

# PORT BIENVILLE RAILROAD

## COMBINED FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND RECORD OF DECISION

### APPENDIX F: RESPONSE TO COMMENTS MATRIX

Prepared for:



**Federal Rail Administration**



**Mississippi Department of Transportation**

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## Appendix F: Comments and Responses Matrix

Comment number	Date received	Format	Agency/Organization	Contact info	Comment Summary	Response
<b>Agency/Organization</b>						
1	11/2/2018	letter	US Department of the Interior	Amy Carson; 601-321-1130; amy_commens-carson@fws.gov; Joyce Stanley, 404-331-4524, joyce_stanley@ios.doi.gov	1) On October 9, 2018, the Department of the Interior announced the proposed listing of the Eastern black rail ( <i>Laterallus jamaicensis jamaicensis</i> ) as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The draft EIS did not address the Eastern black rail since the document was completed prior to the Department announcing the proposed listing. We recommend the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) or its designated non-federal representative include in the EIS an assessment of the impacts of the proposed project on the Eastern black rail. 2) The applicant made a determination that the proposed project "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" the federally endangered Louisiana quillwort ( <i>Isoetes louisianensis</i> ). According to the information in the draft EIS, impacts to stream habitat that could potentially contain Louisiana quillwort are not anticipated because several of the crossings will be modifications of existing stream crossings. However, Louisiana quillwort can occur adjacent to existing road crossings; therefore, we recommend the EIS include details of the survey methodology used including habitat conditions during the surveys and timing of the surveys. If conditions or timing of the surveys previously conducted are found not to be appropriate for detecting Louisiana quillwort, we recommend surveying suitable habitat in the proposed project impact area prior to the start of construction, and early enough for formal consultation to occur if Louisiana quillwort are discovered.	1) See response letter and revised DEIS sections 4.15.4, 4.15.4.1, and 5.14.2 in FEIS/ROD. As detailed in 4.15.4, preferred habitat for the Eastern black rail is typically salt and brackish marshes with dense cover. These preferred habitats do not occur within the survey corridor. An assessment of potential impacts to the Eastern black rail from the proposed project will be included in the FEIS. The species will be included as "proposed threatened" on the Evaluation of T&E Species in the Survey Corridor table (Table 4.25) in the revised DEIS section. An assessment of the Eastern black rail will be added to 5.14.2, detailing habitat requirements and potential impacts from the proposed Project. It is recommended that the proposed Project would have no effect on the Eastern black rail due to lack of potential suitable habitat in the Survey Corridor. 2) See response letter and revised DEIS section 5.14.2. As detailed in 5.14.2, the T&E survey was conducted in March/April 2016, during the optimal field season for the species, and again in June 2016. Due to the site conditions—specifically the silvicultural activities—it is unlikely the Louisiana quillwort inhabits the on-site streams, and no quillwort was observed during field observations. A commitment will be included in the final EIS to complete additional surveys prior to construction during the optimal survey window and in normal site conditions to verify no species are within the construction limits.
2	11/5/2018	letter	Gulf Restoration Network	Andrew Whitehurst; 504-525-1528 ext. 200; andrew@healthygulf.org	1) Three of the streams that must be crossed with railroad bridges or culverts are Turtle Skin Creek, Dead Tiger Creek and Catahoula Creek, all of which are listed for biological impairments, and appear on the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's 2016 303(d) list of impaired waters. We suggest that special care be used in crossing Turtle Skin Creek with bridges and in managing the sheet flow in its drainage area. Water quantity upstream is a problem for this reach of the river; track bed design should avoid, to the greatest extent possible, alterations in the pattern of movement in surface water flows or shallow groundwater that can cause water deficits during dry periods in both bogs bisected by the project and the small drains and streams in this section of the Pearl River basin. Railroad track beds on fill will change sheet flow. Some form of piping system may help keep water moving under the track beds, and longer elevated approaches on creeks – building elevated track bridges slightly longer than required by cost conscious engineers – would also facilitate better stream flow. Making the bridge over Turtle Skin Creek longer in Wetland sections K, L, and M would give Turtle Skin Creek and the Pearl River better protection. 