



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0435

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COMMISSIONER

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November 18, 2016

**Via Electronic Mail to AtlChatt@dot.ga.gov**

Attn: Ariel Heckler, Project Manager  
Division of Intermodal  
Georgia Department of Transportation  
One Georgia Center – 600 West Peachtree NW  
Atlanta, GA 30308

Dear Ms. Heckler:

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) *Atlanta-Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Project Tier I Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (Draft EIS). The FRA, in cooperation with GDOT and TDOT, proposes to construct a high-speed intercity passenger service connecting Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The project aims to enhance intercity mobility and economic growth throughout the project area between the metropolitan areas and the airports of Atlanta and Chattanooga by providing faster and more reliable ground transportation service to the public as an alternative to highway, intercity bus, and air travel in a manner that is safe and cost-effective, while avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating impacts on the human and natural environment.

Actions considered in detail within the Draft EIS include:

- No-Build Alternative – Under the No-Build Alternative, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT would take no action to construct a high-speed ground transportation (HSGT) project in the project area. Existing transportation systems would remain in place, and all transportation system improvements that are currently listed in local, regional, and state transportation plans that have identified funds for implementation will be implemented.
- I-75 Corridor Alternative – Under the I-75 Corridor Alternative, the HSGT project would begin on the east side of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport immediately adjacent to I-75, following I-75 north along the I-75 right-of-way (ROW). North of I-24 in Tennessee, the corridor continues along an existing CSX rail ROW to downtown Chattanooga.
- East Corridor Alternative – Under the East Corridor Alternative, the HSGT project would follow the same alignment as the I-75 corridor until Cartersville, where it would deviate from I-75 and continue along existing CSX ROW parallel to US 411 and into Chattanooga.
- I-75/East Corridor Alternative – Under the I-75/East Corridor Alternative, the HSGT project would follow the same path as the I-75 and East corridors to Cartersville and follow US 411 to Rome, where it would

continue along an existing CSX ROW to rejoin I-75 between Cartersville and Dalton. The corridor would continue along the I-75 ROW to Dalton and into downtown Chattanooga.

TDEC's **Office of Energy Programs and the Tennessee Geological Survey (TGS)** have reviewed the Draft EIS and have no specific comments regarding the proposed action or its alternatives.

TDEC's **Tennessee State Parks and Real Property Management** have reviewed the Draft EIS and note that the proposed project should not impact TDEC managed lands.

TDEC's **Division of Archaeology (DoA)** has reviewed the Draft EIS and provides the following comments regarding the proposed action alternatives that occur within Tennessee. TDOT archaeologists have identified all properties in the study area that are listed or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (3.8.4.2). DoA notes that other potentially significant sites may exist and have yet to be identified, which will be determined by TDOT as part of their responsibilities to comply with Section 106 (3.8.6). At this time, DoA concurs with TDOT findings and suggestions related to this project as discussed within the Draft EIS.

TDEC's **Division of Natural Areas (DNA)** has reviewed the Draft EIS and provides the following comments regarding the proposed action alternatives that occur within Tennessee. For areas of the project occurring in Hamilton County, Tennessee, DNA prefers for the project to use an existing corridor when possible. Besides the known occurrences of rare species included in the NEPA document for Hamilton County, there could be additional rare species that DNA is unaware of because not all of Tennessee has been surveyed. Should suitable habitat for rare species existing on or immediately downstream of the project site, DNA recommends that the project plans provide for the protection of these species. For stabilization of disturbed areas, the Tennessee Natural Heritage Program advocates the use of native trees, shrubs, and warm season grasses, where practicable. Care should be taken to prevent re-vegetation of disturbed areas with plants listed by the Tennessee Exotic Pest Plan Council as harmful exotic plants.<sup>1</sup>

TDEC's **Division of Air Pollution Control (APC)** has reviewed the Draft EIS and provides the following comments regarding the proposed action alternatives that occur within Tennessee.

