

# **Appendix J: Coordination Plan**



## **J. COORDINATION PLAN**

### **J.1 INTRODUCTION**

#### **J.1.1 Purpose of the Coordination Plan**

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU 6002), enacted August 10, 2005, requires lead agencies to develop a plan for coordination public and agency participation during the environmental review process. The purpose of the coordination plan is to facilitate and document the lead agencies structured interaction with the public and other agencies and inform the public and other agencies of how the coordination will be carried out. The intention is to expedite and improve the environmental review process by clearly outlining the coordination process.

#### **J.1.2 Project Overview**

NJ TRANSIT in conjunction with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is proposing a long-range rail-based transit investment in northeastern Hudson County and southeastern Bergen County, generally known as the Northern Branch Corridor that would address existing mobility issues within the corridor. The FTA is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and FTA/FHWA regulations to assess the impacts associated with the proposed new passenger rail service in the Northern Branch Corridor. The proposed passenger rail alternatives would operate along an existing rail right-of-way from North Bergen, Hudson County, to either Englewood or Tenafly in Bergen County, a distance of approximately 8 to 12 miles, respectively. Two vehicle modes are being evaluated for operation of this new service: a light rail extension of the existing Hudson-Bergen Light rail system or the FRA-compliant DMU railcar.

#### **J.1.3 Public Involvement Project History**

The Northern Branch Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) began in 1996 as a continuation of the *West Shore Region Study*, which examined transit options from a regional perspective and included the track segment referred to today as the Northern Branch. Between 1997 and 1999 the West Shore Region public outreach program was implemented to inform the public and elected officials of the purpose of the study, explain the transportation alternatives under consideration, describe the evaluation of alternatives, and detail the environmental review activities.

At the time of the West Shore study, the Northern Branch portion of the network was assumed to be an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) system, which was expected to terminate at the Vince Lombardi Park-Ride on the NJ Turnpike. The outreach effort was based on this assumption; consequently, the alternative recommended for the Northern Branch Corridor in the 1999 West Shore Alternatives Analysis Report (AAR) was a light rail system to Tenafly.

Electric light rail-based alternatives were discussed publicly during the initial 2001 scoping process for the Northern Branch Project. Shortly after the release of the 2001 Scoping Document, the HBLR MOS II was redefined and a new terminal station identified at Tonnelle Avenue in North Bergen instead of 85<sup>th</sup> Street. The new terminal was located south of the existing North Bergen freight rail yard and eliminated the need for avoidance measures to keep the light rail vehicle separated from freight trains.

The lack of an HBLR connection through the North Bergen freight rail yard presented new challenges to the Northern Branch project, which up to this point was expected to provide a service similar to the existing HBLR, seamlessly integrating the HBLR with Northern Branch service at a location in North Bergen, without a transfer. While this integration was still possible, it presented technical and financial obstacles that threatened to compromise the cost-effectiveness of the project. NJ TRANSIT decided to reevaluate the Northern Branch alternatives.

The development of an FRA-compliant DMU vehicle in 2002 presented a solution to the Northern Branch problem of providing passenger rail service through the freight yard and on tracks shared with active freight service. The Northern Branch project was consequently revised, replacing the initially-proposed LRT service with the DMU service that would not interfere with existing freight activities on the Northern Branch. Outreach efforts beginning in October 2004 and carrying through mid-2006 focused on introducing the DMU alternative to the study area elected officials and stakeholders.

In response to feedback from the public and elected officials representing the study area, a new scoping initiative re-introduced the project with four alternatives representing two different vehicle modes—LRT and DMU. This coordination plan and public outreach efforts will focus on the merits of each mode of transit, eliciting input from agencies and from the communities that would be served by the proposed project, and culminating in the analysis presented in the EIS document.

## **J.2 LEAD, COOPERATING AND PARTICIPATING AGENCIES**

### **J.2.1 Lead Agency**

The Lead Agency is responsible for the preparation of an EIS in accordance with 23 CFR part 771 and 40 CFR parts 1500-1508. In addition, SAFETEA-LU 6002 specifies that the lead agencies must identify and involve participating agencies; develop coordination plans; provide opportunities for public and participating agency involvement in defining the purpose and need and determining the range of alternatives; and collaborate with participating agencies in determining methodologies and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives. In addition, lead agencies must provide increased oversight in managing the process and resolving issues.

NJ TRANSIT is the project sponsor and is seeking approval from the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) for the future construction of the Northern Branch Rail Project. The FTA will serve as the lead federal agency and NJ TRANSIT will serve as the joint lead agency.

### **J.2.2 Cooperating and Participating Agencies**

SAFETEA-LU 6002 created specific requirements for agency involvement in the EIS process. Federal, state, and local agencies involved in the coordination process are characterized as either cooperating or participating agencies. A cooperating agency, in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.5, is any Federal agency that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental issues addressed in the EIS. The cooperating agency is responsible for developing information and preparing environmental analysis in their area of expertise as requested by the lead agency.

No cooperating agencies were identified for this project.

The participating agency is a new category of involvement created by SAFETEA-LU 6002. The participating agency is any Federal, State, tribal, regional, and local government agencies that may have

an interest in the project. The following are some of the roles and responsibilities of participating agencies as identified by SAFETEA-LU 6002:

- Participating in the NEPA process starting at the earliest possible time, especially with regard to the development of the purpose and need statement, range of alternatives, methodologies, and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives.
- Identifying, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the project's potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts. Participating agencies also may participate in the issue resolution process.
- Providing meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues.
- Participating in the scoping process. The scoping process should be designed so that agencies whose interest in the project comes to light as a result of initial scoping activities are invited to participate and still have an opportunity for involvement.

