

DRAFT COORDINATION PLAN

**Proposed Connector between Airline Highway (US 61)
and Interstate 10
in St. John the Baptist Parish**

OCTOBER 2, 2009

**State Project No. 70-48-0101
Federal Aid No. HP-TO21(517)
RPC Contract No. PSLC-STJ**

Lead Agencies:

Federal Highway Administration

Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

Regional Planning Commission

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
DNR	Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
DEQ	Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
DWF	Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
LADOTD	Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Act
NOA	Notice of Availability
NOI	Notice of Intent
ROD	Record of Decision
RPC	Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard and St. Tammany Parishes
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users
SCPDC	South Central Planning and Development Commission
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service

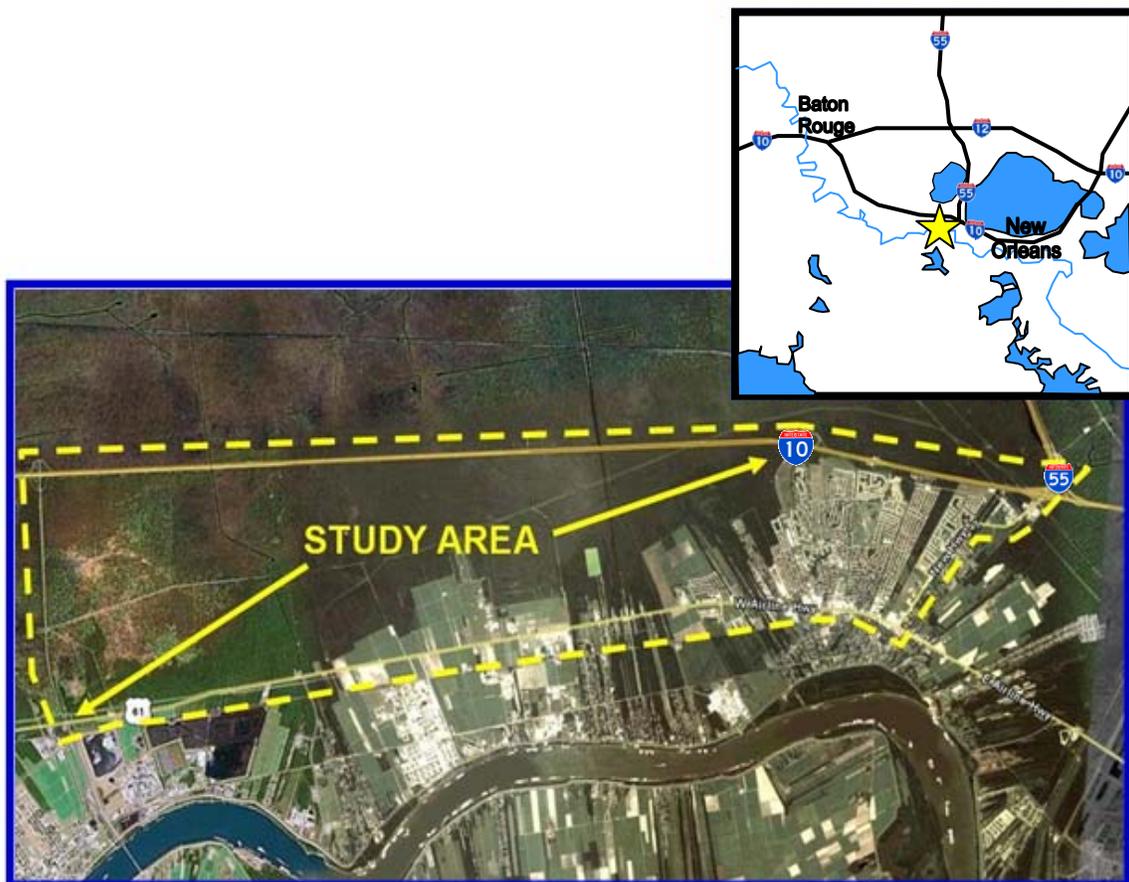
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview

The Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes (RPC), in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD), is studying alternatives for enhanced commercial and non-commercial interstate access between Airline Highway (U.S. 61) and Interstate 10. The FHWA is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project, with LADOTD and the RPC serving as joint lead agencies.