2) Surveys for the protected quillwort and iron- color shiners in all three of these low gradient streams should be performed if they haven't yet been undertaken. 3) Special attention should be paid to the safety concerns of adding more train traffic along US Hwy. 11 which is known as a treacherous and busy road. The two agencies, FRA and MDOT should pay special attention to the ongoing train/traffic situation in the Nicholson to Picayune area. People living there now recognize that there are already traffic congestion problems due to trains at the existing grade crossings along U.S. Hwy 11.	1) As detailed in the response letter, a detailed hydrology study has not been completed for the proposed Project. However, it will be completed during the next project phase. Bridge crossings and culverts will be analyzed in detail to determine the best solution for maintaining stream flow. 2) See response letter and revised DEIS section 5.14.2 in FEIS/ROD for details about the survey window for the Louisiana quillwort. Surveys for the Louisiana quillwort and ironcolored shiners were conducted in March, April, and June 2016 and neither of the species were observed during the field reconnaissance. As noted in the DEIS (5.14.3), no ironcolor shiners were observed during the T&E survey and the preferred aquatic vegetation was not observed in streams during the surveys. Due to the site conditions—specifically the silvicultural activities—it is unlikely the Louisiana quillwort inhabits the on-site streams, and no quillwort was observed during field observations. Revised DEIS section 5.14.2 will be updated to note that additional surveys will be conducted prior to construction during the optimal survey window and in normal site conditions to verify no Louisiana quillwort species are within the construction limits.
4	10/29/2018	letter	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	William Kenneth Dean, 404-562-9378, dean.william-kenneth@epa.gov	1) Based on the available information, Alternative D appears to be a less environmentally damaging alternative than Alternative C. EPA suggests that additional information be included in the DEIS to better support the decision to eliminate Alternative D. Specifically, we request the following be added to the DEIS: a) the exact distances of the two residences from the Segment D centerline; b) the distances from the Segment D centerline where noise and vibration impacts would be moderate and severe; c) the magnitude or level of noise and vibration that the two residences would experience under Alternative D. 2) EPA recommends that bridges and/or culverts that span stream crossings should be built as wide as possible to accommodate flood flows. This entails calculating the extent of the 25-, 50-, and 100-year floodplain at each crossing and designing the bridge/culvert to accommodate those flows. 3a) The appropriate BMPs must be used during and after construction in accordance with State of Mississippi requirements for transportation projects and/or enhanced BMPs, as required, so as not to cause or contribute to a violation of water quality standards or cause further degradation to Turtle Skin Creek. 3b) Please clarify whether the 100-foot-wide right-of-way for the project includes areas likely to be used as borrow for the railroad bed. If no areas in the ROW will be used as borrow for the railroad bed, then provide an explanation whether these areas add to the total amount of wetland impacted by the project. 4) Any unavoidable wetland impacts should be able to be offset using the nearby mitigation banks. FRA and MDOT will need to work with USACE to appropriately evaluate the quality of the existing wetlands being affected and how much compensatory mitigation will be required. 