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Household Travel Survey to Inform NEC FUTURE

The analysis of future travel behavior is a key element of NEC FUTURE. How will travelers respond to the mix of transportation services that might be provided across the region? Given the complex travel patterns on the Northeast Corridor—with intercity, commuter, and connecting services—the NEC FUTURE team is creating a new integrated ridership forecasting model to assess future travel behavior. This model will use data from a new household survey and other regional travel data obtained from the NEC Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission (NEC Commission), individual commuter railroads, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, as well as other sources.



NEC FUTURE will identify a program of investment for the Northeast Corridor to meet the region's long term needs for rail service.

(cont'd on page 2)

Update on Alternatives Development

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) continues to advance the planning and environmental review process for NEC FUTURE, a comprehensive program to develop a long-term vision and phased improvements for the Northeast Corridor (NEC). By defining an investment program to improve the capacity and reliability of NEC rail service for both commuter and intercity travelers, NEC FUTURE aims to enhance the region's mobility options, serve new markets, and provide a foundation for rail service in 2040 and beyond.

The NEC FUTURE team is currently developing alternatives for detailed study in the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The Tier 1 EIS Alternatives will provide distinct choices for the NEC, reflecting what the FRA has learned from initial analysis, public input, and over 100 meetings with stakeholders since the [Preliminary Alternatives](#) were developed in 2013. Each Tier 1 EIS Alternative will depict a different vision for passenger rail on the Northeast Corridor, with a defined set of geographic markets, a “representative route” (discussed on page 3), assumptions about the level of passenger rail service to be provided in 2040, and infrastructure improvements (defined at a conceptual level) that would support the level of service identified. A set of initial projects, applicable to all of the Tier 1 EIS Alternatives, will focus on the NEC's immediate needs. These common projects are expected to include modernization of infrastructure, replacement or rehabilitation of major tunnels and bridges, track improvements, and station improvements.

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What role will passenger rail play in the region's future?

A central task for NEC FUTURE is to determine the role of passenger rail service in the overall transportation system of the Northeast region.

By 2040 (the planning horizon for NEC FUTURE), will the same percentage of travel occur on the rail system as it does today, or will an increasing proportion of travelers choose rail for their travel? What share of total travel should the rail system be designed to attract and serve?

These questions are critical in determining the level of investment and types of improvements to the NEC to be made in the coming decades.





Household Travel Survey – *cont'd from page 1*

Household Travel Survey

The NEC FUTURE team recently completed a telephone survey of households throughout the Northeast region. The survey included questions about existing travel behavior, such as where people travel and their mode of transportation, their trip purpose, party size, trip costs, and other characteristics. In addition, the survey included questions about future travel preferences, such as choosing between modes of travel, premium or standard services, and costs. Approximately 12,000 completed surveys were obtained.

Regional Travel Data

In 2013, the NEC Commission, working with the nine different tolling agencies, collected E-Z Pass transaction data along the highway network between Washington, D.C. and Boston, MA, and surveyed users of the service. In addition, a license plate survey was conducted to gather supplemental data for un-tolled portions of the corridor. The combination of these efforts resulted in a database of observed highway travel patterns across the Northeast. This information complements comparable data, available from Amtrak, commuter rail operators, and the Federal Aviation Administration, that address observed rail and air travel behavior in the Northeast.

Applying the Data

The NEC FUTURE team will use the travel survey data obtained, along with existing data from Metropolitan Planning Organizations and railroads, to build a new Northeast Corridor ridership model to forecast travel behavior and ridership for each Tier 1 EIS Alternative. This information will help the FRA compare the performance of the alternatives and assess environmental impacts related to ridership and the number of trains on the corridor, such as noise and air quality impacts. The results will be summarized in the Tier 1 Draft EIS, and the model will be available for FRA's use in future projects.

Update on Alternatives Development – *cont'd from page 1*

In November 2014, the FRA will hold a series of public open house meetings throughout the corridor to present the Tier 1 EIS Alternatives and describe the process that will be used to evaluate them in the Tier 1 DEIS. Open houses will be held in each NEC state and the District of Columbia. FRA expects to publish the Tier 1 DEIS for public comment in late 2015. At that time, formal public hearings will be held in each of the NEC states and the District of Columbia. Updated information on the November 2014 public meetings and the 2015 public hearings will be posted on the project website at www.necfuture.com.



The FRA is considering the travel needs of existing and future riders. Here, SEPTA passengers board at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

Guiding Principles for Alternatives Development:

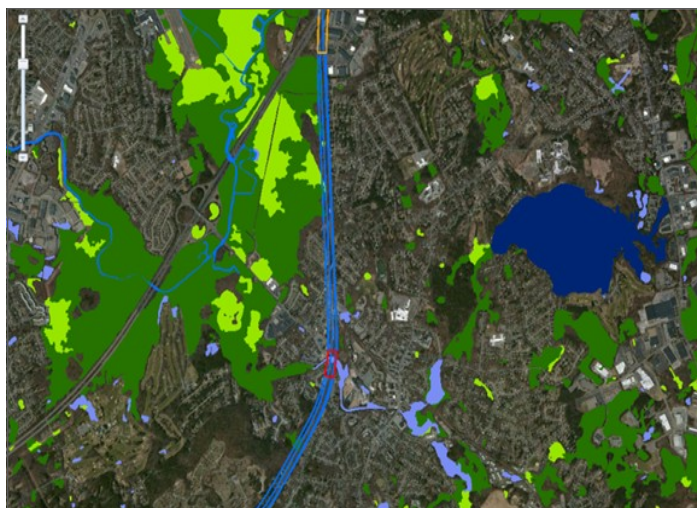
1. *Consider a broad range of alternatives informed by analysis of the market demand for future rail passenger service*
2. *Develop alternatives that focus on efficiency by investing in the existing corridor and exploring more efficient ways of providing service*
3. *Enable flexible, incremental implementation with a phased approach and a common set of projects for early action in any alternative*

