

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

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LAFAYETTE REGIONAL AIRPORT  
I-49 CONNECTOR  
STATE PROJECT NO. 700-24-0073  
FEDERAL AID PROJECT NO. DE-0009(802)  
LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

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RECORD OF DECISION

September 2005

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## **SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION**

This Record of Decision (ROD) provides final Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approval of the FAA actions at Lafayette Regional Airport (LFT) required under the Selected Alternative as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) issued August 2002 for the I-49 Connector project in Lafayette, Louisiana. The alignment under the Selected Alternative for the I-49 Connector extends from just south of Lafayette Regional Airport north to the current southern terminus of Interstate 49 at the Interstate 10/Interstate 49 interchange as described in the FEIS.

The Selected Alternative for the I-49 Connector project is referred to in the FEIS as the RR-4 Elevated Alignment with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Sub-alternative and Sub-alternative H. The modifications required under the Selected Alternative include the displacement of the threshold for Runway 11/29 by 350 feet on the northwest end, lengthening the runway on the southeast end, and accomplishing associated actions. The FEIS for the I-49 Connector was prepared by the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LaDOTD) with the FAA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) serving as cooperating agencies. Because of the potential impacts to LFT from the I-49 Connector project, the FAA participated in the preparation of the EIS as a cooperating agency.

The FAA actions approved in this ROD include FAA approval of the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) for the displacement of the threshold for Runway 11/29 by 350 feet on the northwest end; lengthening it on the southeast end; and accomplishing associated actions including the extension of the taxiway for Runway 11/29 on the southeast end; displacement of the taxiway on the northwest end; relocation of supporting navigational aids for the runway; changes to associated flight procedures; relocation of the ARFF/perimeter road on the southeast end of the Airport; release of approximately 3.5 acres of Airport property for the I-49 Connector right-of-way; and installation of new runway lights, runway end indicator lights, and runway alignment indicator lights as described in Chapter 4 of the FEIS.

## **SECTION 2 – BACKGROUND**

The I-49 Connector project is in the Evangeline Thruway (U.S. 90/U.S. 167 corridor) and would link U.S. 90, south of LFT to I-49 near I-10. Six freeway alternatives were considered in the FEIS on four alignments, two of which would impact LFT by requiring the displacement of 350 feet of Runway 11/29 and other related airport changes. In October 1990, the FHWA and LaDOTD began work on a comprehensive location study and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of potential transportation improvements in the U.S. 90/U.S. 167 Evangeline Thruway corridor in Lafayette, Louisiana. A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on January 17, 1991.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was approved and circulated in May 1992 and a public hearing was held on July 1, 1992. Following the public hearing, the DEIS was withdrawn on December 11, 1992. In December 1997, LaDOTD restarted the project with reconciled set of alternatives and the second Notice of Intent for the project was issued on April 14, 1998.

In November 2000, the FHWA in association with LaDOTD prepared a DEIS to address potential environmental impacts from the proposed improvements to the system of freeways in Lafayette, Louisiana. The FAA served as a Cooperating Agency on the DEIS because of the potential impacts to LFT. Following the comment period, a FEIS was issued in August 2002. After careful consideration of all the identified environmental factors, project commitments and mitigation measures identified in the FHWA FEIS, input received from other agencies, organizations, and the public, the FHWA approved the RR-4 Elevated Alignment with the MPO Sub-alternative and Sub-alternative H as the Selected Alternative in their Record of Decision dated January 2003.

The study corridor for the I-49 Connector is approximately five miles in length, beginning just south of the Lafayette Regional Airport and extending north to the I-10 interchange. The Evangeline Thruway in Lafayette consists of parts of U.S. Highway 90, U.S. Highway 167, and Interstate 49. The proposed freeway upgrade in the Thruway corridor linking U.S. 90 south of Lafayette to I-49 near I-10 has been assigned the name I-49 Connector.

The Selected Alternative, RR-4 Elevated Alignment with the MPO Sub-alternative and Sub-alternative H, will require displacement of Runway 11/29. Displacement of Runway 11/29 is needed in order for the I-49 overpass at the University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) Part 77 approach surface.

The FAA's proposed Federal actions are:

- Approval of the Airport Layout Plan depicting the displacement of Runway 11/29 by 350 feet and displacement of the runway's taxiways described in Chapter 1, Section 1.2 and Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12 of the FEIS;
- Relocation of existing navigational aids on Runway 11/29;
- Approval of associated flight procedures that may be required as a result of the displacement of Runway 11/29; and
- Approval of release of approximately 3.5 acres of Federally obligated Airport land for FHWA use subject to the Airport sponsor's request for release and public notification pursuant to 49 USC 47153.

Two of the primary alignment alternatives for the I-49 Connector freeway considered in the FEIS would require the displacement of 350 feet of Runway 11/29 at the Lafayette Regional Airport. These alternatives are identified in the FEIS as EA-1 and RR-4. A detailed description and analysis of the Federal actions are provided in the FEIS, I-49

Connector, Lafayette, Louisiana, August 2002 (FEIS), Volume I and II.

In accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations §1506.3, the FAA adopted the FHWA final EIS by letter to the Environmental Protection Agency on September 10, 2002, for use in preparing this ROD. Accordingly, this ROD provides FAA approval of changes to the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) to displace the threshold on Runway 11/29 by 350 feet on the northwest and lengthen it by 350 feet on the southeast end; and accomplish related actions including extending the taxiway for Runway 11/29 on the southeast end; displacing it on the northwest end; relocating navigational aids, releasing approximately 3.5 acres of Federally-obligated property to accommodate freeway right-of-way requirements; changing flight procedures as necessary to accommodate the relocated runway; relocating the Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF)/perimeter road on the southeast end of the Airport; installing new runway lights, runway indicator lights, runway alignment indicator lights, and providing new pavement markings as described in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12 of the FEIS.

The FAA's determination in this matter took into consideration the environmental factors identified in the FEIS; input received from other agencies, organizations, the public; and mitigation and commitments contained in the FHWA ROD. Based on this review, the FAA has determined that the technically preferred alternative is also the environmentally preferred alternative. Therefore, the FAA approves the FAA federal actions required at LFT under the Selected Alternative as outlined above and in the FEIS.

This public Record of Decision is issued in accordance with the requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1505.2. The principal features include:

- A statement of the agency's decision;
- An identification of all the alternatives considered by the agency in reaching its decision, with a specification of the alternative that is considered to be environmentally preferable;
- The means adopted (mitigation measures) to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the alternative selected.

In reaching our determination, careful consideration has been given to:

- The aviation safety and operational objectives of the project in the light of the various aeronautical factors and judgments presented;
- The anticipated environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and mitigation measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts from the alternative selected;
- Consideration of alternatives to the proposed action, including the environmentally preferred alternative; and
- Mitigation measures to minimize or avoid harm from the proposed action, including the means to monitor and enforce mitigation measures through

conditions of approval set forth in the ROD.

