



TIER 1 FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
VOLUME 1 (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

# 1. Introduction



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# 1. Introduction

The Northeast Corridor (NEC) is the rail transportation spine of the Northeast region and is a key component of the region's transportation system. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has conducted NEC FUTURE, a comprehensive planning effort to consider the role of passenger rail service on the NEC; through NEC FUTURE, the FRA will establish a framework for future investment in the corridor through 2040 and beyond.

The FRA prepared this Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Final EIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321–4327 and 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508) (NEPA), and other applicable laws and regulations. This document is part of a tiered NEPA review as provided for in the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA implementing regulations. Tiering allows an agency, such as the FRA, to focus on the information available and issues relevant to the decision to be made at each level of environmental review. The environmental review for NEC FUTURE includes a Tier 1 (or programmatic) review that broadly assesses environmental impacts. Subsequent, more-detailed environmental reviews by the FRA and other federal agencies on specific project-level elements (Tier 2) may incorporate and reference the decisions and analyses conducted as part of this Tier 1 review.

In November 2015, the FRA released the Tier 1 Draft EIS for public review and comment during a public comment period that extended from November 2015 through mid-February 2016. The FRA held 11 public hearings during the public comment period (see Chapter 11, Agency and Public Involvement). This Tier 1 Final EIS does the following:

- ▶ Announces the Preferred Alternative identified by the FRA
- ▶ Presents the justification for the Preferred Alternative
- ▶ Evaluates the service characteristics and effects on the built and natural environment of the Preferred Alternative
- ▶ Provides responses to comments received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS during the comment period
- ▶ Provides corrections to the Tier 1 Draft EIS in response to comments received

## 1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TIER 1 FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative identified in this Tier 1 Final EIS is designed to occur over several decades and would be carried out through individual projects. In addition, some elements of the Action Alternatives evaluated in the Tier 1 Draft EIS but not included in the Preferred Alternative are not precluded from being advanced at a future point in time. As such, the FRA prepared the NEC FUTURE Tier 1 Final EIS in two volumes: In Volume 1, the FRA provides information to support the implementation of the Preferred Alternative, and in Volume 2, the FRA provides, as a reference, the alternatives development and evaluation presented in the Tier 1 Draft EIS. Both volumes follow a similar structure so that information between the volumes can be easily considered together.

Volume 1 provides the evaluation and documentation of the Preferred Alternative. It also addresses the comments received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS by presenting responses in a detailed appendix to Volume 1 (Appendix JJ). Volume 1 is intended to be a stand-alone report that describes the FRA's deliberative process to identify the Preferred Alternative, the characteristics of the Preferred Alternative, and a complete environmental assessment of the Preferred Alternative as compared to the No Action Alternative. Volume 1 does not re-consider the Action Alternatives in detail, but does offer illustrative comparisons to highlight the benefits and effects of the Preferred Alternative.

Volume 2 contains the entire Tier 1 Draft EIS released to the public in November 2015, updated to reflect changes made in response to the input received during the public comment period. Updates include clarifications and errata-style edits. Chapter 2, Readers' Guide, provides further guidance on how to use and to find specific areas of interest within the entire Tier 1 EIS.

## 1.2 WHAT IS THE FRA ACHIEVING WITH NEC FUTURE?

The NEC supports the operation of eight Regional rail authorities and Amtrak—the Intercity service provider—as well as four freight railroads. In all, some 256 million passenger trips occurred on trains operating on the NEC in 2014.

### 1.2.1 What is NEC FUTURE?

NEC FUTURE is a comprehensive planning effort to consider the future role of passenger rail service on the NEC in the context of current and future transportation demands. Initiated in February 2012, NEC FUTURE will result in a Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan (PRCIP) for the NEC that will establish a framework for future investment in the corridor through 2040 and beyond. The PRCIP includes the development of a Tier 1 EIS (this document) and Service Development Plan (to be prepared after the Tier 1 EIS and that will serve as a roadmap for implementation of the Selected Alternative). While NEC FUTURE focuses on passenger rail, it also considers the interrelationship of freight rail operations and passenger rail.

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 economic growth.

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The term **"Intercity"** is defined as passenger rail service between metropolitan areas. The term **"Interregional"** describes travel flows between different metropolitan areas. Intercity and Interregional may be used interchangeably when referring to markets, passengers, trips, and passenger rail service.