Environmental Review Process – A Programmatic Approach

For NEC FUTURE, the FRA has chosen a tiered approach to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The first step is a broad, programmatic analysis of the environmental consequences of alternatives, known as a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Tier 1 EIS would be followed by more detailed Tier 2 environmental reviews, focused on specific projects and improvements. In the Tier 1 EIS, alternatives are being defined at a conceptual level and represent a range of possible rail improvements. For example, they will include information about the geographic locations to be served and the types of rail service to be provided, but not specify a precise alignment. Similarly, the analysis of environmental effects of each alternative will be conducted at a high level, based on readily available data. Once FRA completes the Tier 1 EIS and issues a Record of Decision, the more detailed project-level Tier 2 environmental reviews will follow.

Analysis Context

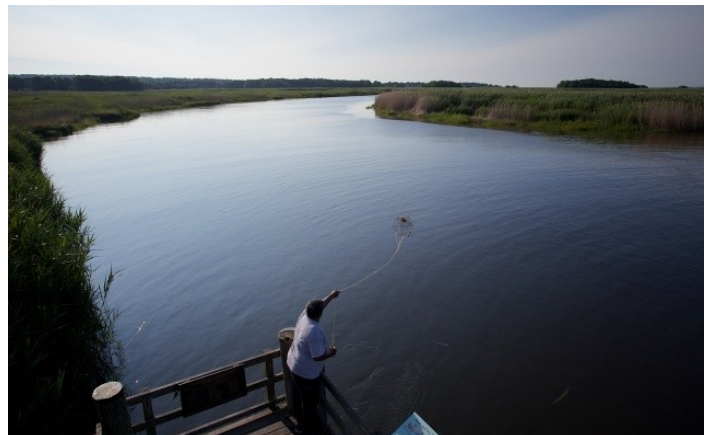
The size of the NEC FUTURE Study Area, a 457 mile corridor covering 50,000 square miles, presents special challenges in documenting existing conditions and assessing environmental consequences in a way that is meaningful for readers and for decision-making. For NEC FUTURE, a geographic information system (GIS) database has been created to compile, store, and analyze environmental characteristics for over twenty specific resource categories, such as wetlands, land cover, and cultural



GIS Mapping will enable the NEC FUTURE team to identify existing conditions and assess environmental consequences.

and historic resources, to name a few. These data were gathered from federal, state, and local sources.

The environmental database will include information that defines the characteristics of each Tier 1 EIS Alternative, such as routes, stations, service types, and type of construction by segment. Instead of a specific alignment, a Representative Route between 150 and 300 feet wide will be used. Together, resource-specific data and the Representative Route will be geographically represented as layers in the GIS database. The interaction of these layers will allow the NEC FUTURE team to assess the environmental consequences within the Affected Environment, the area in which existing conditions and environmental consequences will be identified.



The lower Connecticut River estuary is one of many water resources along the NEC.

The size of the Affected Environment will vary based on the resource. For most resources, it will consist of a “swath” or area between 2,000 feet and two miles in width, centered on the Representative Route. Other resources are not easily tied to a physical footprint. For example, air quality will be evaluated for airsheds defined by Metropolitan Planning Organizations; transportation effects will be considered for the entire Study Area with a focus on NEC stations and metropolitan areas. The environmental impacts of the Tier 1 EIS Alternatives will be compared for each resource and the findings will be presented in the Tier 1 DEIS document.

(cont'd on page 4)

Environmental Review Process – *cont'd from page 3*

Agency Coordination and Public Involvement

In addition to data collection and analysis, NEPA requires agency coordination and public involvement when preparing an EIS. Public meetings and workshops have been held periodically, and the FRA team has been meeting regularly with federal, state, and regional agencies, as well as railroads that operate along the NEC.

FRA has also engaged in early collaboration with federal and state environmental agencies. Informal roundtables with resource and regulatory agencies began in 2012, as part of a pilot project with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) designed to promote communication and help avoid the conflicts and delays that sometimes affect multi-state transportation projects. Through this inclusive and collaborative process, participating agencies developed a Statement of Principles that will guide future environmental consultation for NEC FUTURE. FRA continues to meet with these agencies on a regular basis.



Agency meetings in March 2014 brought together local, state, and federal agencies in Hartford, CT and eight other locations.



Discussion at public workshop in Newark, NJ, April 2013

How Can I Get Involved?



Come to a public open house in November 2014

The FRA will hold a series of public open house meetings throughout the corridor to present an update on the alternatives and the process that will be used to evaluate them in the Tier 1 DEIS. Meeting information will be posted on the project website.



Come to a public hearing in late 2015

FRA anticipates publishing the DEIS in late 2015. At that time, public hearings will be held in each of the NEC states and the District of Columbia to provide an opportunity for public comment. Information on these meetings will be posted on the project website.



Visit our website

Please visit www.necfuture.com to learn more about NEC FUTURE and opportunities for public involvement.



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Tell us what you think

Submit a comment to the project team by completing the online comment form.

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