The limits of the EIS project extend from ¼ mile to the east of US 51 on the east to ¼ mile to the west of LA 3213/641 on the west, and from ¼ mile north of I-10 on the north to ¼ mile south of US 61 on the south. The purpose of the project, as currently defined, is to explore and propose methods for enhanced commercial interstate access between Airline Highway (US 61) and Interstate 10. Figure 1, below, shows the project area:

Figure 1 - Project Study Area:



The project began as an Environmental Assessment (EA) to address interstate access issues for the Port of South Louisiana. A FY2002 Congressional earmark under National Corridor Planning and Development Funds were allocated to perform that study. The Draft Environmental Assessment was completed in August 2004, followed by a public review period. As several major issues were raised by agencies such as the US Army Corps of Engineers and US Fish and Wildlife Service, along with concerns expressed by some residents and environmental groups, the LADOTD, FHWA, Port of South Louisiana, and St. John the Baptist Parish agreed that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was needed. The project was then separated into access between the Port of South Louisiana and Airline Highway (which is being completed as an Environmental Assessment) and the project at hand-- access between Airline Highway and Interstate 10, which is being undertaken as an EIS.

1.2 Alternative Development Methodology

The lead agencies will consider a reasonable range of alternatives which meet the project objectives and are based on agency and public input. These alternatives may include: (1) taking no action; (the no-build alternative) (2) transportation system management alternatives; and build alternatives, including (3) upgrades or improvements to existing routes; (4) a combination of existing and new routes to access I-10 at an existing access point; (5) a combination of existing and new routes to access I-10 at a new access point; and (6) all new routes to access I-10 at a new access point.

The public (as well as federal, state, and local agencies) will be invited to participate in the project environmental review process to ensure that a full range of alternatives is considered and that all appropriate environmental issues and resources are evaluated. The participation process will include opportunities to provide comments on the purpose and need for the project, potential alternatives, and social, economic, and environmental issues of concern.

A list of *Initial Build Alternatives* will be developed during the Scoping Process. The alignments listed in the Environmental Assessment will be evaluated as potential build alternatives. Build Alternatives suggested by the public or agencies will also be considered.

The Initial Build Alternatives will then be evaluated based on criteria agreed to by the lead agencies. Possible criteria include order of magnitude cost estimates, environmental constraints (wetlands, hazardous waste sites, endangered species, etc.) and anticipated human environment impacts (relocations, visual impacts, noise impacts, etc.). Following the evaluation of the build alternatives, any build alternatives considered will be screened such that a maximum of two (2) build alternatives will be carried forward in the EIS process.

The No-Build Alternative, TSM Alternative (if necessary), and up to two (2) build alternatives will be more fully developed as *candidate alternatives* and more thoroughly

analyzed in terms of likely impacts. The probable beneficial and adverse social, economic, and environmental effects of the candidate alternatives and the measures proposed to mitigate the adverse impacts of each alternative will be examined and described. Each factor will be evaluated and discussed for each alternative where a potential for impact for that factor exists.

Following that process, a *preferred alternative* will be selected, based on the impact analysis, as well as on public and agency input.

1.3 Purpose of Coordination Plan

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU, 23 USC §139) prescribes changes to existing FHWA and Federal Transit Authority (FTA) procedures for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, and for implementing the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), 40 CFR parts 1500 through 1508. The objective of SAFETEA-LU is to involve the public and appropriate federal, state, and local agencies in the environmental review process and to move the process along expeditiously. SAFETEA-LU requires that lead agencies establish a plan for coordinating public and agency participation and comment during the NEPA environmental review process.

The purpose of this coordination plan is to facilitate and document the lead agencies' structured interaction with the public and other agencies and to inform the public and other agencies of how the coordination will be accomplished. The project schedule outlined in this coordination plan is required by FHWA and must be provided to all participating agencies, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, the RPC, and must be made available to the public.

2. LEAD, COOPERATING, AND PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

2.1 Lead Agencies

The project joint lead agencies are:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD)
- Regional Planning Commission (RPC)

Responsibilities:

As specified in CEQ regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR § 1501.5), lead agencies are responsible for supervising the preparation of the environmental impact statement. SAFETEA-LU Guidance also specifies that lead agencies must:

- provide increased oversight in managing the process and resolving issues;
- identify and involve participating agencies;
- develop coordination plans;
- provide opportunities for public and participating agency involvement in defining the purpose and need and determining the range of alternatives; and
- collaborate with participating agencies in determining methodologies and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives.

