

Section
8 **COMMENTS AND
COORDINATION**



8.0 Comments and Coordination

The environmental process for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Corridor Program Tier 1 DEIS began in February 2011. A scoping coordination letter describing the program and requesting comments and attendance to upcoming scoping meetings on March 1st and 3rd, 2011 was forwarded to the state and federal resource agencies in February 2011. The agency scoping letter responses and cooperating agency responses are located in Appendix F. The Tier 1 Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail Environmental Impact Statement Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on February 14, 2011, and a copy is located in Appendix G. In March 2011, an initial round of public meetings was held within the corridor to introduce the study to the public, to explain the EIS process and timeline, and to get input. After these meetings, the study team spent the next several months developing alternatives. In late October and early November 2011, a second series of public meetings for this program were held in the cities of Joliet; Bloomington; Springfield; Carlinville; and Alton.

The following sections summarize agency coordination that has occurred at this early phase of this program. Current public coordination and comments relative to the Tier 1 DEIS are also summarized in the following sub-sections.

8.1 Agency Coordination

8.1.1 Federal Agency Coordination

8.1.1.1 U.S Army Corps of Engineers

A letter requesting EIS process cooperation from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was sent August 9, 2011. The U.S. Army Division Commander of the Mississippi Valley Division Corps of Engineers responded September 16, 2011. He indicated the program will involve the St. Louis and Rock Island Corps Districts, and that he understands that the Regulatory staffs at both Districts were involved with the 2004 EIS. He concurs that the St. Louis and Rock Island Corps Districts will be cooperating agencies throughout the EIS process.

8.1.1.2 U.S Fish and Wildlife Service

Richard Nelson, a Field Supervisor for the USFWS, responded to the agency scoping letter, on March 18, 2011, requesting the new USFWS online service to be used to determine if any threatened or endangered species may be affected by the HSR Program. He also stated that the bald eagle has been de-listed, but remains protected, and may be encountered in the study corridor. Finally, he addressed that the USACE is the regulatory agency regarding wetlands. A letter responding to a request for EIS process cooperation from the USFWS, dated September 8, 2011, was received stating their acceptance to be a cooperating agency. Their cooperation will be limited to the degree that time and resources permit.

8.1.1.3 U.S Environmental Protection Agency

On August 16, 2011, the Chief of NEPA Implementation for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responded to a request for EIS process cooperation from the U.S. EPA. The response stated the U.S. EPA accepts to be a cooperating agency throughout the EIS process.

8.1.1.4 Natural Resource Conservation Service

William Gradle, of the NRCS, responded to the agency scoping meeting letter, on February 24, 2011, stating if alternative corridors outside of existing track routes are proposed, they will need additional investigation to determine their impacts on prime farmland. On August 31, 2011, the NRCS responded to a request that they be in cooperation throughout the EIS process. The response stated that they do not have adequate staff to support the effort as a cooperating agency. The NRCS previously completed the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment and Farmland Protection Program Evaluations. The NRCS is requesting copies of the draft and final EIS documents.

8.1.1.5 Federal Highway Administration

The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration responded to a request for cooperation throughout the EIS process on September 2, 2011. The response was of acceptance of participation in the EIS process as a cooperating agency.

8.1.1.6 Federal Aviation Administration

Scott Tener, an Environmental Specialist for the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration, responded to the agency scoping meeting letter, on March 3, 2011, stating he had no comments regarding environmental matters. Airspace review may be needed pending criteria review.

8.1.1.7 U.S. Coast Guard

Scott Striffler, Chief of the Bridge Branch for the Ninth Coast Guard District, responded to the NOI, on March 15, 2011, stating their office responded to the 2009 EA, and Coast Guard Bridge Permit action may be necessary. Now, Norfolk Southern and Canadian National Railway crossings are no longer considered, and an Amtrak Bridge at Mile 3.77 over the South Branch of the Chicago River may be included, but additional information for this structure and any others would be required.

8.1.2 State Agency Coordination

8.1.2.1 Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Anne Haaker, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, responded to the agency scoping letter, on March 21, 2011, stating the agency would like continued consultation on Section 106 impacts. The IHPA responded to a request for cooperation throughout the EIS process on September 9, 2011. The response was of acceptance of participation in the EIS process as a cooperating agency pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800 in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

8.1.2.2 Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

Lisa Bonnett, Acting Deputy Director of the IEPA, responded to the agency scoping letter, on February 24, 2011, stating the IEPA had no objections to the proposed program, and advised of NPDES permit requirements. On September 16, 2011, the IEPA responded to a request for cooperation throughout the EIS process. The response was that they look forward to reviewing and commenting on the EIS documents; however, they are not able to commit to serving as a cooperating agency.

