LA 23 NOGC Railway Relocation PE/NEPA Project

Public Meeting

LA 23 New Orleans & Gulf Coast Railway (NOGC) Relocation
Preliminary Engineering (PE) /
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Project

RPC/FRA Grant # FR-RLD-0032-14-01-00
RPC Task LA23RR1

September 22, 2015; 4 - 7 PM
Mel Ott Park Multi-Purpose Center
2301 Belle Chasse Highway
Gretna, LA 70053

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LA 23 NOGC Railway Relocation PE/NEPA Project

Welcome

Thank you
for your participation!

Please sign-in and collect the meeting material at the sign-in table.

Public meeting materials include:

- **Public Meeting Handout**
- **Public Meeting Comment Card and Survey Form**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**

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Presentation Agenda

- Purpose of this Public Meeting
- NEPA Process
- Public, Agency and Stakeholder Involvement
- Project Overview
- Project Purpose and Need
- Overview of Conceptual Alignment Options
- Overview of Preliminary Alternatives
- Environmental Resources
- Project Timeline / Next Steps

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Purpose of this Public Meeting

- NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act
- Requires the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to consider the environmental impacts of decisions prior to taking action on a proposed project.

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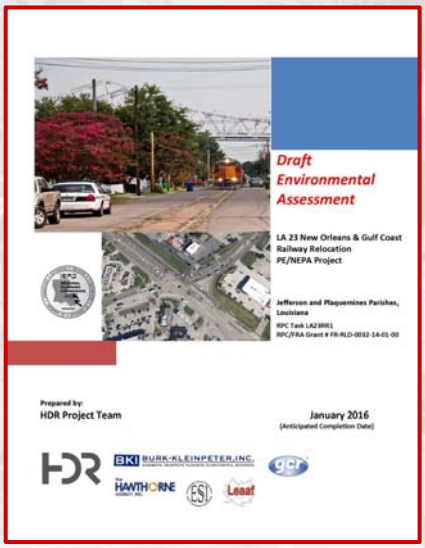
Purpose of this Public Meeting



- A draft environmental assessment (Draft EA) will be completed for the project.
- This public meeting is an opportunity for the public and other interested parties to comment on the alternatives and environmental resources that will be evaluated in the Draft EA.
- Comment forms are provided to allow each person to identify which alternative they prefer.

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Purpose of this Public Meeting

- Meet and listen to interested stakeholders and communities.
- Describe the project's purpose and need.
- Gather information and data to be evaluated in the environmental document.
- Consider issues and concerns that are important to the public.
- Describe the rail alignment alternatives that are being considered.
- Refine the alternatives based on public input.

Community Outreach

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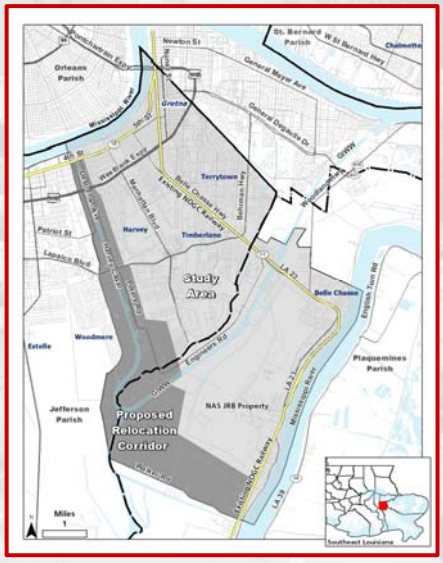
Purpose of this Public Meeting



- Exhibits and handouts are provided to describe the project.
- Project Team Members are available to answer your questions

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What is the NEPA Process?

- This study is guided by the **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969**.
- NEPA is a decision making process that requires Federal agencies to consider the impacts of actions (proposed alternatives) on the human, physical and natural environment and to disclose those impacts in a public document.
- Provides multiple opportunities for public, agency and stakeholder involvement

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Public, Agency and Stakeholder Involvement

- **Agency and Stakeholder Involvement Plan**
- **Project Management Committee Meetings**
- **Solicitation of Views (Federal, state and local agencies)**
- **Cooperating Agency Coordination**
- **Agency Scoping Meeting**
- **Agency and Local Officials Meetings**
- **Informational Meetings**
- **Public Meeting**
- **RPC Website**

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Public, Agency and Stakeholder Involvement

- Agency and Stakeholder Involvement Plan
- ***Project Management Committee (PMC) Meetings***
- Solicitation of Views (Federal, state and local agencies)
- Cooperating Agency Coordination
- Agency Scoping Meeting
- Agency and Local Officials Meetings
- Informational Meetings
- Public Meeting
- RPC Website

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Project Management Committee Members

