Washington Street Bridge Replacement
Vicksburg, Mississippi

FINDING OF NO SIGNFICANT IMPACT

Statement of Purpose and Need:

The City of Vicksburg, Mississippi is a riverfront town located on the eastern banks of the Mississippi River. The current Washington Street Bridge crosses over railroad tracks controlled by the Kansas City Southern Railway Company (KCSRC), in the western portion of Vicksburg. The current Washington Street Bridge is 315 feet long, and is 60 feet in height from the KCSRC track bed to bridge deck. Washington Street acts as a major thoroughfare for the City of Vicksburg, running through downtown Vicksburg and connecting U.S. Interstate 20 to an interconnection with U.S. Highway 61. Since the KCSRC right-of-way runs in a north/south orientation, the tracks act as a practical divider within the city, requiring citizens to cross the KSCRC right-of-way in order to reach the Mississippi River and businesses located west of the right-of-way. The nearest right-of-way crossing to the north, Lee Street, is not equipped with crossing arms or an automated flashing signal system.

The KCSRC right-of-way is located approximately 60 feet below Washington Street, at the base of a steep bluff. Erosion presents a constant challenge to the stability of any bridge at this location. Significant erosion at steep banks of the Washington Street Bridge, the north end of which was replaced in the 1980s, has caused significant instability and movement of the bridge structure. At last inspection, the deck, superstructure and substructure were each rated as being in "Poor Condition." Shifting on the bridge has resulted in misalignment of guardrails on deck. Erosion on the north end of the structure has exposed approximately 15 feet of steel piling, while erosion on the south side has exposed approximately 20 feet of steel piles at the abutment. Because bank erosion is expected to be a long term problem associated with any bridge in the area, the proposed long-term solution is to construct a tunnel over the KCSRC tracks, and replace the existing bridge overpass with an at-grade road placed on top of the proposed tunnel. This alternative is preferable to replacing the bridge at its current location, the other Build Alternative, because it offers the best long term solution to address erosion concerns associated with the project site.

Though Washington Street historically has operated as a designated truck route, the Washington Street Bridge has been closed to all truck traffic since April, 2006, forcing the rerouting of truck traffic to surface streets and grade crossings within Vicksburg. Citizens and legislators within Vicksburg have targeted the Washington Street Bridge for replacement as soon as possible, allocating funds for the project through bond issue in October, 2006. Bridge replacement remains a high priority in Vicksburg. Congress has appropriated $4,273,842 to the FRA for the project in the SAFETEA-LU. An additional $1,000,000 has been allocated from the FRA FY05 budget. The availability of this funding triggered the FRA's preparation of an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Alternatives:
Under the Preferred Alternative, an at-grade road to accommodate Washington Street traffic would be constructed on top of a tunnel erected over the KCSRC right-of-way and current Washington Street Bridge would be demolished. This would allow Washington Street to be reopened to large truck traffic while providing structural stability lacking in the current Washington Street Bridge.

Additionally, an extension to Lee Street would be constructed under the Preferred Alternative, in order to allow for the closing of the Lee Street grade crossing that currently traverses the KCSRC tracks north of the Washington Street Bridge. This grade crossing, which provides entrance to the western commercial area, is not equipped with automated flashing signals or crossing arms.

Various alternatives were considered, including a no-action alternative, reconstruction of the bridge at its current location, and reconstruction of the bridge in an alternate location. All alternatives, with the exception of the no-action alternative, proposed the closing of the Lee Street grade crossing and an extension of Lee Street to accommodate traffic flow and provide contiguous north/south street access west of the KCSRC right-of-way.

Benefits of Preferred Alternative
The construction of a tunnel in place of the current Washington Street Bridge would address traffic flow and safety concerns within the City of Vicksburg. Washington Street could once again accommodate large truck traffic. Transportation patterns would become streamlined and more efficient, as large truck traffic between Interstate 20 and U.S. Highway 61 could cease diversion to other KCSRC crossing sites. This will in turn reduce large truck traffic in other areas of Vicksburg, helping to relieve congestion and inconvenience associated with diverted large truck traffic.

