

Georgia on the Move

Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Project



Project Overview

The Project is a comprehensive planning effort, including a transparent public and agency involvement process, to evaluate and identify a corridor for proposed, new high-speed intercity passenger rail service connecting Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The project consists of a Tiered NEPA environmental review process that implements FRA's "Service NEPA" for High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Programs. Service NEPA (which the Council on Environmental Quality [CEQ] refers to as programmatic NEPA) typically addresses the broader questions relating to the type of service(s) being proposed, including cities and stations served, route alternatives, service levels, types of operations (speed and technology), ridership forecasts, planning-level costs, and other components for future decision-making milestones. For a major FRA HSIPR Corridor Program, this type of environmental review must be completed before any substantial investments in the corridor can be made, including additional planning, design, and engineering work and Tier 2 NEPA for subsequent phases of the Project.

Where Are We Now?

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), recently reached a major milestone for the Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) Project, which evaluated potential high-speed passenger rail corridors that would connect Atlanta, Georgia to Chattanooga, Tennessee. On September 22, 2017, the FRA released the Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) (hereinafter referred to as Tier 1 FEIS/ROD) for the Project. The Tier 1 FEIS/ROD responds to substantive comments received during the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency review and comment period. The Draft EIS (DEIS) was issued on October 7, 2016, with the public and agency review and comment period occurring between October 7, 2016 and December 31, 2016.

The Tier 1 FEIS/ROD also summarizes the potential environmental, transportation, and economic effects of a No Build and three Corridor Alternatives for new high-speed intercity passenger rail service on the population, built, and natural environments within the Project Study Area, as presented in the Tier 1 DEIS. In the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, the FRA identifies a NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative based on analysis presented in the Tier 1 DEIS, input from the public, stakeholders, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies. The I-75 Corridor Alternative is the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative and most effectively achieves the Purpose and Need and is the best performing corridor alternative based on the 12 distinguishing performance measures developed for the Project for this program-level Tier 1 EIS and the input received.



IN THIS NEWSLETTER

Project Overview	1	Summary of Comments and Responses on the Tier 1 DEIS	3
Where Are We Now?	1	NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative	4
What is the Purpose and Need for the Project?	2	Key Findings of Tier 1 FEIS/ROD	5-6
Tier 1 EIS Process	2	Comparative Summary of the Corridor Alternatives	5
High-Speed Ground Transportation Technologies	2	Next Steps	6
Summary of Public Meetings	3		

What is the Purpose and Need for the Project?

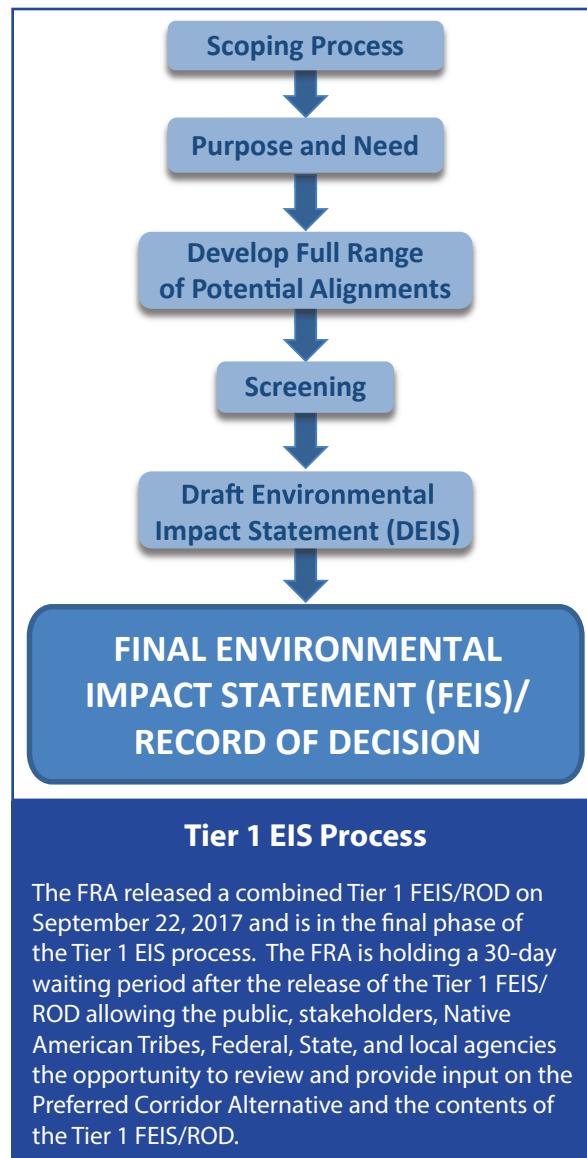
According to the US Department of Transportation, a Purpose and Need Statement is one the most important parts of an EIS. They explain, "It establishes why the agency is proposing to spend large amounts of taxpayers' money while at the same time causing significant environmental impacts. [It] explains to the public and decision makers that the expenditure of funds is necessary and worthwhile... and should justify why impacts are acceptable based on the project's importance."