FRA
Lead Federal Agency

U.S. Department Of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

RPC REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

RPC
Grant Recipient

State of Louisiana Jefferson Parish

CITY OF GRETNA LOUISIANA

PLAQUEMINES PARISH GOVERNMENT

NEW ORLEANS

PLAQUEMINES PORT HARBOR & TERMINAL DISTRICT

DOTD LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & DEVELOPMENT

NEW ORLEANS & GULF COAST RAILWAY COMPANY

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Role of the PMC

- **Review and Comment on Conceptual Engineering**
- **Input into Alternatives Analysis (AA)**
- **Input and Concurrence on a Preferred Alternative (PA)**
- **Review and Comment on the Draft EA**

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Public, Agency and Stakeholder Involvement

- Agency and Stakeholder Involvement Plan
- Project Management Committee Meetings
- Solicitation of Views (Federal, state and local agencies)
- ***Cooperating Agency Coordination***
- Agency Scoping Meeting
- Agency and Local Officials Meetings
- Informational Meetings
- Public Meeting
- RPC Website

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Cooperating Agencies

FRA
Lead Federal Agency

U.S. Department Of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

United States Army Corps of Engineers

Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans (NAS JRB)

United States Coast Guard

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Cooperating Agency Role

- Review and Comment on the Purpose and Need for the project
- Input in determining the Alternatives that will be considered and the Alternatives Analysis (AA) process
- Input and Concurrence on a Preferred Alternative (PA)
- Review and Comment on the Preliminary Draft EA and Preliminary Final EA

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Project Overview

- Existing Rail Infrastructure
- Study Area including:
  - Existing Rail Corridor
  - Proposed Relocation Corridor
- Purpose and Need

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Existing Rail Infrastructure

- Former Union Pacific Railroad (UP) branch line
- 32-mile shortline railroad
- Two NOGC Subdivisions including:
  - ***Westwego Subdivision:***
    - Limits: Interchange with UP Railroad at Westwego yard, through Westwego and Gretna, to Algiers Junction east of Gouldsboro Yard.
  - ***Belle Chasse Subdivision:***
    - Limits: Algiers southward along Madison Street, crossing the Westbank Expressway frontage roads, then parallel to LA 23/ Belle Chasse Highway from Gretna to Belle Chasse.
- Over 280 at-crossing rail crossings along the entire corridor / both subdivisions

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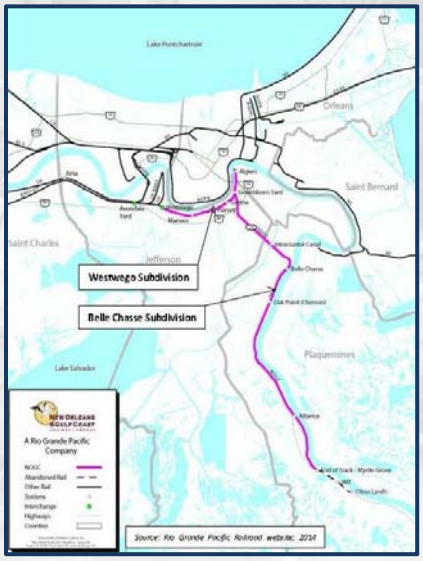
NOGC Railway Subdivisions



NOGC Railway Map

- ***Westwego Subdivision:***
  Approximate length 8 miles
- ***Belle Chasse Subdivision:***
  Approximate length 24 miles

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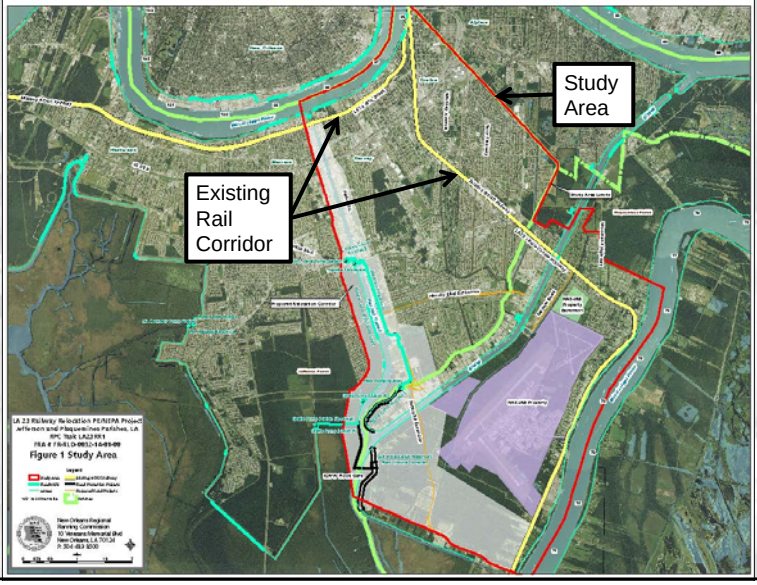
LA 23 NOGC Railway Relocation Study Area



