

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

Administrative Action Environmental Statement

(x) Draft () Final
() Section 4(f) Statement attached

CONTACTS

The following individuals may be contacted for additional information concerning this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS):

Mr. John A. Winkle
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Room W38-311
Washington, DC 20590
Phone: (202) 493-6067
John.Winkle@dot.gov

Ms. Kim D. Thurman
Environmental Division Administrator
Mississippi Department of Transportation
401 North West Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39201
Phone: (601) 359-7922
kthurman@mdot.state.ms.us

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) is proposing the relocation of the existing BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) main line through the City of Tupelo, Mississippi. The purpose of the Tupelo Railroad Relocation Planning and Environmental Study is to evaluate options to improve mobility and safety by reducing roadway congestion caused by the movement of trains running through the City of Tupelo, especially at the intersection of Main Street and Gloster Street (locally referred to as Crosstown).

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), an operating administration within the U.S. Department of Transportation, agreed to serve as the lead Federal agency in the preparation of this DEIS.

The following Federal agencies agreed to participate in the development of this DEIS as cooperating agencies:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- U.S. Department of the Interior – National Park Service (NPS)
- U.S. Department of the Interior – Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Mobile District (USACE)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Vicksburg District (USACE)

SUMMARY OF MAJOR ALTERNATIVES

The major alternatives in this study are:

- No-Build Alternative
- Build Alternatives

The No-Build Alternative would retain the existing roadway and railroad network and, therefore, would avoid the temporary negative impacts that railroad and roadway construction can cause to residences, businesses, wetlands, streams, cultural resources, and other resources. The No-Build Alternative would also not contribute potential viewshed impacts to the area. However, the No-Build Alternative would not meet the project's Purpose and Need goals of improving mobility and safety by reducing roadway congestion caused by the movement of trains running through the City of Tupelo.

The Build Alternatives include operational improvements, alternative corridors, and in-town options such as railroad and highway grade separations. These alternatives were investigated and refined in a five-tiered process, beginning with a Feasibility Study outlined in the *Phase 1 – Feasibility Analysis* (HDR, May 2006). The initial alternatives analysis for the EIS further refined the reasonable range of alternatives by evaluating engineering concerns, environmental impacts, operations, and costs. The refined alternatives included two alternative corridors going around Tupelo and an elevated rail viaduct with a relocated interchange yard through Tupelo. Through the alternatives development process, the two alternative corridors around Tupelo were eliminated from further consideration based upon cost and the substantial adverse impacts anticipated to various environmental components. The elevated rail viaduct with the relocated interchange yard was considered to be the only reasonable Build Alternative and was brought forward for detailed study.

A Preferred Alternative (between the Build and No-Build) will be determined following the public hearing and receipt of public comments on this DEIS. Because the No-Build and Build Alternatives would have both positive and negative impacts on specific locations; the public input regarding this major project is important; and because NEPA requires it, any decision on the Preferred Alternative will be made only following this additional opportunity for public comment.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

This project would have some unavoidable impacts, regardless of which alternative is implemented. As summarized in **Table ES-1**, the primary impacts of the No-Build Alternative would include noise, safety, and mobility impacts, while the primary impacts of the Build Alternative would include construction cost and impacts to farmlands, cultural and historical resources, streams, floodplains, and utilities.

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts

Impact Category	No-Build Alternative	Build Alternative
<i>Human Environment</i>		
Farmland Impacts (acres)	n/a	0.0
Residential Relocations (No.)	0	0
Business Relocations (No.)	0	1
Severe Noise Impacted Receptors (No.)	128	76
Vibration Impacted Receptors (No.)	28	46
Adverse Visual Impacts to Historic Sites or Districts (No.)	n/a	37
Hazardous Material Site Impacts (No.)	n/a	0
Environmental Justice Impacted Census Blocks (No.)	n/a	0
<i>Natural Environment</i>		
Perennial Stream Crossings (No.)	3	4
303 (d) Stream Crossings (No.)	2	3
Wetland Impacts (acres)	n/a	0.0
100-Year Floodplain Impacts (acres)	n/a	10.0
Natural Habitats (acres)	n/a	0.0
<i>Engineering</i>		
Electric Transmission Line Impacts (No.)*	n/a	3
Gas Pipeline Impacts (No.)*	n/a	0
Sanitary Sewer Impacts (No.)*	n/a	2
Railroad Bridges (Feet)	n/a	8,690
Roadway Bridges (Feet)	n/a	2,984
<i>Safety and Mobility</i>		
At-Grade Crossings within City of Tupelo (No.)	16	4
At-Grade Crossings with Unacceptable LOS in 2030 (No.)	3	0
Nearby Intersections with Unacceptable LOS in 2030 (No.)	3	1
At-Grade Crossings Blocked During Interchange Operation (No.)	8	0
Construction Costs (\$2008)	n/a	\$384,745,000

*Based Upon Field Observations of Above Ground Utilities and/or Markers

AREAS OF CONTROVERSY

Since meetings were held throughout the project planning process, the public, local elected officials, and state and federal agencies were actively involved in the development of the alternatives. Controversy has been limited to the discussion of specific issues with specific alignments.

The elevated rail viaduct alternative (i.e. the Build Alternative) is within the City of Tupelo and residents expressed concern regarding the design of the elevated viaduct, particularly regarding the use of retaining walls. Most residents stated, however, that a bridge structure would be acceptable, especially since removing the at-grade rail crossings would have benefits, including reduced traffic congestion and noise from train horns.

