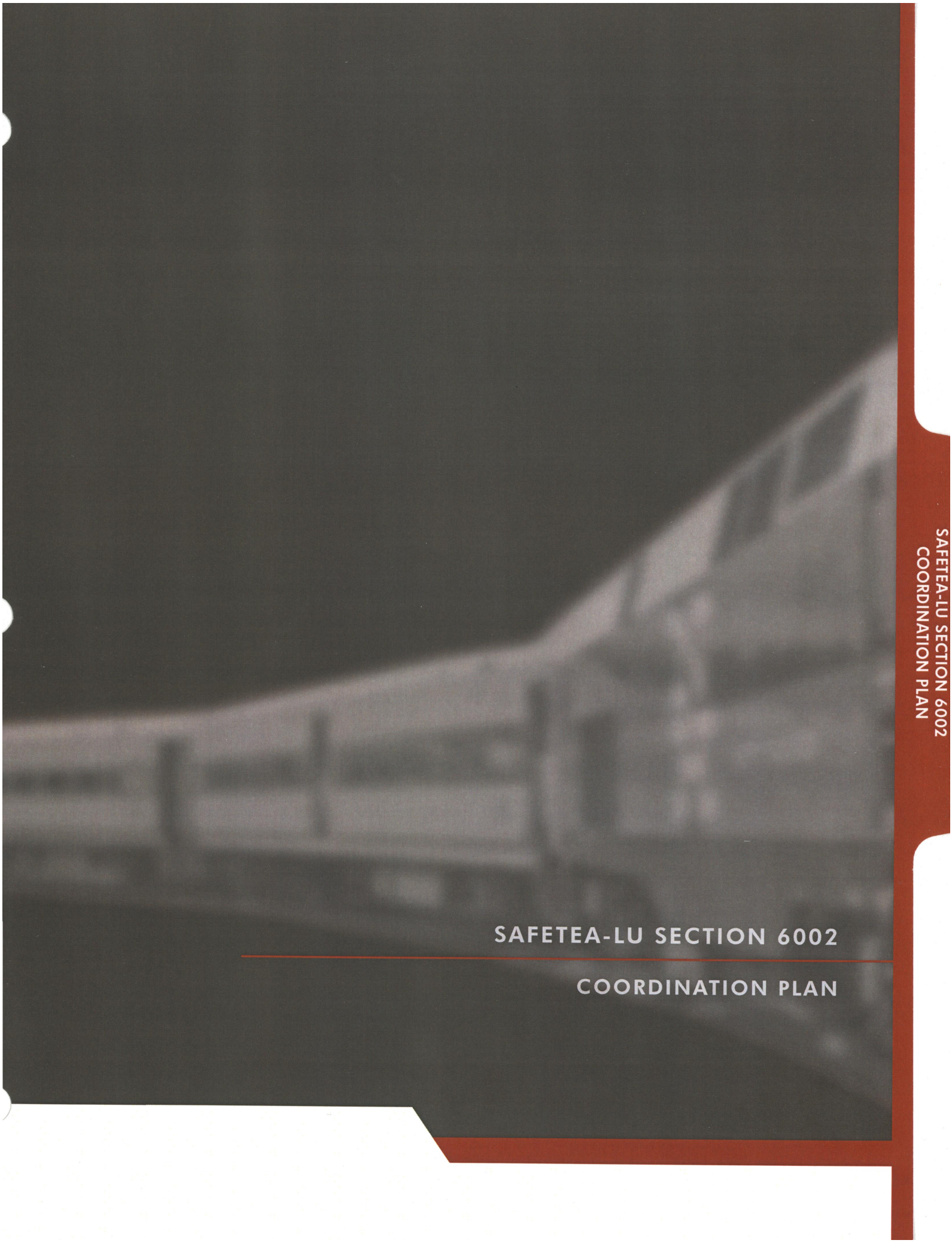

SAFETEA-LU SECTION 6002

COORDINATION PLAN

SAFETEA-LU SECTION 6002
COORDINATION PLAN

SAFTEA-LU SECTION 6002 COORDINATION PLAN

The Purpose of Coordination Plan

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act-A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) requires that the lead agencies establish a plan for coordinating public and agency participation and comment during the environmental review process. The Coordination Plan is intended to document the process by which the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) will communicate with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as the lead federal agency, additional cooperating and participating agencies, regional and local interested parties and the general public regarding the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for State Project No. 302-008. This plan establishes a framework for regular communication among all of the agencies involved in the EIS process. The plan establishes a timeframe for the project, it will establish the participating and cooperating agencies for the project and it will establish a method for involving the public. This coordination plan is a living document and can be modified throughout the progression of the EIS process. This plan is available electronically at www.ct.gov/dotinfo as well as on the project website at http://www.danburybranchstudy.com and in hardcopy format at the Norwalk Public Library, Wilton Public Library, Ridgefield Public Library, Redding Public Library, Redding Public Library, Bethel Public Library, Danbury Public Library, Brookfield Library, and New Milford Public Library.

While the coordination plan addresses the Federal EIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the document will also be utilized for the Connecticut Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) to comply with the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act.

State Project No. 302-008

Danbury Branch Improvements
Norwalk to New Milford, Connecticut

SAFETEA-LU Section 6002
Coordination Plan for the
Federal Environmental Impact Statement
and the
Connecticut Environmental Impact Evaluation

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Project No. 302-008
Danbury Branch Line Electrification
Norwalk to New Milford, Connecticut
Section 6002 Coordination Plan for the
Federal Environmental Impact Statement
Connecticut Environmental Impact Evaluation

Purpose of Coordination Plan

Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act-A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) requires that the lead agencies establish a plan for coordinating public and agency participation and comment during the environmental review process. The Coordination Plan is intended to document the process by which the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) will communicate with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as the lead federal agency, additional cooperating and participating agencies, regional and local interested