Key Contacts

Key Lead Agency Contacts for the project are listed in Table 1, below.

Table 1 - Key Lead Agency Contacts

CONTACT	PHONE	EMAIL
Robert Mahoney Environmental Coordinator, Federal Highway Administration	225-757-7624	robert.mahoney@fhwa.dot.gov
Mike LaFleur Environmental Specialist, La. Department of Transportation & Development	225-242-4512	mike.lafleur@la.gov
Rebecca Otte Environmental Planner, Regional Planning Commission	504-568-6622	rotte@norpc.org

2.2 Cooperating Agencies

The only Agency that has been invited as a cooperating agency is the **US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – New Orleans Division, Regulatory Section.**

Responsibilities

Cooperating agencies share responsibility for developing information and environmental analyses related to their respective areas of expertise. Cooperating agencies are, by definition, also participating agencies. As such, cooperating agencies share the responsibilities of SAFETEA-LU participating agencies, including responsibility to participate in the NEPA process at the earliest possible time and to participate in the scoping process.

Key Contacts

The Key Contact for the project from the USACE’s Regulatory Division is:

Jacqueline Farabee
 US Army Corps of Engineers,
 New Orleans District
 (504) 862-2595
 Jacqueline.R.Farabee@usace.army.mil

2.3 Participating Agencies

Agencies that were invited as Participating Agencies are listed in Table 2 on the following page, along with contact information.

Responsibilities:

Pursuant to Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU, participating agencies are responsible to identify, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the project's potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts. A participating agency's role is to:

- participate in the scoping process;
- provide meaningful and early input on defining the project "purpose and need," determining the range of alternatives to be considered, and the methodologies and level of detail required in the alternatives analysis;
- participate in coordination meetings and joint field reviews as appropriate;
- review and comment in a timely manner on the pre-draft or pre-final environmental documents;
- provide meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues; and,
- participate in meetings to resolve issues that could delay completion of the environmental review process or result in denial of approvals required for project under applicable laws.

Key Contacts

Key Contacts from the Participating Agencies for the project are listed in **Table 2**, beginning below:.

Table 2 - Key Participating Agency Contacts

CONTACT	PHONE	EMAIL
Morton Wakeland, Jr. Environmental Protection Agency	214-665-6444	wakeland.morton@epa.gov
Teresa Bruner Regional Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration	817-222-5000	ter.a.bruner@faa.gov
Joshua C. Marceaux Transportation Biologist, United States Fish and Wildlife Service	337-291-3100	joshua_marceaux@fws.gov
Louis E. Buatt Assistant Secretary, Coastal Management Division, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources	225-343-3583	crdingo@dnr.state.la.us
Chris Davis Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries	225-765-2642	rcdavis@wlf.la.gov
Martha Cazaubon; Leonard Marretta South Central Planning and Development Commission	985-851-2900	martha@scpdc.org leo@scpdc.org

Table 2 - Key Participating Agency Contacts (continued)

Pat McTopy Parish President, St. John the Baptist Parish	985-652-9569	parishpresident@sibparish.com
Monica Salins Executive Director, Pontchartrain Levee District	225-869-9721	msalinspld@bellsouth.net
Pat Breaux Environmental Scientist Supervisor, La. Department of Environmental Quality	985-532-6206	Pat.breaux@la.gov
Doree Magiera, Consultant (URS)for Port of South Louisiana	504-218-0855	Doree_Magiera@URSCorp.com
Walter Baumy Chief, Engineering Division, US Army Corps of Engineers-New Orleans District	504-862-2656	walter.o.baumy@mvn02.usace.army.mil

3. AGENCY COORDINATION, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AND SCHEDULING

Lead agencies are responsible for preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement, including coordination of agency and public involvement. **Table 3**, presented at the close of this section, summarizes key coordination points. Deadlines and expected completion dates are indicated in the table.