- Dust emissions generated by construction activities can vary substantially depending on levels of activity, specific operations, and prevailing meteorological conditions. However, dust emissions due to construction activities are likely to be short-term and temporary in nature. It is recommended that ordinary dust control measures, such as wetting by water spray, be employed to mitigate any dust emissions generated. APC recommends that mitigation of dust emissions be addressed in future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents related to this project.
- Exhaust emissions generated by onsite construction equipment are not likely to be of concern during the project. However, APC recommends that mitigation of exhaust emissions be addressed in future NEPA documents related to this project.
- The proposed project does not reference demolition of buildings. However, if demolition is to occur, fugitive dust emissions produced may require mitigation. Demolition would also require an asbestos demolition notification in advance of any activity as well as proper pre-demolition surveys to identify any regulated asbestos-containing materials (ACM) that may be present. Should any ACM be present, it would need to be handled and disposed of according to applicable Federal, state, and local regulations. This should be addressed in future NEPA documents.
- Should any land clearing activities or disposal of brush or trees/tree limbs occur, APC prefers that wood waste be disposed of by chipping, grinding, or composting rather than open burning. However, if open

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information regarding harmful exotic plants in Tennessee can be found at <http://www.tneppc.org/>.

burning does occur during site preparation and construction, open burning regulations should be followed.<sup>2</sup> APC recommends that detailed clearing activities, total amount of areas where soils are to be disturbed, and associated impacts be addressed in future NEPA documents related to this project.

- The National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) table (Table 3.6) provided does not include the revised ozone standard of 0.070 ppm.<sup>3</sup>
- Page 3-20 indicates that TDEC APC is responsible for monitoring and enforcing air quality regulations in the State of Tennessee. While this statement is correct, in the case of Hamilton County, the Chattanooga/Hamilton County Air Pollution Control Bureau has been delegated authority to monitor air quality and has jurisdiction over air quality issues within the county. This should be reflected in future NEPA documents related to this project.
- Page 3-21 of the Draft EIS notes that Chattanooga is classified as a Non-Attainment Area for the 1997 PM<sub>2.5</sub> Annual Standard. Chattanooga is actually classified as attaining the 1997 2.5 Annual Standard. It is recommended that this be reflected in future NEPA documents related to this project.
- Data contained within Table 3-7 for Hamilton County should be updated to reflect the 2014, 2015, and possibly 2016 data for Chattanooga rather than 2012 and 2013 data.

TDEC's **Division of Water Resources (DWR)** has reviewed the Draft EIS and provides the following comments regarding the proposed action alternatives that occur within Tennessee. As is typical with long range transportation planning and project execution, specific project details associated with each alternative are still being determined. DWR looks forward to working with TDOT, GDOT, and FRA as this project develops.

- The Tennessee portion of the project will likely required an Aquatic Resource Alteration Permit for stream crossings, wetlands, etc., as well as a construction stormwater permit due to the large area being disturbed exceeding one acre.
- Construction activities, including clearing, grading, filling, and excavating, or other similar activities, including staging areas, that result in the disturbance of one acre or more of total land area require coverage under Tennessee's General National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for discharges of stormwater associated with construction activities.
- Given the karst geology of the area, a letter of authorization from DWR's Underground Injection Control program for sinkhole modification will likely be required as well.

TDEC appreciates the opportunity to comment on this Draft EIS. Please note that these comments are not indicative of approval or disapproval of the proposed action or its alternatives, nor should they be interpreted as an indication regarding future permitting decisions by TDEC. Please contact me should you have any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,



Kendra Abkowitz, PhD  
Director of Policy and Planning  
Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation  
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<sup>2</sup> TDEC APC Rule 1200-3-4-.01 et seq., <http://share.tn.gov/sos/rules/1200/1200-03/1200-03-04.pdf>. Additional information on open burning in Tennessee is available at <https://tn.gov/environment/article/apc-open-burning> and <http://www.burnsafetn.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> The current EPA NAAQS table is available at <https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants/naaqs-table>. The final rule was signed October 1, 2015 and became effective December 28, 2015.

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cc: Molly Cripps, TDEC, OEP  
Ron Zurawski, TDEC, TGS  
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