



U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Transit
Administration

REGION I
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FEB 06 2003

Mr. James Capaldi
Director
Department of Transportation
Office of the Director
Two Capitol Hill
Providence, R.I. 02903-1124

**Re: South County Commuter Rail Project Environmental Assessment
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

Dear Mr. Capaldi:

Based upon a review of the environmental documentation, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the South County Commuter Rail project. The proposed project includes the following: extend commuter rail service approximately 20 miles along the Northeast Corridor beginning in Providence, RI, south to the Warwick Intermodal Station at T.F. Green Airport, and terminating at Wickford Junction. The construction elements include a new station at Wickford Junction, station consisting of a full high platform, 1,000 car parking garage, track siding and mainline interlocking.

Please be advised that in accordance with 23 CFR 771.121, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) is required to transmit a copy of this FONSI to all affected Federal, state and local governmental entities. In addition, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the FTA has determined that this project will have no effect on historic or archaeological resources.

Please let me know if you have any questions. The FTA looks forward to continuing to work with the RIDOT on this important transit improvement.

Sincerely,

for
Richard H. Doyle
Regional Administrator

Attachment

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION
REGION 1

Finding of No Significant Impact

Project: South County Commuter Rail Extension

Applicant: Rhode Island Department of Transportation

Project Location: Northeast Corridor – Providence to North Kingstown/Wickford Junction

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this transit improvement is to assist Rhode Island to meet its current and future needs, to enhance the state transportation system, improve air quality, link transportation with land use and support economic development initiatives. More specifically, the goals of this transit improvement is to accomplish the following:

- Reduce congestion, improve safety and provide intermodal connections in the I-95 and Route 1/Route 4 corridors by reducing single occupant vehicle trips and improving travel times in the corridors.
- Provide needed intermodal connections to T.F. Green Airport via RIDOT's Warwick Intermodal Station.
- Support RIDOT's ongoing commitment to maintain the existing highway and rail infrastructure as part of its "fix it first" agenda by adding capacity to the existing system without necessitating additional roadway capacity.
- Support the state's goal (as stated in the *Transportation 2020 Ground Transportation Plan 2001 Update*) of using transportation to attain regional economic development goals by providing connections and offering opportunities to attract new commercial development, including redevelopment in the Warwick Station Redevelopment District at T.F. Green Airport.

Alternatives Considered

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation Rail Corridor Study, November 1994, (incorporated herein by reference) examined public transportation alternatives on the Amtrak Shore Line/Northeast Corridor. Appropriate alternatives were defined in each corridor using three types of public transportation alternatives – light rail transit, commuter rail and busway. Only one transit technology was determined to be appropriate in this corridor – commuter rail. Neither light rail nor a busway would be appropriate since neither could coexist on tracks that carry freight service and high-speed Amtrak passenger service. Also, constructing either light rail or a busway would require the construction of a separate facility parallel to the existing tracks, a prohibitively expensive undertaking for passenger service alone.

In addition to transportation alternatives, this study also examined potential station locations.

Proposed Project

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation is proposing extend commuter rail service along the Northeast Corridor from Providence to North Kingstown with new stations at Warwick and Wickford Junction. The proposed project includes a new station at Wickford Junction consisting of an 800 foot high-level platform with canopies, an 800-foot siding, a new 1,000 car three-story parking garage and mainline interlocking. At this time it is anticipated that service will be provided by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority under the Pilgrim Partnership Agreement. Project components include:

- **Commuter Rail Service Extension** – Continuing eight round-trip commuter rail trains daily (Monday through Friday) south to the Warwick Intermodal Station at T.F. Green Airport and Wickford Junction will augment existing Providence to Boston commuter service. Although the Northeast Corridor is currently used for Amtrak and freight operations, extension of commuter rail service twenty miles south from Providence to Wickford Junction represents a new service opportunity within this corridor.
- **Warwick Intermodal Station** - The Wickford Intermodal Station at T.F. Green Airport will be operational in 2004 serving both MBTA commuter rail service to Boston and Amtrak Acela regional service. Station and rental car garage design is underway. No additional track or signal changes are required for operation of this station. These station improvements are being undertaken through a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) project that was subject to an environmental assessment. The FHWA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact on July 6, 1999. On March 27, 2001 and February 1, 2002 RIDOT submitted environmental re-evaluations to FHWA for project change from a surface parking lot with a stand-alone station to a multi-level parking garage, station and consolidated rental car facility. FHWA accepted the findings that additional environmental impacts could be mitigated with the actions described in the re-evaluations.
- **Wickford Station and Track Improvements** - The preferred site is an undeveloped section of Wickford Junction Plaza, located in the north quadrant of the intersection of Route 102 and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. Proposed trackside improvements include partial canopies and a high-level platform to provide access in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Parking for 1,000 cars will be provided to meet the parking demand determined in previous studies. A new sidetrack and interlocking are required at the Wickford Junction Station location to provide turn-back capabilities to Providence.