- Funding for the required changes to the Lafayette Regional Airport will be the responsibility of the Federal Highway Administration as indicated in the FEIS in Section 4.2.12a, page 4-77. Neither the FAA nor the airport sponsor shall be held responsible for funding of improvements at the Airport resulting from implementation of the I-49 Connector project.

## **SECTION 2 – PURPOSE AND NEED**

The existing Evangeline Thruway is a north-south arterial passing through the older part of Lafayette. It serves local residential and business traffic and also functions as an integral part of the Federal-aid National Highway System servicing south Louisiana. Construction and freeway implementation would begin just south of the Lafayette Regional Airport and continue north to the current southern terminus of I-49 at the I-10/I-49 interchange. This freeway section constitutes the logical termini for the project as it is considered to have independent utility. Exhibit 1-1 in the FEIS presents the Evangeline Thruway study corridor. A freeway upgrade of the Evangeline Thruway in Lafayette accompanied by continuous parallel land service roadways would serve to improve the vital transportation role that the freeway plays and also be compatible with national, state, regional, and local plans in terms of system linkage. This is discussed in the FEIS in Chapter 1, pages 1-3 thru 1-19.

Like many major highways in urban areas, traffic volumes on the Thruway have grown steadily over the last several decades. Volumes currently exceed the physical capacity of the freeway during peak traffic periods. The Lafayette Department of Planning, Zoning, and Codes' (DPZC) computerized traffic model indicates that present and future traffic volumes warrant high type capacity improvements in the Evangeline Thruway corridor.

The Lafayette Regional Airport lies adjacent to the existing Evangeline Thruway in the southeast quadrant of the corridor. Two of the alignments discussed in the FEIS, EA-1 and RR-4, would require the displacement of Runway 11/29 by 350 feet.

This displacement would be needed in order for the I-49 overpass at the University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAA FAR Part 77 approach surface. The various project freeway alternatives, including the “no build” alternative, are described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

The displacement of Runway 11/29 is considered a “connected” action in the EIS and is considered in Section 4.2.12 of the FEIS. The FAA Order 5050.4A, Airport Environmental Handbook, Section 26, identifies a displacement of airport property (such as extending Runway 11/29 to accommodate the I-49 Connector) as a “connected action”. This is discussed in the FEIS in Chapter 4, page 4-74.

## **SECTION 3 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

Lafayette Regional Airport (“LFT” or “the Airport”) is operated by the City of Lafayette, Louisiana and is situated one mile east of Lafayette and 50 miles west of Baton Rouge. The Airport handled approximately 76,024 total aircraft operations in the year 2002.

Construction and freeway implementation under the I-49 Connector project would begin just south of the Lafayette Regional Airport and continue north to the current southern terminus of I-49 at the I-10/I-49 interchange, a length of approximately 5 miles. The proposed action includes construction in the Evangeline Thruway (U.S. 90/U.S. 167 corridor) of a freeway with accompanying interchanges and flanking collector/distributor roadways for local traffic circulation and land access. The existing Evangeline Thruway is a north-south arterial passing through the older part of Lafayette. It serves local residential and business traffic and also functions as an integral part of the Federal-aid National Highway System (NHS) servicing south Louisiana.

Two of the six alternatives considered for the I-49 Connector would require modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport and FAA approval of changes to the ALP as described below and in the FEIS. As discussed beginning on page 4-73 of the FEIS, the airport modifications are necessary because the I-49 Connector overpass at the University/Surrey interchange will encroach on the FAA FAR Part 77, Objects Affecting Navigable Airspace, approach surface if the runway remains where it is currently located. The changes would consist of displacing the threshold of Runway 11/29 by 350 feet on its northwest end and lengthening by 350 feet on its southeast end. This is shown in the FEIS in Exhibits 3-12 and 4-4. The existing 350 feet of runway pavement on the northwest end of Runway 11/29, although removed from service, will remain in place. The taxiway for Runway 11/29 would also have to be extended on the southeast end and displaced on the northwest end in order to accommodate the runway displacement. Navigational aids shown on the ALP would also have to be relocated, flight procedures would have to be changed and the perimeter road at the southeast end would have to be relocated. In addition, the FAA would have to approve the release of 3.5 acres of Federally obligated property for the freeway right of way. This Record of Decision (ROD) approves the required modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport under the Selected Alternative and as described in the FEIS issued September 2002.

The Selected Alternative for the freeway is the locally preferred alternative and described in the FEIS as Alternative RR-4 Elevated and includes the MPO Sub-alternative, which was requested by the Lafayette Consolidated Government (LCG) to keep two local collector streets open under the freeway, and Sub-alternative H which applies to the area north of Willow Street. Additional description of this alternative is in the FHWA Record of Decision, pages 4 & 5. As stated in the FHWA ROD issued January 2003, the Selected Alternative requires the least number of residential displacements; is more conducive to preserving and enhancing the Sterling Grove Historic District; and is able to offer more direct access opportunities to the central business district.

With the exception of wetlands, this Selected Alternative would not have any additional

substantial environmental impacts when compared to the other alternatives considered in the FEIS. With regards to wetlands, the Selected Alternative requires a 350 feet displacement of Runway 11/29 at Lafayette Regional Airport impacting approximately 5 acres of wetlands that would not ordinarily be impacted by other alternatives considered in the FEIS. This alternative is considered to be the more environmentally preferred by avoiding numerous residential, business, and public facilities that would be displaced under other evaluated alternatives.

The Selected Alternative will allow the FHWA to implement the I-49 Connector project and to provide a critical connecting link through Lafayette from existing I-49 to US 90 south of Lafayette Regional Airport.

#### **SECTION 4 – ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN THE EIS RELATED TO MODIFICATIONS AT LFT**

There were six “build” freeway alternatives considered in the EIS, along with a “no build” alternative. Each build alternative consisted of a new freeway with differing alignment and local access provisions. Only two of the alignments, EA-1 and RR-4 would require the displacement of Runway 11/29 and associated Airport improvements discussed in the previous sections of this ROD. The other alignments and the “no-build” freeway alternative would not require displacement of Runway 11/29 or any of the associated modifications at LFT; however, right-of-way along the existing Evangeline Thruway would be required as mentioned in Section 4.2.11.c with all alignments. Access to the airport facilities would remain the same for all alignments as described in Section 4.2.11.d. RR-3 and RR-5 alternatives would provide slightly more direct access to Tower Road than would EA-1 and RR-4. As stated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12, the ten “sub-alternatives” to the above six alternatives and detailed in Chapter 2 of the EIS have no bearing on Lafayette Regional Airport.

**No-Build Alternative** – The existing grade signalized Evangeline Thruway would remain in its current configuration and there would be no displacement of Runway 11/29, no requirement for release of Federally-obligated airport property, and no requirement for the proposed airport modifications previously described.