Based on analysis of previous studies and through feedback from the public and agencies during the Scoping Process, the study team finalized the Purpose and Need Statement for the project.

The purpose of the Atlanta - Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) Project is to enhance intercity mobility and economic growth throughout the Project Area between the metropolitan areas and the airports of Atlanta, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, by providing faster and more reliable ground transportation service to the public as an alternative to highway, intercity bus, and air travel, in a manner that is safe and cost-effective, while avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating impacts on the human and natural environment.

The needs for the HSGT project are summarized as follows:

- Enhance regional transportation mobility and accessibility
 - Population and employment growth
 - Congested transportation corridor with increasing demand
 - Limited transportation options
- Spur Economic Growth and Regional Vitality
- Provide safe, efficient, reliable transportation
- Enhance airport access and intermodal connections
- Improve air quality nonattainment areas and minimize environmental impacts



High-Speed Ground Transportation Technologies



During Tier 2 NEPA, a technology will be selected.

High-speed is defined as above 180 mph.

Two Types:

- Steel-Wheeled
 - Steel-wheel vehicles on steel rail
- Maglev (Magnetic Levitation)
 - Uses electromagnetic forces to lift and propel a train along a guideway, with power supplied to the magnets through the track

Both types:

- Operate on a grade-separated right-of-way, which eliminates potential points of conflict with pedestrians or other non-rail vehicles.
- Appropriate for intercity use, and can provide a travel time competitive with automobile travel within the Atlanta-Chattanooga corridor.

Summary of Public Meetings

During the public and agency review period, the FRA and GDOT held three public meetings in Atlanta, GA, Chattanooga, TN, and Dalton, GA. An estimated 93 persons attended the three public meetings. The table below provides a list of public meeting locations and estimated attendance.

Public Meeting	Location	Date/Time	Number of attendees ¹
Atlanta, GA	GDOT General Office One Georgia Center Room 403 and 404 600 West Peachtree Street, NW Atlanta, GA 30308	Tuesday, November 15, 2016 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	16
Chattanooga, TN	Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency (CHCRPA) Development Resource Center Conference Room 1A-50 1250 Market Street # 2000 Chattanooga, TN 37402	Wednesday, November 16, 2016 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	25
Dalton, GA	City of Dalton City Hall and Administration Building Main Auditorium 300 W. Waugh Street Dalton, GA 30720	Thursday, November 17, 2017 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	52
Total			93

¹Based on the number of individuals who registered on the sign-in sheets. Additional persons may have been present but did not choose to register.

The purpose of the public meetings was to provide agencies and the public with the opportunity to learn about the proposed project, ask questions, and provide comments on the DEIS, the proposed alternatives, and other issues related to the development of the Project. The FRA received comments on the DEIS at the public meetings as well as through the GDOT project website or by email or US mail.

Summary of Comments and Responses on the Tier 1 DEIS

The public comment period on the Tier 1 DEIS occurred from October 7, 2016 to November 21, 2016. However, comments were received until early 2017 because the public and agency review and comment period was opened in close proximity to the holiday time period and FRA, GDOT, and TDOT recognized that additional time was needed to provide comments.

During the public and agency review period for the Tier 1 DEIS, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT received a total of 49 comments. Comments received represented the viewpoints from Native American Tribes, Federal, State and local government agencies, businesses, residents, interested individuals, and property owners. Of the submittals, 28 comments generally were in support of the Project, and two (2) were generally opposed to the Project. The remaining comments were on specific information provided in the DEIS, requesting further review, or acknowledging receipt and review of the Tier 1 DEIS. Most comments were received from the public. Most comments indicating support for a particular corridor evaluated in the Tier 1 DEIS supported the I-75 corridor, due to the minimal environmental impacts and direct route. Several comments also suggested that FRA and GDOT consider a hybrid alternative of the I-75 and I-75/Rome Corridor, citing the importance of serving Rome as a key factor.