8.1.2.3 Illinois Department of Natural Resources

On August 15, 2011, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources responded to a request for cooperation throughout the EIS process by accepting the request. The response included the direction to address all correspondence and meeting agendas to Mr. Steve Hamer of the Office of Realty and Environmental Planning, Division of Ecosystems and Environment.

8.1.2.4 Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Mark Miles, Director and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, responded to the agency scoping letter, on March 2, 2011, stating the agency is looking forward to receiving further Section 106 information relevant to the study corridor.

8.1.2.5 Illinois Department of Agriculture

The Illinois Department of Agriculture responded to a request for cooperation throughout the EIS process on September 12, 2011. The response was of acceptance of participation in the EIS process as a cooperating agency.

8.1.3 Tribal Coordination

8.1.3.1 Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska

Alan Kelley of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska requested to be a consulting party in regards to Section 106 components of the EIS process.

8.1.3.2 Miami Tribe of Oklahoma

George Strack, the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, stated the Miami Nation is not currently aware of existing documentation linking a specific Miami cultural or historic site to the EIS program corridor, and the Miami Nation offers no objection to the proposed construction at this time. However, should human remains and/or objects be uncovered, regardless of initial determination as to site dating or cultural affiliation, Mr. Strack should be contacted to initiate consultation.

8.1.3.3 Osage Nation Historic Preservation Office

The Osage Nation Historic Preservation Office accepted the invitation to be a consulting party throughout the EIS process via a letter dated May 31, 2011. The letter also stated that the Osage Nation currently has Section 106 concerns for Sangamon, Macoupin, Jersey, Madison, and St. Clair counties in Illinois and St. Louis County in Missouri.

8.1.4 Agency Coordination Meetings

8.1.4.1 September 2011 NEPA 404 Merger Meeting

The agencies and consulting entities in coordination for the Chicago to St. Louis Tier 1 EIS met on September 7, 2011 for the NEPA 404 Merger Meeting at the FHWA office in Springfield. The attendees included: FHWA, IDOT, USEPA, IHPA, IDOA, IDNR, USACE, USFWS, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Parsons Transportation Group, Hanson Professional Services, Olsson, and Kaskaskia Engineering Group. During this meeting, presentations included: IDOT provided an overview of the HSR program in Illinois, Parsons Brinckerhoff discussed the current document/construction schedule for the 2004 ROD project and associated improvements between Dwight and St. Louis, and Parsons discussed the Tier 1 and Tier 2 documents for the Chicago to St. Louis corridor.

Comments included:

- USEPA requested clarification of agency contact information. The response is that contact information would be readily available through webpages and update emails moving forward.
- IDNR asked about the status of plant surveys. It was determined the surveys were complete, and the information would be forwarded to IDNR.
- FHWA and IHPA commented that 6(f)/4(f) impacts with cultural resource descriptions were not included on the presentation slide. The response stated the studies include those items under the cultural resources section.
- FHWA asked about the schedule for the FEIS submittal/Record of Decision being December 2012. The concern was that the 30 day review period, submittal, and ROD could not occur in the same month. The response included the review period was accounted for, and the schedule in the presentation is to simply note that the document is intended to be complete by the end of 2012.
- A question regarding the handling of the Tier 2 document was met with the response that it would be folded into the EIS for the whole corridor.

8.1.4.2 September 2011 Progress Meeting

The agencies and consulting entities in coordination for the Chicago to St. Louis Tier 1 DEIS met on September 27, 2011 for the Agency Bi-monthly Coordination Meeting via teleconference. The attendees included: FHWA, IDOT, USEPA, IHPA, IDOA, IDNR, USACE, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Parsons Transportation Group, Hanson Professional Services, Olsson Associates, Kaskaskia Engineering Group, Huff & Huff, Knight Engineering, TranSystems, and Quigg Engineering. The meeting covered the ongoing activities and status for the environmental documents for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail program and the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement for the Chicago to St. Louis Full Build-Out, which includes double track installation and other improvements along the full corridor. Comments and responses relevant to the Tier 1 DEIS are as follows:

- IDOT asked about the alternatives to be presented in the Tier 1 DEIS, and how the document will reference the ongoing construction work being conducted under the

2004 ROD. The response was that the No-Build option or existing condition will include all the track upgrades currently under construction as completed.