**EA-1 Elevated** – The I-49 Freeway utilizes the existing Evangeline Thruway alignment for its entire length. I-49 is continuously elevated between Willow Street and Pinhook Road. All existing arterial cross streets, collector streets, and many minor streets remain open to traffic. A continuous one-way ground level frontage road system utilizing the existing Evangeline Thruway roadway is provided to accommodate local trips and land use access. Slip ramps are provided to connect I-49 with the frontage roads. In some areas, control of access lines will be required along the outer edges of the existing ground level Thruway between the slip ramps and the intersecting cross streets. Runway 11/29 at Lafayette Regional Airport would be displaced 350 feet on its northwest end and extended 350 feet on its southeast end. This displacement would be required in order for the I-49 overpass at University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAR Part 77 approach surface. The runway’s taxiway would also be

extended on the southeast end and displaced on the northwest end to accommodate the runway displacement. It would require relocation of the ARFF/perimeter road on the southeastern end, new runway lights, runway end indicator lights, runway alignment indicator lights, and pavement markings. The design of the runway/taxiway extensions and related actions would be in accordance with FAA specifications. Fill would be required to bring the ground elevation up to grade with the existing runway to construct the southeast extension for Runway 11/29. Airspacing and obstruction evaluations must be performed before and during construction of the I-49 Connector. Construction cranes should not extend above the runway glide slope.

EA-1 Selected Overpasses – The I-49 Freeway utilizes the existing Evangeline Thruway alignment for its entire length. I-49 has an undulating (up and down) profile between Willow Street and Pinhook Road. I-49 will pass over the key crossing streets of Willow Street, Donlon Avenue, U.S. 90, Johnston Street, Pinhook Road, and University Avenue. These key crossing streets, along with Kaliste Saloom Road, will remain open to traffic. Simcoe, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jefferson, and Taft Streets, as well as all minor streets, are severed and continuous access across the project main line will no longer occur. A continuous one-way ground level frontage road system utilizing the existing Evangeline Thruway roadway is provided to accommodate local trips and land use access. Slip ramps are provided to connect I-49 with the frontage roads. In some areas, control of access lanes will be required along the outer edges of the existing ground level Thruway between the slip ramps and the intersecting cross streets. Runway 11/29 at Lafayette Regional Airport would be displaced 350 feet on its northwest end and extended 350 feet on its southeast end. This displacement would be required in order for the I-49 overpass at University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAR Part 77 approach surface. The runway's taxiway would also be extended on the southeast end and displaced on the northwest end to accommodate the runway displacement. It would require relocation of the ARFF/perimeter road on the southeastern end, new runway lights, runway end indicator lights, runway alignment indicator lights, and pavement markings. The design of the runway/taxiway extensions and related actions would be in accordance with FAA specifications. Fill would be required to bring the ground elevation up to grade with the existing runway to construct the southeast extension for Runway 11/29. Airspacing and obstruction evaluations must be performed before and during construction of the I-49 Connector. Construction cranes should not extend above the runway glide slope.

RR-3 Elevated – The I-49 Freeway utilizes the existing Thruway alignment between I-10 and U.S. 90, but utilizes a new alignment parallel to the Union Pacific Railroad between U.S. 90 and Kaliste Saloom Road, and returns to the existing Thruway alignment south of Kaliste Saloom Road. I-49 is continuously elevated between Willow Street and University Avenue or at-grade between Johnston Street and University Avenue. All existing arterial cross streets, collector streets, and many minor streets remain open to traffic. A continuous one-way ground level frontage road system with slip ramps is not provided. Instead, more traditional point access diamond type interchanges are provided at Johnston Street and University Avenue. Lafayette Regional Airport would not be impacted by this alternative since it would not require the displacement of

Runway 11/29 or any of the other associated changes at the Airport.

RR-3 Selected Overpasses – The I-49 Freeway utilizes the existing Thruway alignment between Mudd Avenue and Kaliste Saloom Road, and returns to the existing Thruway alignment south of Kaliste Saloom Road. I-49 has an undulating (up and down) profile between Willow Street and Pinhook Road. I-49 will pass over the key crossing streets of Willow Street, Donlon Avenue, U.S. 90, Johnston Street, Pinhook Road, and University Avenue. These key crossing streets, along with Kaliste Saloom Road, will remain open to through traffic. Simcoe, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jefferson, and Taft Streets, as well as all minor streets, are severed and continuous access across the project main line will no longer occur. A continuous one-way ground frontage road system with slip ramps is not provided. Instead, more traditional point access diamond type interchanges are provided at Johnston Street and University Avenue. Lafayette Regional Airport would not be impacted by this alternative since it would not require the displacement of Runway 11/29 or any of the other associated changes at the Airport.

RR-4 Elevated – The I-49 Freeway utilizes the existing Thruway alignment between I-10 and U.S. 90, but utilizes a new alignment curving near the Union Pacific Railroad between U.S. 90 and Pinhook road, and returns to the existing thruway alignment south of Pinhook Road. I-49 is continuously elevated between Willow Street and Pinhook Road. A more traditional point access diamond-type interchange is provided at Johnston Street. Runway 11/29 at Lafayette Regional Airport would be displaced 350 feet on its northwest end and extended 350 feet on its southeast end. This displacement would be required in order for the I-49 overpass at University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAR Part 77 approach surface. The runway's taxiway would also be extended on the southeast end and displaced on the northwest end to accommodate the runway displacement. It would require relocation of the ARFF/perimeter road on the southeastern end, new runway lights, runway end indicator lights, runway alignment indicator lights, and pavement markings. The design of the runway/taxiway extensions and related actions would be in accordance with FAA specifications. Fill would be required to bring the ground elevation up to grade with the existing runway to construct the southeast extension for Runway 11/29. Airspacing and obstruction evaluations must be performed before and during construction of the I-49 Connector. Construction cranes should not extend above the runway glide slope.

RR-5 Elevated – The I-49 Freeway utilizes the existing Thruway alignment between I-10 and Pinhook Road, utilizes a new alignment near Union Pacific Railroad between Pinhook Road and Kaliste Saloom Road, and returns to the existing Thruway alignment south of Kaliste Saloom Road. I-49 is continuously elevated between Willow Street and Pinhook Road. Lafayette Regional Airport would not be impacted by this alternative since it would not require the displacement of Runway 11/29 or any of the other associated changes at the Airport.

Comparison of Alternatives~~{xe "Comparison of Alternatives"}~~ Retained for Detailed Consideration

On the basis of the screening criteria used to evaluate potential alternatives, the FEIS identified six freeway alternatives that were determined to be reasonable, prudent, and feasible, and were retained for further consideration in addition to the no-build alternative. A comparison of the operational issues, cost considerations{xe "cost considerations"}, environmental impacts, and ability to meet project needs for each of the alternatives for the freeway project as a whole, including modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport, was detailed in the FEIS. A summary comparison of the six alternatives is provided in the FEIS (S-16, Exhibit S-4). The comparison summarized in the FEIS addressed material differences among the alternatives in specific impact categories. A comparison of these alternatives is also discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12 of the FEIS as they relate specifically to impacts to Lafayette Regional Airport and environs. {xe "aircraft noise"}{xe "air quality"} From this final comparison, a Preferred Alternative for the I-49 Connector was selected by the FHWA.