5) The DEIS does not specifically address the effects of the project on migratory bird species of concern, with exception to the wood stork, a federally listed threatened and endangered species. EPA recommends that the FEIS include more specific information about migratory birds, with emphasis on species of concern for the study area and the potential effects of the project on the species of concern, and that the discussion address habitat reduction, fragmentation, and seasonality.	1) See response letter and revised DEIS section 3.2.3.2 in FEIS/ROD. (a) The two closest residences to the Alternative D centerline are 205 and 632 feet away. (b) No vibration impacts are anticipated. (c) Severe noise impacts were determined and from Lower Bay Road severe impacts can be felt at 703 feet away; therefore the two closest residences to Alternative D would experience severe noise impacts. The requested information for 1(a) through (c) will be added to the FEIS in the revised DEIS section. 2) See response letter. As detailed in the the letter, bridge crossings and culverts will be analyzed in detail to determine the best solution for maintaining stream flow and accommodating flood flows. The 25-, 50- and 100-year floods will be evaluating. 3a) See response letter. Any water quality impacts would be mitigated as part of the 404/401 permit process. A comprehensive SWPPP would be prepared and the BMPs to protect water quality would likely mitigate impacts from the Project construction. 3b) See response letter and individual revisions in DEIS Errata Sheet (Table FEIS-2) of FEIS/ROD. As noted in the response letter, borrow material is a contractor responsibility. It is the responsibility of the contractor to get permits for borrow material because they identify their own material and sites. Wetland impacts will be defined during the permitting phase when all impact types are calculated. 4) As noted in the response letter, wetland mitigation will be completed in the next project phase and coordinated with USACE. 5) See response letter and revised DEIS sections 4.15.4 and 4.15.4.1 for discussion of Migratory Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) regulations and database results; FRA will revise DEIS section 5.14.2 and 5.14.4 to include specific information about BCC and potential effects. A new table and subsections will be added to the revised DEIS sections, specific to BCC (5.14.2.1 and 5.14.5).
5	10/15/2018	email	NOAA-NMFS	brandon.howard@noaa.gov	No comments	No response required.
6	11/5/2018	letter	Tradewind Energy, Inc	Drew Gibbons; Emily Truebner, 913-953-5225, etuebner@tradewindenergy.com	The proposed Port Bienville route runs directly through the project land for a proposed 80 MW solar energy facility (Hancock County Solar Project, LLC), which is not mentioned in the draft EIS. Therefore, Tradewinds Energy opposes the use of Segment 10b, which splits much of the project property in half. Tradewinds Energy requests coordination for a minor deviation on proposed segment 10b to the south of the solar site. Tradewinds Energy asks MDOT and FRA reconsider Segment 10b due to failure of the draft EIS to consider the increased cost and impact to the proposed solar facility; also request we be kept up to date of future developments on the Port Bienville Railroad project. In addition, the draft EIS does not consider the lost revenue to the Picayune School District, which owns land that is subject to a Solar Site Evaluation Easement and could generate meaningful revenues if the solar project moves forward. We ask that the added cost of land acquisition and the lost revenues to the school district be part of the evaluation of any proposed route.	MDOT and FRA appreciate your comments and have taken them into consideration. Land use was evaluated in the DEIS and the project was determined to be consistent with future land use designations identified in the Hancock County Comprehensive Plan. The Preferred Alternative (Alternative C), has been accepted by FRA. MDOT and FRA will keep Tradewind Energy up to date on future developments for the Project. Conversely, the Project is available for review online on MDOT and FRA's websites at <a href="http://sp.mdod.ms.gov/Environmental/Pages/Projects.aspx">http://sp.mdod.ms.gov/Environmental/Pages/Projects.aspx</a> and <a href="https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0798">https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0798</a> .
7	11/6/2018	letter	Hancock Chamber of	Tish H. Williams, 228-467-9048	In support of the Draft EIS; Hancock Chamber of Commerce acknowledges the value of the project for the benefit of the region and for	No response required.

