

The LA 23 Rail Relocation PE/NEPA Project Summary
FRA Grant No. FR-RLD-0032-14-01-00

Project Location

The LA 23 Railway Relocation Project is located in the New Orleans region on the west bank of the Mississippi River with the primary study area roughly bounded by the Harvey Canal, also considered part of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) on the west, the Mississippi River on the north, the Jefferson/Orleans Parish line on the east and Walker Road on the south. The study area includes a portion of the existing freight track (approximately 13 miles in length) located between the Harvey Canal and the Perry Street Wharf and between the Perry Street Wharf and Walker Rd. in Jefferson, Orleans and Plaquemines Parishes, Louisiana. The study area also includes the proposed (more direct) alternative routes within the Peters Road corridor (approximately 9 miles in length) from the Harvey Canal at LA Highway 18 (4th Street) to Walker Road.

On the west bank, existing freight track extends from the Union Pacific (UP) terminal, Avondale Yard proceeding east, echoing the Mississippi River crescent shape terminating at the Port of New Orleans Perry Street Wharf and Gouldsboro Yard rail terminal, approximately 8.7 miles in length. The New Orleans and Gulf Coast Railway (NOGC) leases most of this track from UP (7.02 miles) beginning at Westwego, Louisiana. From Westwego the track passes eastward to Marrero and Harvey, Louisiana traversing adjacent to the 4th Street right-of-way. The track then merges onto 4th Street in the City of Gretna from Dolhonde Street to Amelia Street where trains mix with vehicle traffic. The track returns adjacent to 4th Street at Amelia Street. Additional track is also leased by NOGC from UP on what is known as the Hooper Spur which runs along the west side of Peters Road (LA Highway 3017) for 4.5 miles beginning at 4th Street. This track is not currently used by the NOGC because it is in a state of disrepair.

A second track, owned by NOGC, leaves Gouldsboro Yard in a southerly direction and runs within Madison Street through residential neighborhoods from LA 428 (Burmester Avenue) to LA 466 (Kepler Street), no longer following the riverfront. The track continues south within Madison Street for approximately 2.25 miles (again mixing with vehicle traffic), then turns southeast leaving the street proper, traversing right-of-way adjacent to LA 23 (Belle Chasse Highway) for 15 miles. The NOGC track and LA 23 rejoin the riverfront contour at the Belle Chasse Ferry Landing. The average elevation across the entire area fluctuates but is approximately 3 feet above sea level. See map below.

Project Cost and Funding Sources

This project is supported with \$640,000 (80%) of funding originating from the 2009 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Surface Transportation Program Urbanized Area >200K funding (PC L230: Demo ID or Urban Area Code 022) and was transferred to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

on March 19, 2013. FRA accepted the funds transfer and will be the Lead Federal Agency due to their expertise in rail planning and development projects. The local match is \$160,000 (20%).

Local funds are distributed through the Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Tammany and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC) but provided by the following entities: Plaquemines Parish, Port of Plaquemines, Jefferson Parish, Regional Planning Commission for a Total Local Match of \$160,000.

FRA Project No. FR-RLD-0032-14-01-00 was entered into on October 1, 2014 by and between the FRA and the RPC. The RPC advertised a Request for Qualifications for Consultant Services thereafter and on January 16, 2015 entered into a contract with the project team lead, HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR), to perform work outlined in the Consultant Work Scope titled as Environmental Document, LA 23 Railway Relocation PE/NEPA Project, Jefferson and Plaquemines Parishes, Louisiana, RPC/FRA Grant # FR-RLD-0032-14-01-00.

Four Major Tasks to be Undertaken

Task 1 provides for creating the Detailed Project Work Plan. This is the responsibility of the Regional Planning Commission which will be accomplished with input from the Consultant, particularly on the final budget and schedule.

Task 2 consists of data collection, GIS mapping of data, and an existing and future year traffic and at-grade crossing delay analysis to inform the alternatives development process.

Task 3 is the Preliminary Engineering including right-of-way and Relocation Plans and preliminary cost estimates.

Task 4 includes all the tasks to complete the environmental documentation in compliance with NEPA including all public involvement activities.

Analysis Activities

This project will analyze a no-build alternative on the existing track alignment and several build alignment alternatives within the Peters Road (LA 3017) corridor from 4th Street (LA 18) extending to LA 23 and tying into the NOGC track near Walker Road based on the findings of the 2002, 2004 and 2008 studies, briefly described below. There has been continued interest by local government to reduce congestion and increase safety as well as interest from business and industry and the NOGC to improve rail access. For the no-build alternative the evaluation will document “do nothing” impacts. Another build alternative will look at Transportation System Management (TSM) solutions that mitigate current and future train traffic on the existing track which includes consideration of existing, under construction and planned projects along the track and their effect. Other build alternatives will evaluate the extension of rail in the Peters Road corridor to provide a more direct alignment. The

outcome of the project is for FRA to issue a decision identifying a preferred alternative, following the FRA's procedures for the Consideration of Environmental Impacts (Environmental Procedures).

Project Schedule

The period of performance for all work is estimated at 18 months, from October 1, 2014 to March 30, 2016 with the grant ending June 30, 2015.