#### Selected Alternative

From the list of potential alternatives described above, the FHWA Selected Alternative was identified as RR-4 Elevated and includes the MPO Sub-alternative and Sub-alternative H (RR-4). As stated in the FHWA's ROD issued in January 2003, their decision was based on analyses contained in the DEIS issued in November 2000; the FEIS; and the comments of Federal, state, and local agencies, members of the public and elected officials, and other information in the record in this matter. The Selected Alternative decision represented a balance in which certain factors were weighed against others in reaching a decision. The FHWA's ROD mentioned three factors that stand out as the most notable regarding the Selected Alternative:

- The Selected Alternative would require the least number of residential displacements;
- The Selected Alternative moves traffic (both the proposed freeway and existing Evangeline Thruway) farther from the Sterling Grove Historic District than other alternatives (except RR-5); and
- The Selected Alternative is on a new alignment in the core area, and as such is geometrically able to offer more direct access opportunities to the central business district.

Under the selected Alternative, approximately 350 feet of the existing runway would have to be displaced from the northwest end; and the southeast end of the runway would have to be extended 350 feet in order for the I-49 overpass at the University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAR Part 77 approach surface. The cost for extending Runway 11/29 and its taxiway would be included in the overall cost of the I-49 Connector project and funded by FHWA and LaDOTD. The existing 200 feet overrun area on the southeast end of the runway would be reconstructed at the end of the 350-foot runway extension.

Related to the runway/taxiway extensions would be a relocated ARFF/perimeter road on the southeastern end, relocated navigational aids on Runway 11/29, a change to flight

procedures to accommodate runway changes, new runway lights, runway end indicator lights, runway alignment indicator lights and pavement markings for Runway 11/29. The LaDOTD/FHWA has committed to funding the relocation of the VHF Omni-Directional Radio Range (VOR) (page 4-79 of the FEIS and page 19 of the FHWA ROD), if upon completion of the I-49 Connector project an impact on the VOR is identified. In order to minimize impacts to the Medium Intensity Approach Lighting System with Runway Alignment Indicator Lights (MALSR) for Runway 04R that will be in place prior to commencement of design of the I-49 Connector project, the LaDOTD/FHWA has agreed to coordinate with the FAA on any preliminary design in the area between nodes A and B as depicted in Exhibit S-2 of the FEIS.

The Selected Alternative would improve access to the Airport terminal area. No increase in travel time is anticipated for Emergency Response Units to access the airport under the Selected Alternative, although vehicles would have to enter from the north on I-49 and from the west on Kaliste Saloom. Likewise, response time for accidents outside of Airport property would not be hindered.

Existing flight tracks are not expected to change laterally as a result of the 350-foot extension of Runway 11/29 under the Selected Alternative and noise is not expected to impact surrounding communities. Noise contour maps would only change slightly as a result of the displacement of Runway 11/29 to the southeast. In fact, noise sensitive land uses northwest of the Airport should experience reduced single event noise impacts because aircraft will be at higher altitudes as they approach and depart Runway 11/29 under the Selected Alternative.

Exhibit 3-12 in the FEIS presents the layout of the runway extension and its relationship to surrounding wetlands and Bayou Tortue. Extending Runway 11/29 would encroach on an area considered jurisdictional wetlands subject to Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act of 1977. The runway extension would affect approximately 5 acres of wetlands as discussed in Section 4.3.3.b of the FEIS. Impacts to Bayou Tortue can be avoided by utilizing design features of the runway extension and stabilization with riprap or other means to be determined and implemented by FHWA and LaDOTD in accordance with the Section 404 permitting process. As stated in the FHWA ROD on page 5, the impact to wetlands is considered to be more than offset by the avoidance of numerous residential, business, and public facilities that lie in the path of RR-3 and RR-5 that would be displaced by those alternatives.

Under the Selected Alternative, approximately 3.5 acres of airport property would be required for the I-49 Connector on the western side of the Airport property. This required property lies along Evangeline Thruway, mainly between Tower Road and the newly constructed Petroleum Helicopter, Inc. (PHI) facility. Any acquisition costs are the responsibility of the state and Federal highway agencies as indicated in the FEIS on page 4-77 and 4-78, Section 4.2.12c. Upon request from the airport sponsor for release of the approximately 3.5 acres of federally-obligated property required for the I-49 Connector freeway project, the FAA has determined that such property can be released

since it is not needed for present or foreseeable airport purposes and such action will protect, advance or benefit the public interest in civil aviation.

## **SECTION 5 - PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

A "Notice-of-Intent" (NOI) to prepare an EIS was prepared and distributed by FHWA and published in the Federal Register on April 14, 1998. A copy of the NOI is in Appendix C of the FEIS. In addition, a written "Solicitation-of-Views" letter was mailed on May 5, 1998, to various agency representatives, legislators, and selected members of the general public. Comments were requested regarding potential impacts from the project. A copy of this letter is also in Appendix C of the FEIS.

A Scoping Meeting was held on June 24, 1998, to receive input from agencies and citizen groups on issues to be discussed and evaluated in the DEIS concerning the I-49 Connector project. A copy of the Scoping Meeting letter of invitation, a list of those invited, and the Scoping Meeting Minutes are in Appendix C of the FEIS.

Agency and public input were actively solicited by the FHWA throughout the environmental process. The public information program included information meetings in addition to the public hearing on the Draft EIS. Articles and announcements were published in local newspapers to inform the public of the project and to announce formal public meetings. These included a Major Investment Study (MIS)/Mode Meeting and a DEIS Public Meeting. Newspaper and television representatives were encouraged to attend the meetings.

The MIS/Mode Meeting was held June 24, 1998, at the Lafayette One Stop Shop Auditorium. Notices for this meeting were published in the Lafayette newspapers The Daily Advertiser and The Times of Acadiana. The purpose of this meeting was to decide whether a freeway in the Evangeline Thruway corridor should be implemented as transit improvements alone could not accommodate the existing and projected trips. A copy of the minutes of this meeting are in Appendix C of the FEIS.

A DEIS public meeting was held in Lafayette on July 30, 1998. Notices of the meeting were published in the same newspapers as indicated above, twice prior to the actual meeting date. Approximately 96 citizens, not counting LaDOTD and FHWA representatives, attended the meeting.

Following the distribution and review of the DEIS dated November 2000, a formal Public Hearing was held in Lafayette at the Frem F. Boustany Convention Center on December 14, 2000. Notices of the hearing were published in The Daily Advertiser and The Times of Acadiana. A copy of the public hearing notice is in Appendix C of the FEIS.

Approximately 276 citizens attended the public hearing. A summary of the oral and

written comments received regarding the DEIS and their responses is in Table 5-1 of the FEIS. Comments with responses are contained in Appendix C of the FEIS dated August 2002.