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			Commerce	office, tish@hancockchamber.org	Mississippi and offers its support for the project. The agencies are encouraged to expedite the approval of the final EIS and ROD so that this valuable project may begin in earnest.	
8	12/14/2018	letter	Southern Rail Commission	John Spain, Chairman, jspain@braf.org	In short, the SRC requests FRA to update the EIS to incorporate the findings of the Congressionally established Gulf Coast Working Group, co- led by the FRA and the Southern Rail Commission and other recent developments around the restoration of passenger rail along the Gulf Coast. The SRC offered eight recommendations: 1) The EIS should be updated to add background about the GCWG, including Congress's mandate, the rigorous process the GCWG went through in studying how best to restore passenger rail across the Gulf Coast, and the GCWG final recommendations; 2) The draft EIS should be updated to remove the factually inaccurate statement and instead explain the infrastructure analysis that FRA's staff conducted as part of the GCWG final report and what that analysis found; 3) The draft EIS should be updated to remove the statement about operating at 110 mph and the need to double CSX's mainline in order to operate at 110 mph to eliminate any potential misconceptions. Instead the EIS should mention the GCWG's and FRA's infrastructure analysis that FRA's staff conducted as part of the GCWG final report and what that analysis found. If there is a continued desire to add details about the operation of future passenger rail service, Amtrak and the SRC should be consulted for those details as they would be the co-operators of the service Amtrak has notified CSX it intends to run; 4) The draft EIS should be updated to add a discussion about the State of Mississippi's 2016 rail plan update and the State's rail goals, including its desire to implement a Gulf Coast passenger rail service. Furthermore, the draft EIS should mention the SRC's federal application, especially the SRC's application for funds to build a siding east of Ansley on the CSX main line, which is in close proximity to the Port of Bienville. Overall, section 4.18.3.5 does not represent the current State of Mississippi's rail plan and needs to be updated to bring it in sync with the 2016 state rail plan; 5) The draft EIS should be updated to remove the reference to double tracking CSX's main line since no party is planning to pursue double tracking CSX's main line to accommodate passenger rail service (CSX's freight capacity plans is outside the purview of the SRC). Instead, the EIS should explain the infrastructure analysis that FRA's staff conducted as part of the GCWG final report and what that analysis found. This section may also want to add the projects SRC has applied for federal CRISI funding. However, none of those projects would double track CSX's main line; 6) The draft EIS should be updated to remove the reference to double tracking NS's main line since the SRC is not aware of any party planning to pursue double tracking NS's main line to accommodate passenger rail service. In addition, the SRC strongly believes it's a huge assumption to assume that NS's main line would have to be double tracked to accommodate passenger rail service. Because the GCWG found that passenger trains could run on CSX's line without having to double track the line, the mention of double tracking NS's main line to accommodate passenger rail service should be removed out of prudence; 7) [There is no discussion of 1) Amtrak's notification to CSX in the Spring 2018 notifying CSX of Amtrak's intent to restore passenger rail service in 12-18 months between New Orleans and Mobile on CSX's tracks or 2) the SRC's applications for FY17 R&E funding and FY18 CRISI funding to help implement two round trips a day passenger rail service between New Orleans and Mobile.] Both of these developments are directly relevant to the Port of Bienville project as the passenger rail service would use the same CSX tracks the Port of Bienville currently connects to. Therefore, the SRC believes these developments need to be included in this EIS as part of any no-build or alternative analysis. Otherwise, the study would be incomplete and therefore inaccurate; and, 8) [One thing the SRC urges FRA to keep in mind when it comes to include a discussion about necessary capital improvements along the CSX's main line for restoring passenger service and the costs associated with these capital improvements is that Congress rejected the CSX infrastructure estimate as overstated in the report language accompanying the FY18 Omnibus Appropriations bill (Public Law 115-141) and directed the Gulf Coast Working Group to continue with FRA/Amtrak's capital estimates...] The draft EIS, when it comes to identifying necessary capital improvements along the CSX's main line for restoring passenger service and the costs associated with these capital improvements, should follow the GCWG's and FRA's own estimates, as mandated by Congress in the FY2018 appropriations bill.	