Study Area
(boundary shown in red)

Existing Rail Corridor (alignment shown in yellow)

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Corridor Limits – Along Existing Rail Corridor

- Begin at Harvey Canal along LA 18
- LA 18 / 4th Street in Gretna
- Port of New Orleans Goldsborough Yard in Algiers
- Adams and Madison Streets in Algiers and Old Gretna
- LA 23 / Belle Chasse Highway in Jefferson Parish
- Crossing Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW)
- LA 23 / Belle Chasse Highway in Plaquemines Parish to the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base (NAS JRS)

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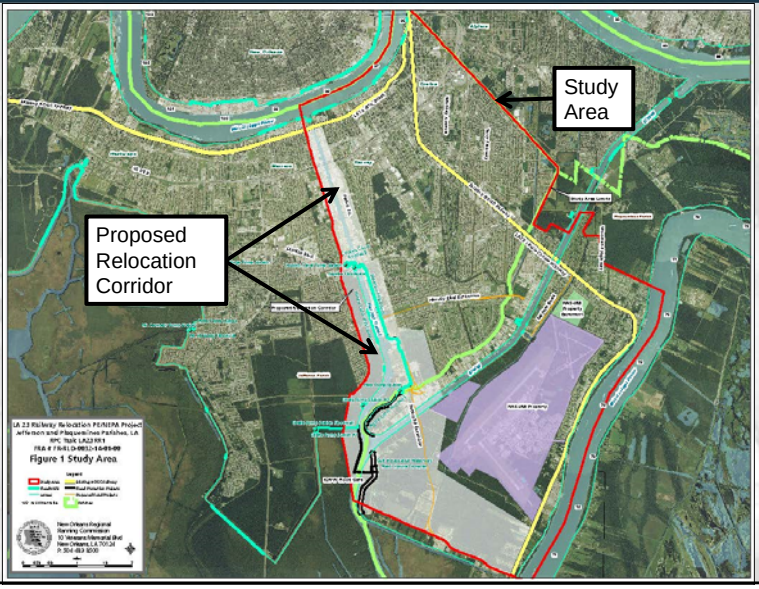
LA 23 NOGC Railway Relocation Study Area



Study Area
(boundary shown in red)

Proposed Relocation Corridor
(shown in gray)

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Proposed Relocation Corridor Limits – Along Harvey Canal Industrial Corridor

- Begin at the Harvey Canal along LA 18 / 4th Street
- US 90B / Westbank Expressway Crossing
- Lapalco Boulevard Crossing
- Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) Crossing
- South of the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base

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Project Purpose and Need

- Improve Safety
- Relieve Congestion
- Improve Emergency Evacuation Route
- Enhance Quality of Life
- Improve Efficiency of Rail Operations

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Project Purpose and Need

- **Improve Safety**
  - Potential to eliminate approximately 120 at-grade rail crossings along the existing rail corridor. Most of the private crossings along the existing route have no active warning system and rely on passive crossbucks signage, train horn noise, and driver awareness.
  - Reduce potential public exposure to some hazardous materials within residential and commercial areas.

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Project Purpose and Need

- **Relieve Congestion**
  - Minimize congestion and delay especially along 4th Street in downtown Gretna, where in-street running of trains can block side street traffic from 12 minutes to 20 minutes, depending on the overall length of train sets.
  - The in-street segment on Madison Street runs from Americus Street to Stumpf Boulevard. Regular trains average about 25 cars in both directions and it takes about 13 minutes to clear this segment of roadway.
  - The process of train assembly and movement within in-street corridors results in blockage at numerous intersections and motorist delay causing significant congestion and poor operating conditions.

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Project Purpose and Need

- **Improve Emergency Evacuation Route**
  - Improve emergency and hurricane evacuation along LA 23 which is a designated hurricane evacuation route.
  - Improve public safety access for fire, police, and ambulance response. Current railroad freight traffic along the existing rail corridor has a devastating effect on LA 18 and LA 23 by blocking access to adjacent roads as well as access to public roadways and private businesses. Delay to emergency vehicles is a concern when train sets as long as 1.3 miles could potentially block primary emergency response access along, or crossing, LA 18 and LA 23.

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Project Purpose and Need

- **Enhance Quality of Life**
  - Improve mobility for West Bank area motorists.
  - Reduce train noise in densely developed residential and commercial areas.

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Project Purpose and Need

- **Improve Efficiency of Rail Operations**
  - The average operating speed for NOGC trains along the existing rail alignment averages 10 mph, with actual speeds ranging from 1 mph to 6 mph within Gretna.
  - Relocation of the NOGC Railway to an alternate location where development is not as dense would improve the efficiency of NOGC's freight rail operations.