## **SECTION 6 – IMPACT CATEGORIES, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

The following are some of the main environmental impact categories that were examined in the FEIS as they relate to the entire 5-mile freeway project:

Land Use and Transportation  
Socioeconomics  
Public Facilities and Services  
Cultural Resources  
Section 106 Statement  
Section 4(f) and 6(f) Statements  
Aesthetics and Joint Use Development  
Community Design Workshop  
Effects of Different Grade-Type Freeways  
Noise Impacts  
Waste Sites  
Lafayette Regional Airport  
Water Resources and Hydraulics  
Soils  
Flora, Fauna, Wetlands, and Endangered Species  
Air Quality Impacts  
Construction Impacts  
Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources  
Potential Permits  
Pumping Stations  
Live Oak Trees near Sterling Grove Historic District  
Transportation  
Pumping Stations  
Right-of-Way and Displacements  
Opportunities for Use of Under Bridge Areas and Right-of-Way  
Construction Costs  
Sterling Grove Historic District Visual Mitigation Opportunities  
Interior Noise Analyses (For Selected Alternative)  
Study of Oak Tree Near Castille/Thruway Intersection

Table S-2 in the FEIS identifies the FHWA commitments and mitigation measures resulting from the EIS process, including those related to Lafayette Regional Airport. As a cooperating agency, the FAA considered the analysis in the FEIS for purposes of making its determinations relating to the proposed modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport under the I-40 Connector Project.

Analysis of Impacts Relating to Modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport Under the

## EA-1 and RR-4 Alternatives

Although there were six build alternatives considered in the FEIS for the proposed I-49 connector, only two of the four primary freeway alignment alternatives, EA-1 and RR-4, (EA-1 Elevated, EA-1 Selected Overpasses, and RR-4 Elevated) had the potential to require airport modifications including runway/taxiway displacement and related actions.

However, all build alternatives would require approximately 3.5 acres of airport right-of-way for the I-49 Connector on the western side of the airport property. EA-1 (Elevated and Selected Overpasses) and RR-4 (Elevated) would require displacement of Runway 11/29 and related actions in order for the I-49 Connector overpass at the University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAR Part 77 approach surface. The No-Build freeway alternative and other build alternatives (RR-3 Elevated, RR-3 Selected Overpasses, and RR-5) would not require displacement of Runway 11/29 or other related work at the Airport. As stated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12, the ten “sub-alternatives” to the above six alternatives and detailed in Chapter 2 of the EIS have no bearing on Lafayette Regional Airport.

Impacts of the proposed I-49 Connector project alternatives on the Lafayette Regional Airport and environs were discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12 of the FEIS. The impact categories can be broken down as follows:

- Runway/Taxiway Displacement, Extension, and Related Actions
- Right-of-way Requirements
- Access and Circulation
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Compatible Land Use
- Light Emissions
- Solid Wastes
- Cultural Resources
- Floodplain and Wetlands
- Water Quality
- Environmental Justice
- Other Impact Categories
- Cumulative Impacts

## **Impacts**

### **Runway/Taxiway Displacement and Related Actions**

#### **Build Alternatives:**

Lafayette Regional Airport lies adjacent to the existing Evangeline Thruway in the southeast quadrant of the corridor. Two of the alignments, EA-1 and RR-4, would require the displacement of Runway 11/29 and associated actions. These changes

would be required in order for the I-49 overpass at the University/Surrey Street interchange to remain under the FAR Part 77 approach surface. The surface was calculated using a slope of 34:1 descending from a point 17 feet above the I-49 overpass roadway to a point on the existing runway. The end of the displaced runway would be set 200' from this point. This requires a 350-foot displacement of Runway 11/29.

Approximately 350 feet of the existing runway would be displaced from the northwest end, and the southeast end of the runway would be extended 350 feet. The existing 200 feet overrun area on the southeast end of the runway would be reconstructed at the end of the 350 feet extension of the runway. The runway's taxiway would also be extended on the southeast end of Runway 11/29 and displaced on the northwest end in order to accommodate the runway displacement. The existing 350 feet of runway pavement on the northwest end of Runway 11/29 removed from service will not be torn out.

Related to the runway/taxiway extensions would be a relocated ARFF/perimeter road on the southeastern end, relocated navigational aids on Runway 11/29, a change to flight procedures as required, release of approximately 3.5 acres of Federally obligated airport property for project right-of-way, new runway lights, runway end indicator lights, runway alignment indicator lights, and pavement markings for Runway 11/29.

Plate 2a in the FEIS Appendix A shows the relationship of the proposed I-49 Connector and the displaced threshold of Runway 11/29. Exhibit 3-12 in the FEIS presents the layout of the runway extension and its relationship to surrounding wetlands and Bayou Tortue.

**FHWA Mitigation:** Fill would be required to bring the ground elevation up to grade with the existing runway in order to construct the southeast extension for Runway 11/29. Airspacing and obstruction evaluations must be performed before and during construction of the I-49 Connector. Special care must be taken to ensure that the construction cranes do not extend above the glide slope. Specific roadway lights must be used on the I-49 Connector overpass at University/Surrey Streets, pointed down and designed to ensure they do not encroach into the glide slope or otherwise affect airport operations.

In addition to the fill construction safety issues, there are safety considerations that must be addressed in connection with the overpass construction for the I-49 Connector at University Avenue and the I-40 Interchange at Kaliste Saloom Road. Both the I-49 Connector overpass at University Avenue and the I-49 Connector interchange at Kaliste Saloom Road would penetrate a 100:1 slope of any runway. As a result, a FAA Form 7460-1, Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration, would need to be filed with the FAA Air Traffic Division, ASW-520, before any construction begins.

The EA-1 and RR-4 Alternatives would require extending Runway 11/29 at the Airport. This would encroach on an area considered jurisdictional wetlands subject to Section

404(b) of the Clean Water Act of 1977, based on a field inspection of the area. The runway extension would affect approximately 5 acres of wetlands as discussed in Section 4.3.3.b of the FEIS. Impacts to Bayou Tortue can be avoided by utilizing design features of the runway extension and stabilization with riprap or other means.

Possible additional methods of mitigation for wetland impacts include restoration, creation, or mitigation banking that would provide offsite locations for this mitigation. LaDOTD will implement mitigation of one of the above methods if it were determined necessary during the Section 404 permitting process.

#### No-Build Alternative:

The no build freeway alternative and two of the four build alternatives (RR-3 and RR-5) would not require displacement of Runway 11-29, and there would be no construction activity required at the Airport. Therefore, there would be no mitigation requirements at the Airport associated with the no-build alternative.

### **Right-of-Way Requirements**

#### Build Alternatives:

For all freeway build alternatives, approximately 3.5 acres of airport right-of-way would be required by the I-49 Connector on the western side of the Airport property. This required right-of-way lies along the existing Evangeline Thruway, mainly between Tower Road and the newly constructed Petroleum Helicopter, Inc. (PHI) facility.

**FHWA Mitigation:** Fair market value of this property is not known at this time, but must be taken into consideration prior to release. The Airport would derive the benefit of improved access through release of the required property for freeway use. The approximately 3.5 acres of Airport property required by the I-49 Connector project are considered Federally-obligated property. Any acquisition costs are the responsibility of the state and Federal highway agencies as indicated in the FEIS page 4-77 and 4--78, Section 4.2.12c. As stated in the Commitment portion of Section 3.10 of the FHWA ROD, the LaDOTD and FHWA will fund necessary airport modifications as a part of the highway project.