See response letter and revised DEIS section 4.18.3.4 - Passenger Rail. 1) FRA will include a general statement about the GCWG in the GCWG Report to Congress. 2) FRA will revise the statement in question to provide context and summarize improvements discussed in the GCWG Report. 3) FRA will revise the reference to 110 mph speed in Section 4.18.3.4 of the DEIS and revise the text to acknowledge that the service proposed in the GCWG Report is not high-speed rail. 4) FRA does not think including additional references to the state rail plan concerning passenger rail service is necessary at this time and will not mention the grant application. 5) FRA will revise the double track language to remind the reader about the previous GCWG efforts, etc. 6) FRA will take another look at the MS Statewide Plan to verify the source of that language and consider revising as appropriate. 7). FRA will mention Amtraks's letter since it's part of the background and will revise the text accordingly. FRA will not mention SRC's grants since award announcements have not yet been made. 8) FRA acknowledges the comment but won't mention this in the FEIS.
9	10/24/2018	letter	DAK Americas	John Oladele; 3303 Port and Harbor Drive, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520; 228-533-4000	DAK Americas Mississippi Inc. sees great economic value in increasing the region's freight-handling capacity by building a rail-line extension. The link to the Norfolk Southern Railroad would make Hancock County even more appealing to present and future industrial and commercial, by complimenting the existing connection to the CSX Railroad along the coast. Growth in industry and certain capacity constraints on the existing system necessitate this additional infrastructure. We applaud the forward-looking nature of the rail-service extension proposal. DAK Americas strongly supports the rail-service extension which is clearly in the best interests of the economic success of Hancock County, and urges an expedited approval of the FEIS and ROD.	No response required.
10	10/26/2018	letter	Mississippi Power	Brian Useforge; 2605 13th Street, Gulfport, MS 39501; 228-865-5824	Mississippi Power sees great economic value in a proposal to increase the region's freight-handling capacity by building a rail-line extension from Port Bienville Industrial Park. The north-south rail connection would make Hancock County even more appealing to present and future industrial and commercial, by complimenting the existing connection to the CSX Railroad along the coast. The growth in industry and certain capacity constraints on the existing system necessitate this additional investment in infrastructure. Mississippi Power strongly supports the rail-service extension, which is clearly in the best interests of the economic success of Hancock County, and urges an expedited approval of the FEIS and ROD.	No response required.
11	10/16/2018	letter	City of Diamondhead	Mayor Thomas Schafer, IV; Councilmember L'Ecuyer and Depreo	The railroad connector would create economic opportunity for growth of Hancock County and parts of Pearl River County; such a connector would further serve to provide additional rail service options to existing industry in South Mississippi where only one option currently exists, and has the ability to provide evacuation and storage response outside of coastal flood zoned during an emergency. The City of Diamondhead acknowledges the value of the project for the benefit of the region and Mississippi and offers its support for the project. The parties are encouraged to expedite approval of the final EIS and ROD so that this valuable project may begin in earnest.	No response required.
12	11/6/2018	letter	City of Waveland	Mayor Mike Smith	The railroad connector would create economic opportunity for growth of Hancock County and parts of Pearl River County by creating dual Class 1 rail access to both the CSX and NS Railroads; such a connector would further serve to provide additional rail service options to existing industry in South Mississippi where only one option currently exists, and has the ability to provide evacuation and storage response outside of coastal flood zoned during an emergency. The City of Waveland acknowledges the value of the project for the benefit of the region and Mississippi and offers its support for the project. The parties are encouraged to expedite approval of the final EIS and ROD so that this valuable project may begin in earnest.	No response required.
13	6/14/2019	email	NOAA-NMFS HCD	January.Murray@noaa.gov	No comments	No response required.

