# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION...................................................................................................................................1
   1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION ...................................................................................................................1
   1.2 PURPOSE OF THE SCOPING DOCUMENT .....................................................................................3

2. STUDY OVERVIEW..............................................................................................................................4
   2.1 HISTORY OF PROJECT PLANNING .................................................................................................4
      2.1.1 West Shore Region Study ...........................................................................................................4
      2.1.2 Post West Shore Region Study Developments .........................................................................5
   2.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF POST-WEST SHORE REGION STUDY DEVELOPMENTS ....................................7
   2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) ...............................................................................7
   2.4 SCOPING PROCESS .......................................................................................................................8
   2.5 RELATED PROJECTS ......................................................................................................................10
   2.6 RELATED STUDIES AND ACTIVITIES ............................................................................................11
   2.7 SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS ........................................................................................................11

3. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION ...............................................................................................12
   3.1 PURPOSE AND NEED....................................................................................................................12
   3.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ...........................................................................................................13

4. ALTERNATIVES...................................................................................................................................16
   4.1 NORTHERN BRANCH CORRIDOR EIS ALTERNATIVES .................................................................16
   4.2 FUTURE CONNECTION TO MANHATTAN .......................................................................................17
      4.2.1 Tri-County Rail Concept Plan .................................................................................................18
      4.2.2 Northern Branch Commuter Rail Conversion ..........................................................................18

5. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ................................................................19

6. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM ..............................................................................................20
   6.1 NEWSLETTERS ..............................................................................................................................20
   6.2 STUDY WEBSITE ..........................................................................................................................20
   6.3 CITIZENS LIASON COMMITTEE (GLC) ........................................................................................20
   6.4 BREAK-OUT SESSIONS ...............................................................................................................21
   6.5 AGENCY COORDINATION ..........................................................................................................21
   6.6 SMALL TOWN MEETINGS ...........................................................................................................21
   6.7 SCOPING MEETINGS/PUBLIC HEARING(S) ...............................................................................21

APPENDIX A – NOTICE OF INTENT ........................................................................................................22
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Description

The Northern Branch Corridor project is proposed to address the transportation needs of southeastern Bergen County through the re-introduction of passenger rail service on an existing freight line that services customers between North Bergen and Northvale.

The Northern Branch Corridor is a densely settled suburban environment in northeastern Hudson County and southeastern Bergen County, New Jersey. The project area can generally be described as following the existing Northern Branch railroad right-of-way from south to north, roughly parallel to the Hudson River. Specifically, the study area begins in the vicinity of the existing North Bergen Bus Park-and-Ride in the Township of North Bergen, Hudson County, and continues north through North Bergen into the Bergen County municipalities of Fairview, Ridgefield, Palisades Park, Leonia, Englewood, and Tenafly, ending near the Tenafly/Cresskill border. To ensure full evaluation of all alternatives, the communities of Cresskill, Demarest, Closter, Norwood and Northvale are also included. An overview of the study area is provided in Figure 1.

Historically, transportation links have fueled the development of this area. Most significant was the arrival of the Erie Railroad (later Erie-Lackawanna) Northern Branch Line in the nineteenth century, which spurred the rapid growth of moderately dense dormitory communities throughout the study area. Residents utilized the railroad to reach jobs in Jersey City, Newark, and New York City (via Hudson River ferries and the Hudson Tube trains, now known as PATH). The railroad also encouraged the growth of a significant industrial and manufacturing sector, primarily in the southern half of the study area.

Throughout the twentieth century, the combination of many national and regional economic, political and transportation factors led to the deterioration of both passenger and freight rail services in the Northern Branch Corridor, much like many other railroad corridors in the country. These changes led to the discontinuation of passenger rail service in the Northern Branch corridor in the 1960s. Freight services decreased to one round trip per day.

As the area enters the twenty-first century, its character as a series of primarily bedroom communities continues. The area continues to grow as communities are redeveloped. Former industrial areas, primarily located in the southern portion of the corridor, are rapidly changing into commercial and even residential uses. However, unlike earlier periods of growth during which the railroads provided a reliable travel option, residents now depend entirely on the roadway system for mobility within the corridor.
Figure 1
Project Study Area

Northern Branch Corridor

- Municipal Boundary
- Municipalities within the Project Study Area
- Major Study Area
- Proposed Roadways
- Proposed Northern Branch Rail
- Hudson Bergen Light Rail
- Freight Only

0 2.5 5 Miles

Hudson County
Bergen County
Rockland County
Hudson Bergen Light Rail
1.2 Purpose of the Scoping Document

This Scoping Document for the Northern Branch DEIS is one part of a process, which is a requirement under the regulations and guidelines issued by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to implement the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and in conformance with Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. The purpose of the Scoping Document is to provide information to the public and agencies regarding the Northern Branch DEIS process, issues, alternatives and methodologies. The broader purpose of the scoping process is to provide an opportunity for the public and agencies to comment on and provide input to the Northern Branch DEIS as it is initiated.

This Scoping Document for the Northern Branch DEIS discusses the following topics:

**Overview:** outlines the history of project planning, describes the scoping process for the study, defines the study area, identifies related projects and studies, and presents the project schedule and contacts.

**Purpose and Need for the Project:** describes the purpose and need for improved transportation services in Bergen and northern Hudson Counties and identifies the related goals and objectives of the study.

**Alternatives:** summarizes the preliminary alternatives that will be examined in this Northern Branch DEIS.

**Social, Economic and Environmental Impacts:** identifies the types of environmental issues that will be analyzed in the Northern Branch DEIS.

**Public and Agency Involvement:** summarizes the public and agency participation program and identifies the public participation program elements. The outreach plan will remain flexible throughout the study to accommodate changing public needs.
2. STUDY OVERVIEW

2.1 History of Project Planning

2.1.1 West Shore Region Study

Passenger rail services, once operated on rail lines throughout Bergen County, were abandoned throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The growth of automobile usage and accompanying roadway congestion in subsequent decades led planners and officials to search for solutions to the growing traffic problems in the Bergen County area. Routes once used for passenger rail services were identified as opportunities to create new travel options to address roadway congestion.

In response to these growing concerns about congestion and its impact in the region, NJ TRANSIT, Bergen County and Rockland County initiated the West Shore Region Study in 1996 to examine mobility issues in Bergen County, New Jersey, and Rockland County, New York. Previous studies in the area, including the West Shore Commuter Rail Planning Study Phase I Final Report (Kaiser Engineers, December 1988) and the West Shore Line Evaluation Study (Sverdrup, April 1995), had examined only specific corridors and modes. The West Shore Region Study was undertaken to provide a comprehensive examination of multiple modal opportunities throughout the entire study area. The Alternatives Analysis Report (December 1999) for the West Shore Region Study was prepared to document the process which examined a broad range of preliminary alternatives and led to the selection of the Northern Branch Build Alternative for further analysis in the Major Investment Study/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (MIS/DEIS). The Build Alternative recommended for further study in the MIS/DEIS was an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail system from the vicinity of 85th Street in North Bergen to Tenafly. This Build Alternative assumed that the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail would be extended to the Vince Lombardi Park-and-Ride on the NJ Turnpike.

