
Abstract

The Northeast Corridor (NEC) is the rail transportation spine of the Northeast United States and is a key component of the region’s transportation system, which supports the operation of eight Regional rail authorities and Amtrak—the Intercity rail service provider—as well as four freight railroads. The NEC FUTURE program (NEC FUTURE) is a comprehensive planning effort to define, evaluate, and prioritize future investments for the NEC from Washington, D.C., to Boston (Study Area). As part of NEC FUTURE, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is evaluating passenger rail alternatives in the Study Area to improve current and future passenger rail transportation needs within the NEC.

The purpose of NEC FUTURE is to upgrade aging infrastructure and to improve the reliability, capacity, connectivity, performance, and resiliency of future passenger-rail service on the NEC for both Intercity and Regional trips, while promoting environmental sustainability and continued economic growth. The needs addressed by NEC FUTURE include aging infrastructure, additional capacity to accommodate growing population and employment, gaps in connectivity, compromised performance, resiliency, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

The FRA has prepared this Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Draft EIS) in compliance with the following:

- 4 National Environmental Policy Act (42 USC §4332 et seq.)
- 4 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508)
- 4 Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC §306101 et seq.)
- 4 Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act (49 USC §303)
- 4 FRA Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 FR 28545)

The FRA has prepared this Tier 1 Draft EIS in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration and in coordination with multiple other federal and state agencies and stakeholders. This Tier 1 Draft EIS describes and summarizes the potential environmental, transportation, and economic effects of NEC FUTURE alternatives on the population, and built and natural environments within the Study Area.

The FRA evaluates four alternatives as part of NEC FUTURE. These alternatives include the No Action Alternative and three Action Alternatives to address the Purpose and Need of the NEC FUTURE Program. Each Action Alternative defines a different “role” for rail on the NEC: Alternative 1 *maintains* the current role of rail; Alternative 2 *grows* the role that rail plays in regional transportation; and Alternative 3 *transforms* rail as the mode of choice for transportation in the region. In contrast, the No Action Alternative supports investment in the NEC sufficient only to preserve today’s service levels (defined as the number of trains per hour by operator and type of service) in the future. Each Action Alternative consists of a set of improvements to existing Intercity and Regional rail service, new rail service, improved or new infrastructure to accommodate needs and service, and a Representative Route that illustrates a potential routing for that Action Alternative.

The objective of this Tier 1 Draft EIS is to provide sufficient information for the public and agencies to comment on the alternatives and for the FRA to make an informed decision on identifying a Preferred Alternative for NEC FUTURE. No sooner than 30 days after issuance of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the *Federal Register*, the FRA will host public hearings on the Tier 1 Draft EIS in various locations within the Study Area. The public hearings will occur over multiple weeks to ensure that the opportunity to comment is given to those who would like to participate in the review process. In addition, the FRA will provide public hearing materials online at www.necfuture.com. The public comment period will begin with the publication of the NOA and extend through January 30, 2016.

Based on the analysis presented in this Tier 1 Draft EIS and after consideration of public and stakeholder input received during the public comment period, the FRA will identify a Preferred Alternative. In the spring of 2016, the FRA will then identify and make public the Preferred Alternative to be carried forward for analysis in the Tier 1 Final EIS. At that time, the FRA will also announce whether it will prepare a combined Tier 1 Final EIS/Record of Decision (ROD) (pursuant to Pub. L. 112-141 Stat. 405, Section 1319(b)) or a separate Tier 1 Final EIS and ROD.

The ROD will document the Selected Alternative. The FRA will also prepare a Service Development Plan (SDP) for the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative will be implemented through subsequent actions (referred to as Tier 2 projects) that will involve more-quantitative, detailed, site-specific effects assessments and permit applications along with the development of location-specific avoidance and mitigation measures as necessary for permit approvals.