

Section 6 COMMENTS AND COORDINATION



6.0 Comments and Coordination

A scoping coordination letter describing the project and requesting comments was forwarded to the state and federal resource agencies on September 3, 2010. The scoping letter and agency responses are in Appendix A. The Springfield Rail Improvements Project was included as part of the Tier 1 Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail Environmental Impact Statement Notice of Intent (NOI). The NOI was published in the Federal Register on February 14, 2011.

Since February 2011, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), has been conducting a Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail Project and a Tier 2 project-level evaluation for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project. A scoping coordination letter describing the project and requesting comments and upcoming scoping meeting attendance was forwarded to the state and federal resource agencies in February 2011. The agency scoping letter responses and cooperating agency responses are located in Appendix E of the Tier 1 DEIS. In March 2011, an initial round of public meeting was held within the corridor to introduce the studies to the public, to explain the EIS process and timeline, and to get input. After these meetings the study team spent the next several months developing alternatives. In late October and early November 2011, public hearings were held in the cities of Joliet; Bloomington; Springfield; Carlinville; and Alton. Additional agency and public coordination can be referenced in Section 6.0 of the Tier 1 DEIS.

6.1 Agency Coordination

A coordination letter describing the Springfield Rail Improvements Project was mailed to federal, state and local agencies on September 3, 2010 (see Appendix A). This letter explained the purpose of the project, the project location, potential project alternatives and requested any concerns or specific issues that should be addressed in the NEPA document.

6.1.1 Federal Agency Coordination

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers responded to the September 3, 2010 coordination letter on October 8, 2010. Since the Springfield Rail Improvements Project does not involve any Corps' administered land, no further Rock Island real estate coordination is necessary. However, further coordination may be necessary for potential impacts to waters of the U.S. and/or wetlands. Also, coordination was suggested with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency.

U.S. Department of Commerce. The Regional Director of the Chicago Regional Office of the Economic Development Administration responded on November 2, 2010. They expressed no concerns or issues that needed to be addressed regarding the high-speed rail service from Chicago to St. Louis.

U.S. Department of Interior. The Rock Island Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responded on November 9, 2010. A list of potential federally-listed threatened and endangered species was provided to assist in the assessment of suitable habitat within the project area.

6.1.2 State Agency Coordination

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Division of Ecosystems and Environment responded on September 10, 2010 via electronic mail that the project team should use their Eco-Cat program to identify any potential state-listed threatened and endangered species.

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. The Acting Deputy Director responded on September 16, 2010 and had no objections to the proposed project. The potential for a NPDES permit and a permit from the Division of Public Water Supplies was mentioned as a courtesy, if warranted.

Illinois Department of Agriculture. The Acting Chief responded on September 17, 2010 stating that they have no comments towards the evaluation and selection of a high-speed railroad corridor through Springfield.

Illinois Emergency Management Agency. The Regional Coordinator responded via electronic mail on September 17, 2010 with concerns for safety from hazardous materials along the 10th Street corridor.

Illinois State Geological Survey. The Director and State Geologist provided information on coal mines and poorly drained soils within the project area. No concerns or issues with the project were noted.

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. The Deputy State Historic Preservation Offices submitted a letter on October 4, 2010. Their concerns related to the possible adverse effects of the project on National Historic Landmarks within the project area. If any adverse effects are proposed, the Advisory Council on Historic preservation and the National Park Service will need to participate in the Section 106 consultation process.

6.1.3 Local Governments

The project included input from a Steering Committee composed of representatives of the City of Springfield, Sangamon County, IDOT and Senator Durbin's office. This Committee met as needed.

IDOT Bureau of Railroads representatives served on the Steering Committee. Meetings were held to update the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on the progress of the project. Coordination with state and federal environmental agencies is included in Appendix A.

6.2 Technical Committee

A Technical Committee met as needed to discuss the project. Members of this Committee included representatives of the Steering Committee plus:

- Norfolk Southern Railroad
- Illinois Midland Railroad
- Kansas City Southern Railroad
- Union Pacific Railroad
- Canadian National Railroad
- Amtrak
- Illinois Commerce Commission

6.3 Public Involvement Activities

Public engagement has been a key element in the success of the Springfield Rail Improvements Project. The project team has worked to connect with the project's interested and impacted parties through a variety of communications and outreach tactics. The principal aim has been to educate and inform the public about the project's process, activities and findings. To this end, a website has been maintained, newsletters distributed, email broadcasts sent out, displays circulated, and community presentations facilitated. Key stakeholders and their constituents have been directly engaged in the study through a series of stakeholder interviews and the formation of four advisory groups.