**"Regional"** describes travel within a metropolitan area. **"Regional rail"** is defined as passenger rail service within the travel shed of a metropolitan area. Regional rail provides local and commuter-focused service characterized by a high-percentage of regular travelers. Regional rail is a broad term that reflects the expanded role of commuter railroads to also serve metropolitan travel needs throughout the day and beyond the work week.

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The NEC FUTURE planning effort is intended to produce a long-term vision for passenger rail on the NEC, including high-speed passenger rail, and a phased investment plan to accomplish that vision. The FRA is the lead federal agency for this effort, and is conducting the program in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) (a cooperating agency in the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] process, see Section 1.2.3), tribal, state and local governmental jurisdictions along the NEC, passenger and freight railroads, and other stakeholders.

### 1.2.2 What decision is the FRA making?

In this Tier 1 Final EIS, the FRA has identified a Preferred Alternative. This Tier 1 Final EIS identifies the following:

- ▶ The Preferred Alternative’s **physical location**, defined in terms of the urban centers or places connected, a representative route connecting those locations, and the station types and locations<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ The Preferred Alternative’s **capacity**, defined in terms of the number of trains per hour or tracks in a given route section
- ▶ The Preferred Alternative’s **service characteristics**, defined in terms of service frequency and type, station functions, design speed and travel-time targets
- ▶ The Preferred Alternative’s **infrastructure and operating condition**, defined as a system that achieves a state of good repair
- ▶ The **opportunities preserved** to improve rail service in the future on the NEC itself and on connecting corridors.

More detail about the characteristics of the Preferred Alternative are presented throughout this Tier 1 Final EIS and specifically in Chapter 4, Preferred Alternative, and Chapter 5, Transportation.

The Preferred Alternative is the FRA’s recommendation, but is not a decision on, an NEC FUTURE investment program. Following the publication of this Tier 1 Final EIS, the FRA will select an alternative (Selected Alternative) in a Record of Decision (ROD).<sup>2</sup> The Selected Alternative is intended to serve as the starting point for Tier 2 project studies. Sufficient details are provided in the Tier 1 Final EIS and will be included in the ROD to guide these next steps without limiting the opportunities for local or regional sponsors to incorporate innovations or to reflect local or more immediate needs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Preferred Alternative representative routes and construction characteristics are the basis for the analysis in the NEC FUTURE Tier 1 EIS. They illustrate necessary improvements to achieve the Preferred Alternative service and performance objectives. As part of the Tier 1 process, the FRA has determined the necessity for new segments in particular geographic sections of the NEC in order to meet the Purpose and Need, and has identified a representative route for each potential new segment. The FRA or another federal agency providing funding for a particular project will evaluate specific locations for new segments as part of the Tier 2 project studies, prior to making any decision regarding new segment locations.

<sup>2</sup> The term “Selected Alternative” is used in this chapter to refer to an alternative to be selected in the ROD. The Selected Alternative may be the same as the Preferred Alternative described in this Tier 1 Final EIS, or may include modifications to the Preferred Alternative. As in any NEPA process, it is also possible that the ROD will result in the selection of the No Action Alternative.

### **1.2.3 What is the Federal Transit Administration's role in NEC FUTURE?**

Agencies that may have jurisdiction by law or special expertise regarding the impacts of a proposed action may be asked by the lead federal agency to be a cooperating agency under NEPA. Cooperating agencies' responsibilities are detailed in the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1501.6. For the NEC FUTURE Tier 1 EIS process, the FRA invited the FTA to be a cooperating agency because of its likely involvement in the implementation of the NEC FUTURE Selected Alternative (for example, as a funding source for a Tier 2 project) and for its expertise related to commuter rail operations along the NEC. The FTA agreed to be a cooperating agency; their participation is essential to advancing this program in a coordinated manner. As a cooperating agency, the FTA may elect to adopt the findings of, or a portion thereof, of the Tier 1 Final EIS for the proposed action and issue its own ROD, pursuant to 40 CFR 1506.3, as appropriate. Regardless of the issuance or nature of an FTA ROD (if issued), ongoing coordination with metropolitan planning organizations in the Study Area will be necessary for candidate Tier 2 project studies. Specific information about the FTA's ongoing role in the implementation of the NEC FUTURE Selected Alternative will continue to be worked out as the NEC FUTURE ROD is developed.

