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FRA Releases Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently reached a major milestone for NEC FUTURE, the FRA's comprehensive plan for the Northeast Corridor (NEC) between Washington, D.C., and Boston. NEC FUTURE will define a long term vision and guide investment in passenger rail improvement projects on the NEC through 2040.

On November 10, 2015, the FRA released the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Draft EIS) for NEC FUTURE. The result of over three years of intensive technical study and collaboration with agencies, railroad operators and the public, the Tier 1 Draft EIS is a key step in the development of a collective vision for the future of the nation's busiest rail line. It presents three Action Alternatives that represent different visions for the role of rail in the Northeast transportation system, along with a detailed evaluation.

The FRA is encouraging the public, agencies, and interested organizations to comment on the Tier 1 Draft EIS. The comments received will help inform the identification of a Preferred Alternative to be advanced into the Tier 1 Final EIS. Also available for review is a Draft Programmatic Agreement prepared under the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 compliance process. The public comment period is open until January 30, 2016. The Tier 1 Draft EIS and associated materials are available on the project website (www.necfuture.com) and in public libraries along the NEC. All are invited to attend one of the public hearings that will be conducted in each of the corridor states and the District of Columbia in December and January (see *Public Hearings*, pg. 4).



Passengers at Penn Station New York, the busiest rail station in the Western Hemisphere



Cabs at Washington Union Station, the southern terminus of the NEC

Why NEC FUTURE?

The NEC is a national asset. It is the backbone of a transportation system that connects many of the people and places that drive the economy today. Ensuring the NEC continues to support our growing population and economy, in both traditional and new ways, benefits not only the Northeast, but also the entire United States. New investment brings the potential to vastly improve passenger rail service and performance, expand connections, serve new markets, and introduce efficiencies that are not possible on today's system. In the shorter term, bringing the NEC to a state of good repair and relieving chokepoints are fundamental to safe and efficient travel in the Northeast.





Tier 1 Draft EIS Presents Findings of Environmental Review

The Tier 1 Draft EIS assesses the broad impacts of an investment program to improve passenger rail service within the NEC FUTURE Study Area. It evaluates three Action Alternatives against a No Action Alternative, and considers impacts to transportation, the economy, the built environment, and natural resources.

A Note to Readers

The Tier 1 Draft EIS can be accessed from the program website at www.necfuture.com. In reviewing the document, a recommended place to begin is with the [Reader's Guide](#) (Chapter 2). This chapter will familiarize the reader with key concepts, terms, and methodologies used in the environmental analysis. In addition, the [Introduction](#) (Chapter 1) answers general questions about the Tier 1 Draft EIS and explains how potential project sponsors can use the document in the future. For more detail on a particular topic, you may download a particular chapter or appendix.

For a reader with only a short time to devote to the document, either the Tier 1 Draft EIS [Summary](#) or a short brochure, [Highlights](#) of the Tier 1 Draft EIS, are recommended.

Alternatives Considered

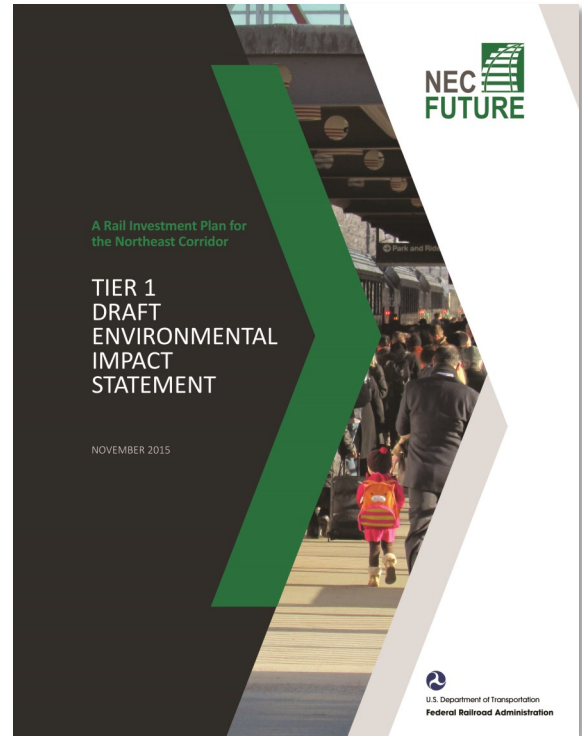
The FRA has identified three Action Alternatives for the NEC, each of which presents a different vision for the future role of passenger rail in the transportation system in the Northeast. In developing these Action Alternatives, the FRA considered a broad range of possibilities for the NEC to respond to travel market trends, passenger service needs and public input.

The **No Action Alternative** provides a baseline for comparison with each of the Action Alternatives. The No Action Alternative includes currently planned or funded projects for the NEC through 2040. The No Action Alternative continues the current level-of-service but does not address existing capacity constraints, gaps in connectivity, or expansion to markets that are underserved by rail.

The Action Alternatives described in the Tier 1 Draft EIS are:

- **Alternative 1:** *MAINTAINS* the role of rail in the region today, expanding the level of rail service to keep pace with the growth in population in the Study Area.

Alternative 1 includes new rail service and investment in the NEC to expand capacity, add tracks, relieve key chokepoints and bring the existing NEC to a state of good repair.



- **Alternative 2:** *GROWS* the role of rail, expanding rail service at a rate of growth greater than the in regional population and employment.

Alternative 2 maximizes the capacity of the existing NEC and removes speed restrictions where practical and safe. Alternative 2 provides a new segment between New Haven, Hartford, and Providence, improving performance between New York City and Boston while connecting to new markets in the Connecticut River Valley.

- **Alternative 3:** *TRANSFORMS* the role of rail by becoming a dominant mode choice for travel in the Northeast.