In June 2001 the FTA published a Notice of Intent to prepare an MIS/DEIS for the Northern Branch Corridor, which included a No Build Alternative and a Build Alternative, the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail extension from 85th Street to Tenafly. A Draft Scoping Document was prepared and a scoping meeting was held in July 2001. The Final Scoping Document was published in December 2001; no additional alternatives were carried forward into the MIS/DEIS. NJ TRANSIT initiated work on the analyses required to evaluate the environmental impacts of the No Build and Build Alternatives. During the time that these analyses were being conducted, several significant developments occurred that required a re-evaluation of the mode used to restore rail passenger service on the Northern Branch Corridor.
2.1.2 Post West Shore Region Study Developments

The West Shore Region Study considered several alternatives for providing passenger rail service to the Northern Branch Corridor communities, as well as various modes, including commuter rail, electric light rail, diesel light rail, and automated guideway. At that time, only commuter rail could operate in mixed freight traffic; automated guideway required a separate track, and both electric and diesel light rail required either separate tracks or rescheduling freight service to overnight operation. All modes with the exception of the electric light rail were eliminated from further study due to the limited right-of-way in the area of 69th Street to 85th Street, where it was assumed that the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail would be constructed. As a result, the recommended alternative for the Northern Branch Corridor in the 1999 AAR was an electric light rail system from Tenafly to 85th Street in North Bergen, where it would then continue on Hudson-Bergen Light Rail track to Hoboken Terminal.

Below is a summary of the more significant developments that occurred after the publication of the West Shore Region Study which generated the need to take a fresh look at the analysis and ultimate recommendations contained in the West Shore Region Study.

2000 Census and Market Needs

According to the 2000 Census, there are more than 884,000 residents of Bergen County. Projections for growth indicate this number will increase to almost 1,000,000 by 2030. Bergen County’s population increase is part of a much larger migration as estimates anticipate more than 1.5 million people locating west of the Hudson by 2030. The current commuting patterns in Bergen County’s Northern Branch Corridor indicate two significant destinations: Manhattan and New Jersey’s Hudson River Waterfront. Presently, the Northern Branch Corridor generates more than 26,000 daily commuters, of which 87% travel to Manhattan. Only 13% cite the Waterfront as their destination. Equally as significant is the mode of transportation indicated, of the more than 23,000 who commute from the Corridor to Manhattan, 92% use either cars or buses thus contributing to the region’s traffic congestions on local roads and river crossings. Even the 3,400 that daily commute to the Waterfront prefer their cars by 85%. The situation only becomes more acute when the growth projections for new jobs in Manhattan are considered. It is anticipated that by 2030 almost 400,000 new jobs will be created in midtown Manhattan alone, significantly increasing the demand for cross-Hudson commuting options. This growth places increasing pressures on the region’s already congested roads and river crossings as well as on the bus traffic through the at-capacity Lincoln Tunnel.

Modern DMU Technology

In February 2002, Colorado Railcar Manufacturing introduced the first self-propelled diesel-multiple-unit (DMU) vehicle meeting the Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) newest structural requirements, as defined in 49 CFR Part 238, for vehicles operating in mixed freight traffic. The availability of this technology, which had previously been considered unproven, as well as the advancement of the THE Tunnel project, enabled NJ TRANSIT to reconsider the interconnection of northern New Jersey with the existing commuter rail system. Additionally, the DMU provides an opportunity for the efficient reuse of existing freight lines to provide commuter rail service. This is particularly important in densely settled environments, such as Bergen County, where reuse of existing rail infrastructure can reduce or eliminate environmental and/or
community disruptions caused by new construction. The FRA-compliant Colorado Railcar is currently operating in Florida and contracts have been awarded for similar vehicles by transit properties in Oregon and North Carolina.

**Access to the Region’s Core (ARC)**

Concurrent with the West Shore Region MIS/EIS, NJ TRANSIT, in conjunction with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, initiated a multi-phase study entitled *Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) Major Investment Study (MIS)*. Phase 1 of the ARC MIS identified 137 alternatives for initial screening, including commuter railroad (five corridors), subway (extensions of existing service and new service), Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) service (extensions and connections to NYC subway), bus, ferry, light rail, multimodal, new technology, freight, and automobile. Preliminary screening in Phase 2 reduced the 137 alternatives to 15 alternatives, including: multi-link connections involving new subway or bus tunnels under the Hudson River; commuter rail; rapid rail transit; and joint-use tunnels. Further quantitative and qualitative evaluation reduced this list of 15 alternatives to four alternatives, which was further refined to advance the Trans-Hudson Express (THE) Tunnel. The *Final ARC MIS Summary Report* was published in 2003. In July 2006, the Federal Transit Administration approved the initiation of Preliminary Engineering for THE Tunnel. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the ARC Project was published in February 2007 and public hearings were held in March 2007. Work is underway to address the comments received on the document.

**Hudson Bergen Light Rail MOS I, II, III**

The West Shore Region Study assumed the northern terminus of the HBLR (MOS II) to be at 85th Street in North Bergen. This is significant in that it anticipated the construction of a highly expensive and difficult section through the North Bergen freight yard. That expectation helped support the West Shore Region Study’s recommendation of light rail on the Northern Branch. Ultimately, however, the HBLR terminated at Tonnelle Avenue in North Bergen and never confronted the obstacles of running non FRA-compliant light rail vehicles through an active freight yard. Additionally, HBLR MOS III did not advance to the Vince Lombardi Park and Ride in Ridgefield, a modification which would impact the Bergen-Passaic Corridor as discussed below. These changes presented an opportunity to rethink the passenger rail network both north and west of North Bergen. The availability of the DMU further supported a new perspective when considering alternatives.

**Passaic-Bergen Corridor**

The West Shore Region Study’s light rail alternative for the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad in western Bergen and eastern Passaic Counties could also be rethought in response to the final construction of the HBLR and the advance of new rail technologies. As a shared use freight/passenger rail corridor, the DMU now offered a significant financial relief from the expense of maintaining time or physically separated operations. Additionally, with the termination of the HBLR at Tonnelle Avenue in North Bergen, a light rail system for the Passaic-Bergen Corridor would not benefit from the expense of connections already made through the North Bergen freight yard.
Meadowlands

The emergence of the Meadowlands Xanadu as a major entertainment destination refocuses attention on the application of light rail as a suitable transportation alternative. Not susceptible to the requirements of sharing track with freight, a proposed extension of the HBLR to this location in Secaucus would enable a one-seat ride from major population centers of Hudson County. Additionally, the employment opportunities created in the service, amusement and hospitality industries by the Xanadu development could be accessed by the same market via light rail.

2.2 Significance of Post-West Shore Region Study Developments

The developments mentioned above significantly change the baseline assumptions against which the original West Shore Region Study’s recommendations were made. Whether considered individually or in combinations, the effect of the following developments require a re-evaluation of the original Study's conclusions:

- The advancement of new passenger rail technology (DMU) which opens the use of shared freight corridors and eliminates the need for time or physical separated operations as well as reducing the impact and inconvenience of construction on surrounding communities and environments
- The termination of the HBLR at North Bergen’s Tonnelle Avenue as opposed to 85th Street which would have assumed solving the issue of bringing light rail operations through an active freight yard (North Bergen freight yard)
- The increase in congestion on Bergen County’s local roads and river crossings as well as the at-capacity of buses using the Lincoln Tunnel
- The current size and projected growth of Bergen County’s population and its increasing dependence on auto and bus commuting to Manhattan
- The anticipated increases in Manhattan-based jobs and the need to provide a cross-Hudson commuting alternative to the automobile and bus
- The advancement of THE Tunnel and its ability to connect commuter rail networks with Manhattan

As a result, an analysis of the vehicle technology needs to be conducted for this Corridor. FTA and NJ TRANSIT have, therefore, reissued the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Northern Branch Rail Corridor passenger rail service restoration project. FTA and NJ TRANSIT have, therefore, reissued the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Northern Branch Rail Corridor passenger rail service restoration project. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will serve as the lead federal
agency for the environmental review. The EIS will be prepared in accordance with the following: NEPA (as amended) and the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) implementing regulations for NEPA; Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (USDOT) Act of 1966; FTA NEPA regulations (23 C.F.R. Part 771); and other applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

The EIS Development Process is shown in Figure 2.