8.1.4.3 November 2011 IHPA Coordination Meeting

The agencies and consulting entities in coordination for the Chicago to St. Louis Tier 1 DEIS met on November 10, 2011 for the IHPA Coordination Meeting. The attendees included: IDOT, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Parsons Transportation Group, Knight Engineering, TranSystems, and Hanson Professional Services. During the meeting, program designs were reviewed, future NEPA documents were summarized, and coordination with IHPA on upcoming projects related to Chicago-St. Louis High Speed Rail Program and the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement was established.

8.1.4.4 November 2011 Progress Meeting

The agencies and consulting entities in coordination for the Chicago to St. Louis Tier 1 DEIS met on November 29, 2011 for the Agency Bi-monthly Coordination Meeting via teleconference. The attendees included: FRA, IDOT, USEPA, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Parsons Transportation Group, Olsson Associates, Kaskaskia Engineering Group, Huff & Huff, Knight Engineering, TranSystems, and Quigg Engineering. The meeting covered the ongoing activities and status for the environmental documents for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail program and the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement.

8.1.4.5 January 2012 Progress Meeting

The agencies and consulting entities in coordination for the Chicago to St. Louis Tier 1 DEIS met on January 31, 2012 for an Agency Coordination Meeting and update for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Program. The attendees included: FRA, IDOT, USEPA, IHPA, USACE, USFWS, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Parsons Transportation Group, Olsson Associates, Kaskaskia Engineering Group, Huff & Huff, Knight Engineering, TranSystems, and Quigg Engineering. The meeting covered the ongoing activities and status for the environmental documents for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail program and the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement. All agencies will be notified when NEPA documents are publically available, and will also receive a cooperating letter for Environmental Assessments.

8.2 Public Coordination

Public engagement has been a key element in the success of the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Corridor Program Tier 1 DEIS. The study team has worked to connect with the program's interested and impacted parties through a variety of communications and outreach tactics. The principal aim has been to educate and inform the public about the study's process, activities and findings. To this end, a website has been maintained, email broadcasts sent out, displays circulated, and community presentations facilitated. Key stakeholders and their constituents have been readily kept current on the study and progress.

Direct engagement of the general public has also been a critical component of the study team's public involvement efforts. Two rounds of public open houses were held in

March and the end of October/beginning of November, each of which were attended by roughly 250 and 350 people total. These open houses provided a means to both inform the public and solicit its input at key milestones in the study. Outreach efforts and meeting notification efforts included newsletters, study emails, study website, letters, public officials, newspaper ads, and media outlets. Copies of the Tier 1 DEIS Public Meeting Comment Summary Reports can be made available upon request.

The public meeting was designed to find out about concerns, issues and community plans; provide information on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and DEIS schedule; and get input about the High-Speed Rail Program from Chicago to St. Louis. Below summarizes areas of public concern at each open house.

8.2.1 Public Open Houses

8.2.1.1 March 1-9, 2011

Five open houses were held in Joliet, Bloomington, Springfield, Carlinville and Alton. The table below provides a distribution of responses for each concern.

Table 8.2-1. Areas of Concern

Areas of Concern	Number of Responses
Traffic/Transportation	84
Travel Time	83
Socio-economic Resources (land-use, population, employment, etc.)	79
Grade Separation	72
Cost	66
Noise and Vibration	65
Cultural Resources (historic properties/ archaeological sites)	48
Natural Resources (wetlands, surface/ ground water, wildlife, etc.)	40
Energy	36
Visual Aesthetics	36
Special/Hazardous Waste	33
Other	33
Public Parks and Recreational Areas	31
Air Quality	30
Other	30
Flood Plains	18
TOTAL	754

Several respondents selected “other” and noted specific concerns in the City of Springfield and the impact on smaller communities. Some mentioned mining impacts, property de-valuation and economic development concerns. Other meeting attendees were concerned about safety, cost/funding, transit-oriented development, job creation, minority participation, passenger service levels, service demand/use/need and handicap accessibility.