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14	6/27/2019	email	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	William Kenneth Dean, 404-562-9378, dean.william-kenneth@epa.gov	Per EPA's request, the Alternative D discussion paragraph in Subsection 3.2.3.2 was revised to include additional information regarding potential noise and vibration impacts in the southern portion of the study area. EPA acknowledged that this information better supports the decision to eliminate Alternative D from further study. Subsection 4.15.4 was revised to include more specific information about migratory birds, with emphasis on Birds of Conservation Concern and potential effects, pursuant to Executive Order 13186, Section 3(c)(6). EPA acknowledged that a new table (Table 5.12) and a new subsection (Subsection 5.14.5) have been added to summarize and/or discuss the effects of the No-Build and Build Alternatives on the Migratory Birds of Conservation Concern. Some of the EPA's comments are addressed through minor text changes described in the errata sheets. Minor text revisions have been made to the wetlands discussion in Section 5.11.1, "Impacts to Wetlands, Streams, and Other Water Bodies," in response to EPA's request for clarification regarding whether the 100-foot-wide right-of-way for the project includes areas likely to be used as borrow for the railroad bed. Based on the FRA's response, the EPA understands that construction limits are estimated to be approximately 75 feet wide, and while borrow areas will be determined later in the project development process, the FRA assumes the wetland impacts will not exceed those estimated in the DEIS. The EPA understands that actual construction limits will be defined during the design phase and wetland impacts will be further defined during the permitting process phase. While no revisions or changes were made to the DEIS in response to EPA's comment regarding the width of bridges and culverts, EPA acknowledges that the FRA response letter provides an acceptable response to the EPA's comment. Based on the FRA's response to the EPA's comment regarding construction impacts, the EPA has determined that clarification is needed in the FEIS/errata sheet. The FEIS and errata sheet should clarify that the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be designed to minimize (not mitigate, as indicated in Section 5.13.1.2 of the DEIS and in the FRA response to comments) water quality impacts by minimizing the potential for erosion and sedimentation during construction. Furthermore, we recommend that the FEIS/ROD identify the agency or organization that would be responsible for completing the SWPPP and the phase in which the SWPPP would be completed. In response to the comment regarding wetlands mitigation, the FRA stated that wetland mitigation will be completed in the next project phase and that required mitigation, mitigation bank availability, and pricing will be evaluated and coordinated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The EPA notes that there are seven commercial mitigation banks, comprised of similar wetland types as those in the project area, in relatively close proximity to the proposed project. The EPA is signatory to the mitigation banking instruments and understands those mitigation banks continue to provide credits to offset wetland impacts in southern Mississippi. Any unavoidable impacts resulting from the construction of the proposed project should be able to be offset using mitigation bank credits within the impacted watershed(s).	Section 5.13.1.2 of the DEIS and this FRA response to EPA's comments have been clarified to state that SWPPP would be designed to minimize water quality impacts by minimizing the potential for erosion and sedimentation during construction. A SWPPP will be completed during the next project phase. FRA will select the contractor that will be responsible for the design and completion of the SWPPP. FRA acknowledges that there are seven commercial mitigation banks, comprised of similar wetland types as those in the project area, in relatively close proximity to the proposed project. Any unavoidable impacts resulting from the construction of the proposed project should be able to be offset using mitigation bank credits within the impacted watershed(s).
15	7/15/2019	letter	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Amy Carson for Stephen M. Ricks, 601-321-1130	Habitat for the eastern black rail does not occur in the proposed project area, therefore, the project will have no effect on the eastern black rail or its habitat. This information needs to be added to the FEIS. USFWS confirms that the proposed project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the following listed species: the endangered Louisiana quillwort ( <i>Isoetes louisianensis</i> ), threatened Eastern indigo snake ( <i>Drymarchon couperi</i> ), threatened black pine snake ( <i>Pituophis melanoleucus lodingi</i> ), endangered red-cockaded woodpecker ( <i>Picoides borealis</i> ), threatened wood stork ( <i>Mycteria americana</i> ), and endangered Florida panther ( <i>Puma concolor coryi</i> ). The eastern indigo snake and the Florida panther are considered extirpated from Mississippi. If the Louisiana quillwort plants are discovered during surveys, USFWS should be contacted to reinstitute informal consultation. No further Consultation under section 7 of the ESA is required unless changes in the scope or location of the proposed project of if federally listed species are discovered prior to construction.	No response required.
<b>Public</b>						
13	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Beau Gex; 219 Nicholson Ave.; Waveland, MS 39576; 228-216-8321	Support the Preferred Alternative C due to the few areas it impacts; no issues/concerns; this is an excellent project. It is much needed for the economic development of the county and surrounding areas.	No response required.
14	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Bruce L. Prestien; 7936 Hapuna Place, Diamondhead, MS 39525; 228-586-1298	Prefer Blue (line); stay away from Infinity;	No response required.
15	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Ronald Robertson; 406 Caribe Place N; Gulfport, MS 37507	Prefer Alternative C, minimizes environment and community impacts.	No response required.
16	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	John Hall; 6815 Hilo Street, Diamondhead, MS 39525; 228-669-6111	No concerns; Build it.	No response required.
17	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Robert R. Kane; 202 South Touhme Street, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520; 228-342-3272	I highly recommend this project for my potential economic benefit for Hancock County. I don't find any adverse problems in this study.	No response required.
18	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Janet Sacks; 6473 Kalipekona Way, Diamondhead, MS 39525; 228-671-9337	No concerns	No response required.
19	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Shane LaFontaine; 812 Edna Street, Waveland, MS 39576; 228-263-2394	No concerns; continue to move forward.	No response required.
20	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	William P. Cotter, 1320 Dubac Lane, Waveland, MS 39576 228-323-2889	Good project need for transportation health of southwest Mississippi; continue on.	No response required.
21	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Lisa Ramos, 11 Bayour View Drive, Gulfport, MS 39507; 614-316-2352	No concerns; recommend project moves ahead.	No response required.
22	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Tiffany Goodwin, 807 Red Fox Road, Pass Christian, MS 39571; 601-382-88058	No issues; this would bring industry and jobs to the region! Get the project as developed as quickly as possible.	No response required.
23	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Paul W. Foley; 2505 Shelby Lane, Ocean Springs, MS 39564; 228-217-	Concerns about hydraulic bridge crossings, wetland impacts, alignment (horizontal); let's get this funded	No response required.