### 2.4 Scoping Process

The purpose of the scoping process is to provide an opportunity for the public and agencies to comment on and provide input to the Northern Branch EIS as it is initiated. On October 2, 2007, FTA published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to initiate the Northern Branch EIS, the subject of this Draft Scoping Document. This effort builds upon the planning and public outreach activities previously conducted as they relate to development of goals and objectives, screening of alternatives, and evaluation of impacts. Analyses will be updated as necessary to reflect conditions that may have changed since the previous scoping process was concluded. A copy of the NOI is included in Appendix A.

A Draft Scoping Document is prepared as one part of the scoping process to provide information to the public and agencies on the Northern Branch DEIS process, issues, alternatives and methodologies. This draft Scoping Document for the Northern Branch EIS will be mailed to pertinent federal, state, and local agencies and provided upon request to any interested party. Comments on the draft Scoping Document may be made orally at the public scoping meetings, or in writing throughout the scoping process. A Final Scoping Document will be prepared as a revision to the Draft Scoping Document based on the comments received from the public and agencies during the scoping process.

Agency and public 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. Both groups will be asked to comment 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.

The general public and interest groups will be invited via various advertising and outreach mechanisms, and federal, state, and local agencies will be invited by letter to participate in the scoping process.

The scoping meetings for the Northern Branch Corridor EIS will be held:

- **Wednesday, October 24, 2007**
  - 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm
  - and
  - 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm
- Crowne Plaza Englewood Hotel
- 401 S. Van Brunt St.
- Englewood, NJ 07631
FIGURE 2
EIS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Notice of Intent & Scoping Procedures

Draft EIS

Agency/Public Review & Comment

Final EIS

Record of Decision

Agency Action
Registration to speak will begin at 2:30 p.m. and will remain open until 4:30 p.m. for the afternoon session; registration to speak will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will remain open until 8:30 p.m. for the evening session.

Information and scoping materials can be found on the project website http://NorthernBranchCorridor.com. Additionally, interested parties can post questions and/or sign up for the mailing list on the website.

The formal scoping comment period closes on November 7, 2007. Formal scoping comments can be given either orally at the above scoping meetings, or in writing to Linda A. Mosch, P.E., Project Director, Northern Branch EIS, NJ TRANSIT, One Penn Plaza East, Newark, NJ 07105-2246. Pertinent oral comments received at the meetings and written comments received via letter will be summarized in the Final Scoping Document.

### 2.5 Related Projects

NJ TRANSIT and NJDOT are currently implementing a number of major network expansion projects that have relevance to the Northern Branch Corridor EIS. These projects include:

- **69th Street Bridge**, a new bridge at 69th Street in North Bergen to grade separate the roadway over the CSX and NYS&W railroads
- **U.S. Route 1/9 widening**
- **Meadowlands Commuter Rail Project**, an extension of commuter rail service via the Pascack Valley Line and a new station to serve the New Jersey Meadowlands area, including the Sports Complex
- **Hudson-Bergen Light Rail 8th Street Extension** in Bayonne
- **Pascack Valley Line sidings**
- **Passaic-Bergen Rail Restoration**, a project to provide rail passenger service between Hawthorne and Hackensack, serving up to nine new stations along the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway (NYS&W) Main Line rail corridor. The new service will demonstrate the use of diesel-multiple-unit (DMU) rail vehicles compliant with Federal Railroad Administration standards that allow the vehicles to share the railroad right-of-way with freight trains.
- **Access to the Region’s Core (ARC)**, the construction of a new trans-Hudson tunnel that will more than double the capacity of NJ TRANSIT train service to midtown New York to accommodate present and future demand, to offer added one-seat ride service to existing rail lines, and to provide reliability and system redundancy to the existing 100-year-old infrastructure. Major elements include two new single-track Hudson River rail tunnels, a new station expansion under 34th Street in New York, construction of new track connections in Secaucus, and additional rail yard in Kearny, and other related infrastructure improvements that support full utilization of the new tunnel’s capacity.
2.6 Related Studies and Activities

NJ TRANSIT is studying a number of major network expansion proposals and engaging in other activities that have relevance to the Northern Branch Corridor EIS. These related studies and activities with which the EIS will be coordinated include:

- **West Shore DEIS**, a study by NJ TRANSIT that will examine the potential benefits, costs, and social, economic, and environmental impacts of reasonable and feasible alternatives for improving access in the West Shore study area
- **Meadowlands Phase II**, a further extension of commuter rail service from the Sports Complex Station to NJ TRANSIT’s Bergen County and Main Lines
- **Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Meadowlands Extension**, an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail from North Bergen through Secaucus to the New Jersey Meadowlands area

2.7 Schedule and Contacts

The schedule for completion of the Northern Branch Corridor EIS is outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publish Notice of Intent to Prepare EIS</td>
<td>October 2, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Scoping Document</td>
<td>October 2, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency and Public Scoping Meetings</td>
<td>October/November 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoping Comment Period</td>
<td>November 7, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Scoping Document</td>
<td>November 28, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of DEIS</td>
<td>Fall/Winter 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEIS Distribution</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEIS Comment Period</td>
<td>Spring/Summer 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Hearing(s) on DEIS</td>
<td>Summer 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contact people for FTA and NJ TRANSIT are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Reyes-Alicea</td>
<td>Community Planner, Northern Branch EIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office of Planning and Program Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda A. Mosch, P.E.</td>
<td>Project Director, Capital Planning &amp; Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ TRANSIT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Bowling Green, Room 429</td>
<td>One Penn Plaza East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY 10004-1415</td>
<td>Newark, NJ 07105-2246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212-668-2203 (voice)</td>
<td>973-491-8481 (voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212-668-2136 (fax)</td>
<td>973-995-4445 (fax)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

3.1 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Northern Branch project is to address the transportation needs of southeastern Bergen County through the re-introduction of rail transit service. The project area is heavily populated and is centrally located in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area. The area is directly west of the Hudson River, in close proximity to Manhattan. The area’s location relative to New York City has played an important role in its development and continues to be an important factor in the economy of the area.

Most of the transportation problems in the project area are the result of the great changes that have taken place during the past 30 years. While Bergen County’s population had not changed significantly until 1990, there have been other significant changes. The number of households has grown, resulting in smaller households and more workers per household than in the past. Even more significant has been the growth in employment from 1960 to today. The number of jobs only tells part of the story about the project area’s economy. The economy is diversifying. A growing number of the jobs are now service oriented, with fewer in the manufacturing sector. This shift has contributed to the area’s transportation problems because service sector businesses generate more trips than manufacturing businesses, especially during the off-peak travel periods.