## **1.3 NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS**

### **1.3.1 What is a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement?**

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), there are various levels of environmental review that can be undertaken by an agency. The level of detail and analysis conducted is determined by the degree to which the proposed action may result in significant impacts, establishes a precedent for future actions, or is considered to be a major federal action or an environmentally controversial issue. NEPA provides the flexibility to assess projects in a staged approach known as tiering. Tiering addresses broad programs and issues in an initial (Tier 1) or programmatic level analysis, and analyzes site-specific, project-level (Tier 2) proposals and impacts in subsequent studies. The FRA determined that a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was the appropriate level of NEPA documentation for NEC FUTURE due to the nature of the decision to be made, the complexity of the Northeast Corridor (NEC), and the multi-jurisdictional nature of the passenger rail operations.

### **1.3.2 What is the difference between the Tier 1 Draft EIS and Tier 1 Final EIS?**

For NEC FUTURE, the Tier 1 Draft EIS identified and evaluated a range of alternatives for consideration to help inform the FRA's decision on a Preferred Alternative. The Tier 1 Final EIS differs from the Tier 1 Draft EIS in that it identifies the Preferred Alternative and provides focused analyses of the Preferred Alternative. The Tier 1 Final EIS also includes the comments received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS during the public comment period and a revised Tier 1 Draft EIS based on the comments received. The Tier 1 Final EIS is the next step in the NEPA process that will inform the FRA's selection of an alternative in the Record of Decision (ROD).

### **1.3.3 How does the public provide feedback on the Tier 1 Final EIS?**

The FRA will hold a 30-day waiting period after release of the Tier 1 Final EIS. During this waiting period, the public may provide feedback on the Preferred Alternative and the contents of the Tier 1

Final EIS. This is not a formal comment period, and the FRA will not respond to individual comments as required for the Tier 1 Draft EIS. The FRA will consider this additional feedback in its determination of a Selected Alternative in the ROD in accordance with 40 CFR 1506.10(b).

#### **1.3.4 What is the process for Tier 2 project studies?**

The Tier 1 decision will be followed by a series of Tier 2 project studies that help to implement the overall NEC FUTURE vision. Under this approach, Tier 2 project studies will be prepared for many, and probably most, future improvements to the NEC that require NEPA review. The Tier 2 process for NEC FUTURE will occur over a period of several decades. For those Tier 2 project studies subject to NEPA, the Tier 2 NEPA documents will range from Categorical Exclusions to EISs, and there will likely be different project sponsors, and even different lead agencies.

NEPA reviews are triggered by a federal action, such as using federal funds or obtaining a federal permit/clearance. Non-federally funded or permitted projects are not subject to the provisions of NEPA. The NEPA process for each Tier 2 project study will follow the statutory requirements of the lead federal agency for implementing NEPA and meet all applicable state requirements. For each Tier 2 project study, a NEPA class of action will be determined by the lead federal agency and the appropriate level of documentation and analysis will be undertaken. Consistent with any NEPA process, public and agency involvement will be an important element of the Tier 2 project studies.

As each Tier 2 project study progresses, additional engineering, design, and construction methods and plans will be developed. Site-specific mitigation for unavoidable impacts will be identified as appropriate consistent with other applicable regulatory requirements. All applicable permits and clearances will be obtained as part of the Tier 2 project studies, prior to construction and implementation.

#### **1.3.5 How can Tier 2 project sponsors use the analysis documented in this Tier 1 EIS?**

The analysis in this Tier 1 EIS is intended to provide a starting point for subsequent Tier 2 project studies. For example, a Tier 2 project study can rely on the Purpose and Need established for NEC FUTURE. This Tier 1 analysis also provides a guide to where transportation, economic, environmental, and/or construction impacts are likely and can help to determine the scope of work for a Tier 2 study. Resource and regulatory agencies have reviewed the analysis in this Tier 1 EIS through the robust NEC FUTURE agency coordination effort; such coordination will also be helpful since a Tier 2 project sponsor—instead of starting a new discussion about an area of concern or issue—can continue the earlier discussion initiated as part of NEC FUTURE.