The FAA has conducted modeling of obstacles, primarily large tractor-trailers, on the I-49 Connector frontage road for possible impacts to the Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Range (VOR) radiated signal. The modeling indicates no impacts to the operation of the VOR.

The FAA has an active project to replace the Runway 22L localizer antenna array in essentially the same location in the future. The I-49 Connector project will not require any additional right-of-way in the vicinity of the existing or future relocated localizer antenna array. No impact on the FAA's plans should occur, therefore no mitigation will be required.

The LaDOTD/FHWA has committed to funding the relocation of the VHF Omni-

Directional Radio Range (VOR) (page 4-79 of the FEIS and page 19 of the FHWA ROD), if upon completion of the I-49 Connector project, an impact on the VOR is identified.

In order to minimize impacts to the Medium Intensity Approach Lighting System with Runway Alignment Indicator Lights (MALSR) for Runway 04R that will be in place prior to commencement of design of the I-49 Connector project, the LaDOTD/FHWA has agreed to coordinate with the FAA on any preliminary design in the area between nodes A and B depicted in Volume I of the FEIS, Exhibit S-2.

#### No Build Alternative

Since no Airport property would be required for the no-build alternative, no mitigation would be required.

### **Access and Circulation**

#### Build Alternatives

All build alternatives would improve access to the Airport terminal area. Access to the Airport for the Emergency Response Units (ERU) would require alternate measures with the EA-1 and RR-4 alternatives. These vehicles approach the Airport from all directions and enter the airport via Tower Road. After the freeway project is implemented, vehicles would have to enter from the north on I-49 and from the west on Kaliste Saloom and would have to travel south about three-quarters of a mile past the Petroleum Helicopters Inc. (PHI) facility and then make a U-turn to head back northward to enter the Airport via Tower Road. No increase in travel time is anticipated due to the proposed project.

The ARFF vehicles would still have access to airport property via the perimeter and interior roadways within the Airport property. Accidents outside the Airport property can be accessed the same way as they always have except for outside the southwestern portion of the airport. The ARFF vehicles would have to utilize the I-49 Connector northbound frontage road. Access from Tower Road to the southbound frontage road for the EA-1 and RR-4 alternatives would be a little less direct. The vehicles would turn from Tower Road onto the northbound frontage road and U-turn at University Street to head south. Response time for accidents outside of Airport property would not be hindered because of the ability to use the free-flowing roadways provided by the I-49 Connector project.

#### No Build Alternative

Access and circulation for terminal, commercial, and emergency response operations would continue as they presently occur, but freeway service from I-10 to the Airport area would not be provided.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

## **Noise**

### Build Alternatives

The Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) is the standard noise metric used by the FAA to evaluate aircraft noise impacts and the 65 DNL is the FAA's threshold of significance for noise impacts.

Noise levels directly related to the Airport improvements associated with the build alternatives, EA-1 and RR-4, are not expected to impact surrounding communities. Due to the displacement of Runway 11/29 to the southeast, noise contour maps would change slightly. The 65 DNL noise contour for the runway extension to the southeast remains totally on airport property; therefore, no noise impacts should occur. Exhibit 4-4 in the FEIS reflects the before project and after project noise contours for the Airport. Noise sensitive land uses located northwest of the Airport should experience reduced single event noise impacts because aircraft will be at higher altitudes as they approach and depart Runway 11/29 under the proposed action, than under existing conditions. Existing flight tracks are not expected to change laterally.

Noise assessments relating to the freeway are in Section 4.2.10 of the FEIS.

### No Build Alternative

Runway noise contours would not be affected by the no-build alternative.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

## **Air Quality**

### Build Alternatives

Lafayette Parish was designated by the EPA, on August 18, 1995, as an ozone attainment area with an approved limited maintenance plan. As an air quality maintenance area, all federally funded activities proposed in Lafayette Parish are subject to the State's general conformity regulations.

Through recent coordination with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LaDEQ) (see letter dated September 13, 2002, attached as Appendix 1 to this Record of Decision), it has been determined that conditions in the approved Lafayette Parish maintenance plan remain unchanged; and the parish continues to meet all national ambient air quality standards, including the 1-hour ozone standard. Using the above-established criteria for determining conformity in limited maintenance areas, the Selected Alternative for the I-49 Connector and the Lafayette Airport Improvements, as described in the FEIS, is presumed to conform and is therefore in compliance with the general conformity provisions of the Louisiana State Implementation Plan (SIP).

As stated in their September 13, 2002 letter, the LaDEQ is reasonably confident that the

part of the project directly affecting the Airport will have no significant impact on the regional air quality of Lafayette Parish, nor jeopardize its current attainment status. The methodology used to determine the air quality effects caused by construction of the 350' extension of Runway 11/29 under Alternatives EA-1 and RR-4 is discussed in the FEIS on page 4-82.

#### No-Build Alternative

No change in air quality would occur if no construction occurs under the project.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

### **Compatible Land Use**

#### Build Alternatives

The proposed project is compatible with the Airport Master Plan. Because the project will provide a better vehicular transportation system, land use development in the area of the Airport could be expected to improve. Extension of Runway 11/29 in Alternatives EA-1 and RR-4 will have no bearing on surrounding commercial or residential land uses.

With regard to FAA Advisory Circular 150/5200-33, Hazardous Wildlife Attractant on or Near Airports, the runway extension will not attract any additional species or quantity of wildlife in the area. No land use changes to surrounding land is expected to occur.

#### No-Build Alternative

Land development would be expected to continue along the Evangeline Thruway and Surrey Street with or without the proposed project.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

### **Light Emissions**

#### Build Alternatives

The 350-foot extension of Runway 11/29 will occur in an undeveloped area; therefore it has no potential for adverse impacts.

Lighting for the freeway project in the area of the overpass at University/Surrey Streets would have the potential to impact aircraft on approach or departure from Lafayette Regional Airport.

**FHWA Mitigation:** The lights will be specially designed so the light poles will not penetrate the Runway 11/29 glide slope; they will be designed to ensure the lights will not interfere with flight operations in the vicinity of the Airport. See page 19 of the

FHWA ROD.

#### No-Build Alternatives

There would be no change to the lighting environment due to the no-build alternative.

### **Solid Wastes**

#### Build Alternatives

Solid waste disposal items for runway construction due to the two build alternatives will be minimal, consisting of approximately 2,500 cubic yards of abandoned runway pavement and base material. This material will be disposed of at a landfill permitted for such activity. There are no landfills within the vicinity of the Airport to cause bird or wild life attractant concerns in conforming to FAA Advisory Circular 150/5200-33, Hazardous Wildlife Attractants on or Near Airports.

#### No Build Alternative

There would be no solid waste for disposal.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

### **Cultural Resources**

#### Build Alternatives

Following consultation with the Division of Historic Preservation and the Department of Archaeology in the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, it was determined that no historical structures are located on the Airport property. There are identified archaeological sites known to be located on the Airport, but these recorded sites would not be affected by the I-49 Connector project.