The growth in households and the diversification of the economy have caused an increase in travel in the project area in recent years. The increases have been during the peak travel periods, the off-peak weekday periods, and the weekend periods. Congestion on the roads is a growing problem, which is reducing overall mobility in the area and could constrain future economic growth, and may affect the area’s very high standard of living.

While the transportation system continues to provide a fairly high level of mobility for some residents and businesses, many parts of the system are straining to accommodate the new demands caused by a growing economy. The area’s roadways provide the best evidence of the strains on the system. While more roads are congested for longer periods, there are few opportunities to expand local or regional roadway capacity. The project area has a substantial transit system. However, there is evidence that the system is not providing service for all of the markets that could be served. Further investments in transit would improve mobility in Bergen County, alleviating some traffic congestion, and supporting continued economic growth. Provision of new transportation service in the Northern Branch Corridor would address:

- Commuting to New York City (trans-Hudson) from Bergen County;
- Inter- and intra-corridor commuting, both to employment centers within the project corridor, and from the project corridor to employment locations in other areas of New Jersey; and,
- Non-work trips including business, shopping, recreational, and education to New York City, within the corridor, and to destinations outside the corridor in New Jersey.
3.2 Goals and Objectives

Based on the needs identified in the project area, goals and objectives in the Northern Branch Corridor were identified in the early planning studies and are as follows.

Goal 1: Meet the needs of travelers in the project area.

Objectives:

- **Attract riders to transit.** A central goal of the project is to attract more riders to rail transit in the Northern Branch corridor. In spite of its proximity to New York, eastern Bergen County continues to have high single occupancy vehicle commutation. The goal of re-introducing rail transit is to encourage a greater transit ridership both on opening day and into the future.

- **Improve travel time.** Travelers in the project area put a high value on their time, and are looking for travel options that will improve their travel time and reliability.

- **Improve convenience.** Travelers are looking for new travel options that will make traveling in the region more convenient. They are looking for frequent service, adequate parking at stations, competitive travel times, and convenient connections to other transit services, such as ferries, PATH, and feeder services.

- **Provide more options for travelers.** Today, travelers are severely limited in their travel options. Transit can be used for only a very small portion of the area’s travel needs. Travelers want more travel options to meet their diverse travel needs. Options could include service to many destinations, including Midtown, Lower Manhattan, the Hudson River Waterfront, Newark, and recreational areas, such as the Sports Complex and the Jersey Shore, especially on weekends and at night.

- **Improve services for the low-income/minority/transit dependent travelers.** Transit dependent residents in the project area need good transit options to more of the region’s jobs, not only the jobs in Manhattan, but growing employment centers in New Jersey, like the Hudson River Waterfront area, Newark, the Meadowlands, and Bergen and Rockland employment centers.

Goal 2: Advance Cost-Effective Transit Solutions

Objectives:

- **Support favorable farebox recovery.** For the vast majority of transit systems, fare revenue does not cover the cost of providing service. However, higher farebox recovery ratios allow transit agencies to maximize the amount of service that can be provided for the same dollar of public operating subsidy. One of the goals of the Northern Branch project is to introduce rail transit to the corridor in a manner that is sensitive to the need to minimize the operating subsidy required to run the service. This will help ensure that the provision of transit service in the corridor is financially sustainable.

- **Advance cost-effective transit solutions.** The objective is to advance a project that, from a cost-benefit perspective, provides the greatest overall benefit at the lowest capital cost.

- **Support future expansion, scalability and affordability.** The Northern Branch project should allow for future transit expansion while at the same time provide a solution that is affordable to construct. With limited capital funds, the ability to advance projects in
phases helps to keep the projects affordable. Project scalability allows projects to be constructed without precluding future expansion projects. One of the criteria on which the Northern Branch project will be evaluated is the degree to which one phase of a project integrates into a more global planning effort for transportation improvement in the region.

Goal 3: Encourage economic growth.

Objectives:
- **Provide transportation capacity to support growth.** Population and employment growth in and around Bergen County and Hudson County is expected to continue in the future. Additional transportation capacity and new travel options will be needed to support this growth, providing access between the jobs in the counties and surrounding residential communities. Growing congestion will continue to have negative impacts on the area’s economy in the future.
- **Help attract new businesses.** Companies looking to locate new facilities, or expand existing facilities in Bergen County and Hudson County, will be looking for assurances that steps are being taken to provide the area with new travel alternatives. One of the major assets of this area is its proximity to New York City and its role in sustaining the strength of the State Plan's Metropolitan Planning Area. New transportation choices that improve access to New York and the rest of the region will help Bergen County and Hudson County to maintain their competitive advantage in the region.

Goal 4: Improve regional access.

Objectives:
- **Provide connections to a variety of locations within the region.** With the one exception of Manhattan, Bergen County's access to the rest of the region is almost entirely by auto, on highways that are becoming increasingly congested. With the completion of the Secaucus Transfer, the areas served by the Main, Bergen, and Pascack Valley lines now benefit from rail access to the growing Hudson River Waterfront area, to Newark, to Trenton, and to the major recreational attractions, like the Meadowlands and the New Jersey Shore.

Goal 5: Reduce roadway congestion.

Objectives:
- **Provide more travel options for travelers trying to avoid highway congestion.** Major regional highways in the project area are heavily congested. There are a limited number of major highways, each serving intra-county and regional travel needs. Congestion in Bergen County is a growing problem, which is likely to become more serious in the future. Transit strategies are unlikely to substantially reduce congestion, but can provide useful new travel alternatives for travelers trying to avoid congestion.
Goal 6: Enhance the transit network.

Objectives:

- **Eliminate gaps in the rail network.** Bergen County’s transit share for trips to Manhattan is lower than any other part of northern New Jersey. This is due to several gaps in the transit network serving the area. For example, there is no rail service in eastern Bergen County. The closest rail line is the Pascack Valley Line, which is west of the Hackensack River. This inconvenient and capacity-constrained line is not an option for most residents of eastern Bergen County. Also, rail service is infrequent during off-peak periods. Rail service is best to Lower Manhattan, via PATH and ferry, less effective to the Valley, between Canal Street and 34th Street, via PATH, and most difficult to Midtown.

- **Eliminate gaps in the bus network.** The bus network in eastern Bergen County also has some gaps. First, the network only serves Midtown Manhattan. Also, in the eastern most parts of the county, there is little or no bus service. In the more central parts of the study area there are many bus routes. However, these routes are generally slow because they travel on local roads and make many stops along the route to pick up passengers.
4. ALTERNATIVES

4.1 Northern Branch Corridor EIS Alternatives

The following alternatives are recommended for further analysis in the Northern Branch Corridor EIS:

- No Build Alternative
- Diesel-Multiple-Unit Vehicle Alternatives
  - Terminus at Hudson Avenue in Tenafly
  - Terminus at NJ Route 4 in Englewood
- Electric Light Rail Vehicle Alternatives
  - Terminus at Hudson Avenue in Tenafly
  - Terminus at NJ Route 4 in Englewood

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative includes the existing transportation network, as well as any roadway and transit projects that will be completed by 2030. The FTA defines the No Build Alternative as including only “committed” improvements, which typically includes the projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) or other local capital programs, plus other minor transit service expansions or adjustments. The No Build Alternative reflects conditions in the future if no new actions are taken from the proposed project. For the Northern Branch Corridor EIS, the No Build Alternative includes the current transportation network plus programmed and committed projects, such as THE Tunnel.