#### **1.3.6 Can other projects not mentioned in NEC FUTURE be identified after the Record of Decision?**

In general, the tiered NEPA process for NEC FUTURE assumes that the Tier 1 decision will be followed by a series of Tier 2 project studies that help to implement NEC FUTURE. However, for a project to be considered a Tier 2 project, its elements or service objectives must be included in the definition of the Selected Alternative. For Tier 2 project studies advanced in support of this Tier 1 decision, the FRA will consider consistency with the Tier 1 decision and prioritize those projects that support that decision.

In addition, the FRA will collaborate with stakeholders and sponsoring agencies on a case-by-case basis to address projects that are not included in the Selected Alternative, but may be related to the scope of the Selected Alternative and may further complement the Selected Alternative. The Tier 1 decision would preserve opportunities to consider (in separate studies outside of Tier 2) concepts not identified in the Selected Alternative, based on factors such as the immediacy of need, funding availability, and project definition.

### **1.3.7 Does finalization of this Tier 1 EIS/Record of Decision allow construction to begin?**

Neither the Tier 1 EIS nor the Record of Decision would allow construction to begin on the Selected Alternative. This Tier 1 EIS does not provide enough detail to clear or obtain permits for any construction activity to begin. No agency permits or approvals (e.g., Section 404 permits) have been either applied for or issued as part of this Tier 1 EIS process. The level of detail provided by the Tier 1 EIS is insufficient to determine site-specific impacts. Furthermore, the FRA did not complete any field studies or investigations as part of this Tier 1 EIS to confirm the presence or absence of documented resources. Successful completion of Tier 2 studies and environmental documents would allow construction to begin, such as ongoing NEPA documents for the Baltimore & Potomac (B&P) Tunnel and the Hudson River Tunnel. Additional planning, as part of the Service Development Plan, will further define phasing of specific Tier 2 project studies (see Chapter 10, Phasing and Implementation).

### **1.3.8 What happens after the Record of Decision?**

The Record of Decision will identify the Selected Alternative and document commitments made by the FRA. The FRA will then prepare a Service Development Plan that will serve as a roadmap for implementation of the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative described in the Record of Decision, or elements of the Selected Alternative, can advance to Tier 2 project studies.

### **1.3.9 How can the NEC FUTURE Section 106 Programmatic Agreement be used for Tier 2 actions?**

Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the FRA has executed a Programmatic Agreement with the Federal Transit Administration, the State Historic Preservation Officers of the eight states and Washington, D.C., through which the NEC runs, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. This Programmatic Agreement establishes the framework for continued compliance with Section 106 during future environmental review processes for NEC FUTURE Tier 2 projects. The Programmatic Agreement includes state-specific appendices that allow the Section 106 consultation process for Tier 2 undertakings to be adapted as necessary based on each state's requirements. For Tier 2 project studies that have the potential to affect historic properties and may result in an undertaking, the framework provided in the Programmatic Agreement should be reviewed for consistency with requirements of the relevant states (see Appendix GG for the Programmatic Agreement).

## **1.4 IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

The Preferred Alternative achieves Intercity and Regional rail service frequencies consistent with the “grow” vision defined for Alternative 2 documented in the Tier 1 Draft EIS. To achieve this

“grow” vision, the FRA adapted the Alternative 2 representative service plan and service objectives, including performance targets (frequency, stopping patterns, travel times) and then looked at ways to balance the infrastructure suggested for the alternatives considered in the Tier 1 Draft EIS (Alternatives 1, 2, and 3) to determine the representative infrastructure needed to meet proposed service objectives. In some cases, the representative infrastructure avoided or minimized impacts to environmentally sensitive areas of concern, and in others it provided for future opportunities. Chapter 4, Preferred Alternative, describes the details about the service and infrastructure.

Key features of the Preferred Alternative include the following:

- ▶ Emphasizes the FRA’s commitment to the existing Northeast Corridor (NEC), brings it to a state of good repair, and maximizes its capacity with strategic infrastructure investments and operational efficiencies.
- ▶ Supports up to five times as much Intercity rail service as today, increases Regional rail service to accommodate growth in population and employment, removes speed restrictions where practical and safe, reduces trip times, offers frequent new Metropolitan and Intercity-Express services, and expands one-seat-ride options for many markets across the NEC, including to Hartford, CT, and Springfield, MA, and to connecting corridors.
- ▶ Expands the existing NEC with over 200 miles of new segments from Alternatives 2 and 3 that avoid speed and environmental constraints in northern Maryland and Delaware, near Philadelphia, in the New Jersey/New York City metropolitan area, and along the Connecticut coastline.
- ▶ Incorporates enhanced electrified service along the Hartford/Springfield Line between New Haven and Hartford, CT, and Springfield, MA, in order to respond to comments received to strengthen service to central New England and leverage existing investments and identified market opportunities.