#### No Build Alternative

No impact would occur from the no build alternative.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

### **Floodplain and Wetlands**

#### Build Alternatives

The extension of Runway 11/29 under Alternative RR-4 would reach into the floodway fringe of the Bayou Tortue Swamp. The effect on the floodplain is discussed in the FEIS in Section 4.3.1.b. The runway extension would also affect approximately five acres of wetlands as discussed in Section 4.3.3.b in the FEIS. These wetlands are

considered jurisdictional wetlands subject to Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act of 1977.

**FHWA Mitigation:** As stated in the FHWA ROD, LaDOTD will apply for a Section 404 permit for the 5 acres being impacted as a result of the RR-4 Alternative relating specifically to the Airport. The area of wetlands affected by the runway extension would be minimized by utilizing design features that would avoid relocation of the Bayou Tortue. Potential methods of mitigation for wetland impacts include restoration, creation, or purchase of replacement wetlands. As discussed in the FEIS in Section 4.3.3.b, this decision will be made during the permitting process in consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. As discussed in the FEIS, there is no practical alternative to the proposed construction in wetlands and the proposed action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands that may result from such use.

No Build Alternative

No wetlands would be impacted by this alternative.

**Water Quality**

Build Alternatives

Section 4.3.1 of the FEIS states that there should be no adverse water quality impacts due to the airport project. The FEIS contains coordination with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LaDEQ) that provides certification of reasonable assurance the project will not adversely impact water quality. The September 3, 2002 letter from LaDEQ is attached to this ROD as Appendix 2.

No Build Alternative

No water quality impacts would occur with this alternative.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

**Environmental Justice**

Build Alternatives

This is discussed in the FEIS in Section 4.2.12 as it relates to the Airport, and in Section 4.2.2b (Social Impacts) as it relates to the I-49 Connector project. No impacts due to construction at the Lafayette Regional Airport are anticipated for this category.

No Build Alternative

No impacts would occur with this alternative.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

Throughout Chapter 4 of the FEIS, impacts and consequences of the numerous build and no build alternatives were provided. In Chapter 1 of the report, other significant proposed actions in the Lafayette area, including expansion of the Lafayette Regional Airport, not related to the I-49 Connector were identified. These projects are listed below:

- Multi-modal transit center
- Provision of frontage roads along each side of I-10 between Ambassador Caffery Parkway and the Vermillion River
- South College Road extension and bridge from Pinhook Road to Kaliste Saloom Road
- Camelia Boulevard extension from Johnston Street to Verot School Road with bridge over the Vermillion River
- Verot School Road extension from Pinhook Road to Ambassador Caffery Parkway as well as widening to major arterial status

After analysis of the individual impacts viewed in the context of the whole, and viewing the relationship of the proposed I-49 Connector project to the Lafayette area, the resulting judgment is that the cumulative impact (or benefit) of the I-49 Connector plus the connected action of runway extension would not result in a detrimental cumulative impact.

Thus, the FEIS considered other future actions, other than the I-49 Connector project and its impact to the Lafayette Regional Airport. More in-depth cumulative impacts concerning other possible future actions cannot be determined at this stage due to the unknown construction implementation schedule for the project, which begins with the corridor preservation program and is dependent upon funding availability. No other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions will occur that have not been addressed during the analysis.

**Mitigation:** None recommended.

## **SECTION 7 – MITIGATION AND COMMITMENTS**

The responsibility for implementation of the mitigation measures outlined above in connection with the improvements at Lafayette Regional Airport lies with the FHWA and LaDOTD as indicated in both the FEIS and the FHWA ROD. The FAA will have oversight responsibility with respect to mitigation related to modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport.

The FAA will monitor the implementation of the mitigation measures related to the

modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport under the Selected Alternative as necessary to assure they are carried out as project commitments.

The FHWA ROD outlines commitments made as they relate to the Lafayette Regional Airport and the I-49 Connector project, identified on page 18 and 19 of the ROD. The FHWA and LaDOTD have committed to the following:

- FHWA and LaDOTD will ensure that construction cranes will not extend above the glide slope;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will ensure that freeway lights will be limited to those that can be pointed down and will be designed so as to not encroach into the glide slope or otherwise affect Airport operations;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will fund Airport modifications under the Selected Alternative as part of the freeway project;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will fund relocation of the VOR If an impact on the VOR is identified as a result of the I-49 Connector project,
- FHWA and LaDOTD will coordinate with the FAA on any preliminary design in the area between Nodes A and B depicted in Volume 1 of the FEIS, Exhibit S-2, to prevent impacts to the MALSR for Runway 4R;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will coordinate with FAA (ANI-600) during design phase of the project to ensure that FAA technical specifications are being met with regard to navigational aids;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will file an FAA Form 7460-1, Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration with the FAA Air Traffic Division (ASW-520) before construction begins; and
- FHWA and LaDOTD will obtain a Section 404 permit because the project will impact 5 or more acres of wetlands. During the permitting process, the FHWA and LaDOTD will utilize design features for the runway extension that will avoid the need to relocate the Bayou Tortue. FHWA and LaDOTD will implement wetland mitigation utilizing one or more of the following: restoration, creation, or mitigation banking.

## **SECTION 8 - COMMENTS ON THE FEIS**

Letters were received from the general public as well as the following Federal, state and local agencies/offices in response to the FEIS:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Coast Guard  
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality  
Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry  
Louisiana Floodplain Management  
Lafayette Consolidated Government-City-Parish  
Mayor, City of Jeanerette, LA  
Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce  
Mayor, City of Loreauville, LA

Lafayette Downtown Development Authority  
Lafayette Airport Commission  
Concerned Citizens Coalition & Sterling Grove National Historic District  
Kiwanis Club of Jeanerette  
Trees Acadiana  
Concerned Citizens Coalition of Lafayette  
Petroleum Helicopters Inc. (PHI)

All of these comments have been reviewed and are summarized in the FHWA ROD in Appendix A, along with the responses to those comments. Only one comment, which was from the public, concerned Lafayette Regional Airport as it relates to the I-49 Connector project. The comment stated that the wetlands should be protected and LaDOTD should not be influenced by airport development plans. As noted previously, there is no practical alternative to the proposed construction in wetlands and the proposed action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands that may result from such use.

Appendix C of the FHWA FEIS describes the public participation program including public meetings and the public hearing. Ample opportunities were given for public comments and participation in the EIS process.

## **SECTION 9 - THE AGENCY'S FINDINGS**

In accordance with applicable Federal law, FAA Order 1050.1E, Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures, and FAA Order 5050.4A, Airport Environmental Handbook, the FAA makes the following independent determinations for this project as they relate to the modifications required at the Airport, based upon all of the available information and data, which are contained in the FEIS and the FHWA ROD.

### **Project Conforms to the Avoidance and Minimization of Harm to Wetlands - Executive Order 11990, as amended.**

As discussed in the FEIS, the FHWA Selected Alternative, RR-4, will directly affect wetlands at the Airport. FHWA acknowledged in their ROD that they will have to obtain a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act as a condition to its proceeding with any Airport development under the approvals contained in this ROD.