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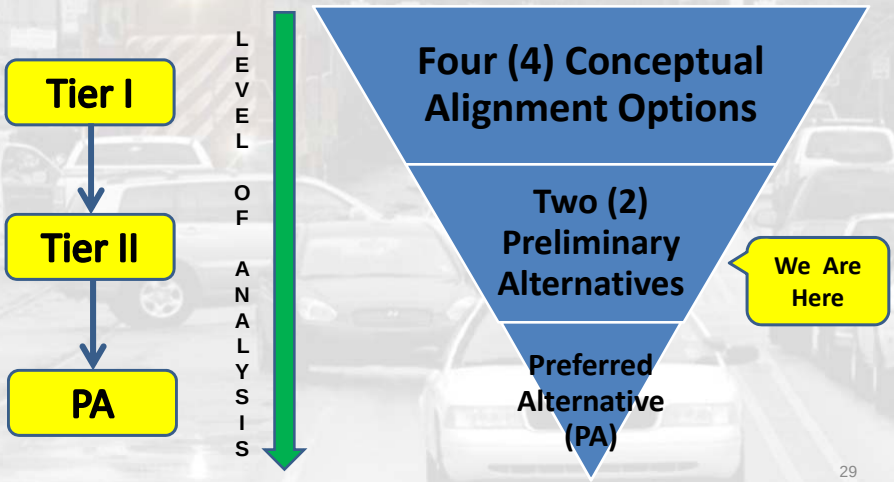
Tiered Alternatives Analysis Process



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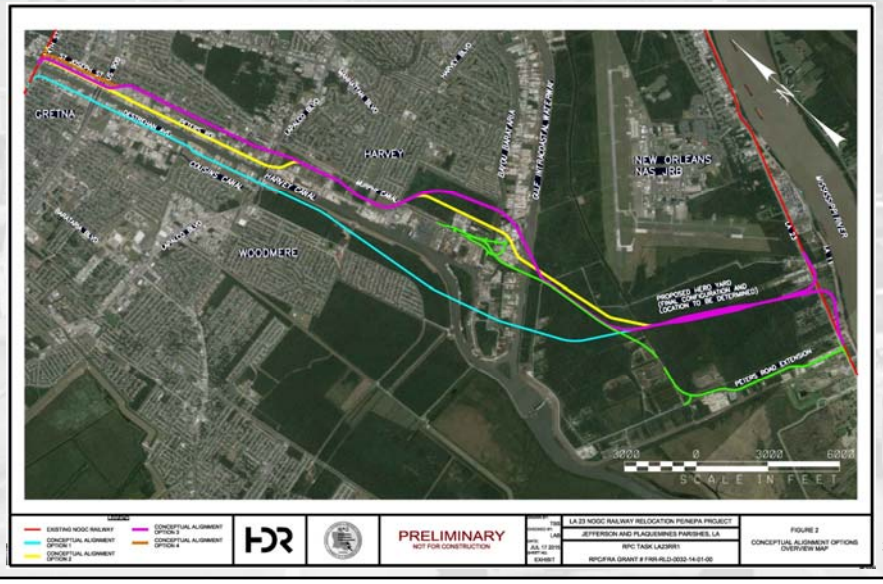
Conceptual Alignment Options 1 - 4



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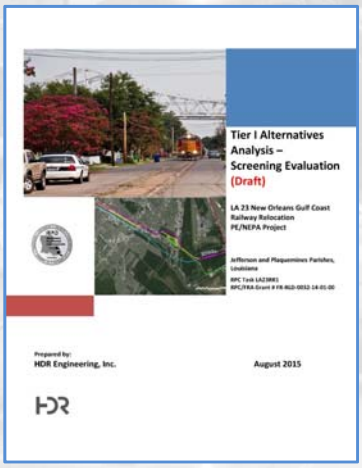
Conceptual Alignment Options 1 - 4

Tier I Alternatives Analysis – Screening Evaluation



- Conceptual Alignment Options
  - 4 Options Identified
  - Field Review Conducted to Update Existing Conditions
- Conceptual Rail Layouts Refined
- Physical, Natural and Human Impacts Defined for Each Option
- Cost Estimates Prepared
- Analysis Summarized in Tier I AA Report

- **Final Recommendation - Eliminate Option 1 and Option 4 from Further Evaluation**