The elevated rail viaduct alternative was developed by MDOT with considerable input from citizens and local officials, and particular care has been taken to maintain the integrity of existing facilities, with special regard for the viewshed of historic and cultural resources. The elevated rail viaduct would enhance economic opportunities for the Tupelo area, while

minimizing impacts to farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, and cultural resources (as compared with the dismissed Alternatives).

COORDINATION REQUIRED

A permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) would be required for the Build Alternative under provisions of Section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) Amendments of 1972. Section 404 requires the application for and approval of a permit before wetlands or other waters of the U.S. can be dredged or filled. The Clean Water Act requires public notice and review and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review of Section 404 permits. Encroachment into floodways would be coordinated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Involvement with historic sites and districts is being coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). The project area is in an attainment area and therefore no conformity analysis under the provisions of the 1990 Clean Air Act, as amended, is required.

MEASURES TO AVOID OR MINIMIZE ADVERSE IMPACTS

Measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts that could result from the proposed project include the following:

Farmland

The agricultural lands which would be converted to transportation right-of-way are all within the city limits of Tupelo and are given an “urban” designation by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and therefore do not require a permit for acquisition. Federal and State acquisition and relocation policies would be followed, and any purchase of land would be based on fair market value. In addition, access would be provided to agricultural parcels separated by the interchange tracks.

Environmental Justice

There are no environmental justice concerns for low-income or minority populations within the affected environment. If such impacts are discovered in subsequent phases of this project, a community outreach program would be initiated.

Relocations

Relocation assistance would be conducted in accordance with the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-646).

Traffic

During construction, all local rail, through-rail, and roadway traffic would be adequately and safely accommodated. All construction activities would be scheduled to minimize traffic delay.

Utilities

Construction would be coordinated with affected utility companies. Any disruption to utility service during construction would be minimized by phased utility adjustments.

Noise

The elevated rail viaduct and rail interchange yard would decrease the noise impacts from train horns through Tupelo and create a “quiet zone” through downtown Tupelo. During construction, the contractor would comply with all State and local sound control ordinances. Each piece of equipment with internal combustion engines shall be equipped with a muffler.

Air Quality

During construction, all construction debris, such as vegetation and existing rail equipment, would be removed from the project site and disposed of in compliance with air quality laws and regulations.

Water Quality

A detailed sediment and erosion control plan for construction would be developed and approved by the appropriate agencies prior to construction of the Build Alternative. Construction materials would be stored and disposed of such that they are not discharged into or alongside of streams. Disturbed sites would be re-established with vegetative cover after construction to reduce runoff and lessen sediment loadings. Special precautions would be taken during construction to ensure that groundwater is not contaminated. Construction measures that would minimize water quality impacts to streams and tributaries would be incorporated into the design of the Build Alternative. Best Management Practices (BMP’s) would be used to minimize water quality impacts.

Wetlands/Waters of the U.S.

In accordance with Section 404 (b)(1) guidelines, all practicable measures would be taken to avoid or minimize impacts to wetlands. If the Build Alternative were selected, affected wetlands would be delineated and mapped, and copies of the supporting documents would be provided to the USACE for field verification. An individual permit from the USACE would be required. Stream impacts are anticipated to be minimal due to the proposed bridge structures.

Floodplain

Bridges, pipes, and box culverts would be designed in accordance with FRA and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) floodplain impact requirements. Flood studies would be performed as required. The Build Alternative improvements will be designed to accommodate the floodway channel improvements proposed by the Town Creek Master Water Management District.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Construction activities would be limited to the project right-of-way and the construction sequence would be managed such that construction would be limited to select areas along the project corridor to limit impacts to vegetation and wildlife. BMP’s used to reduce runoff

would benefit vegetation and aquatic habitat. Exposed surfaces would be re-vegetated during construction.

Hazardous Materials

No hazardous materials sites listed in available databases lie within the affected area of the Build Alternative. If the Build Alternative were selected, additional research would be conducted on hazardous material sites that could be potentially affected. Any site impacted by the project that is determined to contain hazardous materials would be remediated as required by regulations and by MDOT policy.

Archaeology

As part of the analysis completed for this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a detailed survey was completed and all archaeological sites located in the Build Alternative were evaluated for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Construction of the Build Alternative would not physically impact any NRHP-eligible archaeological sites. Archaeological clearance of the Build Alternative was recommended for approval by the SHPO. However, if during construction any cultural materials are discovered, the appropriate parties (as delineated by the proposed Memorandum of Agreement [MOA], included in **Appendix F**) would be notified and appropriate mitigation implemented.

Historic Sites and Districts

All standing structures located in the Area of Potential Effects (APE) were evaluated for eligibility for the NRHP and impacts to their historic viewsheds. Consultation with the SHPO has determined that there are 37 NRHP-listed or NRHP-eligible properties or historic districts within the APE which would experience adverse visual impacts as a result of the proposed project. However, the FRA, MDOT, Chickasaw Nation, City of Tupelo, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (SHPO) are in the process of negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), included in **Appendix F**, to mitigate these visual effects. The MOA would be a binding document and the commitments entered into the MOA must be satisfied during the final design and construction processes. FRA and MDOT have also concluded that the visual effects of the Build Alternative do not impair the functions or qualities of the affected historic resources which made those resources eligible for the NRHP. Therefore, there are no Section 4(f) impacts to historic properties or districts as a result of the Build Alternative.

Construction Costs

Funding sources for design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of the Build Alternative have not been identified. Pending the selection of the Preferred Alternative, MDOT and/or the City of Tupelo would have to identify and Federal, State, local, and/or private funding sources for design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction in future phases of the project.