A list of participating agencies is provided in Table J-1.

**Table J-1. Participating Agencies**

<b>Participating Agency</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Title</b>
NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection	Lisa Jackson	Commissioner
Federal Highway Administration, NJ Division	Dennis Merida	Division Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration	Joseph Boardman	Administrator
Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission	Robert Ceberio	Executive Director
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection	Ken Koschek	Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife
New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Charles Scott	
NJ Department of Transportation	Jen Chihwei	Senior Engineering Planning
NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection	Lawrence Schmidt	Director, Coastal Planning & Program Coordination
North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority	Joel Weiner	Executive Director
Office of Natural & Historic Resources	Cari Wild	Assistant Commissioner
US Army Corps of Engineers	Richard Tomer	Chief-Eastern Permit Section
US Environmental Protection Agency-Region 2	John Filippelli	Chief, Strategic Planning and Multi-Media Programs Branch
US Environmental Protection Agency-Region 2	Grace Musumeci	Chief, Environmental Review Section

### **J.3 AGENCY COORDINATION, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, COORDINATION POINTS**

#### **J.3.1 Agency Coordination**

The Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) has been utilized as an agency involvement forum throughout the history of the Northern Branch Corridor DEIS in order to communicate with regulatory and review agencies the status of the study, solicit input, and engage agencies in the environmental review

process. As a continuation of this agency involvement practice, participating agencies will be asked to serve on the TAC. Members will be asked to review scoping documents, provide input on appropriate methodologies for analysis of alternatives and will be consulted at various periods of the EIS process including the project scoping, DEIS comment period and drafting of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

### **J.3.2 Public Involvement**

The public will be given an opportunity for input at various stages of the EIS process including public scoping meetings, public meetings/open houses, public hearings for the DEIS and comment period for the FEIS.

Scoping meetings will be held to review the study scope and approach and to receive comments and suggestions for consideration from agencies and the general public. Input will be solicited on the purpose and need for the Northern Branch Corridor improvements; on the study's goals and objectives; alternatives to be evaluated; social, economic or environmental issues of concern; and, the proposed public participation program.

Open house meetings will be held in which attendees can informally view project materials available for display, review alternatives and ask study team members questions and provide feedback.

Formal public hearings will be conducted upon the completion of the DEIS. The purpose of DEIS hearings is to receive public comment on the findings of the DEIS. These comments are considered in the preparation of the FEIS. A 30-day comment period will follow the publication of the FEIS.

In addition to the TAC, a Citizens Liaison Committee (CLC) will be developed to foster communication between municipalities in the Northern Branch corridor and the study team. Members of the CLC will include mayors and their appointed representatives, town council members, citizens, and Chamber of Commerce members. Members of the original West Shore Region CLC will be invited to continue their involvement with the project. At committee meetings, the study team will present information and updates on the study status, elicit feedback from CLC members, and note comments and concerns for follow-up discussion at subsequent meetings.

A project website will be maintained throughout the project to keep the public informed of the EIS progress and to solicit public comment. The website will provide project materials, meeting handouts and presentations, and offer a feedback form/email address for study area stakeholders and the general public. The website will remain updated and active through the EIS process.

From the beginning of the Northern Branch Project, a mailing list of interested individuals, including CLC and TAC members, elected officials, agency representatives, and other stakeholders has been maintained by the project study team. The mailing list will be updated to remain current with changes in committee members and elections. A database mailing list will also be maintained of individuals submitting comments during the scoping period. Individuals on the mailing list will be notified via email or traditional mail as new outreach activities are planned. The database will be used during the DEIS public comment period, as well, to identify issues of concern and refine the public outreach process for the development of the FEIS.

### **J.3.3 Public Officials**

Although public officials and their representatives are included on the CLC, it is also important to have focused meetings with the leaders of each jurisdiction to discuss their unique needs and expectations. A

series of public official meetings will be conducted to disseminate important project information throughout the process.

### J.3.4 Coordination Points

A list of coordination points and the participants and actions associated with those points is provided in Table J-2.

**Table J-2. Coordination Points**

<b>Coordination Points</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Notice of Intent (NOI)	Lead Agencies	Draft NOI and Submit to <i>Federal Register</i> .
Scoping	Lead Agencies	Publish draft scoping document. Schedule public and agency scoping meetings. Solicit input on purpose and need and range of alternatives.
	Participating Agencies and the Public	Comment on draft scoping document. Comment on purpose and need and range of alternatives.
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meetings	Lead Agencies	Conduct TAC meetings to obtain input on methodologies, assessments and impacts. Provide agencies with information regarding alternatives and solicit comments.
	Participating Agencies	Collaborate on methodologies, assessments and impacts. Comment on alternatives.
Community Liaison Committee (CLC) Meetings	Lead Agencies	Conduct CLC meetings. Provide agencies with information regarding alternatives and solicit feedback.
	Public	Provide feedback on alternatives.
Open Houses	Lead Agencies	Informal sessions to disseminate information and solicit feedback.
	Public	Review alternatives and study materials. Request information, provide feedback.
DEIS	Lead Agencies	DEIS includes purpose and need, alternatives description, affected environment, and environmental consequences. Publish DEIS Notice of Availability (NOA). Conduct public hearing on DEIS.
	Participating Agencies and Public	Review DEIS and comment.
FEIS	Lead Agency	Review public comments and incorporate into FEIS. FEIS Notice of Availability (NOA).
	Participating Agencies and Public	Review and Submit Comments on FEIS.
Record of Decision (ROD)	Lead Agency	Submit ROD.