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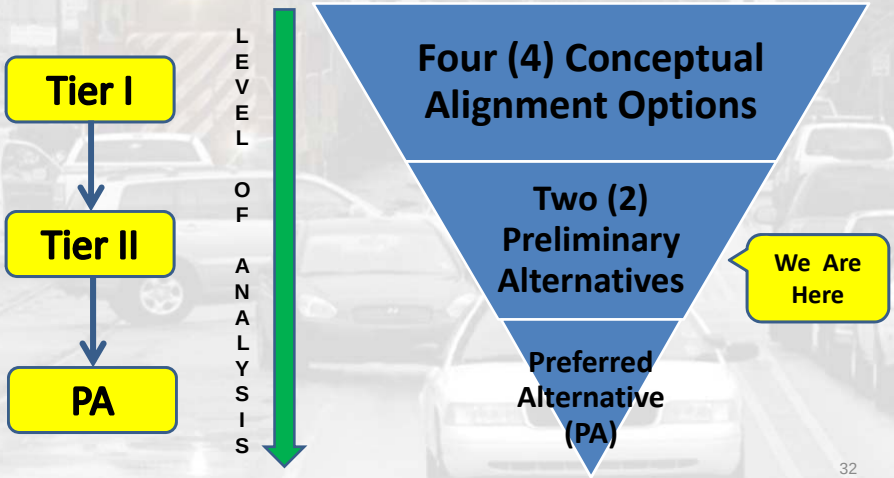
Tiered Alternatives Analysis Process



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Preliminary Alternatives A, B or Other

Tier II Alternatives Analysis

- **Preliminary Alternatives**
  - **2 Options Retained from the Tier I Alternatives Analysis**
  - **Conceptual Alignment Options Renamed Preliminary Alternatives A and B**
  - **An Additional Alternative Could Evolve From a Combination of the Alignments Associated with Preliminary Alternatives A and B (see comment card)**
- **Engineering and Environmental Analyses Further Refined**

- **Next Steps in the Alternatives Analysis**
  1. **Complete Engineering and Environmental Analysis For Any Additional Alternatives**
  2. **Obtain Public and Stakeholder Input to Identify a Preferred Alternative**
  3. **Begin Environmental Assessment**

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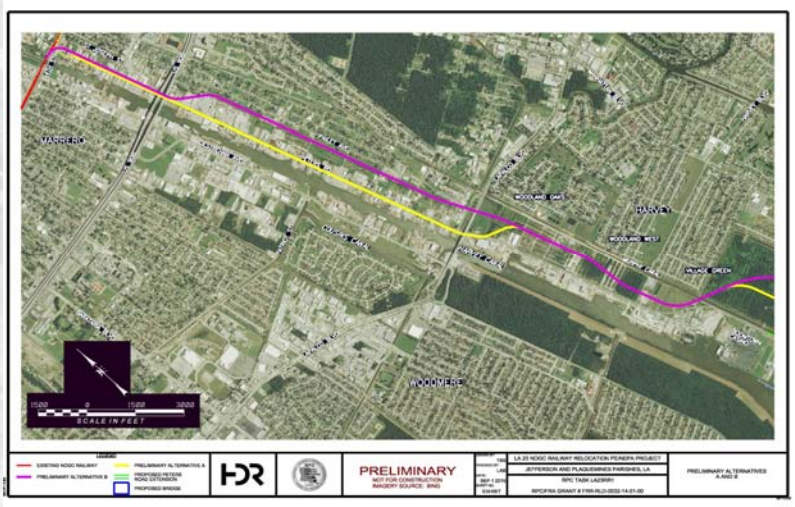
Preliminary Alternatives A and B

Limits - 4th Street (LA 18) to Murphy Canal



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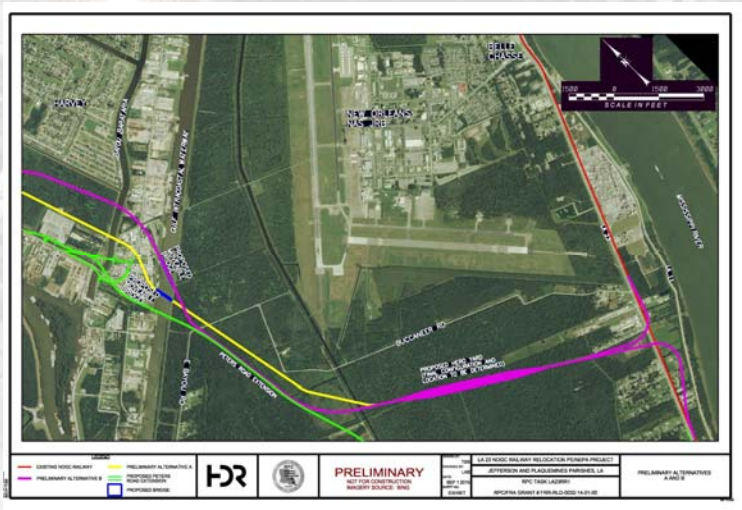
Preliminary Alternatives A and B