Dalton City Hall Public Meeting

NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative

In the Tier 1 DEIS, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT identified three Corridor Alternatives and a No-Build Alternative for the HSGT Project:

- No-Build Alternative
- I-75 Corridor Alternative
- East Corridor Alternative
- I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative

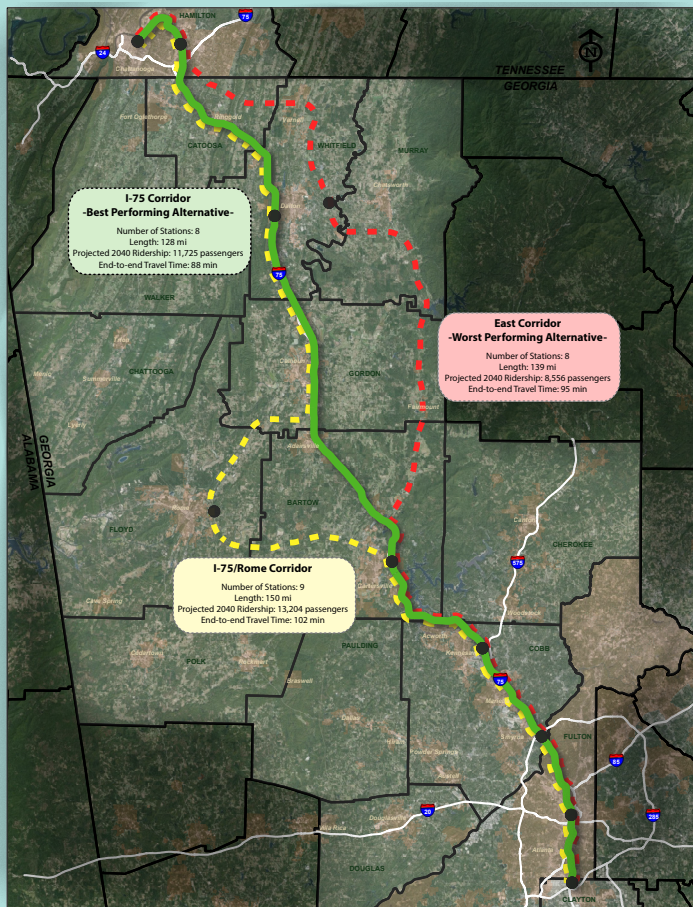
The Tier 1 FEIS/ROD identifies the NEPA Preferred Alternative as the I-75 Corridor Alternative.

No-Build Alternative:

The definition of the No Build Alternative remained the same from the Tier 1 DEIS to the Tier 1 FEIS. The No-Build Alternative represents the Project Area's transportation system as it is anticipated to be in the planning horizon year 2040 including the existing transportation system and assuming that there would be no new HSGT improvements in the Project Area. This Alternative assumes that all transportation system improvements that are currently listed in local, regional, and state transportation plans and that have identified funds for implementation will be implemented including the highway and transit projects in each of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO's) transportation plans within the Project Area as well as aviation projects identified in the Master Plans of the two airports, which currently provide passenger carrier service to the Project Area.

NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative – I-75 Corridor Alternative:

The NEPA Preferred Alternative is the I-75 Corridor Alternative. The I-75 Corridor Alternative is an approximately 1,000-foot wide corridor that begins on the eastern side of Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport (HJIA) immediately adjacent to Interstate 75 (I-75) and follows I-75 northward to near I-285 where the corridor then follows the I-75 and I-85 shared facility (Downtown Connector) northward to the University Avenue overpass where the corridor then follows along both the Norfolk Southern-owned railroad right-of-way and I-75/I-85 into Downtown Atlanta. This allows for two design options to be further evaluated during additional planning activities and Tier 2 NEPA studies during any subsequent phases of the Project, including a potential connection to the proposed Georgia Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) site near Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive in Downtown Atlanta. Both corridor design options continue northward to I-75 at Howell Mill Road where the corridor then follows I-75 northward to I-24 south of Chattanooga, TN. North of I-24 the corridor continues parallel to CSX-owned railroad right-of-way (W&L railroad line) into Downtown Chattanooga. Stations would likely be located at HJIA, Downtown Atlanta, Cumberland Galleria, Town Center, Cartersville, Dalton, Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport (CMA), and Downtown Chattanooga. The 1,000-foot wide I-75 Corridor Alternative gives Project Sponsors the flexibility to develop one or more alignments during Tier 2 NEPA studies and to potentially avoid or minimize impacts to resources within the corridor.



