
Abstract

The Northeast Corridor (NEC) is the rail transportation spine of the Northeast United States and is a key component of the region’s transportation system, which supports the operation of eight Regional rail authorities and Amtrak—the Intercity rail service provider—as well as four freight railroads. The NEC FUTURE program (NEC FUTURE) is a comprehensive planning effort to define, evaluate, and prioritize future investments for the NEC from Washington, D.C., to Boston (Study Area). As part of NEC FUTURE, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is evaluating passenger-rail alternatives in the Study Area to improve current and future passenger-rail transportation needs within the NEC.

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 needs addressed by NEC FUTURE include aging infrastructure, additional capacity to accommodate growing population and employment, gaps in connectivity, compromised performance, resiliency, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

The FRA has prepared this Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Final EIS) in compliance with the following:

- ▶ National Environmental Policy Act (42 USC §4332 et seq.)
- ▶ Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508)
- ▶ Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC §306101 et seq.)
- ▶ Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act (49 USC §303)
- ▶ FRA Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 FR 28545)

The FRA has prepared this Tier 1 Final EIS in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration and in coordination with multiple other federal and state agencies and stakeholders. This Tier 1 Final EIS describes and summarizes the potential environmental, transportation, and economic effects of the NEC FUTURE Preferred Alternative on the population, and built and natural environments within the Study Area.

The FRA identified a Preferred Alternative based on analysis presented in the Tier 1 Draft EIS, stakeholder and public feedback received during the public comment period, and consideration of FRA and U.S. Department of Transportation policy goals and objectives. The Preferred Alternative achieves Intercity and Regional rail service frequencies consistent with the “grow” vision defined for Alternative 2 in the Tier 1 Draft EIS. The FRA adapted a representative “grow” service plan and service objectives in defining the Preferred Alternative—including performance targets (frequency, stopping patterns, travel times)—and looked at ways to balance the infrastructure suggested for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 to best fit the Preferred Alternative’s service objectives. Refinements to reflect regional or local priorities were considered in the development of the Preferred Alternative.

This Tier 1 Final EIS is presented as two volumes. The objective of Volume 1 is to present the Preferred Alternative as well as the evaluation and documentation of its impacts and benefits. It also addresses the more than 3,200 comments received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS, which are presented in a detailed appendix to Volume 1 (Appendix JJ). Volume 2 contains the entire Tier 1 Draft EIS, including appendices, but updated to reflect changes noted during the public comment period (November 2015 to February 2016). Updates include clarifications, errata-style edits, and specific comments related to information provided in the Tier 1 Draft EIS.

The FRA will hold a 30-day waiting period after release of the Tier 1 Final EIS in accordance with 40 CFR 1506.10(b). This waiting period will allow the public to review and provide feedback on the Preferred Alternative and the contents of the Tier 1 Final EIS.¹ This is not a formal comment period, and the FRA will not respond to individual comments as was required for the Tier 1 Draft EIS. The FRA will consider feedback on the Preferred Alternative received during the waiting period and then identify an alternative, referred to as the Selected Alternative, in the Record of Decision (ROD). The Selected Alternative documented in the ROD may or may not be the same as the Preferred Alternative described in this Tier 1 Final EIS. The FRA will also prepare a Service Development Plan for the Selected Alternative following the issuance of the ROD.

The Selected Alternative will be further evaluated through a series of subsequent actions (referred to as Tier 2 project studies). As appropriate, feasibility studies may be conducted prior to advancing Tier 2 projects to consider location-specific constraints and opportunities. Tier 2 project studies will provide more detailed site-specific effects assessments, engineering, and design; identify all applicable permits; and define location-specific avoidance and mitigation measures.

¹ Questions or feedback on the Tier 1 Final EIS may be sent to info@necfuture.com.