parties and the general public regarding the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for State Project No. 302-008. This plan will establish a framework for regular communication among all of the agencies involved in the EIS process. The plan will establish a timeframe for the project, it will establish the participating and cooperating agencies for the project and it will establish a method for involving the public. This coordination plan is a living document and can be modified throughout the progression of the EIS process. This plan is available electronically at www.ct.gov/dotinfo as well as on the project website at http://www.danburybranchstudy.com and in hardcopy format at the Norwalk Public Library, Wilton Public Library, Ridgefield Public Library, Redding Public Library, Redding Public Library, Bethel Public Library, Danbury Public Library, Brookfield Library, and New Milford Public Library.

While the coordination plan addresses the Federal EIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the document will also be utilized as a Connecticut Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) to comply with the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act.

Background

ConnDOT undertook the Danbury Branch (Branch) feasibility study to examine the needs of and identify potential improvements to the New Haven Line's commuter rail branch line service between Norwalk and Danbury. A Congressional earmark and state bonding has provided the funding for this study, which has been conducted into two phases. Phase I identified, reviewed, and evaluated a range of preliminary improvement alternatives to the Branch, including electrification, addition of passing sidings, extension of service to New Milford, and track realignment modifications. Phase I documentation was completed and published in May 2006.

The alternatives recommended for further consideration in Phase II as a result of the Phase I analysis include: (A) No build; (B) Transportation System Management; (C) South Norwalk to Danbury Improvements including electrification, passing sidings, and minor track realignment; (D) Extension of diesel passenger service from Danbury to New Milford with improvements including new stations and minor track realignment; and (E) Partial electrification from South Norwalk to the vicinity of Route 15. The following towns are included in the study area: Norwalk, Wilton, Ridgefield, Redding, Bethel, Danbury, Brookfield, and New Milford.

Throughout the progression of the Phase I study, Federal, State, regional and local agencies, as well as the general public were given the opportunity to participate in the identification and development of alternatives to the project. The *Feasibility Study Danbury Branch Electrification Final Report May 2006* is available on the ConnDOT website at www.ct.gov/dotinfo, on the project website at www.danburybranchstudy.com as well as in hardcopy format for public inspection at ConnDOT's Office of Intermodal Planning, 2800 Berlin Turnpike P.O. Box 317546, Newington, CT 06131-7546.