Comment number	Date received	Format	Agency/Organization	Contact info	Comment Summary	Response
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24	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Scott LaFontaine; 730 Gladstone Street, Waveland, MS 39376; 228-671-9303	No concerns; move forward with the project	No response required.
25	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Rhoda E. Swanson; 400 Sears Ave., Waveland, MS 39576; 985-290-2039	No real issues; get it up and running	No response required.
26	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Bob Swanson; 400 Sears Ave., Waveland, MS 39576; 985-290-2039	No real issues; getting the project as fast as possible	No response required.
27	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Kevin Carlisle; 8314 Amoka Drive, Diamondhead, MS 39525	No concerns; I feel this will benefit Hancock County industry by opening up dual Class I access to rail.	No response required.
28	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Ellen Ceaser; 1204 Fern Drive, Picayune, MS 39466; 601-799-0282	None	No response required.
29	10/23/2018	comment sheet	Public	Janel Carothers; 6 Beau Braun Drive, Long Beach, MS 39560; 228-596-8002	None	No response required.



February 28, 2019

Mr. John Spain  
Chairman, Southern Rail Commission Baton Rouge Area  
Foundation  
100 North Street, Suite 900 Baton Rouge, LA  
70802

**Re: Port Bienville Rail Study and Environmental Impact Statement Public Comment Response**

Dear Mr. Spain:

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has received the Southern Rail Commission's (SRC) letter, dated December 14, 2018, with its comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Port Bienville Railroad Project. FRA has carefully considered each recommendation and has decided how to handle each one as described below. FRA will include a copy of the SRC's letter in the Final EIS' Appendix with other public comments.

1. **SRC Recommendation:** *The EIS should be updated to add background about the [Gulf Coast Working Group] GCWG, including Congress's mandate, the rigorous process the GCWG went through in studying how best to restore passenger rail across the Gulf Coast, and the GCWG final recommendations.* **FRA response:** FRA will include a general statement about the GCWG, including the goal of the GCWG as stated in *Section 2.1.2 - Goals* of the Report to Congress, and a high-level summary of the findings in the GCWG Report to Congress (GCWG Report).
2. **SRC Recommendation :** *The draft EIS should be updated to remove the factually inaccurate statement and instead explain the infrastructure analysis that FRA's staff conducted as part of the GCWG final report and what that analysis found.* **FRA response:** In line with FRA's response to the SRC recommendation no. 1 above, FRA will revise the statement in question to provide context and summarize the range of capital improvements discussed in the GCWG Report.

3. **SRC Recommendation:** *The draft EIS should be updated to remove the statement about operating at 110 mph and the need to double CSX's mainline in order to operate at 110 mph to eliminate any potential misconceptions. Instead the EIS should mention the GCWG's and FRA's infrastructure analysis that FRA's staff conducted as part of the GCWG final report and what that analysis found. If there is a continued desire to add details about the operation of future passenger rail service, Amtrak and the SRC should be consulted for those details as they would be the co-operators of the service Amtrak has notified CSX ii intends to run.*

**FRA response:** FRA will revise the reference to 110 mph speed in Section 4.18.3.4 of the DEIS to reference information in FRA's *Vision For High-Speed Rail in America, High -Speed Rail Strategic Plan*, dated April 2009, which states that “*emerging and regional high-speed corridor services (operating speeds up to 90-110 mph and 110-150 mph respectively, on shared and dedicated track in corridors of 100-500 miles.*” Here's a link to the report via FRA's eLibrary:

<https://www.fra.dot.gov/eLib/details/LI8234#pIzSgDkVision%20For%20High-Speed%20Rail%20in%20America>

FRA will also revise the text to acknowledge that, notably, the service proposed in the GCWG Report is not high-speed rail, despite operating on a designated High-Speed Rail Corridor, and would therefore not be held to the above noted requirements regarding emerging and regional high-speed corridor services.

4. **SRC Recommendation:** *The draft EIS should be updated to add a discussion about the State of Mississippi's 2016 rail plan update and the State's rail goals, including its desire to implement a Gulf Coast passenger rail service. Furthermore, the draft EIS should mention the SRC's federal application, especially the SRC's application for funds to build a siding east of Ansley on the CSX main line, which is in close proximity to the Port of Bienville. Overall, section 4.18.3.5 does not represent the current State of Mississippi's rail plan and needs to be updated to bring it in sync with the 2016 state rail plan.*

**FRA response:** FRA does not think including additional references to the state rail plan concerning passenger rail service is necessary at this time. FRA will not mention SRC's CRISI grant application, as the application review process is still underway. If the application is selected for an award before the Final EIS is published, then FRA and the Mississippi DOT (MOOT) project team will consider mentioning it in the Final EIS.



