and
- Expand Jefferson Parish's Bicycle/Pedestrian Access.



Step 4 – Avondale Garden Road (AGR) Alternative





- Cul-de-sac's AGR
- Relocates the existing intersection to a new Signalized intersection
- Retains dedicated left- and right-turn, and U-turn movements
- Estimated Cost - **\$62.0M**

Avoids wetlands | Impacts floodplains | Two commercial relocations | Eliminates train horn noise

The Avondale Garden Road Alternative would also:


- Cul-de-sac AGR and remove the existing intersection with US 90,
- Relocate the existing intersection to the new signalized intersection, and
- Retain the existing dedicated left- and right-turn and U-turn movements at the new intersection location.

The estimated cost is \$62.0M


This alternative would avoid wetlands but would impact floodplains. It would result in two commercial relocations – Concrete Busters and MTC Trucking. Closing the George Street and AGR crossings would eliminate the required train horn auditory warnings.




The Avondale Garden Road Alternative would look similar to this.



Step 4 – Willswood Lane Realignment





- Realigns and grade separates existing Willswood Lane
- Closes the existing Willswood Lane at-grade crossing
- Maintains access to residential properties
- Expands Jefferson Parish's Bicycle/Pedestrian Access
- Estimated Cost - **\$57.2M**

Avoids wetlands | Minimizes floodplains | Avoids residential/commercial relocations | Eliminates train horn noise

The Willswood Lane Realignment would:


- Realign and grade separate the existing Willswood Lane to the east,
- Close the existing Willswood Lane at-grade crossing,
- Maintain access to existing residential properties via the existing roadway, and
- Expand Jefferson Parish's Bicycle/Pedestrian Access.

The estimated cost is \$57.2M


This alternative would avoid wetlands and minimize floodplain impacts. It would also not result in any residential or commercial relocations and would also eliminate the required Willswood Lane train horn auditory warning.




The Willswood Lane Realignment would look similar to this.



Step 4 – Willswood Lane Alternate







- **New grade separated roadway connecting Live Oak Boulevard and River Road**
- **Closes the existing Willswood Lane at-grade crossing**
- **Expands Jefferson Parish’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Access**
- **Increases the trip length by no more than **1.75 miles****
- **Estimated Cost - **\$48.1M****


The Willswood Lane Alternate would:

- Construct a new grade separated roadway west of Willswood Lane connecting Live Oak Boulevard and River Road,
- Close the existing Willswood Lane at-grade crossing, and
- Expand Jefferson Parish’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Access.



Step 4 – Willswood Lane Alternate





- **New grade separated roadway connecting Live Oak Boulevard and River Road**
- **Closes the existing Willswood Lane at-grade crossing**
- **Expands Jefferson Parish’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Access**
- **Increases the trip length by no more than **1.75 miles****
- **Estimated Cost - **\$48.1M****

Bridges wetlands | Impacts floodplains | Avoids residential/commercial relocations | Eliminates train horn noise


It would increase the trip length for Willswood Lane residents by no more than 1.75 miles, depending the travel destination.

The estimated cost is \$48.1M


This alternative would bridge wetlands but would impact floodplains. It would not result in any residential or commercial relocations. Closing the Willswood Lane crossing would eliminate the required train horn auditory warning.



The Willswood Lane Alternate would look similar to this.



Step 5 – Build Alternatives and Environmental Impacts



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


These three alternatives, in various combinations, resulted in five Build Alternatives.

- Build Alternative 1 is the Avondale Garden Road (AGR) Alternative and closes both the existing AGR and George Street crossings
- Build Alternative 2 is the Willswood Lane Realignment and closes the existing Willswood Lane crossing
- Build Alternative 3 is the Willswood Lane Alternate, and also closes the existing Willswood Lane crossing
- Build Alternative 4 combines the Avondale Garden Road (AGR) Alternative (Build Alternative 1) and the Willswood Lane Realignment (Build Alternative 2), closing the existing Willswood Lane, George Street, and AGR crossings
- Build Alternative 5, combines the Avondale Garden Road (AGR) Alternative (Build Alternative 1) and the Willswood Lane Alternate (Build Alternative 3), also closing the existing Willswood Lane, George Street, and AGR crossings


These five Build Alternatives can be viewed in more detail along with rendering of the alternatives in the Exhibits Area.