Direct engagement of the general public has also been a critical component of the project team's public involvement efforts. Two public open houses, each of which were attended by roughly 300 people were held. These open houses provided a means to both inform the public and solicit its input at key milestones in the project. Tools to gain public input, including a project email, a telephone hotline, and the maintenance of a direct mail repository were developed.

6.3.1 Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders' input were sought to learn about community issues that could impact the project and to gain insights on effective public outreach and engagement activities. Seventeen key informant interviews were conducted with municipal, business and community stakeholders in the first eight weeks of the project. These meetings introduced stakeholders to the project; obtained their initial thoughts on the project; and

helped the team become aware of key issues, opportunities, and the best methods to engage constituents.

6.3.2 Stakeholder Advisory Groups

Four distinct stakeholder groups were identified and formed into corresponding advisory committees: Business, Community, Medical and Public Officials. Fifteen representatives from the area chamber of commerce, local businesses, and professional trade organizations came together to form the Business Advisory Group. The Community Advisory Group consists of 20 members serving on behalf of 15 neighborhood associations, a bicycle/pedestrian advocacy group, and several civic and faith-based organizations. Delegates from the region's largest health care providers participate in the Medical Advisory Group. Lastly, the Public Officials Advisory Group includes elected officials such as city aldermen, county board members, and state and federal representatives, as well as agents from the regional planning commission, park district, and mass transit district.

All four advisory groups have convened three times since the beginning of the project (February 2010, April 2010, and November 2010). Advisory group members serve as liaisons between the project team and their respective constituencies. They also provide guidance on the best ways to attain public input. Advisory group meeting summaries are made available to the public via the project website.

6.3.3 Communications, Outreach, and Engagement

As previously mentioned, a variety of tools have been employed in order to inform and educate the public. This includes a comprehensive project website that contains information on every aspect of the project as well as meeting summaries, a presentation calendar, and information presented at both open houses. The project website has had more than 14,000 visits since it was launched in April 2010.

Project newsletters are another means of communicating with the public. Thus far, three newsletters have been written and distributed (see Appendix C). The first newsletter served as an introduction to the project and advertised the first open house. The second newsletter reported on public input results from the first open house. The third newsletter provided an update on the project and announced the second open house. The newsletters are distributed to approximately 2,800 people and are also sent via email to a list of about 500 individuals. This same email list has received additional e-broadcasts about open houses and website updates.

The project also has an email account that is checked daily and has received 50 emails to date. The nature of the email messages range from presentation requests to comments regarding the proposed alternatives. Messages are logged in a database and responded to as necessary. Additionally, the project has received twelve letters from individuals,

businesses, and organizations, representing the interests of neighborhoods, property owners, professional associations, businesses, and the Mid-Illinois Medical District.

Since the project's onset, 31 community presentations have been made, reaching more than 1,000 people. Presentations have been hosted by neighborhood associations, faith-based groups, the local school district, and civic, trade, and professional organizations. By going into the community to share project information, answer questions and obtain feedback, exposure to a wider audience of constituents has been gained than those who would normally self-select to attend project meetings.

Four large-scale (seven foot) display kiosks that change locations about every six to eight weeks were also created. The kiosks' eight panels describe the project's purpose and background, timeline and project team, current and future rail conditions, and how to get involved. Beginning in April 2010, the kiosks were displayed at various locations in and around the project area, including local hospitals, civic and municipal buildings, churches, and White Oaks Mall.

6.3.4 Public Open Houses

Two public open houses were held to correspond with: 1) an initial discussion of the project's purpose and needs, and 2) the development of preliminary alternatives. These interactive sessions have given interested citizens and stakeholders opportunities to examine detailed project information and to share their corridor preferences and concerns. They have also provided settings for residents to meet with and ask questions.

The first open house was held on Tuesday, April 20, 2010 and had more than 290 people in attendance. Meeting notices in the form of letters, flyers and posters were sent to all four stakeholder advisory groups, elected officials, and approximately 120 area churches. The first newsletter included the open house announcement and a postcard was sent as an email-broadcast. The website's home page and Facebook page also featured event announcements. Radio advertisements ran on WMAY, WTAX, WFMB, and WUIS along with newspaper ads in The Illinois Times, Springfield Business Journal, Capital City Courier and Pure News. A press advisory was distributed to local media contacts and generated an interview on WMAY the day before the open house and an article in The State Journal Register the day of the meeting. The four kiosks displayed open house flyers and were at Memorial Hospital, Prairie Capital Convention Center, the city's Municipal Building, and the Central Library. Additionally, door hangers were distributed to residences immediately adjacent to the three rail corridors.