3.1 Cooperating and Participating Agency Coordination

Cooperating and Participating Agencies will be asked to submit comments during the scoping process that summarize their jurisdiction and/or special expertise related to the project area. Following scoping, lead agencies will collaborate with cooperating and participating agencies on methodologies for documenting environmental conditions and assessing impacts. All agencies will be notified of the availability of draft and final EIS documents and given appropriate comment opportunities (see Table 3). Lead agencies will also coordinate with agencies on completion of necessary permits following the Record of Decision (ROD).

3.2 Public Involvement

Specific study elements will be directly influenced by public involvement. The public will be offered an opportunity for input at critical periods of the EIS process:

- The Public Scoping Meeting will identify key project concerns and possible solutions that the lead agencies can use in developing the statement of the project purpose and need, determining project alternatives, and gathering data for impacts analysis. A 10-day comment period following the meeting was provided for the public to submit comments to be included in the Scoping Report.
- If a full EIS is determined to be necessary, during the development of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a public meeting will be scheduled to review and comment on project alternatives. A 10-day comment period following the meeting will be provided.

- A public hearing will provide the public with the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft EIS. There will be a 45-day comment period following the meeting for the public to submit comments on the Draft EIS.
- There will also be a 30-day comment period following publication of the Final EIS Notice of Availability (NOA).
- Methods of communication with the public throughout the project include*:
 - Preparing response letters/e-mails and responding to telephone calls to answer questions or provide information on the project;
 - Holding briefing meetings with neighborhood associations, chamber of commerce, civic or business organizations, etc., during the development of the EIS;
 - Preparing and distributing project information/update letters/e-mails and flyers; and,
 - Preparing and distributing post cards/e-mails to inform persons on the project mailing list of upcoming meetings and other key milestones, such as the availability of the Draft EIS. Post cards/e-mails will also be sent to acknowledge receipt of comment letters and e-mails.*

3.3 Public Officials

City and other public officials will be kept informed of project progress and outcomes. The consultant team will hold brief meetings with St. John the Baptist Parish Government and the Port of South Louisiana during the development of the EIS and will hold meetings as needed with the Regional Planning Commission and other community groups.

**To receive meeting notices and be added to the project contact list, please contact Chris Mills with project consultant N-Y Associates, Inc. at (504) 885-0500 or at cmills@n-yassociates.com. Please provide your name, phone number, mailing address and e-mail address.*

Table 3 - Summary of Project Activities, Participation, and Scheduling

Task	Brief Description / Expected Outcomes	Participants	Expected Timeframe <i>(actual completion in italics)</i>	Meetings			Deliverables						
				Date & Time	Location / other info	Audience	Document Name	Draft Available (date)	Comments Due by:	Comments	Final Approval (date & by whom)	Final Distributed (date and to whom)	
Project Initiation	RPC notifies FHWA to initiate EIS	Lead agencies	<i>May 5, 2009</i>				Notification Letter						May 5 th , 2009 Distributed to FHWA; cc to LADOTD
Notice of Intent (NOI)	Lead agencies collaborate on drafting NOI. FHWA submits NOI to <i>Federal Register</i> for publication	Lead agencies	<i>May 15, 2009</i>				Notice of Intent						May 15, 2009 Distributed to all Federal Agencies via <i>Federal Register</i>
Scoping	RPC and consultant invite cooperating and participating agency participation. RPC and Consultant schedule scoping meetings for agencies and the public.	Lead agencies	<i>July 1, 2009</i>				Meeting Notices						Agency Invitation letters- 7-2-09. Agency Scoping meeting invites 7-20-09. Public Scoping meeting advertised on 7-22-09 & 8-5-09 (Times-Picayune) and 7-25-09 & 8-5-09 (L'Observateur)
	Agency Scoping Meeting	Lead, cooperating and participating agencies	<i>August 4th, 2009</i>	August 4 th 10 AM	RPC Offices	Lead, cooperating and participating agencies	Meeting Report						
	10-day scoping comment period.		<i>August 14th, 2009</i>		contact Chris Mills at (504) 885-0500 or at cmills@n-yassociates.com								
	Public Scoping Meeting	Lead Agencies and Public	<i>August 5th, 2009</i>	August 5 th 6:00 PM	St. John the Baptist Parish Council Chambers	General public and interested organizations	Meeting Report						
	10-day scoping comment period		<i>August 15th, 2009</i>		contact Chris Mills at (504) 885-0500 or at cmills@n-yassociates.com								