EIS/EIE Scoping

Two Public Information Meetings were held on November 29, 2005 at the Wilton Town Hall Annex and on December 1, 2005 at the former New Milford Railroad Station, to present and discuss the results of the Phase I analysis and the alternatives recommended for further consideration in Phase II.

ConnDOT and URS/Washington Group International (WGI) have developed a scope of work for the Phase II EIS/EIE. While the scope of work was being developed it was made available to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), FTA, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality (CT CEQ), State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), and Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (VCOG) for review and comment. A Scoping Coordination Meeting was held on July 11, 2006 at the New Haven Union Railroad Station, to discuss the scope of work with the resource agencies, including the environmental resources to be investigated, the level of detail required for each resource studied, and further refinement of the alternatives.

The results of the public meetings and agency scoping meeting have been will be incorporated into a NEPA/CEPA Scoping Memorandum and Agreement, and circulated among ConnDOT, FTA, and the cooperating agencies for review and comment.

Participating and Cooperating Agencies

The study team for this undertaking shall consist of WGI, ConnDOT, FTA, SWRPA, MNR, HRR and HVCEO, and subconsultants to WGI. Coordination with the team shall be maintained through regular meetings, and the team will meet with ConnDOT periodically throughout the study period.

FTA will be the lead Federal agency for this project. As lead Federal agency in the Section 6002 process, FTA is responsible for making certain decisions as specified in Section 6002. In addition, FTA has an overall responsibility for facilitating the expeditious completion of the environmental review process, reviewing and accepting the EIS, and ensuring that ConnDOT complies with all requirements. ConnDOT will act as Joint Lead Agency for this project and will coordinate with the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management regarding CEPA compliance.

Cooperating Agencies are those Federal, State, or local government agencies that have jurisdiction by law or special expertise regarding the environmental impacts involved in the proposed transportation project. Cooperating Agencies will be asked to review technical reports and draft chapters of the DEIS/DEIE in their respective fields of expertise. The agencies requested to be Cooperating Agencies for this project

include the following: the SHPO, DEP, OPM, CT CEQ, DECD, EPA, FTA, FRA, ACOE, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service. (Responses and copies of letter requesting their participation are attached).

Public Involvement

Under NEPA and CEPA, the public must be given an opportunity for input during the EIS/EIE environmental review process. The public is encouraged to be involved early and often during project development. Public meetings will be held and the DEIS/DEIE will be made available for public comment as well. A notice will be published in area newspapers in order to notify the public of the availability of the DEIS/DEIE. The notice will indicate where the document can be obtained for review and it will also indicate where additional information can be obtained regarding the project. The public must be allowed an opportunity to provide input on the Purpose and Need of the project and the range of alternatives considered for the project as well.

The Danbury Branch Improvements EIS/EIE process will involve a public outreach program intended to inform the public and receive any input the public may have regarding this project. The public participation process contains the following elements: (1) meeting with town boards, (2) meeting with the SWRPA and HVCEO, (3) advisory committee meetings, (4) public information meetings, (5) newsletters, (6) public hearings on the DEIS; and (7) a website. An extensive public involvement program was established in Phase I and is summarized below.

Phase I Public Involvement Program

The Phase I Public Involvement program established a Study Advisory Committee consisting of the first elected official or their representative from each of the communities along the Branch line as well as the communities north of Danbury, as follows: Norwalk, Wilton, Ridgefield, Redding,, Bethel, Danbury, Brookfield, and New Milford. In addition, the Study Advisory Committee included representatives from the Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board, HVCEO, SWRPA, Housatonic Railroad, Metro-North Railroad, New Milford Rail Restoration Society, Housatonic Area Regional Transit, Metro-Pool, Providence & Worcester Railroad, Connecticut Rail Commuter Council, state legislators and congressional representatives.

A total of five Study Advisory Committee meetings were held throughout Phase I, as follows:
First Advisory Committee Meeting – 6-26-2003
Second Advisory Committee Meeting – 9-23-2003
Third Advisory Committee Meeting – 3-10-2004
Fourth Advisory Committee Meeting – 11-30-2204
Fifth Advisory Committee Meeting – 10-18-2005

A project website was launched on August 22, 2003 and is located at the following web address:
www.danburybranchstudy.com

A total of four public Open House meetings were held in Phase I:
Ridgefield community Center: 9-30-2003
Norwalk Community Center: 10-02-2003
Wilton Town Hall Annex: 11-29-2005
New Milford Railroad Station: 12-01-2005

A presentation on the results of Phase I was also made to the Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) in January, 2006 (a televised meeting on Connecticut Television Network).

In addition, comments from the public were also solicited from the website, via comment cards at the public meetings, and via email to the project team. The Phase I Public Involvement Program successfully received input on the following items:

- purpose and need for the study
- study goals and objectives
- alternatives for improvement to the Branch
- scope of services for Phase II

Phase II Public Involvement

The project website, established in Phase I, will continue to be maintained to inform the public of project status and to solicit comments from the public. The website will be updated periodically during the course of the project to provide current project information and to provide users with an opportunity to submit comments. Content on the website will include reports of past meetings, information regarding future meetings, photographs of the project area, current project status, and links to relevant websites. A link to it will be available at the ConnDOT web site: www.ct.gov/dotinfo.

Public meetings/hearings are required to keep the public informed of the study and EIS/EIE process, and to solicit input from the public. The public information meetings for this study are anticipated to be held in mid-2008 and public hearings will be held during the EIS/EIE process. Once the DEIS/DEIE is approved and filed, ConnDOT will hold public hearings to present the study documentation to the public and receive comments on the findings. These comments will be considered by ConnDOT when preparing the FEIS and ROD and selecting the preferred alternative(s).

ConnDOT will participate in all meetings with the public and the SWRPA and HVCEO and on an "as needed" basis in meetings with Town officials and boards. WGI will inform all participating and cooperating agencies of the meetings. ConnDOT will review draft materials prior to distribution.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of this study is to address two regional concerns; of primary concern is automobile congestion in the Route 7 and other adjacent north/south corridors; a second concern is the diversion of Connecticut rail commuters to the Harlem Line in New York. The purpose of phase I was to develop and evaluate a range of infrastructure and service improvements on the Danbury Branch to determine their potential to significantly enhance the Branch's attraction as a competitive alternative to driving in the Route 7 and other adjacent north/south corridors. In addition, Phase I was to determine whether service on the Branch Line could be improved sufficiently to attract riders now commuting on the Harlem Line.

Alternatives Considered

The alternatives that will be considered for this study include the following:

- No Build
- Transportation System Management
- South Norwalk to Danbury Improvements including electrification, passing sidings, and minor track realignment
- Extension of diesel passenger service from Danbury to New Milford with improvements including new stations and minor track realignment

- Partial electrification from South Norwalk to vicinity of Route 15.

Environmental Review Scope

According to the scope of services for this undertaking, the main portions of this project include the following:

- Study Management and Coordination
- Public Outreach
- NEPA, CEPA, and 404 Coordination
- Section 106 Consultation and Section 4(f) Evaluation
- Base Map Preparation
- Data Collection and Evaluation
- Transportation Alternative Development and Evaluation
- Conceptual Engineering and Evaluation
- Draft EIS/EIE and Public Hearings
- Final EIS/EIE Preparation
- Record of Decision

The data used for the preparation of the EIS/EIE will include the data that was contained in the Danbury Branch Electrification Feasibility Study documents to the greatest extent possible.

Methodologies

The general steps for impact analyses include: (1) Identifying the important cause-and-effect relationships between the project activities and impacts to resources, (2) determining the magnitude and significance of the effects over the relevant time frames, based on the resource characterizations from the data collection phase, (3) identifying relevant mitigation measures, either those to be undertaken as project specific actions or those evolving as general or regulatory trends in the affected area; and (4) summarizing any unmitigated adverse impacts and their significance.