At the first open house, participants learned about the project's purpose and need, technical activities and engagement process as well as shared their community values and context, concerns and desires with the project team. To capture public input, the attendees were asked to complete a comment form and to visit a public input station

where they could post their thoughts about the project for all to see. A total of 108 comment forms were completed. Respondents, 86 percent of whom were city residents, indicated that they found the open house to be well planned and worth their time. In addition, they characterized the project team as informative, helpful and prepared.

On the comment form's two open-ended questions, respondents were able to share a wide range of perspectives. The first question asked what would make the project a success. Ninety-one people answered this question and stated in order of preference (with the last two bullets tied):

- Routing Springfield's rail (freight) traffic out of town,
- Conducting the study in a fair and neutral manner,
- Informing the community of the project's activities and findings, and
- Locating rail traffic along the city's eastern corridors.

The second open-ended query simply asked for any additional comments or questions. Fifty-four people shared their insights, with most focusing on:

- Concerns about noise and vibration impacts,
- Appreciation for the project team's community involvement efforts,
- Suggestions for keeping the public informed,
- A desire to move rail (freight) traffic out of town, and
- Concerns about public safety.

Many open house attendees not only completed comment forms, but also visited the public input station to answer questions about their project concerns, desires and values. Because some participants had strong affiliations with the 3rd Street, 10th Street or 19th Street railroad corridors, they were encouraged to direct their responses to the corridors they cared about most. They were also given an option of answering more broadly, which involved providing responses that focused on the city as a whole.

One hundred eighty-six responses were received to the first question posed at the public input station, which was, "What concerns do you have about increasing rail traffic near where you live, work and play?" The top five areas of concern overall were:

- Compromised public safety,
- Damaging noise and vibration impacts,

- Traffic delays,
- Negative effects on the local economy, and
- Increased neighborhood division and destruction.

The second question asked people to articulate their desires for railroad corridor and neighborhood improvement. A total of 200 responses were given with the top four improvement desires being:

- Spur economic development,
- Route train (freight) traffic outside of town,
- Increase green space and recreation options along the impacted corridors/neighborhoods, and
- Improve traffic flow.

The last question addressed by open house attendees concerned the values they thought should inform the project team's decision making as it determined how best to accommodate increasing rail traffic. Respondents posted 171 comments, which revealed the most important values as:

- Doing what is best for Springfield's economy,
- Promoting public safety,
- Protecting and enhancing neighborhoods, and
- Improving traffic flow.

The second open house was held on Tuesday, November 16, 2010 and was attended by 309 citizens. The main purpose of this open house was to:

- Present the alternatives for accommodating increasing rail traffic;
- Share the evaluation factors in the alternative selection process; and
- Obtain public input on which alternative would best serve the City of Springfield.

The open house was announced in the project's third newsletter and was mailed to approximately 2,800 people. Advisory group members were sent letters and an email message; flyers were mailed to elected officials; approximately 120 area churches were sent posters; and an announcement was sent to 500 people via an e-broadcast. The website and Facebook page were updated with an open house notice. Radio ads ran on WMAY, WTAX, WFMB, and WUIS. Newspaper ads were featured in The Illinois

Times, Springfield Business Journal, and Capital City Courier. Flyers were made available on the project's kiosks, which were at the County Municipal Building, Springfield Art Association, Abundant Faith Christian Center and Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church. Additionally, the Faith Coalition for the Common Good circulated an email to its 200 members; St. John's Hospital notified its 3,600 employees; and Memorial Hospital included an announcement in its newsletter to 4,500 employees. Earned media included an article in The State Journal Register and a radio interview with WTAX, both the day before the open house.

Attendees were encouraged to visit 12 display stations, three of which featured information on the proposed alternatives for accommodating rail traffic. The other stations featured: project information; historic structures; noise and vibration; corridor redevelopment opportunities; land acquisition process; high-speed rail; non-viable alternatives; railroad safety; and public engagement. The alternative stations displayed descriptions, maps and technical comparisons based on evaluation factors such as traffic delays, expected crash frequency and estimated displacements. These three stations represented variations of the following alternatives:

- Double track 3rd Street;
- Shift 3rd Street rail traffic to 10th Street; and
- Shift 3rd Street and 19th Street rail traffic to 10th Street.