5. **SRC Recommendation:** *The draft EIS should be updated to remove the reference to double tracking CSX's main line since no party is planning to pursue double tracking CSX's main line to accommodate passenger rail service (CSX's freight capacity plans is outside the purview of the SRC). Instead, the EIS should explain the infrastructure analysis that FRA's staff conducted as part of the GCWG final report and what that analysis found. This section may also want to add the projects SRC has applied for federal CRISI funding. However, none of those projects would double track CSX's main line.*

**FRA response:** FRA will revise the double track language to remind the reader about the previous GCWG efforts, etc. and that CSX and the passenger rail service operator (assumed to be Amtrak at this time) need to reach an agreement on the final list of capital improvements. It will also be noted that double tracking the entire corridor is not anticipated as a requirement to support passenger rail operations as proposed in the GCWG Report to Congress.

6. **SRC Recommendation:** *The draft EIS should be updated to remove the reference to double tracking NS's main line since the SRC is not aware of any party planning to pursue double tracking NS's main line to accommodate passenger rail service. In addition, the SRC strongly believes it is a huge assumption to assume that NS's main line would have to be double tracked to accommodate passenger rail service. Because the GCWG found that passenger trains could run on CSX's line without having to double track the line, the mention of double tracking NS's main line to accommodate passenger rail service should be removed out of prudence.*

**FRA response:** FRA will discuss this with MOOT and will take another look at the Mississippi Statewide Freight Plan, amended October 2017, to verify the source of that language. FRA will consider revising the text as appropriate.

7. **RC Recommendation:** *[There is no discussion of 1) Amtrak's notification to CSX in the Spring 2018 notifying CSX of Amtrak's intent to restore passenger rail service in 12-18 months between New Orleans and Mobile on CSX's tracks or 2) the SRC's applications for FY17 R&E funding and FY18 CRISI funding to help implement two round trips a day passenger rail service between New Orleans and Mobile.] Both of these developments are directly relevant to the Port of Bienville project as the passenger rail service would use the same CSX tracks the Port of Bienville currently connects to. Therefore, the SRC believes these developments need to be included in this EIS as part of any no-build or alternative analysis. Otherwise, the study would be incomplete and therefore inaccurate.*

**FRA response:** FRA will mention Amtrak's letter since it's part of the background, and will revise the text to state that the actual restoration of

*(FRA response to recommendation continued)*

passenger rail service is not imminent because various agreements, including an operating agreement, need to be executed and capital improvements need to be made. Also, similar to FRA's response to recommendation no. 4, FRA will not mention SRC's CRIST and R&E grant applications since award announcements haven't been made yet.

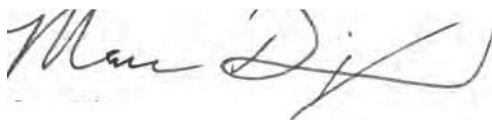
8. **SRC Recommendation :** *[One thing the SRC urges FRA to keep in mind when it comes to include a discussion about necessary capital improvements along the CSX's main line for restoring passenger service and the costs associated with these capital improvements is that Congress rejected the CSX Infrastructure estimate as overstated in the report language accompanying the FY18 Omnibus Appropriations bill (Public Law 115-111) and directed the GulfCoast Working Group to continue with FRA/Amtrak's capital estimates...]* *The draft EIS, when it comes to identifying necessary capital improvements along the CSX's main line for restoring passenger service and the costs associated with these capital Improvements, should follow the GCWG's and FRA's own estimates, as mandated by Congress in the FY2018 appropriations bill.*

**FRA response:** FRA acknowledges the comment but won't mention this in the Final EIS.

Thank you for your interest in the Port Bienville EIS, and FRA encourages the SRC to stay informed about its progress by visiting FRA's website:

<https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0798>. If you have any questions, please contact me via email at [marc.dixon@dot.gov](mailto:marc.dixon@dot.gov) or telephone (202) 493-0614.

Sincerely,  
South Central Regional Manager



Marc Dixon