

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Railroad Administration****Notice of Availability for Public Review of the Draft Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement for the Chicago, IL, to Omaha, NE, Regional Passenger Rail System Study**

AGENCY: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Notice of availability of draft environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: FRA is issuing this Notice to advise the public that a Draft Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 EIS) has been prepared for the Chicago to Omaha Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study (Study). The Tier 1 EIS was prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA); FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (Environmental Procedures); and guidelines published by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) on implementing NEPA. The Study includes both a Tier 1 EIS and a Service Development Plan. FRA is the lead federal agency and the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) is the joint-lead state agency for the environmental review process. For passenger rail projects, this Tier 1 EIS focuses on broad corridor and service level issues, while subsequent Tier 2 analyses will focus on the details of a specific project or action.

Iowa DOT proposes to establish high-speed passenger rail service between Chicago, Illinois, through Iowa, to Omaha, Nebraska. The proposed project would provide an alternative to automobile, bus, and air travel by decreasing travel times, increasing frequency of service, improving reliability (particularly in inclement weather), providing an efficient transportation option, and providing amenities to improve passenger ride quality and comfort. The project would also promote environmental benefits, including reduced air pollutant emissions, improved land use options, and fewer adverse impacts to the surrounding habitat and water resources.

The Tier 1 EIS presents the proposed project's purpose and need, identifies reasonable alternatives, describes the affected environment, and analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives considered, including the no-build alternative.

DATES: Written comments on the Draft Tier 1 EIS should be provided within

the 45-day comment period to Iowa DOT on or before Wednesday, December 26, 2012. Public hearings are scheduled to occur in early December 2012 in Chicago, Illinois, and in Des Moines and Council Bluffs, Iowa. For further details, please reference the Study's Web site at: www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha/.

ADDRESSES: Comments or additional information on the Tier 1 EIS can be submitted in multiple ways: Mailed directly to Amanda Martin, Freight and Passenger Rail Policy Coordinator, Iowa Department of Transportation, 800 Lincoln Way, Ames, Iowa 50010; submitted electronically through the Chicago to Omaha Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study Web site at www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha/; submitted electronically to email@chicagotoomaha.com with "Draft EIS" in the Subject line; recorded at the Study's toll-free information line at 800-488-7119; or provided orally or in writing at the in-person open house public hearing.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andreea Martin, Environmental Protection Specialist, Federal Railroad Administration, 1200 New Jersey Avenue Southeast, (Mail Stop 20), Washington, DC 20590, telephone (202) 493-6201; or Amanda Martin, Freight and Passenger Rail Policy Coordinator, Office of Rail Transportation, Iowa Department of Transportation, 800 Lincoln Way, Ames, Iowa 50010, telephone (515) 239-1653.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Chicago to Omaha regional intercity passenger rail corridor extends from Chicago Union Station, in downtown Chicago, Illinois on the east to a terminal in Omaha, Nebraska on the west. In Illinois, the Study area extends west from Chicago Union Station (the hub for the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative) for approximately 200 miles to the Mississippi River near Moline, Illinois, and continues west for approximately 300 miles across the entire state of Iowa to the Missouri River, a distance of approximately 500 miles. The Study area terminates in Omaha, which is located at the Missouri River, the eastern border of the state of Nebraska.

The Chicago to Omaha Regional Passenger Rail System would provide a competitive passenger rail transportation option between Chicago and Omaha to help meet current and future demand for travel in the Study area. The need stems from travel demand and increasing congestion, resulting from population growth and changing demographics along the corridor from Chicago, Illinois to

Omaha, Nebraska, as well as the lack of competitive and attractive travel alternatives to highway and air transportation. The proposed improvements of the preferred alternative meet the purpose and need criteria by: decreasing travel times; increasing frequency of service; improving service reliability; providing safe and efficient service; providing amenities to improve passenger ride quality and comfort; and promoting environmental benefits (reduced air pollutant emissions, improved land use options, and fewer adverse impacts to the surrounding habitat and water resources).

The Tier 1 EIS is available for review online at FRA's Web site www.fra.dot.gov and Iowa DOT's Web site at www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha. The document is also available at 113 libraries located along the corridor in Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. For a full list of these viewing locations visit the Chicago to Omaha Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study Web site at www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha.

Issued in Washington, DC, on November 15, 2012.

Corey W. Hill,

Director, Office of Passenger and Freight Programs

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Railroad Administration****Notice of Availability of a Final Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement, for the Chicago, IL to St. Louis, MO High Speed Rail Corridor Program and Tier 2 Evaluation for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project**

AGENCY: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), United States Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Notice of availability of final environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: FRA is issuing this notice to advise the public that a Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) has been prepared for the Chicago, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri High Speed Rail Corridor Program. The Final EIS includes a Tier 1 corridor evaluation for the Chicago, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri high-speed rail corridor and a Tier 2 project-level evaluation for the portion of the high-speed rail corridor in Springfield, Illinois. FRA is the lead federal agency and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is

the joint-lead state agency for the environmental review process.

IDOT proposes to improve high speed passenger rail service between Chicago, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri, including the rail lines through Springfield, Illinois. The proposal includes the development of double track along the railroad corridor to improve high-speed passenger service reliability and safety, and to increase the number of trips between Chicago and St. Louis, as well as improvements to railroad crossings, signals, and stations.

