

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1. Project Setting and Consultation Requirements

The proposed Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project (Meadowlands Rail Project or the Project) is a new 2.3-mile railroad alignment with station and associated roadway improvements to be developed by the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA or Authority). NJ TRANSIT and the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) will assist the NJSEA in the design, management and construction of the Project. Upon completion of the Project, the NJSEA would grant to NJ TRANSIT an easement across NJSEA property for the purpose of operating the Project. NJSEA would operate and maintain the station.

The Project study area is generally bordered by the NJ TRANSIT Pascack Valley Line on the west, Paterson Plank Road on the north, NJ Route 120 on the east and NJ Route 3 on the south (Figure 1.1-1).

A majority of the project alignment is located within the Meadowlands Sports Complex property, which is owned and operated by the NJSEA. The remainder of the alignment traverses privately owned property that would be acquired by the NJSEA pursuant to Section 5m of its enabling statute (N.J.S.A. 5:10-1 et seq.).

The Meadowlands Sports Complex consists of Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands Racetrack, the Continental Airlines Arena and ancillary buildings, parking areas and pedestrian walkways. The Continental Airlines Arena site will be redeveloped as the proposed Meadowlands Xanadu Redevelopment Project, a mixed-use attraction with diverse components of sports and family entertainment, retail, restaurants, hotel/conference facilities and Class A office space.

The Project is located entirely within a special planning area of the State of New Jersey called the Hackensack Meadowlands District (HMD). The HMD is under the regulatory jurisdiction of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC or Commission), formerly the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission, and the State agency responsible for planning and site review within the District.

However, the Meadowlands Sports Complex is exempted from the Hackensack Meadowlands District legislation by the statute governing operation of the NJSEA. Under Section 5x of the statute, the NJSEA may determine the location, type and character of the project or any part thereof, and all other matters in connection with all or any part of the project, but must do so in consultation with the Meadowlands Commission (N.J.S.A. 5:10-5x).

INSERT FIGURE 1.1-1 Project Study Area

The NJSEA's enabling legislation also requires the Authority to consult on development projects with the NJMC and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP or Department) "with respect to the ecological factors constituting the environment of the Hackensack meadowlands to the end that the delicate environmental balance of the Hackensack meadowlands may be preserved" (N.J.S.A. 5:10-23). This EIS was prepared by the NJSEA for review by the NJDEP and the NJMC, as well as members of the public, as part of this consultation process. The EIS facilitates the goals of the consultation process and meets the scope and intent of New Jersey Executive Order No. 215 EIS process.

1.2. Project Description

This EIS will analyze a proposed new 2.3-mile rail alignment from a connection with the Pascack Valley Line through the Sports Complex and terminating at a rail station centrally located between Giants Stadium, the Continental Airlines Arena and the Racetrack. The rail alignment would be over an entirely new right-of-way. The rail service would require new infrastructure improvements including a connection to the NJ TRANSIT Pascack Valley Line, trackwork, bridges, viaducts and a major new station facility.

The proposed Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project would consist of the following proposed new construction elements that are analyzed as part of this EIS (Figure 1.2-1):

- At-grade "Wye" connection to the existing NJ TRANSIT Pascack Valley Line.¹ The eastbound "Wye" connection to the Pascack Valley Line would be a two-track connection. An optional westbound "Wye" connection to the Pascack Valley Line would be a single-track beginning on viaduct then continuing on embankment.
- As it leaves the Pascack Valley Line, the alignment would ascend on viaduct with bridges over Murray Hill Parkway, Berry's Creek and the Plaza A entrance road/service road to the Sports Complex property.
- The at-grade alignment of the Plaza A entrance road/service road would be modified to bring the road to a new traffic signal at Paterson Plank Road.
- The rail alignment would continue on embankment, descending until it reaches grade level in the vicinity of the western edge of the racetrack paddock area.
- The alignment would then continue at grade, paralleling Paterson Plank Road in the area to the north of racetrack paddocks.
- Remaining at grade, the alignment would curve south.

¹ A Wye is "Y" shaped rail connection.

INSERT FIGURE 1.2-1 Project Overview

- The North Connector Road would be elevated over the at-grade rail alignment through this area. Other access roadways connecting to the North Connector Road would require modification to reach the new grade. Replacement parking for approximately 500 vehicles would be created in the area of the newly reconfigured internal roadways between the alignment and NJ Route 120. A retaining wall between this area and the rail station would be constructed.
- The alignment would widen to three tracks as it approaches the station area.
- The station would consist of one 30-foot wide center island platform and a 15-foot wide side platform. Platforms would be high level and would be 950 linear feet. Two overhead structures would be created for stairs and elevators for access between platforms, the plaza area and parking lots. A station building would be constructed to accommodate a maximum capacity of 800 riders. A canopied area would also be constructed accommodating waiting space for additional riders. Station amenities would be included such as lighting, benches, waste receptacles, signage and ticket vending machines.
- A bus drop-off area, kiss-and-ride area and sidewalks would be constructed.
- A new promenade area would be created between the station and the stadium area, physically and visually linking the two areas for pedestrians.
- No park-and-ride facilities are proposed as part of this project.