Limits - Murphy Canal to LA 23



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Environmental Assessment (EA)

- FRA-compliant EA
- FRA environmental procedures - *Federal Register*, Volume 64; No. 101; May 26, 1999
- Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations
- Other applicable guidance, procedures, regulations and laws govern
- Alternatives to be Considered in EA:
  - No-Build Alternative
  - Preferred Alternative - identified through the alternatives analysis (AA) process with agency, stakeholder and public input and concurrence
- Draft EA results / action - Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

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Environmental Assessment

- Evaluation of the Proposed Build Alternative or Preferred Alternative on the Human, Physical and Natural Environment.
- The No-Build Alternative will also be Evaluated.
- Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Impacts will be Quantified and Described.
- Benefits, Permits, Mitigation and Commitments will be Identified.

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Environmental Assessment Resources

Human Environment	Natural Resources	Physical Environment
Air and Water Quality	Wetlands	Hazardous Materials Sites
Noise and Vibration	100-year Floodplain	Hazardous Materials Transport
Environmental Justice	Prime Farm Land	Oil and Gas Wells
Census/Demographics	Coastal Zones	Water Wells
Traffic, Transportation and Navigation	Protected and Endangered Species	Standing Structures – Residential and Commercial
Land Use and Zoning	Levees and Flood Protection	Construction and Utilities
Cultural Resources	Parks and Recreational Land	Right-of-way

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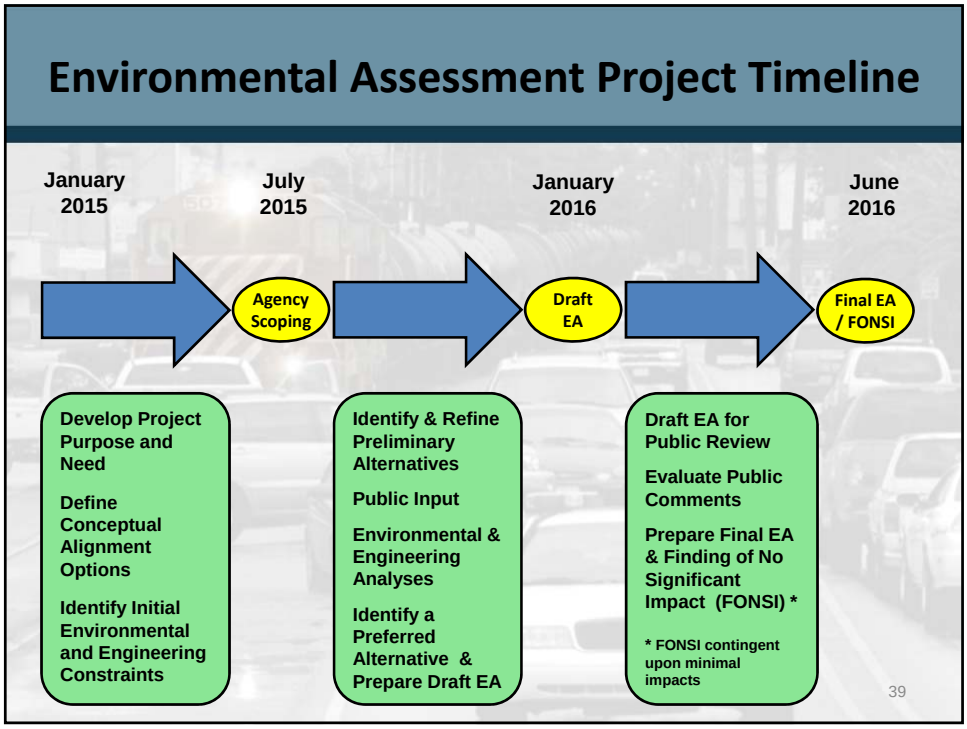
Environmental Assessment Project Timeline
January 2015
July 2015
January 2016
June 2016
Agency Scoping
Draft EA
Final EA / FONSI
Develop Project Purpose and Need
Define Conceptual Alignment Options
Identify Initial Environmental and Engineering Constraints
Identify & Refine Preliminary Alternatives
Public Input
Environmental & Engineering Analyses
Identify a Preferred Alternative & Prepare Draft EA
Draft EA for Public Review
Evaluate Public Comments
Prepare Final EA & Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) *
* FONSI contingent upon minimal impacts
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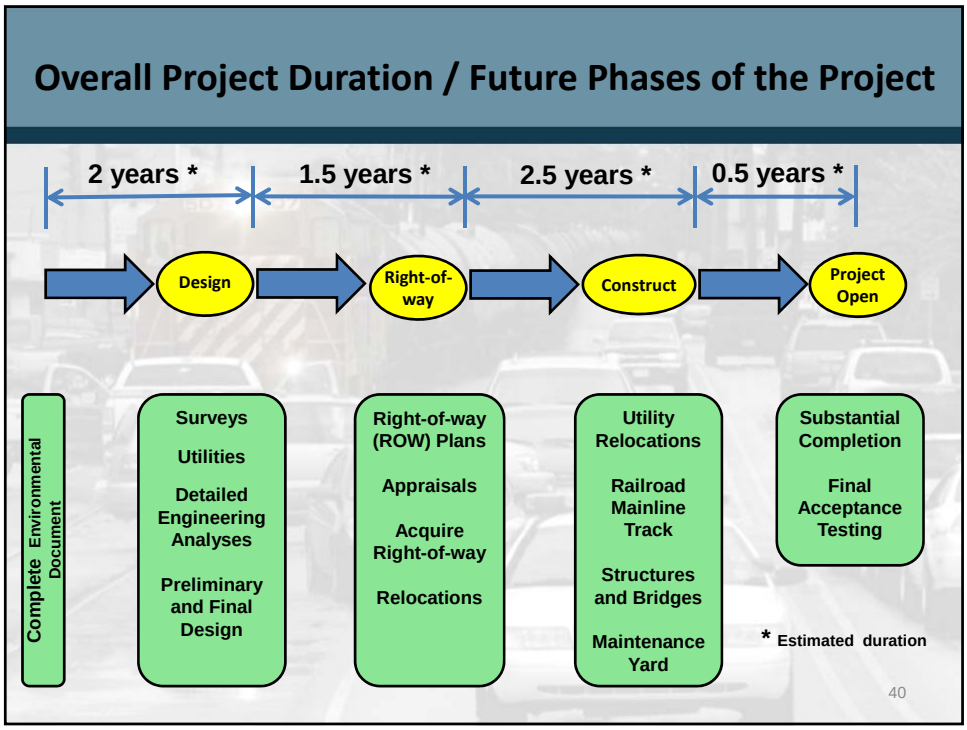
Overall Project Duration / Future Phases of the Project
2 years *
1.5 years *
2.5 years *
0.5 years *
Design
Right-of-way
Construct
Project Open
Complete Environmental Document
Surveys
Utilities
Detailed Engineering Analyses
Preliminary and Final Design
Right-of-way (ROW) Plans
Appraisals
Acquire Right-of-way
Relocations
Utility Relocations
Railroad Mainline Track
Structures and Bridges
Maintenance Yard
Substantial Completion
Final Acceptance Testing
* Estimated duration
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Public Input and Comments