The Final EIS presents the Program's purpose and need, identifies all reasonable alternatives, describes the affected environment, analyzes the potential environmental impacts of all the reasonable alternatives and the No-Build Alternative, and identifies the Preferred Alternative and appropriate mitigation measures to minimize the potential environmental impacts.

DATES: FRA will issue a final decision on the proposal after the 30 day wait period which concludes on December 10, 2012, established by Environmental Protection Agency's publication of the notice of availability of the EIS in the **Federal Register**.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the Final EIS have been sent to affected Federal, State, and local government agencies, stakeholders, and are also available for public review at IDOT, 505 North MacArthur Boulevard, Springfield, Illinois 62702 and online at FRA's Web site: <http://www.fra.dot.gov> and IDOT's Web site: <http://www.idotshr.org>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Andrea E. Martin, Environmental Protection Specialist, Office of Railroad Policy and Development, Federal Railroad Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., MS-20, Washington, DC 20590; email: andrea.martin@dot.gov; telephone: 202-493-6201 or Joseph E. Shacter, Director, Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, 100 West Randolph Street, Suite 6-600, Chicago, Illinois 60601; email: Joseph.Shacter@Illinois.gov; telephone: 312-793-2116.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed Program would include the development of a double track and railroad crossings, signals, and stations along a preferred route of existing railroad corridors between Chicago, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri, to improve high-speed passenger service reliability and safety, and increase the number of trips. This Program of improvements would be in addition to

those associated with FRA studies within the Chicago to St. Louis Corridor previously conducted from 2004 and 2011 and being implemented by IDOT.

The Final EIS identifies and evaluates the environmental and transportation impacts for corridor capacity enhancements, including double track. The current Chicago to St. Louis Corridor operates predominantly on a single track that is shared by both traditional freight and Amtrak passenger rail service.

A tiered environmental process was used to evaluate the proposed Program. A tiered environmental process is a phased environmental review used in the development of complex projects. Under this process, the Tier 1 EIS addresses broad, corridor issues and alternatives. Tier 2 environmental documents address individual component projects of the Selected Alternative carried forward from the Tier 1 environmental process. Concurrently with this Tier 1 study of the full Chicago to St. Louis Corridor, IDOT and FRA conducted a Tier 2 evaluation for the portion of the High-Speed Rail Corridor in Springfield, IL.

In June 2012, IDOT circulated the Draft Tier 1 EIS for a 45-day public and agency review and comment period pursuant to 40 CFR 1502.9(b). The Draft Tier 1 EIS analyzed a No-Build Alternative and various Build Alternatives. IDOT and FRA convened public hearings in August 2012 in Chicago, Joliet, Springfield, Bloomington, and Alton, Illinois.

The IDOT and FRA considered the entire record and compared the potential environmental impacts of the Tier 1 Build Alternatives, as well as impacts of the No-Build Alternative, in order to select the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative follows the existing Amtrak passenger corridor, except through Springfield and north of Joliet. Between Chicago and Joliet, the Preferred Alternative follows the Metra Rock Island District line from Joliet Union Station to the Norfolk Southern (NS) line near 40th Street in Chicago, the NS to Amtrak south of Union Station, and Amtrak owned tracks to Union Station. The Preferred Alternative allows for eight daily round trips at 110 miles per hour (mph) on two tracks.

Other improvements also identified in the Final EIS include sidings, pedestrian grade separations at the stations, and grade separations along major roadways. Individual component projects along the corridor would be advanced and studied in greater detail as future Tier 2 project-level evaluations, as part of the tiered environmental review process.

A Tier 2 project-level evaluation for improvements in Springfield is also included within the Final EIS. The Springfield Rail Improvements Project has been advanced concurrently as a component of the overall corridor program. The Tier 2 evaluation further considers the environmental and transportation impacts of alternatives following different rail routes through the City of Springfield, Illinois. The evaluation addresses safety, noise, and traffic delays that would result from increased volumes of both passenger and freight rail traffic on the three north-south rail corridors that pass through the City of Springfield. In Springfield (as identified in the Tier 2 project-level evaluation), the Preferred Alternative is to shift Union Pacific (UP) freight as well as new and existing Amtrak passenger trains to an expanded NS corridor along Tenth Street.

This Final EIS has been prepared in compliance with the provisions of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR part 1500 *et seq.*), and FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 FR 28545; May 26, 1999).

Issued in Washington, DC, on November 15, 2012.

Corey W. Hill,

Director, Office of Passenger and Freight Programs.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Railroad Administration

[Docket Number FRA-2002-13398]

Petition for Waiver of Compliance

In accordance with Parts 240 and 242 of Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), this document provides the public notice that by a document dated August 16, 2012, the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART) has petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a waiver of compliance from certain provisions of the Federal railroad safety regulations contained at 49 CFR part 240—Qualification and Certification of Locomotive Engineers and 49 CFR part 242—Qualification and Certification of Conductors for continued operation of its TECO Line Streetcar System at a “limited connection” with a railroad operated by CSX Transportation (CSX).