Construction of a tunnel in place of the bridge would address significant soil-related safety and stability concerns. The proposed length of the tunnel spans 350 feet and would avoid the use of steep fill slopes on bluffs prone to basal erosion. The tunnel would be set on concrete footing supported by drilled shafts, with retaining walls used to help transition the fill slopes down the existing grade. Based on these mitigation efforts, the Preferred Alternative would significantly improve geology or soil conditions surrounding the project parameters while minimizing the need for future maintenance and lengthening the foreseeable lifespan of the structure.

Procedural History
On May 14, 2008, Wildlife Technical Services (WTS), in conjunction with the City of Vicksburg, prepared an application Categorical Exclusion (CE) Worksheet in accordance with requirements set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) addressing proposed improvements to the Washington Street Bridge and adjacent Lee Street. The CE worksheet indicated that the Preferred Alternative qualified as a CE that would be granted for the “maintenance of existing railroad equipment; track and bridge structures…. and other existing railroad-related facilities.”

The term “maintenance” as encompassed by agency rules means work normally provided on a periodic basis that does not change the currently existing character of the facility in question. 64 Fed. Reg. 28547. Based on the proposed construction of a tunnel to replace the current Washington Street Bridge, the rerouting of traffic to the at-grade road, and the extension of Lee Street proposed by the project, the FRA determined that the proposed project was ineligible for classification as a CE for NEPA purposes. At that time, the FRA requested that the City of Vicksburg and WTS cooperate with the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) to address the Washington Street Bridge replacement and Lee Street extension project.

Based upon the attached EA, the FRA has concluded the Preferred Alternative is not likely to incur significant environmental impacts. FRA concurs with the preferences of the City and KCSRC and finds that the Preferred Alternative is best able to achieve the project purpose and need without significant environmental impacts.

The potential for environment impacts has been assessed by FRA Office of Railroad Development in the attached EA completed in August, 2008. The potential for environmental impact is summarized for each resource category as follows:

Transportation:
Construction of the Preferred Alternative would have a significant positive impact on transportation within the City of Vicksburg. Washington Street would be reopened to large truck access. This should improve local area traffic by eliminating the need to re-route large trucks through adjoining surface streets in order to traverse the KCSRC right-of-way and by re-establishing Washington Street as the primary truck route connection for U.S. Interstate 20 and U.S. Highway 61. Extension of Lee Street will provide permanent access to existing properties located on the west side of the KCSRC tracks and address community safety concerns by allowing closure of the Lee Street grade crossing.

Public Health and Safety:
The existing Washington Street Bridge is inadequate to meet current transportation safety needs. The proposed tunnel project would allow for significantly safer travels by fully demolishing the current bridge and replacing it with a tunnel, on top of which runs an at-grade road to accommodate Washington Street traffic. Construction of a tunnel would eliminate the potential for erosion at the base of bridge pillars, a documented problem associated with the current bridge structure. The tunnel would provide significant advantages in the long term, offering more stability and less maintenance than a bridge alternative, providing significant long term public health and safety benefits.

Cultural and Historic Resources:
No impacts to historic or cultural resources would occur. Archaeology, Inc. completed a Cultural Resources Survey on May 14, 2007 covering the limits of the proposed project and determined the areas bordering the existing railroad right-of-way and the proposed project limits were to be considered clear of cultural resources. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, in letters dated 3/31/08 and 6/4/08, stated that no

properties in the project area were listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Socioeconomic Conditions/Environmental Justice:
No significant impacts to natural, social or human environments would occur. The proposed site is entirely located in a portion of the City of Vicksburg zoned and historically used for commercial purposes. In the general vicinity of the project site are neighborhoods of residential and commercial character. The Preferred Alternative would replace the Washington Street Bridge that has long operated as a crossing over the KCSRC tracks, providing a safe and reliable connector for the commercial neighborhoods west of the KCSRC right-of-way and the predominantly residential neighborhoods east of the KCSRC right-of-way.

There is general agreement throughout the Vicksburg community on the need to improve or replace the current Washington Street Bridge with updated facilities. The Preferred Alternative, viewed as the best investment given long term safety concerns over site soil conditions, was agreed up on by city officials, engineers and KCSRC officials in January, 2007 at an informal meeting at Vicksburg's City Hall. The initial costs are to be paid out of a bond measure previously approved by the City in October, 2006.