The proposed passenger rail service would be operated using NJ TRANSIT commuter rail equipment that would consist of diesel locomotives hauling commuter coaches in a push-pull configuration. Train length would vary depending on time of day or event, anywhere from a minimum of four coaches to a maximum of ten coaches. Travel times from Frank R. Lautenberg Rail Station at Secaucus Junction to the Sports Complex would be approximately eight minutes. Travel times from Hoboken Terminal to the Sports Complex would be approximately 23 minutes.

The proposed Meadowlands rail station would be operated as a destination station. A park-and-ride facility would not be provided. Shuttle trains would operate approximately every 30 minutes, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 midnight, seven days per week. An expanded service schedule would be operated during events. During evening events, such as basketball games or concerts, shuttle trains would operate approximately every five to ten minutes, from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. During Sunday events, such as football games, shuttle trains would operate approximately every five to ten minutes, from 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM. A similar schedule would be implemented for major nighttime events at the stadium.

Vehicles used in this service would be stored and maintained at existing NJ TRANSIT facilities.

1.3. Project Sponsor

The proposed Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project is sponsored by the NJSEA. The NJSEA owns and manages the entire Meadowlands Sports Complex. As an entity of the State of New Jersey, the NJSEA is the official preparer of the EIS.

The proposed Project requires significant coordination among NJSEA, NJ TRANSIT and the NJDOT. NJ TRANSIT and NJDOT have performed significant advisory functions to NJSEA in

the development of this Project. Their role will continue as the project advances through design, construction and operation.

Funding for construction of the Project will come from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) to the NJSEA. No Federal funding is being used for this Project.

1.4. Document Purpose

With this document, the Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project EIS, NJSEA fulfills two purposes: 1) consultation hearing process requirements with the NJDEP and the NJMC pursuant to Section 5:10-5x and Section 5:10-23 of the NJSEA's enabling legislation, called the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority Law; and 2) submittal of an EIS to the NJDEP pursuant to Executive Order 215.

1.4.1. Statutory Consultation Requirements

This EIS will be used to support the consultation hearing with the NJDEP and the NJMC. The consultation hearing process will be undertaken pursuant to Sections 5:10-5x and 5:10-23 of the NJSEA's enabling legislation (Public Law 1971, Chapter 37 (codified at N.J.S.A. 5:10-1 et seq.)). When undertaking projects such as the Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project, NJSEA is required by Section 5:10-5x to consult with NJMC on the type, location and character of the project and by Section 5:10-23 to consult with NJDEP and NJMC with respect to environmental factors. Legal decisions by the New Jersey Supreme Court clarified that the consultation process 1) must include a public hearing at which all interested parties should be entitled to present their views; 2) is legislative in nature; 3) may be presented to both agencies at the same time; and 4) must include a full record of the hearing on which any further review can be made. The consultation process that the NJSEA follows has been upheld by the New Jersey Supreme Court.

In the consultation process, the NJDEP and NJMC hold a public hearing during which the EIS is presented to hearing officers appointed by the NJMC and the NJDEP and public comments are received and considered by the hearing officers. Written public comments are also received before and after the hearing. At the end of the public comment period, the hearing officers then prepare their report and recommendations for approval by NJMC and NJDEP.

1.4.2. Executive Order No. 215

Executive Order 215, referred to as EO 215, was signed by New Jersey Governor Kean on September 11, 1989.² EO 215 mandates that all departments, agencies and authorities of the State shall prepare and submit to the NJDEP an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in support of major construction projects. The NJSEA's enabling legislation appears to exempt it from EO 215, but the NJSEA decided to comply voluntarily with EO 215. NJSEA has

² EO 215 replaced Executive Order No. 53 (EO 53), an earlier environmental process mandate related to State actions.

decided to prepare an environmental impact statement, which is a more detailed report that addresses issues in greater depth than what would be analyzed in an environmental assessment.

EO 215 does not require a public hearing, but only review by the NJDEP. However, the NJSEA voluntarily decided to present the EIS to the hearing officers at the public consultation hearing.

Although it may be exempt from EO 215, the NJSEA has prepared the Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project Environmental Impact Statement to fulfill the requirements of EO 215. Upon completion of the consultation process with NJMC and NJDEP, the NJSEA will request that the hearing officers find that the consultation process has fulfilled the requirements of EO 215, as well as N.J.S.A. 5:10-x and 5:10-23.

1.4.3. Support Materials for Permit Applications

Elements of the EIS will be used by the NJSEA to support the environmental reports that will be part of the NJDEP and United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) permit applications.

1.5. Project Schedule

Construction of the proposed Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Improvement Project is scheduled to begin in late 2005. Project construction is anticipated to be complete in the year 2007, the Build Year for this EIS. The year 2007 would be the first year of operation for service to the proposed Meadowland rail station.