Task	Brief Description / Expected Outcomes	Participants	Expected Timeframe (<i>actual completion in italics</i>)	Meetings			Deliverables					
				Date & Time	Location / other info	Audience	Document Name	Draft Available (date)	Comments Due by:	Comments	Final Approval (date & by whom)	Final Distributed (date and to whom)
Scoping (cont.)	Individual meetings with elected officials, agencies, and community groups to obtain scoping comments.	Lead Agencies	July-September 2009	Aug. 5, 2009	USACE Headqtrs, Leake Road, New Orleans	USACE	Meeting Report					
				Sept. 11, 2009	Pontchartrain Levee District / Key agency Meeting	Agencies related to issues affecting Pontchartrain Levee District.						
	Complete Public / Agency Meeting Summary Reports, and overall scoping report document illustrating and summarizing the process followed.	RPC and Project Consultant on behalf of Lead Agencies	October 2009				Public / Agency Meeting Summary Reports				RPC	
							Overall Scoping Report				RPC	
Project "Purpose & Need" and Initial Alternatives	Draft project "purpose & need" and an initial set of project alternatives.	Lead agencies	July 2009 - December 2009				Draft Project Purpose & Need Document / Draft Description and Map of Initial Alternatives					
	Comments on the draft project purpose & need and alternatives.	Cooperating and participating agencies										
	Revise "purpose & need" and alternatives.	Lead agencies					Final Project Purpose & Need document / Final Description					

							and Map of Initial Alternatives					
Task	Brief Description / Expected Outcomes	Participants	Expected Timeframe <i>(actual completion in italics)</i>	Meetings			Deliverables					
				Date & Time	Location / other info	Audience	Document Name	Draft Available (date)	Comments Due by:	Comments	Final Approval (date & by whom)	Final Distributed (date and to whom)
Decision to move forward with DEIS	If the list of initial alternatives considered includes any alternatives other than a "no-build" alternative, the project then moves forward into a DEIS.	Lead agencies with input from cooperating and participating agencies	December 2009				Phase I Summary Report	End of December 2009			Lead agencies with input from cooperating and participating agencies	Lead and Participating Agencies; stakeholders, public officials
Draft EIS <i>(tentative; based on results of purpose & need and alternative development)</i>	Inform Parish Government, other officials and appropriate agencies of upcoming draft EIS public meeting	Lead agencies	Summer 2010				Notification Letter					
	Public Meeting for DEIS and 10 day comment period	Public	Summer 2010			General public and interested organizations						
	The preferred alternative will be identified for the Draft EIS (if appropriate).	Lead agencies	Late summer 2010									
	Draft EIS Notice of Availability (NOA)	Lead agencies	Fall 2010				Draft EIS Document					
	Public hearing on Draft EIS and 45- day comment period	Public	Fall 2010			General public and interested organizations						
	Agencies comments on draft EIS, 45 day comment period	Cooperating and Participating Agencies	Fall 2010									

Task	Brief Description / Expected Outcomes	Participants	Expected Timeframe <i>(actual completion in italics)</i>	Meetings			Deliverables					
				Date & Time	Location / other info	Audience	Document Name	Draft Available (date)	Comments Due by:	Comments	Final Approval (date & by whom)	Final Distributed (date and to whom)
Final EIS	Review public comments and responses with Parish and other public officials. Review schedule for Final EIS	Lead agencies	December 2010									
	Information on outcomes of public hearing and release of Final EIS will be available to the public	Public	March 2011									
	Final EIS Notice of Availability (NOA)	Lead agencies	March 2011				Final EIS					
	30-day comment period prior to ROD	All Agencies and the Public	April 2011									
Record of Decision (ROD)	Submit Record of Decision (ROD)	Lead agencies	May 2011				Record of Decision					

4. Revisions to the Coordination Plan

If any dates specified in this coordination plan are changed in the schedule, concurrence will be sought from the Cooperating Agency. Following concurrence, a revised Coordination Plan will be issued. The modified Coordination Plan will be identified by a modification number and date on the title page. Modifications will be described on Page "i" (before the Table of Contents) and highlighted in the text. The updated Coordination Plan will be posted on RPC's web site: www.norpc.org.