Map of Corridor Alternatives -
I-75 Corridor Alternative is the NEPA Preferred Alternative

Key Findings of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD

Comparative Summary of the Corridor Alternatives

Needs	Measures	Corridor Alternative		
		I-75 (NEPA Preferred)	East	I-75/Rome
Enhance regional transportation mobility and accessibility	Time to Travel Alternative End to End (minutes)	88	95	102
	Population within 10 miles of Proposed Station Locations (millions)	2.85	2.86	2.95
	Employment within 5 Miles of Proposed Station Locations (thousands)	869	870	894
	Daily Ridership (number of boardings)	11,725	8,556	13,204
Spur economic growth and regional vitality	Capital Cost (2014\$ millions)	\$8,760	\$10,420	\$9,811
Provide safe, efficient, reliable transportation	Provide passenger HSGT service on exclusive guideway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enhance airport access and intermodal connections	Provide access to HJAIA and CMA; connect to MARTA, GRTA and CCT service areas	Yes	Yes	Yes
Improve air quality nonattainment areas and minimize environmental impacts	Proportion of Corridor Alternative within Existing Transportation Corridor (percent)	76%	31%	53%
	Ratio of EJ areas to overall corridor (based on linear miles)	0.6:1	0.5:1	0.5:1
	Noise-sensitive Land Uses (acres)	5,914	7,519	8,425
	Vibration-sensitive Land Uses (acres)	891	1,695	1,372
	Ratio of Station Areas with and without EJ populations	6:2	6:2	6:2
	Parklands and Wildlife Refuges (acres)	443	447	442
	Parklands and Wildlife Refuges (number)	25	19	30
	Known Archaeological Resources (number)	32	46	38
	Known Historic Resources (number)	26	66	33
	Cemeteries (number)	4	3	5
	Wetlands (acres)	205	205	251
	Stream Crossings (number)	21	18	35
	Floodplains (acres)	1,563	2,576	1,689
	Known Threatened and Endangered Species Habitats (number)	21	38	21

Key Findings of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD

The I-75 Corridor Alternative is the best performing Corridor Alternative as evaluated in the Tier 1 DEIS and FRA selected the I-75 Corridor Alternative as the Preferred Corridor Alternative and the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative in this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. The environmental consequences and benefits of the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative are summarized below.

The I-75 Corridor would:

- Improve mobility and accessibility in the Project Study Area. Transportation benefits and impacts are based on ridership forecasts, proximity of the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative to existing transportation corridors, traffic data, and potential for the Project to transfer trips from the highway system to HSGT ridership, thereby potentially improving traffic conditions on highways;
- Address some of the transportation needs of projected population and employment growth in the Project Study Area, particularly in terms of increasing transportation options, increasing airport and intermodal connections, address transportation limitations on economic growth, provide faster and more reliable ground transportation as an alternative to highway, intercity bus and air travel;
- Have the shortest end-to-end travel time of approximately 88 minutes;
- Provide an opportunity to use the largest area of existing transportation rights-of-way with only minimal use of land areas and land cover not currently classified as an existing transportation corridor;
- Improve air quality by providing a transportation option that does not increase the quantity or the growth rate of mobile source emissions resulting from vehicle miles traveled on the highway network in the Project Study Area; and
- Potentially have impacts on communities, parks, wildlife refuges and recreational areas, cultural resources, water resources, and biological resources identified in the Tier 1 DEIS.

Next Steps

The FRA is holding a 30-day waiting period after the release of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD allowing the public, stakeholders, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies the opportunity to review and provide input on the Preferred Corridor Alternative and the contents of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. This will not be a formal review and comment period and the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will not respond to individual comments as was required during the Tier 1 DEIS. Rather, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will consider input received on the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD for any subsequent phases of the Project.

If advanced, Tier 2 analysis would identify a preferred technology, identify specific locations for stations and maintenance facilities, and will define the alignment on which the HSGT would operate. Future study of the high-speed ground transportation between Atlanta and Chattanooga will be dependent of available funding, which has not yet been identified.

Contact Us

Georgia Department of Transportation

Division of Intermodal

ATTN: Kaycee Mertz, AICP, Rail Program Manager

One Georgia Center

600 West Peachtree Street NW

Atlanta, Georgia 30308

P: (404) 347-0657

F: (404) 631-1844

Project Website:

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoChattanooga>