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## Public hearings set for May 4-5

# Corps of Engineers releases Draft EIS on Massachusetts Department of Transportation's South Coast Rail proposal

**CONCORD, Mass.** – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, has released for public and agency review and comment, its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's South Coast Rail proposal to establish passenger rail service between Boston and the cities of New Bedford and Fall River, Mass.

The project proponent, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), is seeking a Corps of Engineers permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to discharge fill material in waters of the United States, including wetlands, incidental to establishment of passenger rail service between Boston and New Bedford and Fall River. Because the proposal constitutes a potential major environmental impact a Federal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), an in-depth and multi-agency environmental study, is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Draft EIS also has been prepared to serve as a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) to satisfy the requirements of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). The state MEPA review is being conducted simultaneously with the federal NEPA process. The joint EIS/EIR evaluated a range of alternative transportation routes. Alternative routes evaluated in detail included three principal rail routes and one bus route: 1) the "Attleboro Alternative," (2) the "Stoughton Alternative," (3) the "Whittenton Alternative," and (4) the "Rapid Bus Alternative." A No Build/Transportation Surface Management alternative was also evaluated. Additional permutations, including a "Middleborough Rail – Rapid Bus Hybrid" and an "Attleboro Fourth Track" configuration, were also examined.

The Draft EIS is intended to provide information needed for the Corps to perform a public interest review for the Section 404 permit decision. Key issues analyzed in depth in the Draft EIS include: impacts to waters of the United States (including vernal pools and other wetlands); transportation; land use; socioeconomics; environmental justice; visual effects; noise; vibration; cultural resources; air quality; open space; farmland; hazardous materials; biodiversity; threatened and endangered species; and water resources.

In order to properly evaluate the proposal, the Corps of Engineers is seeking public comments on the Draft EIS. The public will have until May 27, 2011 to submit comments on the Draft EIS to the Corps of Engineers. Public hearings, to provide an additional opportunity to comment on the proposal, will be held on Wednesday May 4, 2011 at 7 p.m. in the Qualters Middle School at 240 East Street in Mansfield, Mass., and on Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 7 p.m. in the Keith Middle School at 225 Hathaway Boulevard in New Bedford,

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## **Corps releases Draft EIS on MassDOT's South Coast Rail proposal/2-2-2-2**

Mass. Registration will open at 6 p.m. The Draft EIS has been provided for review at 24 local libraries (listed in the public notice) and on the Corps of Engineers website at:

<http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/projects/ma/SouthCoastRail/southcoastrail.htm>

The project impacts to waters of the U.S. would range in area from approximately 10.3 acres to approximately 21.5 acres, depending on the alternative selected.

Evaluation of impacts of the various alternatives will include application of the guidelines of Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act. As part of this step, the Final EIS will evaluate the range of transportation alternatives to determine the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). As a regulatory agency, the Corps of Engineers does not have a preferred alternative. The alternatives analysis will be working toward the determination of the LEDPA. The DEIS is a draft document released for public comment and the Corps will consider such comments before identifying the LEDPA in the Final EIS. The timeline for the Final EIS is uncertain and will depend upon issues raised during the DEIS review, and additional data that may be needed to evaluate those issues. It is not unusual for a Final EIS to take at least 12-18 months to complete after the comment period closes, but the Corps cannot speculate about the timing in this instance until after the comment period is complete and additional data needs are identified.

The "Attleboro Alternative" would add new service via the existing AMTRAK Northeast Corridor, with added capacity, new track and existing freight lines, from Boston via Attleboro and Norton to Taunton. The new track ("Attleboro bypass") would be laid in the Town of Attleboro, near Chartley Pond in the vicinity of an existing National Grid electrical right-of-way. This alternative would add about 20 new trains to the existing Northeast Corridor between Attleboro and Boston.

The "Stoughton Alternative" would extend the existing Stoughton commuter rail line from its current terminus in Stoughton along presently abandoned railroad rights-of-way through Easton and Raynham to Taunton. This would follow an existing, abandoned railroad grade that crosses Hockomock Swamp and Pine Swamp to the east side of Taunton. This alternative would add four new trains and would otherwise extend existing trains farther south from Stoughton to New Bedford and Fall River.

The "Whittenton Alternative" is a variant of the Stoughton Alternative, and would extend the existing Stoughton commuter rail line from its current terminus in Stoughton along presently abandoned railroad rights-of-way through Easton and Raynham to Taunton. This would follow the existing, abandoned railroad grade that crosses Hockomock Swamp and then an abandoned, winding railroad grade to the west side of Taunton.

Continuation of all three rail alternatives from Taunton would follow existing, active freight lines through Lakeville and Freetown to New Bedford and Fall River. These links between Taunton and New Bedford/Fall River are common to all three rail alternatives identified.

The "Rapid Bus Alternative" would provide commuter bus service, in lieu of rail, from New Bedford, Fall River and Taunton to South Station via I-93, Route 24, and Route 140. North of I-495, buses would use a

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**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – NEW ENGLAND DISTRICT**

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### **Corps releases Draft EIS on MassDOT's South Coast Rail proposal/3-3-3-3-3**

combination of new zipper bus lanes, new reversible bus lanes, two-way bus lanes, existing zipper HOV lanes, and existing HOV lanes, along with a short section in mixed traffic.

The No-Build Alternative would provide enhancements to existing bus services with limited improvements to the existing transit and roadway system, but otherwise no major infrastructure improvements.

Elements of all of the alternatives proposed by MassDOT would be located in waters of the U.S. The proposed alternative routes could affect high quality natural resources, including Commonwealth of Massachusetts Wildlife Management Areas and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. In addition, all of the proposed alternative routes would affect historical and cultural resources, including properties eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, National Historic Landmarks and historic districts that have cultural importance in the affected communities. Consultation on the extent of the impacts on these resources is ongoing with state and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Corps public notice, with more detailed information on the proposed project, can be reviewed online at the Corps website <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil>. Select Regulatory/Permitting and then weekly public notices and search by file number or state.

Public comments on the Corps of Engineers Draft EIS (File # NAE-2007-00698) should be forwarded no later than May 27, 2011 to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, Regulatory Division (ATTN: Alan Anacheka-Nasemann), 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751 or by email to: [SCREIS@usace.army.mil](mailto:SCREIS@usace.army.mil). Additional information is available from Permit Project Manager Alan Anacheka-Nasemann at 978-318-8214 or toll free 800-343-4789 or 800-362-4367 (if calling from within Massachusetts) or by email to: [SCREIS@usace.army.mil](mailto:SCREIS@usace.army.mil).

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