



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

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Scoping meetings projected for fall 2008

Corps of Engineers, MEPA to coordinate environmental review of South Coast Rail Project

BOSTON, Mass. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, and the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs will conduct a coordinated review of an Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the South Coast Rail Project proposed by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works (EOT) to determine its environmental impacts.

EOT is seeking a Corps of Engineers permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to discharge fill material in up to 14 acres of waters of the United States, including wetlands, incidental to establishment of commuter rail service between Boston and New Bedford and Fall River, Mass. They are also seeking an environmental review and permits from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that the lead federal agency in an environmental review make a determination whether an environmental assessment or EIS is required. An EIS determination is made when the lead federal agency finds that the proposal represents potential significant environmental impacts and represents a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The Corps made its determination to conduct an EIS on May 7, 2008.

The Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) requires that EOT evaluate the project and its alternatives and identify all feasible measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate environmental impacts.

Officials tentatively project that a notice of intent to prepare a Federal EIS will be published in the Federal Register in September 2008 which would be followed by joint

Corps/MEPA-sponsored scoping meetings in the fall of 2008. Scoping meetings provide an opportunity for the public, interested groups and local, state and federal agencies to note all potential issues or concerns of the proposed project. These issues and concerns will help shape what is studied in the EIS/EIR.

“This is a joint endeavor to understand all the impacts – direct, secondary and cumulative – of this proposed project, and to fully and fairly evaluate alternatives. In the interest of good government, the Corps and MEPA will collaborate in the coordinated review of the EIS/EIR,” said Christine Godfrey, the Chief of Regulatory Division at the Corps’ New England District. “As lead federal agency on the EIS/EIR, the Corps looks forward to working with the other federal, state and local resource agencies and the public on understanding all the impacts associated with this proposed rail project as it pertains to the transportation needs and smart growth initiatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

The EIS/EIR is expected to be completed by spring 2010 depending on the complexity and range of the issues involved and the studies that may be required. Officials expect to build on the information that is already available and the studies that have been conducted in the past.

“For a large and complex project that requires both state and federal approvals, a coordinated environmental review is the best way to bring all the relevant information to light for public comment,” said Deerin Babb-Brott, Director of the state MEPA Office. “Secretary Ian Bowles appreciates the Corps’ willingness to undertake this coordinated review, and I look forward to working with the Corps throughout the process.”

The Corps has been part of an interagency review team since September 2007 working with federal, state and local agencies involved in the review of this project.

Wendy Stern, Undersecretary of Transportation for the Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works, added, "We are very appreciative that the state agencies and the Corps have established an excellent cooperative process on a project that is of such importance to the Patrick-Murray Administration. Secretary Bernard Cohen and I look forward to working with the Corps, MEPA, and all the environmental resource agencies to make this the best possible project for the South Coast and the Commonwealth as a whole."

More information is available on this proposal from the MAEOT at the website: <http://www.southcoastrail.com/>.

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