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**Intercity-Express** is new premium Intercity rail service operating at speeds of 160–220 miles per hour (mph), making limited stops and only serving the largest markets. Intercity-Express service offers the shortest travel times for Intercity trips, higher-quality onboard amenities, at a premium price, using high-performance trainsets.

**Metropolitan Service** is the new Intercity service envisioned in NEC FUTURE with high-performance trainsets that operate on infrastructure tailored to clockface headways, Metropolitan trains can provide faster journeys, but stopping at more destinations more frequently, at a lower cost and with timed connections with Intercity-Express and Regional train services.

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#### 1.4.1 How did the FRA decide on a Preferred Alternative?

The Tier 1 Draft EIS presented the environmental assessment for each of the three Action Alternatives and compared them to the No Action Alternative. In light of the large number of stakeholders, the size and complexity of the Study Area, and the scale of the analysis, the FRA decided to present the range of Action Alternatives in the Tier 1 Draft EIS and await making a decision on a Preferred Alternative until the public, stakeholders, tribes, federal and state resource

and regulatory agencies, elected officials, and transportation agencies could offer their perspectives on the range of possible futures for the NEC.

The FRA considered the findings of the Tier 1 Draft EIS and comments received on the Action Alternatives in its deliberation on a Preferred Alternative. The FRA's policy objectives also guided the FRA's deliberation on a Preferred Alternative. Prominent among the policies that informed the FRA's decision-making was the provision of safe and reliable transportation advancing new approaches to delivering NEC services. Ultimately, the Preferred Alternative reflects these three factors—findings of the environmental analysis, public and stakeholder comments, and FRA policy—and a determination of how well the Preferred Alternative addresses the needs identified in the NEC FUTURE Purpose and Need.

The Preferred Alternative defines a path forward to achieve quality passenger rail service for future generations and **affirms a corridor-wide commitment to the NEC and the urban centers it connects today**. Chapter 4, Preferred Alternative, provides further details about the FRA's deliberative process and characteristics of the Preferred Alternative.

#### **1.4.2 How did public comments inform the FRA's decision-making?**

The FRA reviewed more than 3,200 individual submissions received during the public comment period. Submissions included public testimony at public hearings, letters, emails, and online submissions via the program's website. Each submission was reviewed to identify unique comments that the FRA then grouped by common categories (transportation, environment, support for/opposition to an alternative). The feedback received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS was considered as the FRA deliberated on a Preferred Alternative. Some of the comments encouraged the FRA to shift routing to avoid or minimize impacts or change a proposed construction type. For example, the FRA received many comments concerning effects to National Wildlife Refuges, and in particular the Patuxent Research Refuge in Maryland. The FRA considered comments such as these to shape the identified Preferred Alternative. Chapter 11, Agency and Public Involvement, and Appendix JJ, Comments and Responses, provide additional information on the public comment period and comments received.

### **1.5 WHAT DOES THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE MEAN FOR CONNECTING CORRIDORS?**

The FRA specifically considered ways in which operating efficiencies would allow for more-frequent, faster, and more-reliable passenger rail service on a well-integrated and connected national passenger rail network. The Preferred Alternative considers connecting corridors—such as the Southeast High Speed Rail Program—that have services that operate onto the Northeast Corridor. Depending on the characteristics of each connecting corridor—electrified or not, available or planned capacity, frequency of service—improvements proposed with the Preferred Alternative could be leveraged to improve connecting corridor services and enhance the benefits of the Preferred Alternative as part of a larger integrated network.

## 1.6 IMPLEMENTING THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The Selected Alternative will define a corridor-wide vision for the Northeast Corridor (NEC) network that reflects the diversity of the Northeast and local concerns. The Selected Alternative will not include decisions about specific alignments, schedules, operations, infrastructure and facilities or construction types; those decisions will be made in subsequent Tier 2 project studies.

