

January 13, 2012

Contact: Taryn Tuss (CEQ): 202-456-6998

Justin Nisly (DOT): 202-366-4570

Council on Environmental Quality, U.S. Department of Transportation Announce Effort to Cut Costs, Fast Track Construction and Job Creation for High-Speed Rail Projects in the Northeast Corridor

Today, the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) announced a pilot project aimed at expediting the environmental reviews for high-speed passenger rail service in the Northeast Corridor through an innovative and more efficient process.

Through this pilot project, CEQ and DOT will work with stakeholders to identify efficiencies to speed the environmental review process that will inform selection of service types and station locations for high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor. The pilot will engage Federal, state and local governments and the public in the environmental review process earlier to set benchmarks that maintain rigorous environmental protections and save time and costs by avoiding conflicts and delays in the later steps of rail-project development.

“The Northeast Corridor is the busiest rail corridor in the U.S.,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. “Our planned improvements will lead to more jobs, a stronger rail system and a stronger economy. By bringing all involved parties to the table earlier in the process, we will do the job better and finish it sooner.”

“The National Environmental Policy Act provides essential protections for American communities and the natural resources our economy depends on,” said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality. “This pilot project will ensure a collaborative environmental review process for quicker, better-informed decisions for the Northeast Corridor high speed rail project.”

To promote transparency and public input, DOT will post and track project timelines and progress on the Federal Infrastructure Projects Dashboard at www.performance.gov, which launched in November 2011 to track high impact, job-creating infrastructure projects for expedited review.

The Transportation Rapid Response Team, a Federal interagency group also launched in November 2011 to speed Federal reviews of transportation projects, will help coordinate the high-speed rail planning process to ensure quick resolution of any interagency conflicts.

The Northeast Corridor high-speed rail planning project is the fourth project selected by CEQ under its National Environmental Policy Act Pilot program, which focuses on identifying and promoting more efficient ways to do effective environmental reviews that can be replicated. CEQ will use efficiencies identified for the high-speed rail project to develop best practices for environmental reviews across the Federal Government.

To learn more about CEQ’s NEPA Pilot Program, visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/nepa>.

###