Diesel-Multiple-Unit Vehicle Alternative

The Northern Branch Corridor Diesel-Multiple-Unit (DMU) Vehicle Alternative would provide service to municipalities along the corridor between North Bergen and Tenafly, linking to the Hudson River waterfront via the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail at a transfer station in North Bergen. Mobility would be improved to and from towns along the line, Midtown Manhattan via transfer at Weehawken, and Downtown Manhattan via transfer at Hoboken. The construction of THE Tunnel and a future connection to it from the Northern Branch affords the opportunity to provide direct service from the Northern Branch to Midtown Manhattan.

The Northern Branch Corridor DMU Vehicle Alternative will involve construction of new transportation infrastructure, including stations and yards. A vehicle storage facility will be investigated in the vicinity of North Bergen. Stations in the following communities will be investigated:

- North Bergen
- Fairview
- Ridgefield
• Palisades Park
• Leonia
• Englewood
• Tenafly

Additional analyses will be conducted to evaluate the impacts of terminating the service at NJ Route 4 in Englewood.

**Electric Light Rail Vehicle Alternative**

The Electric Light Rail Vehicle Alternative would provide service to municipalities along the corridor between North Bergen and Tenafly, linking to the Hudson River waterfront via an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail system. Mobility would be improved to and from towns along the line, Midtown Manhattan via transfer at Weehawken and Downtown Manhattan via transfer at Hoboken. This service will be time-separated from the freight operations – passenger service would operate between 5:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. while freight service would operate between 11:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.

The Electric Light Rail Vehicle Alternative will involve construction of new transportation infrastructure, including stations and yards. A vehicle storage facility will be investigated in the vicinity of Englewood. Stations in the following communities will be investigated:

• Fairview
• Ridgefield
• Palisades Park
• Leonia
• Englewood
• Tenafly

Additional analyses will be conducted to evaluate the impacts of terminating the service at NJ Route 4 in Englewood.

Analyses will also be conducted to evaluate the impacts to the communities north of Tenafly – Cresskill, Demarest, Closter, Norwood and Northvale – due to the proposed nighttime operation of the freight service to accommodate the time-separated electric light rail vehicle alternative.

**4.2 Future Connection to Manhattan**

The restoration of rail passenger service on the Northern Branch Corridor addresses current mobility issues and is, therefore, proposed as part of NJ TRANSIT’s overall master plan. In addition, there is a future opportunity to connect the Northern Branch Corridor to THE Tunnel. While the connection between the Northern Branch Corridor and THE Tunnel will be the subject of a separate future environmental process, analyses of ridership and capital costs will be included in the Northern Branch Corridor EIS.
4.2.1 Tri-County Rail Concept Plan

The potential for future connections to Manhattan is a central element in a much larger transportation plan for northern New Jersey. In 2004, NJ TRANSIT proposed the Tri-County Rail Concept Plan, a passenger rail initiative designed to combine existing rail infrastructure, the majority of which is the reuse of freight lines, with new construction to create an inter-connected network of rail lines serving Hudson, Bergen, and Passaic Counties. The major components of the Tri-County Rail Plan are:

- DMU passenger service between Tenafly and North Bergen (Northern Branch)
- A future connection from the Northern Branch to THE Tunnel
- Future northern expansion of the Northern Branch to Closter, Demarest and the New York State line
- DMU passenger service on the NYS&W between Hawthorne and Hackensack (Passaic-Bergen)
- A future connection from the Passaic-Bergen line to THE Tunnel
- Future westward expansion of the Passaic-Bergen line to Sparta
- HBLR service west to the Meadowlands
- Commuter rail connections to the Meadowlands from the Bergen and Pascack Valley lines

This wider transportation vision for northern New Jersey builds on the work done in the West Shore Region Study and further develops two of the Study’s three proposed commuter lines: Northern Branch and Passaic-Bergen. Originally proposed as light rail systems, the Tri-County Plan utilizes DMUs on these lines to: in the short term, provide passenger rail service within their respective corridors; and in the long term, provide for a one-seat ride via a THE Tunnel connection and dual-powered locomotives.

4.2.2 Northern Branch Commuter Rail Conversion

Northern Branch passenger rail service to Manhattan can also be accomplished independent of the methodology expressed in the Tri-County Rail Concept Plan. Regardless of the passenger rail technology selected for the first phase, a subsequent conversion of the system to FRA-approved commuter rail can also provide the same Manhattan connection.

For a diesel-multiple-unit system, the conversion would require:

- The use of dual-powered (electric and diesel) locomotives for travel through THE Tunnel
- The lengthening of platforms at Northern Branch station to accommodate longer consists

For an electric light rail system, the conversion would require:

- The use of FRA-approved electric commuter rail vehicles
- The lengthening of platforms at Northern Branch stations to accommodate longer consists
- The conversion of the catenary system from electric light rail voltage to commuter rail voltage
5. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EIS will consider all potential direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the project alternatives upon the social, economic and environmental resources in the project area. Generally, the project area has been defined as 150 feet on either side of the railroad corridor between North Bergen and Tenafly. However, the study areas for each resource will vary with its area of potential effect. Resources such as contaminated materials and archaeology, which can be directly affected by project construction, will have study areas confined to the limits of disturbance.

The impacts will be evaluated for the construction period and for the long-term period of operation. Measures to mitigate any significant adverse impacts will be considered. The analysis areas include:

1. Transportation Impacts
   - Air Quality
   - Noise and Vibration
   - Traffic, Parking, Transit, Pedestrians, and Freight Rail
   - Energy and Potential for Conservation
   - Electric and Magnetic Fields
   - Safety and Security

2. Impacts to the Natural Environment
   - Water Quality
   - Wetlands
   - Flooding
   - Navigable Waterways and Coastal Zones
   - Ecologically Sensitive Areas
   - Endangered Species
   - Hazardous Waste

3. Impacts to the Built Environment
   - Land Acquisition and Displacements
   - Land Use, Zoning and Economic Development
   - Consistency with Local Plans
   - Historic Properties and Resources
   - Parkland
   - Archaeology
   - Aesthetics
   - Community Disruption

4. Environmental Justice

5. Construction Impacts

6. Cumulative Impacts
6. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

A public involvement program has been a part of the West Shore Region Study and subsequent planning activities. As the project moves into the EIS phase, this public involvement program will continue to be a critical element of the study. This public involvement program has been designed to inform the public and elected officials of the purpose of the study, explain the transportation alternatives under consideration, describe the evaluation of the alternatives, and inform the public of environmental review activities. Components of the public participation program are described on the following pages.

6.1 Newsletters

From time to time, it may be necessary to publish a project or study update as milestones are achieved. This can be accomplished through the use of a newsletter distributed to members of the Citizens Liaison Committee, and made available at public libraries, municipal buildings, community centers, etc., throughout the Corridor. A newsletter would be event-driven and published only when significant activity has occurred.

6.2 Study Website

Periodically, information regarding the study will be posted on the project’s website, www.NorthernBranchCorridor.com. The website can also be used by the public to post questions or ask for information. This will ultimately generate an e-mail list of interested stakeholders who will receive electronic versions of newsletters.

