3. Purpose and Need

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the purpose and need for the NEC FUTURE program (NEC FUTURE). The need for the program stems from the need for improved passenger rail services along the Northeast Corridor (NEC) rail network; passenger rail is critical to the transportation system in the NEC FUTURE Study Area (Study Area). In addition, this chapter summarizes the comments received regarding the purpose and need as presented in the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Draft EIS), and how the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) addressed and considered these comments in the Tier 1 Final EIS and in developing the Preferred Alternative.

3.2 PURPOSE STATEMENT

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 ***proposed action*** of NEC FUTURE evaluated in this Tier 1 Final EIS is the adoption of an investment program to improve passenger rail service within the Study Area. Chapter 4, Preferred Alternative, summarizes the Preferred Alternative development process, as well as describes the Preferred Alternative's associated infrastructure and representative service plans. The Preferred Alternative evaluated in this Tier 1 Final EIS represents an investment program that articulates a vision for the role of passenger rail services in the Study Area. As described further in Chapter 10, Phasing and Implementation, it is expected that the Preferred Alternative would be implemented incrementally.

3.3 NEED STATEMENT

The focus of NEC FUTURE is to meet current and future passenger rail transportation needs in the Study Area. For the purposes of analysis, the FRA established a planning horizon of 2040. However, the investments proposed in NEC FUTURE are likely to include infrastructure improvements expected to last well beyond 2040 and into the next century. Therefore, while 2040 is the horizon year, the FRA considered future needs of the NEC beyond the 2040 planning horizon in the development and analysis of alternatives.

The overall ***needs*** addressed by NEC FUTURE include aging infrastructure, insufficient capacity, gaps in connectivity, compromised performance, and lack of resiliency. Addressing these needs is essential to support the reliability of the passenger rail system. In addition, the FRA is committed to promoting environmental sustainability and economic growth. These needs are summarized as follows:

- **Aging Infrastructure –** There is a need for continued investment to maintain and bring the NEC to a state of good repair.
- **Insufficient Capacity –** The NEC cannot meet today's or forecasted future demand due to physical and operational constraints arising from critical infrastructure chokepoints and individual railroad operating practices driven by individual policies or customer needs rather than a consideration of network-wide needs. These constraints are further exacerbated by growth in passenger travel.
- **Gaps in Connectivity –** The reach and effectiveness of the rail network could be expanded with improved connectivity both between different rail service providers on the NEC rail network and among the different transportation modes.
- **Compromised Performance –** Improvements in train frequency, travel time, and ticket price are necessary to make passenger rail competitive with other modes. Capacity constraints create a congested passenger rail network, which affects reliability.
- **Lack of Resiliency –** Poor infrastructure, insufficient capacity, and lack of redundancy constrain the NEC to continue to function during unanticipated outages, and catastrophic events, whether weather-related or otherwise. Such resiliency and redundancy is needed to improve reliability of the NEC, especially in the context of global climate change.

The FRA will address these needs in a manner that supports environmental policies and practices and promotes continued economic growth. Therefore, although not passenger rail specific needs, environmental sustainability and economic growth are important considerations for NEC FUTURE:

- **Environmental Sustainability** – Expanding the availability of more energy-efficient transportation modes such as passenger rail is necessary to support desired improvements in air quality and environmentally friendly growth patterns.
- **Economic Growth** – Reliable, efficient, and cost-effective movement of passengers and goods is needed to support continued economic growth in the Study Area.

Volume 2, Chapter 3, describes these needs further.

3.4 RESPONSE TO TIER 1 DRAFT EIS COMMENTS

Public comments received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS Purpose and Need chapter focused primarily on the importance of addressing regional needs of the Study Area with proposed improvements to the NEC; NEC freight rail service needs and goals; connectivity and speed in evaluating and identifying the Preferred Alternative; and the importance of addressing and prioritizing state-of-good-repair needs on the NEC.

The FRA considered these comments and whether they warranted changes to the Purpose and Need as described in the Tier 1 Draft EIS. While commenters provided new areas of emphasis, the needs as identified in the Tier 1 Draft EIS did capture the range of concerns expressed by commenters. As a result, the Purpose and Need for this Tier 1 Final EIS remains unchanged from the NEC FUTURE Tier 1 Draft EIS.

Specifically with regard to freight, the focus of NEC FUTURE is passenger rail; however, freight rail operations on the NEC are important to the region's economy. Although not a highlighted need for NEC FUTURE, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 discuss the importance of freight rail and how it would benefit or be affected by passenger rail improvements.

Comments received on the Purpose and Need as presented in the Tier 1 Draft EIS suggested that the FRA consider and compare other modal solutions, such as highway or air. The NEC FUTURE program addresses the mobility challenges of the Study Area in a multimodal context, with a focus on the role of passenger rail in meeting those challenges.

In developing the Tier 1 Draft EIS Action Alternatives, the FRA evaluated future transportation needs and considered the capacity constraints of the total transportation system (rail, highway, air). As such, the focus of the NEC FUTURE program is on how rail can contribute to the overall mobility of the region given the broader transportation system context.

As noted in Volume 2, Chapter 3, constraints to growth exist in each of the modes throughout the Study Area. Significant investments in all modes will be required in the coming decades to accommodate the magnitude of projected growth in travel demand across the Study Area. As such, the FRA did not attempt to evaluate modal alternatives to passenger rail or the cost-effectiveness of passenger rail improvements relative to air or highway improvements as part of the analysis. For NEC FUTURE, the FRA considered the complementarity of air, rail, and highway transportation modes as a system necessary to meet overall future travel needs. This approach is described in Volume 2, Chapters 1 and 3, and Volume 1, Chapters 4 and 5.