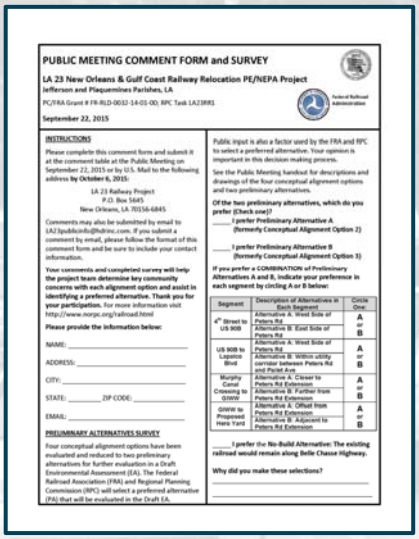
Public Input Is Important!

Comments received will help decision-makers choose the Preferred Alternative. Your comments will assist in the final decision.

There are many ways to provide and submit your comments:

- Comment form / tonight
- Verbal comment / tonight
- E-mail
- US Mail

❖ **Comments are due by October 6, 2015.**



PUBLIC MEETING COMMENT FORM and SURVEY

LA 23 New Orleans & Gulf Coast Railway Relocation PE/NEPA Project
Jefferson and Plaquemines Parishes, LA

PC/FRA Grant # FR-RLD-0032-14-01-00; RPC Task LA23RR1

September 22, 2015

INSTRUCTIONS

Please complete this comment form and submit it at the comment table at the Public Meeting on September 22, 2015 or by U.S. Mail to the following address **by October 6, 2015:**

LA 23 Railway Project
P.O. Box 5845
New Orleans, LA 70156-6845

Comments may also be submitted by email to LA23publicinfo@fhdrinc.com. If you submit a comment by email, please follow the format of this comment form and be sure to include your contact information.

Your comments and completed survey will help the project team determine key community concerns with each alignment option and assist in identifying a preferred alternative. Thank you for your participation. For more information visit http://www.norpc.org/railroad.html

Please provide the information below:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

EMAIL: _____

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES SURVEY

Four conceptual alignment options have been evaluated and reduced to two preliminary alternatives for further evaluation in a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA). The Federal Railroad Association (FRA) and Regional Planning Commission (RPC) will select a preferred alternative (PA) that will be evaluated in the Draft EA.