6.3 Citizens Liaison Committee (CLC)

A Citizens Liaison Committee (CLC) has been initiated to foster communication and build consensus between municipalities and stakeholders in the Northern Branch Corridor and the study team. Members of the Committee include mayors or their appointed representatives, town council members and residents. Community-based organizations such as Chambers of Commerce, local service groups, historical societies, etc., are also encouraged to participate. In addition, to maintain continuity with previous work, wherever appropriate, members of the predecessor West Shore Region Study’s CLC were invited to participate in the Committee. Solicitation to join the CLC was accomplished through direct invitation – targeted to municipal and community leadership or organizations – and continues via an open invitation to the general public available on the project’s website.
6.4 Break-Out Sessions

When appropriate, Committee meetings will begin with a project's status presentation to update the CLC. Committee members will then be encouraged to break into small discussion groups focused on specific issues related to their communities. These sessions will give committee members an opportunity to engage in conversations with each other about study issues and to speak directly with study team members. Meeting minutes may be kept and questions raised by CLC participants requiring follow up will be noted.

6.5 Agency Coordination

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will be assembled to communicate with regulatory and review agencies in the region the status of the Northern Branch DEIS.

6.6 Small Town Meetings

At various points in the study process, meetings will be held with elected officials and citizens, in the towns along the study corridor. Attendees will be given the opportunity to voice their concerns and raise issues about new rail service in their community. As the study progress, more meetings with all towns being considered for stations will be held. Additionally, each community has received at least one briefing for the Town Council, Mayor, Business Administrator or combinations.

6.7 Scoping Meetings/Public Hearing(s)

These forums will be held during the Northern Branch DEIS to provide the general public an opportunity to learn about the study and to comment on its goals and objectives, alternatives, evaluation criteria, and environmental scope and findings.
APPENDIX A – NOTICE OF INTENT
Avenue, SE., Docket Operations, M–30, West Building, Ground Floor, Room W12–140, Washington, DC 20590–0001.

4. Hand Delivery: U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE., Docket Operations, M–30, West Building, Ground Floor, Room W12–140, Washington, DC 20590–0001 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

Instructions: You must include the agency name and docket number for this notice at the beginning of your comments. Submit two copies of your comments if you submit them by mail. For confirmation that FTA has received your comments, include a self-addressed stamped postcard. Note that all comments received, including any personal information, will be posted and will be available to Internet users, without change, to www.regulations.gov. You may review DOT’s complete Privacy Act Statement in the Federal Register published April 11, 2000, (65 FR 19477), or you may visit www.regulations.gov. Docket: For access to the docket to read background documents and comments received, go to www.regulations.gov at any time. Background documents and comments received may also be viewed at the U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE., Docket Operations, M–30, West Building, Ground Floor, Room W12–140, Washington, DC 20590–0001 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. David Schneider, FTA Office of Program Management 202–493–0175, fax: 202–366–3475, or e-mail: david.schneider@dot.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Interested parties are invited to send comments regarding any aspect of this information collection, including: (1) The necessity and utility of the information collection for the proper performance of the functions of the FTA; (2) the accuracy of the estimated burden; (3) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the collected information; and (4) ways to minimize the collection burden without reducing the quality of the collected information. Comments submitted in response to this notice will be summarized and/or included in the request for OMB approval of this information collection.

Title: 49 U.S.C. 5317, New Freedom Program.

(OMB Number: 2132–NEW)

Background: 49 U.S.C. 5317, the New Freedom Program authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to make grants to states and designated recipients in urbanized areas of 200,000 persons or greater to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand the transportation mobility options available to people with disabilities beyond the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Grant recipients are required to make information available to the public and to publish a program of projects which identifies the subrecipients and projects for which the State or designated recipient is applying for financial assistance. FTA uses the information to determine eligibility for funding and to monitor the grantees’ progress in implementing and completing project activities. FTA collects performance information from designated recipients in rural areas, small urbanized areas and other direct recipients for small urbanized areas annually and collects performance information from designated recipients in large urbanized areas on a quarterly basis. The information submitted ensures FTA’s compliance with applicable federal laws and OMB Circular A–102.

Respondents: State & local government, private non-profit organizations and public transportation authorities.

Estimated Annual Burden on Respondents: 251 hours for each of the 206 respondents.

Estimated Total Annual Burden: 122,374 hours.

Frequency: Annual and quarterly.


Ann Linnertz, Associate Administrator for Administration.

[FR Doc. E7–19420 Filed 10–1–07; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–57–P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Transit Administration

Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on the Restoration of Rail Service in the Northern Branch Corridor, Bergen and Hudson Counties, NJ

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

SUMMARY: The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ TRANSIT) intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to study the restoration of rail passenger service on the Northern Branch rail corridor between North Bergen, Hudson County, and Tonnafy, Bergen County. The EIS will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA: 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) of 1969 and the regulations implementing NEPA set forth in 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508 and 23 CFR Part 771, as well as provisions of the recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA–LU). The purpose of this Notice is to alert interested parties regarding the plan to prepare the EIS, to provide information on the nature of the proposed transit project, to invite participation in the EIS process, including comments on the scope of the EIS proposed in this notice, and to announce that public scoping meetings will be conducted. This notice supersedes the FTA notice of June 18, 2001 entitled “Major Investment Study/ Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Northern Branch Corridor, Bergen County, New Jersey.”

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the EIS should be sent to Linda A. Mosch, P.E., NJ TRANSIT Project Manager, by November 7, 2007. Public scoping meetings will be held on Wednesday, October 24, 2007 at 3 to 5 p.m. and at 7 to 9 p.m. at locations indicated under ADDRESSES below. An interagency scoping meeting will be scheduled after agencies with an interest in the proposed project have been identified.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the scope of the EIS should be sent to Linda A. Mosch, P.E., Project Director—Northern Branch EIS, NJ TRANSIT, One Penn Plaza East, Newark, NJ 07105–2246. Comments may also be offered at the public scoping meetings. The address for the public scoping meeting is as follows: Crowne Plaza Englewood Hotel, 401 S. Van Brunt St., Englewood, NJ 07631.

This location is accessible by persons with disabilities. If special translation or signing services or other special accommodations are needed, please contact the Project Director, Linda A. Mosch, P.E., at (973) 491–8481 least 48 hours before the meeting. A scoping information packet is available on the NJ TRANSIT Web site at http://NorthernBranchCorridor.com or by calling the Project Director, Linda A. Mosch, P.E., at (973) 491–8481. Copies will also be available at the scoping meetings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea, Community Planner, Federal Transit Administration, One Bowling Green, Room 429, New York, New York, 10004–1415, telephone (212) 668–2203.
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: I. Scoping

In accordance with Section 6002 of SAFETEA–LU, FTA and NJT invite comment on the scope of the EIS, specifically on project’s purpose and need, the alternatives to be evaluated that may address the purpose and need, and the impacts of the alternatives considered. To ensure that these issues are identified, the scoping meetings will begin with a formal presentation followed by the opportunity for the public to comment on the scope of the EIS. Oral and written comments may be given at the scoping meetings; a stenographer will record all comments. Those wishing to speak are required to register at the meeting location. Registration to speak will begin at 2:30 p.m. and will remain open until 4:30 p.m. for the afternoon session; registration to speak will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will remain open until 8:30 p.m. for the evening session. Written comments may be submitted at the meeting or may be mailed to the project manager at the address in ADDRESSES above.

II. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Project

The purpose of the Northern Branch project is to address the transportation needs of the Northern Branch Corridor through the re-introduction of rail transit service. The project area is heavily populated and is centrally located in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area. The area is directly west of the Hudson River, in close proximity to Manhattan. The area’s location relative to New York City has played an important role in its development and continues to be an important factor in the economy of the area.

Most of the transportation problems in the project area are the result of the great changes that have taken place during the past 30 years. While Bergen County’s population had not changed significantly until 1990, there have been other significant changes. The number of households has grown, resulting in smaller households and more workers per household than in the past. Even more significant has been the growth in employment from 1960 to today. The number of jobs only tells part of the story about the project area’s economy. The economy is diversifying. A growing number of the jobs are now service oriented, with fewer in the manufacturing sector. This shift has contributed to the area’s transportation problems because service sector businesses generate more trips than manufacturing businesses, especially during the off-peak travel periods.

The growth in households and the diversification of the economy have caused an increase in travel in the project area in recent years. The increases have been during the peak travel periods, the off-peak weekday periods, and the weekend periods. Congestion on the roads is a growing problem, which is reducing overall mobility in the area and could constrain future economic growth, and may affect the area’s very high standard of living.

While the transportation system continues to provide a fairly high level of mobility for some residents and businesses, many parts of the system are straining to accommodate the new demands caused by a growing economy. The area’s roadways provide the best evidence of the strains on the system. While more roads are congested for longer periods, there are few opportunities to expand local or regional roadway capacity. The project area has a substantial transit system. However, there is evidence that the system is not providing service for all of the markets that could be served. Further investments in transit would improve mobility in Bergen County, alleviating some traffic congestion, and supporting continued economic growth. Provision of new transportation service in the Northern Branch Corridor would address:

- Commuting to New York City (trans-Hudson) from Bergen County;
- Inter- and intra-corridor commuting, both to employment centers within the project corridor, and from the project corridor to employment locations in other areas of New Jersey;
- Non-work trips including business, shopping, recreational, and education to New York City, within the corridor, and to destinations outside the corridor in New Jersey.

Based on the needs identified in the project area, goals and objectives in the Northern Branch Corridor were identified in the early planning studies and are as follows.

Goal 1: Meet the Needs of Travelers in the Project Area

Objectives:

- Attract riders to transit. A central goal of the project is to attract more riders to rail transit in the Northern Branch corridor. In spite of its proximity to New York, eastern Bergen County continues to have high single occupancy vehicle commutation. The goal of re-introducing rail transit is to encourage a greater transit ridership both on opening day and into the future.
- Improve travel time. Travelers in the project area put a high value on their time, and are looking for travel options that will improve their travel time and reliability.
- Improve convenience. Travelers are looking for new travel options that will make traveling in the region more convenient. They are looking for frequent service, adequate parking at stations, competitive travel times, and convenient connections to other transit services, such as ferries, PATH, and feeder services.
- Provide more options for travelers. Today, travelers are severely limited in their travel options. Transit can be used for only a very small portion of the area’s travel needs. Travelers want more travel options to meet their diverse travel needs. Options could include service to many destinations, including Midtown, Lower Manhattan, the Hudson River Waterfront, Newark, and recreational areas, such as the Sports Complex and the Jersey Shore, especially on weekends and at night.
- Improve services for the low-income/minority/transit dependent travelers. Transit dependent residents in the project area need good transit options to more of the region’s jobs, not only the jobs in Manhattan, but growing employment centers in New Jersey, like the Hudson River Waterfront area, Newark, the Meadowlands, and Bergen Rockland employment centers.

Goal 2: Advance Cost-Effective Transit Solutions

Objectives:

- Support favorable farebox recovery. For the vast majority of transit systems, fare revenue does not cover the cost of providing service. However, higher farebox recovery ratios allow transit agencies to maximize the amount of service that can be provided for the same dollar of public operating subsidy. One of the goals of the Northern Branch project is to introduce rail transit to the corridor in a manner that is sensitive to the need to minimize the operating subsidy required to run the service. This will help ensure that the provision of transit service in the corridor is financially sustainable.
- Advance cost-effective transit solutions. The objective is to advance a project that, from a cost-benefit perspective, provides the greatest overall benefit at the lowest capital cost.
- Support future expansion, scalability and affordability. The Northern Branch project should allow for future transit expansion while at the same time provide a solution that is affordable to construct. With limited capital funds, the ability to advance projects in phases helps to keep the projects affordable. Project scalability...
allows projects to be constructed without precluding future expansion projects. One of the criteria on which the Northern Branch project will be evaluated is the degree to which one phase of a project integrates into a more global planning effort for transportation improvement in the region.

**Goal 3: Encourage Economic Growth**

Objectives:
- **Provide transportation capacity to support growth.** Population and employment growth in and around Bergen County and Hudson County is expected to continue in the future. Additional transportation capacity and new travel options will be needed to support this growth, providing access between the jobs in the counties and surrounding residential communities. Growing congestion will continue to have negative impacts on the area’s economy in the future.
- **Help attract new businesses.** Companies looking to locate new facilities, or expand existing facilities in Bergen County and Hudson County, will be looking for assurances that steps are being taken to provide the area with new travel alternatives. One of the major assets of this area is its proximity to New York City and its role in sustaining assets of this area is its proximity to New York City and its role in sustaining the strength of the State Plan’s Metropolitan Planning Area. New transportation choices that improve access to New York and the rest of the region will help Bergen County and Hudson County to maintain its competitive advantage in the region.

**Goal 4: Improve regional access**

Objectives:
- **Provide connections to a variety of locations within the region.** With the one exception of Manhattan, Bergen County’s access to the rest of the region is almost entirely by auto, on highways that are becoming increasingly congested. With the completion of the Secaucus Transfer, the areas served by the Main, Bergen, and Pascack Valley lines now benefit from rail access to the growing Hudson River Waterfront area, to Newark, to Trenton, and to the major recreational attractions, like the Meadowlands and the New Jersey Shore.

**Goal 5: Reduce Roadway Congestion**

Objectives:
- **Provide more travel options for travelers trying to avoid highway congestion.** Major regional highways in the project area are heavily congested. There are a limited number of major highways, each serving intra-county and regional travel needs. Congestion in Bergen County is a growing problem, which is likely to become more serious in the future. Transit strategies are unlikely to substantially reduce congestion, but can provide useful new travel alternatives for travelers trying to avoid congestion.

**Goal 6: Enhance the Transit Network**

Objectives:
- **Eliminate gaps in the rail network.** Bergen County’s transit share for trips to Manhattan is lower than any other part of northern New Jersey. This is due to several gaps in the transit network serving the area. For example, there is no rail service in eastern Bergen County. The closest rail line is the Pascack Valley Line, which is west of the Hackensack River. This inconvenient and capacity-constrained line is not an option for most residents of eastern Bergen County. Also, rail service is infrequent during off-peak periods. Rail service is best to Lower Manhattan, via PATH and ferry, less effective to the Valley, between Canal Street and 34th Street, via PATH, and most difficult to Midtown.
- **Eliminate gaps in the bus network.** The bus network in eastern Bergen County also has some gaps. First, the network only serves Midtown Manhattan. Also, in the eastern most parts of the county, there is little or no bus service. In the more central parts of the study area there are many bus routes. However, these routes are generally slow because they travel on local roads and make many stops along the route to pick up passengers.

