

**Project Title:** Restoration of Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Service for Sustainable and Economically Efficient Intermodal Corridor Integration

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**Project Summary:**

*Background and Research Needs:* This project focuses on intercity passenger mobility with emphasis on the needs of Gulf Coast cities, communities, and government and private employers. The Mississippi DOT's strategic planning reports indicate: (a) Most of Interstate-10 corridor has average speeds (in both directions) at or below 55 mph. (b) In the Jackson-Hattiesburg-Gulfport Corridor the majority of freight is moved by truck (91 percent) and through traffic (61 percent), which is expected to grow. The high commercial traffic volume increases general congestion on highways and safety risks to other auto commuter traffic. About nine percent of all highway fatalities in 2009 involved large trucks. Fatality rate per 100 million vehicle-mile-traveled is higher for large truck related fatality (1.585 per 100 million truck mile traveled) than other vehicles (1.336 per 100 million non-truck mile traveled). Major widening of Mississippi's I-10 and improvement along with other highway corridors are being pursued by the Mississippi DOT but there is lack of initiative to integrate with passenger rail service. The highly developed multimodal corridors for passenger traffic in other states suffer from low ridership of passenger rail service, primarily due to lack of good integration with other transit services and competition with roadway traffic. Therefore, we need to find ways to integrate passenger/ commuter rail with the auto traffic which can ease auto travel demand on the existing road corridors, offers economically competitive and safer travel, and reduces air pollution.

Currently, the Amtrak sunset service from Miami to Los Angeles through New Orleans is not operational. It served the Gulf Coast triweekly before it was suspended during 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster. The overall goal of this project is to evaluate economic impacts of the restoration of passenger rail service and offer intercity rail solutions. The support of all the cities, public, and employers in the corridor will be essential. There is a dire need for the restoration of the passenger rail service to show the return on massive rail infrastructure investment, which is important to secure federal and non-federal funding.

*Project Objective and Scope:* The primary objective of this project is a technical and economic competitiveness evaluation of selected passenger rail/commuter intercity rail service alternative plans. The scope of this UM study will be limited to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. However, the results can be extended to the entire Gulf Coast using the historical demographic and economic data of the region. This approach of economic impact evaluation is valid for enhancement/revival of other passenger rail services, such as Southwest Chief corridor that will be evaluated by DU team. The key to select an economically viable and safe rail strategy will be good connectivity and employers' incentives to use the rail service. The project will enhance intermodal transportation education by supporting graduate and UG students.