Geology and Soils:
Soil conditions associated with the current Washington Street Bridge are inadequate to support continued full operation of the bridge. Erosion at the base of the bridge, located on steep banks adjacent to the KCSRC tracks, has led to unsafe instability and movement of the bridge. Erosion is expected to continue, and presents a constant concern for bridges at the site.

Construction Impacts:
Construction of the proposed project as planned will require the relocation of utilities located along the KCSRC right-of-way. It is estimated the project construction will be completed within nine months of commencement. The affected roadways, Washington Street and Lee Street, are scheduled to remain open to traffic during construction, though traffic may be temporarily halted for a period of 30-45 days. The tracks within the KCSRC right-of-way will remain operational. The Preferred Alternative was chosen in part because traffic interruptions would be minimized when compared to other considered alternatives.

Utilities:
Select utility lines will be relocated under the Preferred Alternative, predominantly surrounding or within the KCSRC right-of-way. Upon completion of the relocation process, there would be no significant impacts to utilities under the Preferred Alternative.

Noise/Vibration:
Marginal increases in traffic related noises can be expected at both the Washington Street Bridge site and along Lee Street, as both sites will be significantly improved and more accessible to traffic. The ability Washington Street to accommodate large truck traffic

will cause marginal increases in noise typical of that present before the bridge was closed to truck traffic. Because the Lee Street crossing is not equipped with automatic flashers or signal arms, trains traveling past Lee Street at the crossing must sound their horns. Approximately 40 trains pass per day. The closing of the Lee Street crossing will greatly reduce train horn noise. No other impacts related to noise or vibration disturbances are expected as a result of the proposed project.

Land Use:
No changes in land use or zoning would occur through this project. All work is to occur explicitly within the KCSRC or Mississippi Department of Transportation controlled right-of-ways. The neighborhoods bordering the right-of-way have been long established though city zoning and development as commercial to the west and residential/commercial to the east. The Preferred Alternative would improve the already established Washington Street thoroughfare without re-routing traffic in manners significant enough to trigger anticipated land use shift impacts.

Water Resources:
The proposed project is not located at or in an area directly adjacent to any protected waters of special concern, fish habitat or protected drinking water sources. The Preferred Alternative would not have any significant impact on water quality. The construction of an at-grade road on top of the proposed tunnel should improve water rainwater flow in comparison to the current Washington Street Bridge. Elimination of the steep bridge embankments should improve runoff and help limit erosion within the existing right-of-way.

Air Quality:
The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality reports that in 2007 all data collected from various monitoring sites within the State of Mississippi show that the state is meeting all National Ambient Air Quality Standards for all monitored sites, with the exception of ground level ozone within DeSoto County. Warren County is located in an NAAQS attainment area. The proposed project will not have any significant impact on current or future air quality standards or lead to the establishment of a non-attainment area.

Wetlands/Floodplains:
There would be no temporary or permanent impacts on wetlands caused by the Preferred Alternative. There are no wetlands located within the proposed project limits. Coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will not be necessary. There also would be no impact to any floodplains nor any increased flood hazard under the Preferred Alternative. The proposed project property limits are not located within any 100-year floodplain and is not classified as a floodway by any regulating entity.

Threatened or Endangered Species:
There would be no impact to ecologically sensitive or endangered species. In a letter dated March 14, 2008, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks

determined that the proposed project would likely pose little threat to any threatened or endangered species or their habitats.

Sec. 4(f) Park and Recreation Area:
No impacts to parklands or recreation areas would occur. Sec. 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act does not apply, as this proposed project will be fully constructed within the existing KCSRC right-of-way.

Farmlands:
In a letter dated March 28, 2008, the Natural Resources Conservation Service determined that the proposed project site contains no prime farmland designated lands and no U.S. Department of Agriculture designated program contracts.

Secondary and Cumulative Impacts:
During the construction process, citizens may be subject to increased noise/transportation inconveniences. Adjacent streets may experience increased congestion or traffic flow. This secondary effect would be minor and temporary, ceasing upon completion of project construction. No significant cumulative impacts would occur under the Preferred Alternative.

Therefore, the FRA finds that the project as presented and assessed in the EA according to FRA's "Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts" will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment.

Joseph Boardman
FRA Administrator

Date 8/21/08