### 1.6.1 How will the Tier 1 decision guide the next steps toward implementation?

The FRA's Tier 1 decision documented in the Record of Decision is intended to provide general direction regarding its applicability to ongoing and future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies. For ongoing studies involving improvements on the NEC, the FRA will review the existing environmental analysis for consistency with the Tier 1 decision. Because the FRA has coordinated other ongoing studies throughout the NEC FUTURE process, the FRA anticipates that the Tier 1 decision will not require major changes or supplementation of those ongoing studies. For future tiered project studies (Tier 2 project studies), the Tier 1 decision is intended to provide a starting point; specific project sponsors and funding agencies will further define the scope, schedule, and pace of implementation for those subsequent Tier 2 project studies. The FRA will work with the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, Northeast states, Washington, D.C., NEC railroads, and the Northeast Corridor Commission<sup>3</sup> to promote consistency of these projects with the parameters of the Tier 1 decision.

An important element of the Tier 1 decision is recognizing the need to incrementally implement the investment program laid out in the Selected Alternative. Chapter 10, Phasing and Implementation, describes a process for the collaboration necessary to define an Initial Phase for the Selected Alternative. However, the Tier 1 Final EIS and the Record of Decision will not provide specific project lists; such details may be developed after the Selected Alternative has been identified in the ROD. The FRA has initiated a collaborative process with key stakeholders to plan the work necessary to define and advance an Initial Phase of the Selected Alternative; this process will inform the preparation of a Service Development Plan that will describe how the Selected Alternative could be implemented and funded through discrete phases.

### 1.6.2 What is the Service Development Plan?

The Service Development Plan will identify next steps for implementing the Selected Alternative. It will summarize the benefits and costs of implementing the Selected Alternative, including an analysis of transportation network and economic effects, ridership, and funding and financing opportunities. Most importantly, the Service Development Plan will provide the platform for implementing the Selected Alternative.

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<sup>3</sup> The Northeast Corridor Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission, created pursuant to the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, is commonly referred to as the Northeast Corridor Commission or NEC Commission. The name was officially changed to the Northeast Corridor (NEC) Commission under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (2015).

### **1.6.3 Who will be responsible for advancing the NEC FUTURE investment program?**

Moving forward to make the vision of NEC FUTURE a reality will involve a partnership of the federal government, as led by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the NEC states and Washington, D.C., Amtrak, and individual railroad operators. From the beginning of the NEC FUTURE process, the FRA recognized the importance of this level of collaboration among all stakeholders. As such, continuing these working relationships—once the NEC FUTURE process is completed with a Record of Decision for the NEPA process and a Service Development Plan (SDP) to define the next steps toward implementation—is a natural progression.

Defining an Initial Phase and further defining an ongoing leadership role for the FRA are hallmarks of the FRA's commitment to achieving the vision of NEC FUTURE. The sequencing and phasing of the effort are decisions that will require input from each of the key stakeholders, funding agencies, and the resource and regulatory entities responsible for permitting. These decisions have yet to be made but will be an important first step upon completion of the NEPA process. As noted, the SDP can identify the logical sequence of project implementation, packages of improvements to be advanced together, and likely environmental review requirements. Additionally, while specific funding for the overall effort is yet to be determined, the shared vision of the NEC as defined in the Selected Alternative, identified in the Record of Decision, will support a coordinated stakeholder effort to identify federal, state, and other possible funding sources.

## **1.7 ROLE OF THE PUBLIC IN FUTURE DECISIONS**

Public insights and concerns have been instrumental to the process of defining the Preferred Alternative and will continue to be important to project-specific decisions necessary to advance the Selected Alternative after the Record of Decision. Upon completion of the NEC FUTURE environmental review process, the public and interested entities will have opportunities to be involved in Tier 2 project studies as those projects are advanced. It is also expected that, given the breadth of programmatic objectives of the Tier 1 decision, the FRA and U.S. Department of Transportation will seek ongoing public involvement in the advancement of improvements to the Northeast Corridor. Likely opportunities to promote further public involvement in the advancement of the Selected Alternative include continuation of the NEC FUTURE website and regular email alerts to those signed-up on the NEC FUTURE email list. It is also anticipated that the Initial Phase will be integral to the NEC Commission's capital planning process, which will be another opportunity for the public to stay informed about progress toward the Selected Alternative.