**III. Alternatives Proposed for Consideration**

It is proposed that the EIS evaluate a Future No Build Alternative and Build alternatives of two modes: diesel-multiple-unit service from North Bergen to Tenafly, with a connection to the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail at Tonnelle Avenue in North Bergen; and an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail from its existing terminus at Tonnelle Avenue in North Bergen to Tenafly. Additionally, the EIS will evaluate both modal alternatives with a terminus at NJ Route 4 in Englewood.

**Future No Build Alternative:**

**Future No Build Alternative:** the Future No Build consists of the transportation system expected to be in place in the project design year if the proposed project were not built. It includes all other projects currently in the North Jersey Transportation Authority’s 20-year metropolitan transportation plan.

**Diesel-multiple-unit vehicle:** These alternatives would involve simultaneous operation of rail passenger and freight operations using the Northern Branch Corridor right-of-way. Terminal stations would be located at Tenafly, in the vicinity of Hudson Avenue; or at NJ Route 4 in Englewood.

**Light rail vehicle:** These alternatives would involve time-separated operation of rail passenger and freight operations using the Northern Branch Corridor right-of-way. Rail passenger service would operate between 5:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. with freight operations between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. Terminal stations would be located at Tenafly, in the vicinity of Hudson Avenue; or at NJ Route 4 in Englewood. In order to accommodate the shift of freight service to nighttime operation, corridor improvements would be constructed between Tenafly and Northvale.

The build alternatives will involve construction of new transportation infrastructure, including tracks, stations and yards. As many as 11 station locations will be evaluated. Any additional reasonable alternatives that come to light during the scoring process will also be evaluated.

**IV. Probable Effects**

The FTA and NJ TRANSIT will evaluate both project-specific and cumulative changes to the social, economic and physical environment—including land use and socioeconomic conditions, ecology, water resources, historic and archaeological resources, visual character and aesthetics, contaminated and hazardous materials, transportation, air quality, noise and vibration, and environmental justice effects. Mitigation of all adverse impacts will be considered.

**V. FTA Procedures**

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.105(a) and 771.133, FTA will comply with all Federal environmental laws, regulations, and executive orders applicable to the proposed project during the environmental review process to the maximum extent practicable. These requirements include, but are not limited to, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality and FTA implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508, and 23 CFR Part 771), the project-level air quality conformity regulation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (40 CFR part 93), the section 404(b)(1) guidelines of EPA (40 CFR part 230), the regulation implementing section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800), the regulation implementing section 7 of the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (40 CFR part 302), section 4(f) of the DOT Act (23 CFR 771.135), and Executive Orders
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Federal Transit Administration

Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Proposed Transit Improvements in the Crenshaw-Prairie Transit Corridor, Los Angeles, CA

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Crenshaw-Prairie Transit Corridor Project. The proposed project would provide for transit improvements within the Crenshaw-Prairie Corridor, which extends approximately 10 miles from Wilshire Boulevard on the north to El Segundo Boulevard on the south. The study area for the project includes portions of five jurisdictions: the Cities of Los Angeles, Inglewood, Hawthorne, El Segundo, as well as portions of unincorporated Los Angeles County, California. The study area is generally defined as the area extending north to Wilshire Boulevard, east to Arlington Avenue, south to El Segundo Boulevard, and west to Sepulveda and La Tijera Boulevards. A variety of land uses exist within the study area including single- and multi-family residences and commercial uses north of the Interstate 10 (I-10) freeway and south of Slauson Avenue, commercial uses along Crenshaw Boulevard and in Hawthorne, industrial and public land uses in Inglewood and El Segundo, as well as redevelopment areas in Los Angeles, Inglewood, and Hawthorne.

The EIS will be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations. The Draft EIS will be combined with the planning Alternatives Analysis required by 49 U.S.C. 5309 for New Starts-funded projects. LACMTA will also use the EIS document to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

which requires an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The purpose of this notice is to alert interested parties regarding the intent to prepare the EIS, to provide information on the nature of the proposed project and possible alternatives, to invite public participation in the EIS process (including providing comments on the scope of the Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS)), to announce that public scoping meetings will be conducted, and to identify participating and cooperating agency contacts.

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the EIS, including the project’s purpose and need, the alternatives to be considered, the impacts to be evaluated, and the methodologies to be used in the evaluations should be sent to LACMTA on or before November 5, 2007 at the address below. See ADDRESSES below for the address to which written public comments may be sent. Public scoping meetings to accept comments on the scope of the EIS/EIR will be held on the following dates:

- Monday, October 15, 2007, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at Darby Park, 3400 W. Arbor Vitae Street, Inglewood, CA 90305.
- Wednesday, October 17, 2007, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at Nate Holden Performing Arts Center, 4718 W. Washington Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90016.
- Saturday, October 20, 2007, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., at Audubon Middle School, 4120 11th Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90008.

The project’s purpose and need, and the initial set of alternatives proposed for study will be presented at these meetings. The buildings used for the scoping meetings are accessible to persons with disabilities. Any individual who requires special assistance, such as a sign language interpreter, to participate in a scoping meeting should contact Ms. Susan Gilmore, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) at 213-922-7287, or gilmores@metro.net. Scoping materials will be available at the meetings and are available on the LACMTA Web site (www.metro.net/crenshaw). Hard copies of the scoping materials may also be obtained from Ms. Susan Gilmore, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) at 213-922-7287, or gilmores@metro.net. An interagency scoping meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 16, 2007 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at LACMTA, One Gateway Plaza (Gateway Conference Room, 3rd Floor), Los Angeles, CA 90012.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Mr. Alan Patashnick, Project Manager and Director of South Bay Area Team, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, One Gateway Plaza, Mail Stop: 99–22–3, Los Angeles, California 90012, e-mail address patashnickalan@metro.net. The locations of the public scoping meetings are given above under DATES.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Ray Tellis, Team Leader, Los Angeles Metropolitan Office, Federal Transit Administration, 888 South Figueroa Street, Suite 1850, Los Angeles, CA 90017, phone (213) 202–3950, e-mail ray.tellis@dot.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:
Scoping

The FTA and LACMTA invite all interested individuals and organizations, public agencies, and Native American Tribes to comment on the scope of the EIS, including the project’s purpose and need, the alternatives to be studied, the impacts to be evaluated, and the evaluation methods to be used. Comments should focus on: Alternatives that may be less costly or have less environmental or community impacts while achieving similar transportation objectives, and the identification of any significant social, economic, or environmental issues relating to the alternatives.

Purpose and Need for the Project

The project purpose is to improve public transit service and mobility in the Crenshaw-Prairie Corridor between Wilshire and El Segundo Boulevards. The overall goal of the proposed project is to improve mobility in the corridor by connecting with existing lines such as the Metro Green Line or approved transit lines, such as the Exposition Light Rail Transit (LRT) Line (under construction). The proposed project is included in the current LACMTA Long-Range Transportation Plan and in the Southern California Association of Governments’ 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (http://www.scag.ca.gov/rtplan/2004/Final/07RTPProjectList.xls).

Mobility issues in this corridor have been well documented in many studies, including the Crenshaw-Prairie Corridor Preliminary Planning Study (1994), the Route Refinement Study (2000), and the Major Investment Study (MIS) (2003). These reports are available for review on the LACMTA Web site (http://www.metro.net/crenshaw). Additional considerations supporting the project’s need include: