



THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



GEORGE N. CAMPBELL, JR.
COMMISSIONER

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ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

20 August, 2010

Robert Mariner, Program Manager
TIGER II Discretionary Grants Program
U.S. Department of Transportation
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Re: NHDOT Boston-Haverhill-Plaistow MBTA Commuter Rail Extension

Dear Mr. Mariner:

The NH Department of Transportation is applying for TIGER II National Infrastructure Investment program funding to extend service on the MBTA's Haverhill-Boston commuter rail line from its current terminus in Haverhill, Massachusetts, 4.3 miles north across the Massachusetts-New Hampshire state line to Plaistow, New Hampshire. Key project elements include construction of a commuter rail station, a layover facility, track improvements in Plaistow, and three bi-level coaches to accommodate increased ridership under the new service.

As a Federally funded project, this effort will need to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Based on review of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) criteria for Categorical Exclusions, we see it as unlikely that the project as a whole would meet the criteria for a Categorical Exclusion. Accordingly, NHDOT is proceeding with preparation of an Environmental Assessment. Attached to this letter is a table of the resources / issues that will need to be considered in the environmental documentation. Also included is a schedule with approximate time frames for completion of the environmental review process by July 2011.

Although all the resources / issues listed in the enclosed table will be evaluated, after reviewing the project area and meeting with the Natural Resource Agencies (US Environmental Protection Agency, NH Department of Environmental Services and NH Fish and Game Department) on August 18th, 2010, it does not appear that the project will have significant adverse impacts and acquiring a wetlands permit in a timely manner should not be a problem.

The Bureau of Environment will play an advisory role in the review of potential environmental issues and concerns associated with this project, as well as provide input into the preparation of the required environmental documentation.

Sincerely,

Charles H. Hood, Administrator
Bureau of Environment
271-3226
charles.hood@dot.state.nh.us

CHH:jle
Encl.
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It is expected that the effects of the project relative to the following social, economic, natural and cultural resources/issues will be evaluated to determine compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. All resources/issues should be investigated, however some may not be impacted. As such, these resources/issues can be omitted from discussion in the environmental documentation. The resources and issues deemed applicable for this project are typically indicated in bold type in the table below and discussed in the body of the document.

| <u>Social/ Economic</u> | | <u>Natural</u> | <u>Cultural</u> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Safety | Farmlands | Water Quality | Historical |
| Transportation Patterns | Community Services | Stormwater Mgt. | Archaeological |
| Air Quality | Energy Needs | Wetlands | Stonewalls |
| Noise | Utilities | Surface Waters | Aesthetics |
| Displacements | Environmental Justice | Groundwater | |
| Hazardous Materials | | Floodplains | |
| Neighborhoods | | Wildlife | |
| Business Impacts | | Fisheries | |
| Land Acquisition | | Endangered Species | |
| Land Use | | Natural Communities | |
| Tax Base | | Wild & Scenic Rivers | |
| Recreation | | Stream Rechannelization | |
| Public Lands | | NH Designated Rivers | |
| Construction Impacts | | Forest Lands | |
| | | Coastal Zone | |

Proposed Project Timeline

| Approximate Date | Task |
|-------------------|--|
| Aug-Sept-Oct 2010 | Gather project information Send project letters Conduct preliminary field reviews |
| August 2010 | Coordinate with Natural Resource Agencies (Aug 18, 2010) (Additional meetings may be required based on known resources) |
| September 2010 | Begin drafting environmental document (Existing Conditions, Alternatives, etc) |
| Oct-Nov 2010 | Coordinate with NH Division of Historical Resources *Determine if any 4(f) involvement and prepare draft document accordingly Conduct additional meetings as necessary Identify resources/issues associated with project and evaluate impacts Determine mitigation (if required) |
| December 2010 | Public Informational Meeting |
| January 2011 | Finalize draft document |
| February 2011 | Distribute final draft document |
| March 2011 | Public Hearing |
| April 2011 | Address comments received on draft document and at Public Hearing |
| May 2011 | Prepare final document |
| June 2011 | Distribute final environmental document |
| July 2011 | FONSI issued |

NOTES:

*If there is 4(f) involvement, the project may require additional time