Public input is also a factor used by the FRA and RPC to select a preferred alternative. Your opinion is important in this decision making process.

See the Public Meeting handout for descriptions and drawings of the four conceptual alignment options and two preliminary alternatives.

Of the two preliminary alternatives, which do you prefer (Check one)?

_____ **I prefer Preliminary Alternative A (formerly Conceptual Alignment Option 2)**

_____ **I prefer Preliminary Alternative B (formerly Conceptual Alignment Option 3)**

If you prefer a COMBINATION of Preliminary Alternatives A and B, indicate your preference in each segment by circling A or B below:

Segment	Description of Alternatives in Each Segment	Circle One:
4th Street to US 90B	Alternative A: West Side of Peters Rd	A or B
	Alternative B: East Side of Peters Rd	
US 90B to Lapalco Blvd	Alternative A: West Side of Peters Rd	A or B
	Alternative B: Within utility corridor between Peters Rd and Pailet Ave	
Murphy Canal Crossing to GIWW	Alternative A: Closer to Peters Rd Extension	A or B
	Alternative B: Farther from Peters Rd Extension	
GIWW to Proposed Hero Yard	Alternative A: Offset from Peters Rd Extension	A or B
	Alternative B: Adjacent to Peters Rd Extension	

_____ **I prefer the No-Build Alternative: The existing railroad would remain along Belle Chasse Highway.**

Why did you make these selections?

_____

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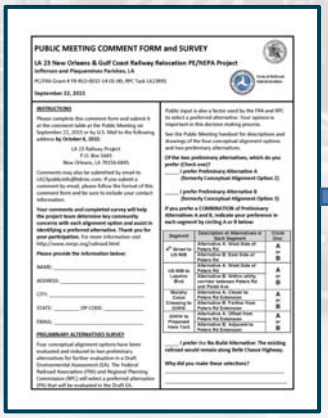
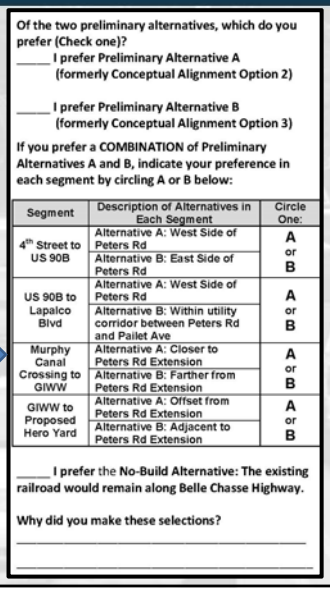
Public Input on a Preferred Alternative

Public input is needed to assist decision-makers in identifying a Preferred Alternative. Please complete the survey portion of the Comment Form





Of the two preliminary alternatives, which do you prefer (Check one)?

_____ **I prefer Preliminary Alternative A (formerly Conceptual Alignment Option 2)**

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If you prefer a COMBINATION of Preliminary Alternatives A and B, indicate your preference in each segment by circling A or B below:

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	Alternative B: Farther from Peters Rd Extension	
GIWW to Proposed Hero Yard	Alternative A: Offset from Peters Rd Extension	A or B
	Alternative B: Adjacent to Peters Rd Extension	

_____ **I prefer the No-Build Alternative: The existing railroad would remain along Belle Chasse Highway.**

Why did you make these selections?

_____

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Conclusion

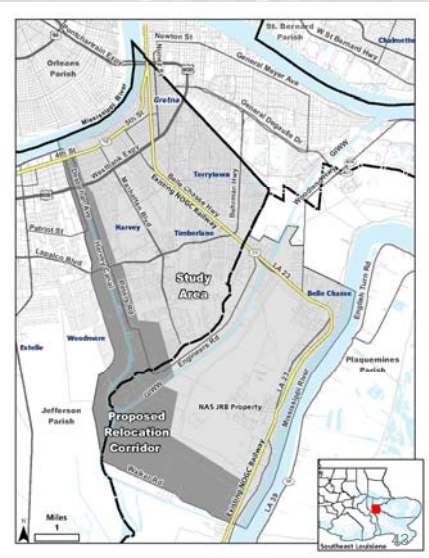
Please review the additional material available throughout the meeting room.

Please provide written comments on the Comment Form and Survey and turn in the completed form at the comment table.

Comments will be accepted by:

- **Comment form / tonight**
- **Verbal comment / tonight**
- **E-mail ***
- **US Mail ***

- **Comments are due by October 6, 2015.**
- *** See address on Comment Form**



LA 23 NOGC Railway Relocation PE/NEPA Project

Thank you for your interest and participation in the LA 23 NOGC Railway Relocation Project

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