

Foreword

This document is the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the MTA/LIRR East Side Access Project. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), in cooperation with the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the East Side Access Project on May 17, 2000. Its publication marked the beginning of public review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The DEIS was circulated to involved and interested agencies and other interested parties, and notice of its availability and of the public hearing was published in the Federal Register on May 26, 2000. In addition, postcards indicating that the DEIS was available and that the public hearing would be held were circulated to some 5,000 households. To advertise the public hearing, MTA published notices in newspapers of general circulation as well as community and minority newspapers throughout the area. MTA also posted advertisements for the hearing in MTA commuter railroad stations and performed seat drops with notice of the hearing on both LIRR and Metro-North Railroad (MNR) commuter trains. MTA held a public hearing on June 15, 2000 at 347 Madison Avenue, fifth floor boardroom. Comments were accepted at that hearing and throughout the public comment period, which was held open until July 12, 2000, as well as following the official comment period, through December 1, 2000.

This FEIS responds to the comments made during the public comment period and reflects refinements to the project design made since publication of the DEIS. The FEIS identifies the comments received and provides responses in a new chapter, Chapter 28, "Comments and Responses on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement." In addition, where appropriate, the text of other chapters of this FEIS is revised in response to comments received. Changes to the document since publication of the DEIS are indicated by italics in a different font than the rest of the document.

The FEIS is revised in response to comments and to incorporate refinements to the project's design since publication of the DEIS. Specifically, the document notes that while the DEIS considered two engineering options for the Preferred Alternative's Manhattan alignment, with different terminals at Grand Central Terminal (GCT), Option 2 has been selected as the preferred engineering option for East Side Access because of its substantial advantages in terms of cost, constructability, and operations; its significantly fewer risks and impacts during construction; and the strong public support of the project with Option 2 as its Manhattan alignment. Since publication of the DEIS, the design for Option 2 has been advanced. Currently, two design concepts are being considered for the Option 2 terminal, both of which would require fewer tracks and one less platform than presented in the DEIS. These are described in Chapter 2 ("Project Alternatives") of this FEIS.

In addition, the FEIS also reflects refinements to the project's construction techniques in Queens that were made to avoid impacts to Amtrak operations at Sunnyside Yard. The construction plan discussed in the DEIS involved use of a small area at the edge of

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Amtrak's Sunnyside Yard as the site for launching the tunnel boring machines that would be used to construct East Side Access tunnels beneath the yard. That work required demolition of several Amtrak buildings at the edge of Sunnyside Yard, adjacent to Yard A. As discussed in Chapter 17 of the FEIS ("Construction and Construction Impacts"), the launch site for the tunnel boring machine is now proposed for a site some 150 feet to the north, within LIRR's Yard A. Demolition of Amtrak's buildings is therefore no longer required.

The FEIS also notes revisions to the proposal for replacement facilities for New York & Atlantic Railway (NYAR). NYAR would create its own replacement facilities, with a new rail storage yard most likely at Blissville, Queens, and a replacement railcar maintenance shop most likely at Fresh Pond, Queens. The Maspeth replacement yard site is no longer under consideration, but analysis of the site remains in the document for comparison purposes.

During the public comment period on the DEIS, more than 300 comments were received from residents and elected officials of municipalities in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, particularly Greenlawn, Babylon, and Riverhead, with respect to the analyses of new nighttime storage yards on Long Island that would be required to accommodate the Long Island Rail Road's expanded fleet. These comments were in opposition to selection of yard sites in Greenlawn (Hazeltine), Babylon, and Riverhead. Many commenters also requested greater public review and involvement in the site selection process for new storage yards. Some commenters requested additional time for public comment on the DEIS. In response to this request, all comments received through December 1, 2000, were included in the FEIS (see Chapter 28).

The text in the FEIS has also been clarified with respect to the yard sites. The DEIS for the East Side Access Project included an analysis of eight potential rail storage yards in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, based on sites identified through a preliminary screening process conducted by the LIRR. That discussion is no longer applicable. Since the DEIS, the LIRR has continued to explore the possible alternatives for developing new yard space and, based on community input, has determined that it will initiate a new site selection process for any new yards to be developed. The process of identifying potentially appropriate sites for the new yards and selecting preferred alternatives for those sites will be conducted in the future by the LIRR. Planning for the storage yards is currently at a very early stage. At present, no site on any LIRR branch has the status of a preferred yard location. As detailed in Chapter 2 of this FEIS, the decision whether to go forward with one or more additional storage yards, where the yard or yards should be located, and the details concerning expansion of the existing yards will be the subject of a tiered environmental review. Under a tiered NEPA EIS approach, the lead agency focuses on the issues that are ripe for decision in the first-tier document and prepares further environmental analyses as elements of the subsequent actions become adequately defined.

Because the increased need for storage yards is one of the foreseeable environmental impacts of the East Side Access Project, this FEIS includes an analysis of that impact. The FEIS identifies seven sites in Nassau and Suffolk Counties to illustrate the types of impacts that could occur with development of new yard facilities on Long Island. As noted above, this is a change from the DEIS, which described those seven sites as part of the site selection process for new LIRR storage yards. It should also be noted that an eighth site,

at Hazeltine in the Town of Huntington, Suffolk County, was also described in the DEIS but is not included in this FEIS. This site has been eliminated because the DEIS identified significant adverse impacts associated with the site's proximity to residential neighborhoods and because of community input received during the public comment period for the East Side Access Project's DEIS. ❖