



**FINAL
PURPOSE AND NEED**

**STATE PROJECT NO. 700-37-0015
FEDERAL AID PROJECT NO. NH-5002(031)**

**I-20 OUACHITA LOOP
MAJOR INVESTMENT STUDY
OUACHITA PARISH**

JUNE, 1998

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1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of the Ouachita Loop is to provide a transportation facility that:

- Connects to I-20 on the east and west,
- Reduces congestion on Louisville Avenue, DeSiard Street, US 165, and Jonesboro Road and in so doing moves people and goods more efficiently across the Ouachita River and within Ouachita Parish,
- Provides for the strengthening of current economic activities and encourages appropriate economic growth opportunity, not a redistribution of existing resources,
- Enhances access to and around the core urbanized area to promote land use to be centralized within the loop, and
- Provides what might be the last chance to connect useable existing Interstate interchanges within a corridor around the Monroe and West Monroe urbanized areas and within the edge of current growth upon which the future transportation system can be developed. Due to the current development trends within and surrounding the corridor and due to the placement of large, public wildlife management areas within Ouachita Parish, the establishment of a loop to service Monroe, West Monroe, and Ouachita Parish in the future appears to be improbable.

1.2 NEED

The following items describe the need for the Ouachita Loop.

1.2.1 TRANSPORTATION DEMAND/CAPACITY

Detailed traffic studies were performed and reported in the *Monroe, Louisiana Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan Update 1996*. This report forecast that major corridors would be deficient by the year 2020.

A traffic improvement alternative which facilitated access to and from the interstate system and which provided an additional crossing of the Ouachita River would benefit the existing traffic system. This would improve local traffic flow as well as improving direct access to both Monroe and West Monroe. Further evaluations will be necessary to determine to what degree the proposed loop or segments of the loop will aid in reducing current and forecasted congestion in the Monroe and West Monroe areas and to what degree traffic operations in Ouachita Parish are affected.

Based upon the review of various transportation studies performed for the Ouachita Council of Governments and Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, there is a consensus that transportation improvements are required in order to alleviate the traffic operations within the study area.

Through continuing discussions with representatives of the cities and parish throughout this study process, it is clear that transportation improvements, which would enhance traffic operations within Ouachita Parish, as well as the surrounding communities, would be consistent with their long-range plans and policies.

Existing public transportation systems in Ouachita Parish is limited to bus service provided by the City of Monroe Transit System which is owned by the City of Monroe but is operated by ATE Management and Services.

With this overall lack of transit options available to commuters in and around Monroe and West Monroe and throughout Ouachita Parish, a full

range of transit type strategies are not available for the area surrounding Monroe and West Monroe.

1.2.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The potential for increased economic development in the project vicinity would be enhanced as a result of the improved accessibility to both the local and statewide transportation network. An efficient transportation system is key to sustaining the economic well-being of the community. Economic growth must also be recognized as the means that will allow the community to maintain and expand on the amenities and quality of life it now enjoys. At the same time, the region will need to try hard to sustain some of the small town characteristics that make it the livable place it currently is.

Historical data show that improvements to transportation systems have positive effects on the surrounding economy. Reduction in delays, reduced fuel consumption and improved driving conditions could be some of the immediate benefits the project would offer those currently traveling across Ouachita Parish. In addition to this, new businesses would be more attracted to the area if an adequate transportation network is provided.

Enhancing the economic development potential of the region is seen as an important need for the proposed loop. The importance of economic development in the region is indicated in several studies, including *The Delta Initiatives* (1990), a report by the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission. The Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission was established under Public Law 100-460 in 1988 to study and make recommendations regarding economic needs, problems, and opportunities in the Lower Mississippi Delta region. The Lower Mississippi Delta area is comprised of 219 parishes and counties in

Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky that form the poorest region of the United States. Ouachita Parish is within the Lower Mississippi Delta.

The Federal Highway Administration initiated an update of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission's report in 1995 as it specifically related to transportation issues. *Linking the Delta Region with the Nation and the World* (1995) was the Federal Highway Administration's report on its studies, discussions, and fact findings. "The update makes it clear that the connection between transportation improvements and the demonstrated economic improvements in the region is direct, fundamental, and unambiguous."

While travel conducted for many reasons would be affected, the emphasis for local economic development concerns is to attract new industry to the region and expand existing industry in the region. By bringing in new jobs, expanding regional income and adding to the tax base, local leaders hope to improve the economic and social status of the region's residents and businesses. In doing so, benefits such as reduced unemployment and reliance on public assistance, stemming outmigration of labor force and households, expanded public and private investment, and enhanced self-image and self-esteem are also seen as likely.

1.2.3 SYSTEM LINKAGE

The Ouachita Loop will provide links to the main network of Federal and State highways that serve Ouachita Parish. The most significant of the facilities to be served are:

- I-20 This freeway is a major east/west interstate highway. I-20 runs from its intersection with I-10 in west Texas to

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its intersection with I-95 at Florence, South Carolina. I-20 connects Ouachita Parish to major urban areas in the south including Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas; Shreveport, Louisiana; Jackson, Mississippi; Birmingham, Alabama; and Atlanta, Georgia.

US 80 Prior to the construction of the Interstate Highway System, US 80 was the major east/west route through north Louisiana. US 80 crosses Ouachita Parish parallel to I-20 through Monroe and West Monroe.

US 165 US 165 is the major north/south Federal Highway through Ouachita Parish. The southern terminus for US 165 is at US 90 east of Lake Charles, Louisiana, and the northern terminus is in Little Rock, Arkansas.

LA 15 State Highway LA 15 cuts diagonally in a northwest/southeast direction across Ouachita Parish and northeast Louisiana from US 167 south of the Arkansas State Line to US 84/65 at Ferriday, Louisiana and then runs south to LA 1 near Lettsworth, Louisiana.

LA 34 State Highway LA 34 runs through northcentral Louisiana from US 71 at Montgomery, Louisiana to I-20 in West Monroe, Louisiana.

The project's logical termini are the existing I-20 interchanges at Milhaven Road (LA 594) and Cheniere-Drew Road (LA 546). Milhaven Road (LA 594) is Exit 124 off I-20, and Cheniere-Drew Road (LA 546) is Exit 108

off I-20. These termini allow the Ouachita Loop to function as a stand-alone improvement without forcing other improvements which may have impacts so that the project has independent utility.

1.2.4 INCLUSION IN TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The Ouachita Loop is contained in the *Monroe, Louisiana Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan Update 1996*. The loop project is contained under the classification of “ Unfunded Needs” along with several other projects as being needed by the year 2020 but not apparently able to be implemented due to a forecasted shortfall of funding at the State and Federal levels.

1.2.5 CORRIDOR PRESERVATION

Corridor preservation is defined as “ A coordinated application of various measures to obtain control of or otherwise protect the right-of-way for a planned transportation facility.” The identification of the corridor for the Ouachita Loop is important in order to:

- Prevent inconsistent development,
- Minimize/avoid environmental, social, and economic impacts,
- Reduce displacements,
- Allow for the orderly assessment of impacts,
- Permit orderly project development, and
- Reduce costs.

If this corridor is not preserved, the existing development trends within and surrounding the proposed corridor indicate that the land area may become completely developed. If this corridor is lost, the placement of numerous, established, large federal and state wildlife management areas within Ouachita Parish would force a new corridor to be placed so far out

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from the developed core that a loop would not be beneficial to the transportation network and would be much more costly due to the increased length.