Agency Coordination and Public Opportunity to Comment

- On January 15, 2002, RIDOT held an agency scoping and coordination meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to provide the regulatory and other planning agencies a briefing on the project, and to solicit comments that need to be addressed in the EA.
- On August 3, 2002, the environmental assessment was circulated for 30-day public comment period and a Notice of Availability was published in the Providence Journal.
- Four comment letters were received: Town of North Kingstown, RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, the RI Department of Administration Statewide Planning Program, and Wickford Junction Associates, LLC. RIDOT has provided adequate responses to these comment letters.

Determinations and Findings

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Finding

FTA served as lead agency under NEPA for the project. RIDOT, prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with NEPA, 42 U.S.C. Section 4321 et seq., and with FTA's regulations, 23 CFR Part 771. The EA analyzes and describes the project's potential significant impacts.

After carefully considering the EA, its supporting documents, and the public comments and responses, **FTA finds under 23 CFR 771.121 that the proposed project, with the mitigation to which RIDOT has committed, will have no significant adverse impacts on the environment.** The record provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an EIS is not required.

Noise Findings

Potential noise impacts from the project were assessed using FTA noise assessment criteria following FTA's Transit Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment (1995). Noise modeling demonstrated that residents of two adjacent homes could be adversely affected by noise from the proposed parking facility during the peak commuting hours. An existing natural berm in this area, in addition to further landscaping enhancements, will provide limited screening from noise generated on the ground level of the structure. In addition, approximately 100 feet of the northwesterly face of the garage will be enclosed to mitigate noises that may be generated from the upper levels of the parking facility, resulting in no net increase in the ambient noise levels.

Water Quality Impacts

The proposed Wickford Junction Station is located above the Hunt, Annaquatucket, and Pettaquamsett sole source aquifers with groundwater classified as GAA by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). The existing storm water management system proposed for this project will be a closed system connected to the system constructed and in place for the Wickford Junction Plaza. The expansion of the existing storm water management system will be subject to the review and approval of RIDEM and the Town of North Kingstown.

Also, in accordance with the Safe Water Drinking Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) needs to review and approve this federally funded project given its proximity to a sole source aquifer. This project may not proceed into construction prior to the receipt of EPA's approval.

Land Use and Secondary Growth Impacts

The environmental assessment recognizes that there is a potential for secondary growth impacts as a result of the new train station at Wickford Junction. The majority of the project elements conform to the existing Town of North Kingstown policies and zoning and are compatible with surrounding land uses. Although the specific impacts are uncertain, RIDOT has given assurances that it is committed to assisting all state and local agencies that have the appropriate expertise and jurisdiction in establishing effective land use and zoning policies and regulations.

Section 106 Compliance

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, requires the review of federally assisted projects for impacts to districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects listed in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places. Federal agencies must coordinate with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and potentially affected Tribes to make this determination. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) has established procedures for the protection of historic and cultural properties in, or eligible for, the National Register (36 CFR Part 800).

On August 23, 2002, the Rhode Island Historical and Heritage Commission determined that any resource that may have existed on the site (Wickford Junction) has already been destroyed and that no archaeological sites remain in the project area.

Based on the cultural resources analysis and coordination with the SHPO, FTA finds that the project will have no effect on any identified or likely cultural or historic resources, and that the Section 106 coordination and consultation requirements for this project have been fulfilled.

Section 4(f) Findings

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, codified at 49 U.S.C. 303, declares a national policy that a special effort should be made to preserve the natural beauty of the countryside, public park and recreational lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. The Secretary of Transportation may not approve transportation projects that adversely affect such resources unless a determination is made that there is no feasible and prudent alternative, and that all possible planning has been done to minimize harm (23 CFR 771.135).

FTA finds that the proposed project will not use or significantly impact any resources protected by Section 4(f) of the DOT Act of 1966.

Permits

RIDOT will be required to obtain all necessary permits and approvals prior to the construction of this project.

Approved: Mary Beth Kello Date: 2/6/03
for Richard H. Doyle
Regional Administrator

Concur: Margaret E. Foley Date: 2-6-03
Margaret E. Foley
Regional Counsel