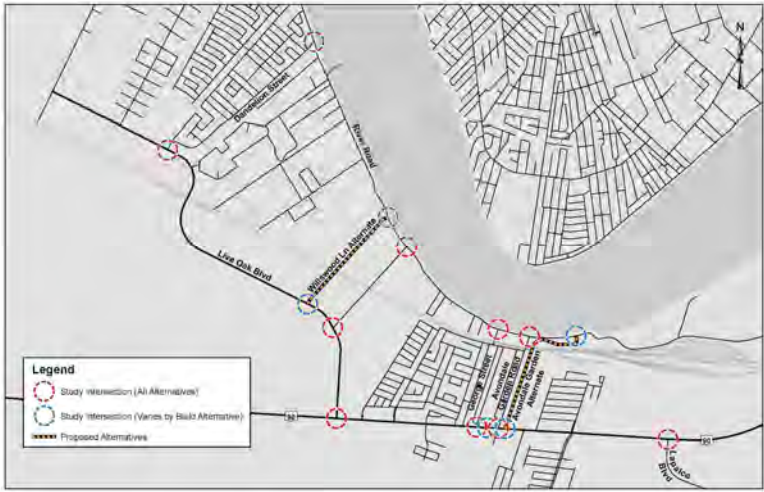
The potential impacts and estimated costs of the five Build Alternatives are summarized in this table.

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.



Step 5 – Area Traffic Analyses





- Existing and new intersections were evaluated to determine potential impacts to surrounding roadway network

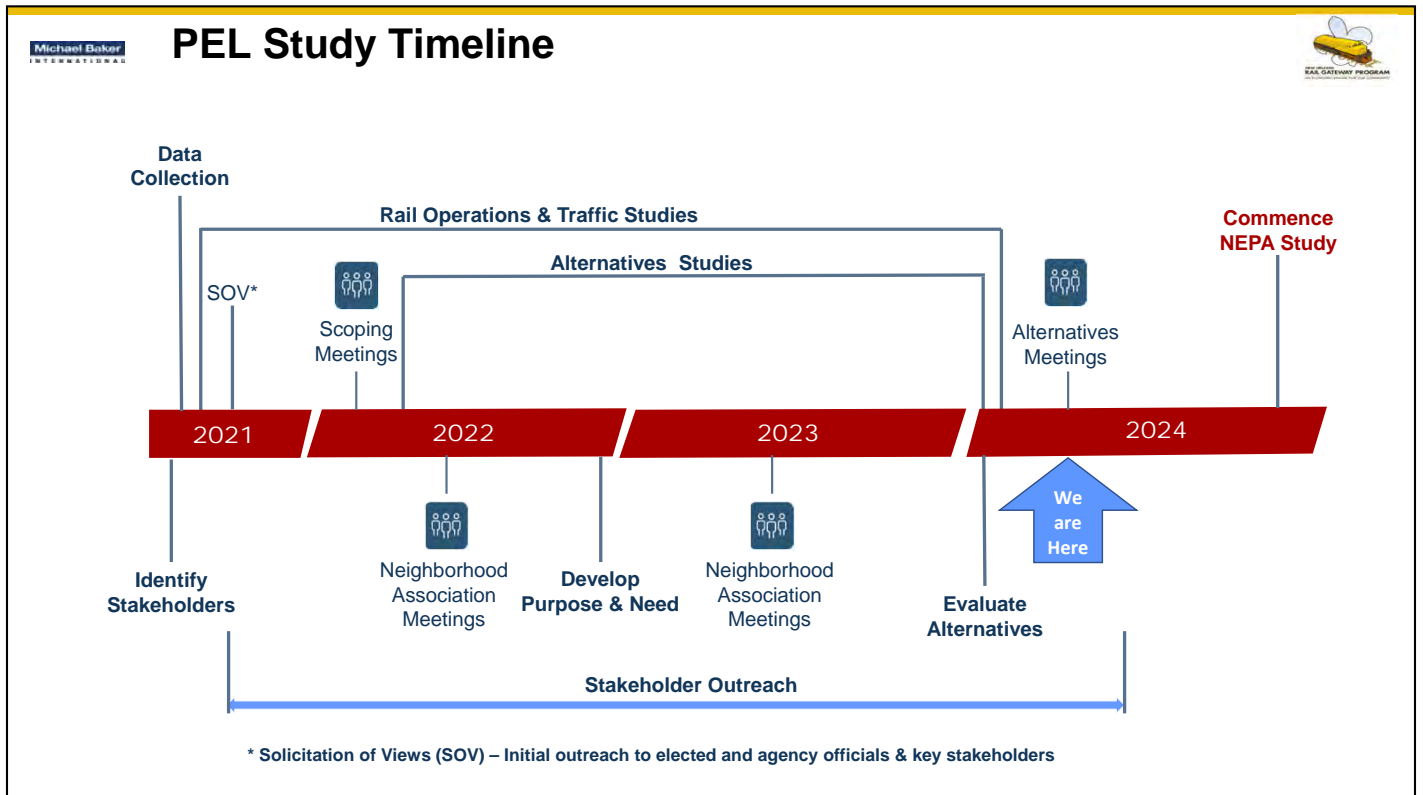
- None of the five Build Alternatives would result in any significant intersection delays or travel impacts to area roadways

Area intersections were evaluated to determine any impacts of the Build Alternatives on the surrounding roadway network.

The red dashed circles indicate existing intersections where analyses were conducted for the forecast future No Build and all five Build Alternatives.

The blue dashed circles indicate the new intersections that were evaluated for the Build Alternatives. These intersections differ depending on the Build Alternative being evaluated.

None of the five Build Alternatives would result in any significant intersection delays or travel impacts to area roadways.



This PEL study is nearing completion. The study will advance to the NEPA study phase later this year. The NEPA phase will further refine the alternatives with a focus on the environmental impacts. The study and NEPA documentation will take at least a year to complete.



We Want to Hear From You!



- **Comment Forms are available at Tonight's Meeting or at www.dotd.la.gov/AvondalePELStudy**

- **Submit at this meeting**
- **Submit Online**
- **USPS Mail to:**
 - **NORG – Avondale PEL Study**
c/o The Hawthorne Agency, Inc.
P.O. Box 56845
New Orleans, LA 70116
- **Email to: NORG@mbakerintl.com**
(Subject: *NORG Avondale PEL Study Comment Form*)
- **Include your contact information to receive future study notices**
- **Comment forms received at this meeting or post-marked/emailed no later than **April 30, 2024**, will be included in the public record**

We want to hear from you!

If you want to comment about the study or this presentation, please complete the Comment Form you received at the Welcome Table. The comment form is also available on the Avondale PEL Study webpage and can be submitted online or downloaded and printed for sending via USPS mail or email.

Comment forms must be received or postmarked no later than April 30, 2024, 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
 - Future Study Notices

- **Contact us:**

- Telephone - (504) 488-6196
- Email - 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

Please provide your contact information to receive newsletters and future notices as the project moves to the next phase of study.

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 will also be posted to the DOTD Avondale Webpage.



Thank you for Watching!



THANK YOU



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

After this presentation, please review the project exhibits, talk with Study Team representatives, and give us your comments.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask one of the Study Team representatives. We're all wearing name badges. **Remember, the only bad questions are the ones not asked!**

Thank you again for attending today's public meeting!