

Nomination Received by Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President
For the CEQ NEPA Pilot Project Program
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/nepa/nepa-pilot-project-nominations>

PART I. NOMINATOR

First Name:	Rebecca
Last Name:	Reyes-Alicea
Organization:	USDOT, Federal Railroad Administration
Project Title:	Northeast Corridor Tier 1 EIS
Submitted by:	Federal Agency
Date Received:	06/14/2011

PART II. SHORT ANSWERS

I. What Federal agency or agencies will be involved in this pilot project?

The Federal agencies involved in this pilot project include: US Department of Transportation, US Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, US Coast Guard, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

II. What is the Federal action to which this NEPA pilot project applies?

The Federal action that applies to this NEPA pilot is the preparation of a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision.

III. How will this pilot project reduce the costs and time needed to complete the NEPA process?

This NEPA pilot project will showcase how early involvement and outreach in the development of Tier 1 analysis of a rail corridor crossing multiple states and federal jurisdictions can provide time and cost savings when performing Tier 2 analysis at the project level. Engaging state and federal resource agencies at the initiation of the Tier 1 analysis will provide valuable information that can be incorporated into project level decisions. This information will inform project planning, potentially avoiding conflicts and reducing mitigation costs for environmental impacts associated with project development.

When engaging the stakeholders in the Tier I analysis, environmental goals are expected to be established that all participants can agree to as a benchmark moving forward for this project. Those benchmarks can inform how decisions are made later in project development and increase efficiencies in the review process.

IV. How will this pilot project ensure rigorous environmental protection?

This NEPA pilot project will bring together resource agencies at the state and federal level as well as citizen stakeholders to identify baseline environmental goals for the project. After those goals have been agreed to, the second Tier 2 project phase will be informed by these baselines. With support from federal, state and local stakeholders at the Tier 1 level, environmental protection will be built into the project development process and Tier 2 analysis.

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V. How will this pilot project improve the quality and transparency of agency decisionmaking?

Full engagement of interested parties in the development of the Tier 1 analysis will result in greater information sharing between the public and the Department. Building a coalition of support for the proposed project will require open and honest communication with stakeholders throughout the process. This pilot project seeks to build this community of support through active public engagement providing transparency to a large and very complex project.

VI. Will this pilot project develop best practices that can be replicated by other agencies or applied to other Federal actions or programs? Please describe?

The goal of this NEPA pilot project is to provide best practices on how to complete large scale, multi-state, tiered environmental studies in close coordination with resource agencies. Early coordination in Tier 1 can provide for improved and more efficient processes and may be a model for other environmental reviews. In addition, this coordination will lay the ground work for future project level environmental analysis as projects advance along the Northeast Corridor.

PART III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

(See attachment on following page.)

Council on Environmental Quality

NEPA Pilot Project Nomination

NORTHEAST CORRIDOR

TIER 1 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is initiating planning studies for major long-term improvement of high-speed intercity passenger rail in the Northeast Corridor as a core component of a better integrated, more efficient, and higher capacity northeast regional transportation network. The improvement of rail service in the Northeast Corridor is an important Administration priority and of importance to Congress, the northeast states, and major northeast cities. The planning studies were proposed by the northeast states and Amtrak and the studies have been closely coordinated with these interests and through the Northeast Corridor Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission.

The planning studies will consist of transportation systems and passenger rail service planning. Another component of this effort is a Tier 1 environmental impact statement (EIS) to address the broad environmental effects of improved passenger rail service and construction of necessary infrastructure for the entire 500-mile corridor between Washington, DC and Boston, MA. While some of the improvements considered will be to the existing railroad lines, new tracks and new rail corridors will be evaluated for a multi-decade investment program. Expanding existing railroad corridors, acquiring and constructing new corridors will affect water resources and habitat as well as developed properties.

Because this study area covers the nation's largest and most complex urban mega-region, the EIS will involve an unusually broad range of stakeholders and require establishing expectations among many agencies. The focus of the pilot will be to establish understandings and procedures for integrated and tiered decision making that will make the Tier 1 EIS more efficient and useful. Agreement on environmental performance through the tier 1 process will bring added efficiencies when component projects are advanced thorough Tier 2 studies and are considered for permits by resource agencies.

The EIS will be prepared over several years starting in 2012 by the FRA using contract support. The Department of Transportation's goal is to complete the planning studies and EIS as expeditiously as possible. As a pilot project, coordination with state and Federal agencies can begin in advance of starting the EIS, which may alleviate delays and conflicts later. FRA is initiating the EIS with FY10 appropriations and will be seeking additional funding in future years to complete the multi-year planning and environmental studies. Additional expertise, advice, and assistance available through the CEQ Pilot Program could help to make this Administration priority initiative more successful and may develop model approaches to multi-state and multi-jurisdictional NEPA processes and to tiered NEPA processes for linear infrastructure generally.