Section 404 Permit Coordination

The coordination process between the NEPA process and the Army Corps of Engineers Section 404(b)(1) process for evaluating alternatives and impacts. This process satisfies both FTA's selection of a preferred alternative and the ACOE's requirements for selecting a Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). The process requires that the ACOE coordinates with ConnDOT and provides written approvals at key milestones in the project. Concurrent with the preparation of a draft EIS, a preliminary application for a Section 404 Permit will be prepared.

Draft EIS/EIE

The DEIS/EIE must be in conformance with NEPA and CEPA. The DEIS will be filed with EPA after which a 45 day comment period will begin. A public hearing on the DEIS/DEIE is scheduled and prior to the hearing, the public will be notified of the date, time, and place of the hearing in accordance with NEPA and CEPA requirements.

Review and Comment

A 45 day comment period for the DEIS/DEIE will begin on the date that EPA publishes a notice of availability in the *Federal Register* for the DEIS. This date will coincide with the notice of availability of the DEIE by ConnDOT. Copies of the DEIS/DEIE will be distributed to all Participating Agencies, Cooperating Agencies and any member of the public who requests inclusion in the distribution. All comments received during this period will be considered for the FEIS/FEIE.

Selection of the Preferred Alternative(s)

Coordination will occur with ACOE during their review of the DEIS and the Section 404 Permit Application. Meetings will be held between ConnDOT and FTA, in consultation with other agencies, to determine which alternative(s) is/are to be considered the LEDPA/ Preferred Alternative.

Final EIS/EIE

The FEIS/EIE will explain the process by which the preferred alternative(s) was/were selected, and include a detailed description of the preferred alternative. Once the FEIS/EIE is complete, copies will be distributed to all Participating Agencies, Cooperating Agencies, any individual who provides substantive comments on the DEIS/DEIE, and any member of the public who requests inclusion in the distribution. In accordance with the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, once a notice of the FEIS is published in the *Federal Register* by EPA, a 30 day waiting period must occur before the Record of Decision (ROD) can be issued by FTA. The ROD is scheduled to be issued in Spring 2011 for this project. A ROD for CEPA compliance will be simultaneously issued by the Connecticut OPM.

Project Schedule and Timeframe

ConnDOT has prepared a draft schedule that indicates projected dates for all environmental studies and meetings associated with this project.

Table 1: Project Schedule

Action	Target
Consultant given Notice to Proceed with Phase II study scope	December 2007
Advisory Committee Meetings	At major milestones throughout the EIS study process
Draft Coordination Plan	January 2008
FTA Coordination Meeting	January 2008
Alternatives Analysis	Winter 08 – Summer 09
Issue EIS Notice of Intent in Federal Register	Summer 2009
Begin Preparation of Draft EIS (DEIS)	Summer 2009
File DEIS with EPA	Spring 2010
Public Hearing on DEIS	Summer 2010
Identify Preferred Alternative(s)	Summer 2010
Permit Application to ACOE	Fall 2010
Begin Preparation of Final EIS	Fall 2010
File Final EIS (FEIS) with EPA	Winter 2011
Issue Record of Decision (ROD)	Spring 2011

List of Acronyms

ACOE – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
CEPA – Connecticut Environmental Policy Act
CEQ – President's Council on Environmental Quality
ConnDOT – Connecticut Department of Transportation
CT CEQ - Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality
DECD - Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development
DEIS/FEIS – Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Final Environmental Impact Statement
DEP - Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
EIS/EIE – Enviromental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Evaluation
EPA - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FRA - Federal Railroad Administration
FTA – Federal Transit Administration
HRR – Housatonic Railroad
HVCEO - Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials
LEDPA – Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative
LPA – Locally Preferred Alternative (s)
MNR – Metro-North Railroad
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
OPM – Connecticut Office of Policy and Management
ROD – Record of Decision
SHPO - State Historic Preservation Office
SWRPA - South Western Regional Planning Agency
TSB – Connecticut Transporation Strategy Board
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WGI =Washington Group International