Almost half of the comment forms were completed in the additional comments section. Of those comments, about 20 percent were about the Springfield Railroad Corridor P alternatives. Another 10 percent noted changes that meeting attendees would like to see to the proposed high-speed rail service, amenities, alternatives or stops, including:

- Additional proposed alternatives in the St. Louis and Chicago area;
- Express or limited service between St. Louis and Chicago;
- Service terminus in East St. Louis;
- Service to East St. Louis, Kankakee, Decatur, the Quad Cities, and Champaign;
- Increase parking availability at stops; and
- Direct connections to the airports – St. Louis Lambert, Chicago Midway and O’Hare.

In addition to several comments received about the team and the public meeting notification, participants were equally concerned about safety and the separation of passenger and freight service. Respondents noted the following:

- Reliability of railroad crossing warning devices;
- Compromised emergency responder service in the rural communities;
- Community division;
- Impacts that mines and minerals will have on railroad tracks; and
- Impacts of increased freight traffic within the corridor.

Finally, there were several respondents that challenged the 135 mph travel speed as “high-speed” or they desired a 220 mph rail speed along with grade separation and electrification.

Generally, stakeholders seemed to support high-speed rail but were concerned about federal funding being used for Union Pacific Railroad track improvements. Notwithstanding the funding issue, others were looking for more information since infrastructure improvements, such as tracks, highway/rail crossings, etc. are underway and other planning studies, such as the Springfield Railroad Corridor Study, are ongoing. Stakeholders also recognized the magnitude of this endeavor and expressed their appreciation for public involvement at the onset.

8.2.1.2 October/November 2011

In late October and early November 2011, five public meetings were held in Joliet, Bloomington, Springfield, Carlinville and Alton. The study team presented seven

evaluation criteria. These criteria were used to screen the alternatives and to narrow them down to a group of preferred alternatives. The table below lists the criteria and the number of responses each one received.

Table 8.2-2. Alternative Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Number of Responses
Minimize impacts to social and economic resources	80
Minimize impacts to existing and planned development	51
Minimize operating and capital costs	34
Maximize ridership/revenue potential	29
Minimize impacts to cultural resources	26
Minimize impacts to natural resources	8
Maximize avoidance of areas with potential hazardous materials	4

Minimize Impacts to Social and Economic Resources

Respondents were most concerned about the alternatives’ impact on social and economic resources. Eighty-six (86) percent of the people who commented about this particular criterion attended the Springfield meeting. They expressed concern about increasing freight and passenger traffic on the 3rd Street corridor alternative saying that it would negatively impact downtown Springfield businesses and residential neighborhoods. In other cities, such as Carlinville where four (4) percent of the comments referred to social and economic resources, respondents wanted to make sure there was enough clearance at crossings for farm machinery.

Minimize Impacts to Existing and Planned Development

Minimizing impacts to existing and planned development received the second largest number of comments. Once again, the majority of respondents (94 percent) were from the Springfield meeting. Most of their comments referred to the medical district’s expansion plans and how rail traffic must avoid destroying this district. Respondents said that the district provides jobs and generates tax revenue.

Minimize Operating and Capital Costs

The most comments on minimizing operating and capital costs (35 percent) cited the State of Illinois' financial status as well as the U.S. government's. As one respondent said, "we should get our financial house in order first before planning for this project." Others expressed concern about wanting to make sure that the program is necessary and cost-effective. They want to see more information, such as projected ridership numbers, before providing further comment.

Maximize Ridership/Revenue Potential

Out of the 31 comments about maximizing ridership/revenue potential, 48 percent of respondents cited their support for high-speed rail. They said that high-speed rail is needed to compete with "other super powers around the world." Others felt that high-speed rail would be an asset to communities and would fill a vital need in Illinois' transportation system.

Minimize Impacts to Cultural Resources

Of the 26 comments received about minimizing impacts to cultural resources, 81 percent came from the Springfield public meeting. Respondents want to make sure that the city's historic Lincoln sites as well as its historic downtown are preserved.

The second round of public meetings for the Tier 1 DEIS provided an opportunity for attendees to review the preliminary alternatives and the criteria to be used to evaluate them. The overwhelming majority of comments about the alternatives came from Springfield residents, who also made up 69 percent of respondents. As for the evaluation criteria, 31 percent of respondents feel minimizing the social and economic impacts is the most important criterion to consider when analyzing the alternatives.

The results of the alternatives analysis are presented in this Tier 1 DEIS. The third round of meetings will be public hearings. The Federal Railroad Administration, in coordination with the Illinois Department of Transportation, will make the final decision on the preferred alternative for the Tier 1 DEIS. Completing the Tier 1 DEIS is a critical aspect for continued high-speed rail development. Public input is a key element to success.