Although it is generally recognized as preferable to attempt to mitigate wetland losses or harm through replacement on site, or at least in the same watershed, that approach is frequently not available on airports. The aircraft safety policies and standards reflect concern where the construction of man-made or enhanced wetlands would present an attractant to wildlife in aircraft movement and operations areas. Such an attractant is

not consistent with aviation safety, creating a serious potential for a safety hazard for aircraft striking wildlife on the ground or in the air (FAA Advisory Circular 150/5300-33).

FAA consultation will be necessary for the full and proper consideration of all wetlands mitigation measures on the Airport to ensure that flight safety is not compromised.

As indicated in the FEIS, Section 4.3.3.b, there is no practicable alternative to the use of approximately 5 acres of wetlands due to the 350-foot extension of Runway 11/29 and 200' overrun area under the Selected Alternative. All practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands will be undertaken. This project, therefore, will be in compliance with Executive Order 11990, as amended.

## **SECTION 10 - CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL**

This ROD approves the FAA Federal actions necessary to support the modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport for implementation of the environmentally Preferred Alternative, Alternative RR-4 Elevated with MPO Subalternative and Subalternative H, subject to FHWA meeting the following conditions for implementing the project as set forth below. The FAA will monitor the implementation of these mitigation actions as necessary to assure that representations made in the FEIS with respect to mitigation are carried out.

The Mitigation Section of this ROD includes summaries of the mitigation actions discussed more fully in the FEIS Summary, Section S.6, page S-18. Based on this mitigation, the FAA finds that all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted through appropriate mitigation planning. Mitigation measures for those impact categories where mitigation measures are necessary to avoid or minimize significant environmental impacts are summarized below:

- FHWA and LaDOTD will ensure that construction cranes will not extend above the glide slope, interfering with the safe and efficient air traffic operations;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will ensure that freeway lights installed as part of the I-49 Connector project will be limited to those that can be directed down and will be designed so as to not encroach into the glide slope or otherwise affect Airport operations;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will fund necessary Airport modifications as a result of the I-49 Connector project;
- FHWA and LaDOTD commits to funding the relocation of the VOR if, upon completion of the I-49 Connector project, an impact on the VOR is identified;
- FHWA and LaDOTD agrees to coordinate with the FAA on any preliminary design in the area between Nodes A and B depicted in Volume 1 of the FEIS, Exhibit S-2, to prevent impacts to the MALSR for Runway 4R;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will coordinate with the FAA (ANI-600) during design phase of the project to ensure that FAA technical specifications are being met with regard to navigational aids;
- FHWA and LaDOTD will file an FAA Form 7460-1, Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration with the FAA Air Traffic Division (ASW-520) before

construction begins and ensure FAA airspace and obstruction evaluations are completed by FAA before and during construction of the I-49 project;

- FHWA and LaDOTD will utilize design features for the runway extension that will avoid the need to relocate the Bayou Tortue as a result of the project impacting approximately 5 acres of wetlands. They will also implement wetland mitigation utilizing one or more of the following: restoration, creation, or mitigation banking; and
- FHWA and LaDOTD will, in the event that historic properties are discovered during construction, cease activity in the area and contact the FAA and State Historic Preservation Officer within 48 hours of the discovery.

## **SECTION 11 – DECISION AND ORDER**

In the FEIS and FHWA ROD, the Selected Alternative, Alternative RR-4, is identified as the "environmentally preferred alternative". Since the FHWA determined that the Selected Alternative, Alternative RR-4, is the only possible, prudent, and practicable alternative for the proposed I-49 Connector, the remaining decision for the FAA is whether to approve or not approve the FAA's agency actions necessary for implementation of the proposed modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport under the Selected Alternative. Approval would signify that the FHWA could proceed with the proposed Airport development, in accordance with the Conditions of Approval discussed above. Not approving these agency actions would prevent the FHWA from proceeding with Federally supported development in a timely manner.

I have carefully considered the FAA's goals and objectives for the air transportation system, including safety considerations, and potential impacts to the environment as identified in the FEIS. This process included evaluation of the purpose and need for the proposed action as it pertains to modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport; alternative means to the proposed action, including "No Build"; environmental impacts of the proposed action and the alternatives; and mitigation necessary to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Based upon the administrative record of this project, I find that the proposed action for modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport is reasonably supported and should be approved. I certify, as prescribed by 49 United States Code 44502 (formerly Section 308 of the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, as amended), the proposed project is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce or in the interests of national defense.

Accordingly, having considered: (1) the policies set forth at 49 United States Code Sections 40104 and 47101; (2) the various alternatives in the FEIS relating to the operational requirements of LFT, including the environmentally preferred alternative;

and (3) economic and technical considerations, the FAA hereby approves the

implementation of the modifications at Lafayette Regional Airport as described in the FEIS under the Selected Alternative.

I, therefore, direct that action be taken to carry out the FAA actions as they may relate to Lafayette Regional Airport, including the underlying safety elements, discussed more fully in this ROD:

- Approval of the Airport Layout Plan depicting the Airport modifications under the Selected Alternative identified in the FEIS as RR-4, displacement of Runway 11/29 by 350' on the northwest end, and a 350-foot extension of the runway on the southeast and displacement of the Runway's taxiways described in Chapter 1, Section 1.2 and Chapter 4, Section 4.2.12 of the FEIS;
- Approval of associated flight procedures that may be required as a result of the displacement of Runway 11/29;
- Installation and/or relocation of visual and instrument aids to navigation as required for Runway 11/29;
- Approval of associated flight procedures and safety actions that may result from the proposed action; and
- Upon request of the airport sponsor, release of approximately 3.5 acres of Federally obligated Airport land for I-49 Connector use.

FAA's approval of the modifications for Lafayette Regional Airport as described under the Selected Alternative in this ROD signifies that the project meets FAA standards for agency approval. It does not however, signify an FAA commitment to provide financial support for this project. The funding commitment for identified Airport modifications to Lafayette Regional Airport as a result of the I-49 Connector Project rests solely with the FHWA and LaDOTD. Likewise, environmental mitigation is to be carried out and funded by FHWA and LaDOTD in accordance with the Conditions of Approval discussed above in this ROD.

This action is directed to be taken under the authority of 49 United States Code 40104, 44502, 40113, 44701, and 46110 (formerly Sections 305, 308, 313(a), 601, and 1006(a) of the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, as amended); and 49 United States Code 47101 and 47122 (formerly Sections 502 and 519 of the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982, as amended.)

This decision constitutes an order of the Administrator reviewable in the Circuit Court of Appeals in accordance with the provisions of 49 United States Code 46110 (formerly Section 1006 of the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, as amended.)

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Ava L. Wilkerson  
Regional Administrator,  
Southwest Region

Date

### Right of Appeal

This order constitutes final agency action under 49 U.S.C. 46110 (formerly Section 1006 of the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, as amended). Any party to this proceeding having a substantial interest may appeal the order to the courts of appeals of the United States or the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia upon petition, filed within 60 days after entry of this order.