Alternative 3 supports passenger rail trips over longer distances and improves connections. Alternative 3 includes new route options operating between Washington, D.C. and Boston that are separate from the existing NEC. These new route options support speeds up to 220 mph and—while separate from the existing NEC—are connected to and integrated with services offered on the existing NEC.

Alternative 3 also includes service and infrastructure improvements on the existing NEC to increase capacity, eliminate chokepoints, and bring the existing NEC to a state of good repair.

Key Findings of the Tier 1 Draft EIS

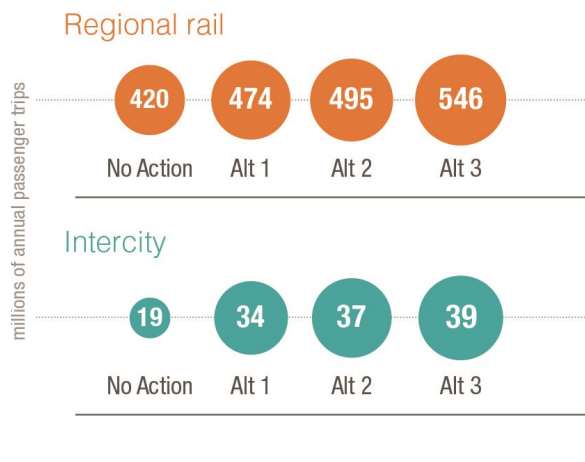
- NEC ridership is strong today, and will increase in the future if improvements are made to support reliable and frequent travel options.

- Improvements to rail service result in a shift of riders from both highways and air, resulting in a decrease in energy usage and emissions.

- As metropolitan areas have grown and the economy of the Northeast has diversified, the “hard line” between Intercity and Regional rail markets has blurred. Metropolitan service, which operates with higher performance equipment, stops at a mix of Intercity and Regional rail stations, and offers a lower fare than existing Intercity service, taps this emerging market.

- The New York market drives demand for both Intercity and Regional rail ridership: 52-63 percent of all trips on the NEC are projected to start or stop at Penn Station New York in 2040.

RIDERSHIP



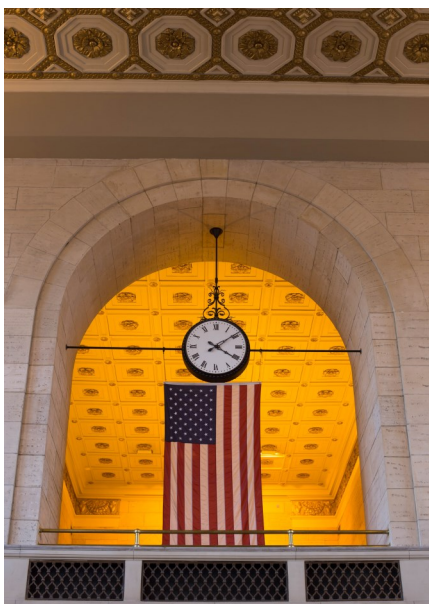
- Footprint-related (physical) environmental impacts occur mostly where new off-corridor segments are proposed. However, more off-corridor route-miles allow for greater travel time savings, greater resiliency and redundancy, more places to be reached by rail, and greater opportunity for future growth beyond 2040.

- With more off-corridor route-miles, higher levels of investment are needed.



Public Hearings in December and January

The public comment period on the Tier 1 Draft EIS is open until January 30, 2016. During this period, all interested persons are encouraged to comment on the Tier 1 Draft EIS. Comments may be submitted at a public hearing, on the NEC FUTURE website, by email, or by mail (see box at right).



Architectural details at New Haven Union Station.

The FRA will conduct eleven public hearings throughout the Northeast to present the Tier 1 Draft EIS and receive public comments.

Each hearing is scheduled 4:00-7:00 p.m., with brief presentations at 4:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Following each presentation, there will be an opportunity to speak. If you would like to speak, you may sign up when you arrive. A stenographer will also be available for private testimony, if you prefer. Comment cards will also be available.

In the event of inclement weather, hearings may be canceled or rescheduled. Please check the website for updates: necfuture.com. If you require assistance to attend, please contact the NEC FUTURE team at least five days prior to the hearing you wish to attend at comment@necfuture.com.

Next Steps: Tier 1 Final EIS

Following public comment on the Tier 1 Draft EIS, the FRA will identify a preferred investment program (Preferred Alternative) that achieves a specific vision for passenger rail on the NEC. The Preferred Alternative will be based on alternatives presented in the Tier 1 Draft EIS and will reflect stakeholder and public input. The FRA will announce the Preferred Alternative in spring 2016. The Tier 1 Final EIS will describe and evaluate the Preferred Alternative.

After the Tier 1 Final EIS and Record of Decision are issued in fall 2016, the FRA will complete a Service Development Plan (SDP) that provides a blueprint for phased implementation of the Preferred Alternative. NEC FUTURE does not require any agency to fund or construct specific projects, but instead ensures that future investments are consistent with the long-term NEC vision and benefit all of its users.



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The FRA, @USDOTFRA



Review the Tier 1 Draft EIS

The Tier 1 Draft EIS is posted on the project website: necfuture.com.

Print copies of the Tier 1 Draft EIS are available for review at public libraries in communities along the NEC; see the website for a listing.

Submit a Comment

Public Hearings:

Meeting information is posted online at necfuture.com.

- Boston – December 9
- New Haven – December 14
- New York – December 15
- Washington, D.C. – December 16
- Providence – December 17
- Philadelphia – January 11
- Mineola, Long Island – January 12
- Hartford – January 13
- Baltimore – January 14
- Newark – January 19
- Wilmington – January 20

On Line comments:

www.necfuture.com

Email comments:

Comment@necfuture.com

Written comments:

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