6.3.4.1 *Comment Form Results*

A total of 233 comment forms were received – 199 at the open house, 31 via the project's website and three via mail and electronic mail.

Respondents were asked to select the alternative that they thought would best address Springfield's need to accommodate increasing rail traffic. With 220 responses to this question, approximately 47 percent of the respondents selected one of the two alternatives that involved shifting both 3rd Street and 19th Street rail traffic to 10th Street. Forty-two percent selected one of two alternatives that involved shifting only 3rd Street to 10th Street; and the remaining respondents, 11 percent, favored one of three alternatives to double track 3rd Street.

The 220 responses to this question are organized in the following table:

**Table 6-1. Public Response Summary - Alternative Which Best Addresses
Accommodating Increasing Rail Traffic**

Alternative	Number of respondents choosing the alternative	Percentage of respondents choosing the alternative
Alternative 3B: Shift 3 rd Street and 19 th Street tracks to 10 th Street corridor; fully grade separated; two new grade separations on 19 th Street corridor; Quiet zones along corridor; close six streets along 10 th Street.	53	24 percent
Alternative 3A: Shift 3 rd Street and 19 th Street tracks to 10 th Street corridor; five new grade separations on 10 th Street corridor; two new grade separations on 19 th Street corridor; Quiet zones along corridor; close four streets along 10 th Street.	50	23 percent
Alternative 2A: Shift 3 rd Street to 10 th Street; five new grade separations on 10 th Street corridor; two new grade separations on 19 th Street corridor; Quiet zones along all corridors; close four streets along 10 th Street.	50	23 percent
Alternative 2B: Shift 3 rd Street to 10 th Street; fully grade separate south of North Grand; two new grade separations on 19 th Street corridor; Quiet zones along all corridors; close six streets along 10 th Street.	43	19 percent
Alternative	Number of respondents choosing the alternative	Percentage of respondents choosing the alternative
Alternative 1B: Double Track 3 rd Street; seven new grade separations; Quiet zone along 3 rd Street corridor.	10	4 percent
Alternative 1A: Double Track 3 rd Street; no new grade separations; Quiet zone along 3 rd Street corridor.	8	4 percent
Alternative 1C: Double track 3 rd Street - seven new grade separations; five new grade separations on 10 th Street corridor; two new grade separations on 19 th Street corridor; Quiet zones along all corridors.	6	3 percent

Evaluation Factors

After selecting their top alternative, respondents were asked to choose the top three factors that they used in their decision-making. The available choices included the factors being considered in the alternative selection process. As indicated by the comment forms, the top three factors were traffic delays, public safety and corridor redevelopment.

Table 6-2. Public Response Summary - Factors Considered in Alternative Selection

Factors considered in choosing an alternative	Total number of responses received
Traffic Delays	164
Public Safety	163
Corridor Redevelopment	101
Environmental Impacts	88
Displacements	82
Costs	76

The comment form also contained a section for respondents to add any additional comments about the alternatives or the factors used in the selection process. One hundred and sixteen, about half, of the submitted comment forms included remarks in this section.

Of those who completed this section, 40 percent used this opportunity to describe why Alternative 1, double tracking 3rd Street, was not the best choice. Citizens cited reasons that generally centered on the following:

- Negative impacts on the local economy, especially on the medical district;
- Disruption to business operations and traffic flow in the downtown area; and
- Overall devastation to the city's downtown, including historical sites.

Another 16 percent of the comments revealed support for consolidating 3rd Street traffic to 10th Street (either Alternative 2 or 3) because it would create redevelopment and economic development opportunities, both along an abandoned 3rd Street and along an expanded 10th Street corridor; and it would improve traffic flow within and through the city.

There were several comments, approximately seven percent of the total provided in this section, which demonstrated concern for or opposition to consolidating rail onto the 10th Street corridor. Reasons cited include the following:

- Further division between the East Side and West Side of the city;
- Impacts on traffic flow and emergency medical access due to road closures; and

- Negative effects on Lanphier High School and the surrounding area.

Close to 10 percent of the comments focused on which factors to consider in the selection process. Respondents mentioned displacements, corridor redevelopment, vibration and noise, public safety, tourism, people with disabilities, a minimal number of overpasses/underpasses, and long-term planning for the City. The remaining comments ranged from suggestions on re-routing the rail corridor out of the city or completely underground to remarks on high-speed rail.