ABSTRACT

Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT have proposed the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project to enhance the capacity and improve the operation of the Portal Bridge, a passenger rail bridge over the Hackensack River. The existing Portal Bridge is a two-track, moveable swing-span rail bridge between the City of Kearny and the City of Secaucus in Hudson County, New Jersey. It was constructed by the Pennsylvania Railroad and began operation in 1910 as part of a larger project that also included the following elements: New York's original Pennsylvania Station; twin tunnels from Tonnelle Avenue in New Jersey to 9th Avenue in Manhattan; the portion of the Northeast Corridor from Tonnelle Avenue to the former Manhattan Transfer station in Harrison, New Jersey; and electric traction power and signal systems along this segment. These major improvements made possible direct train service between western and southern points on the Pennsylvania Railroad and New York City.

The Portal Bridge is located at Milepost 6.1 along the heavily used "High Line" portion of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, which connects Newark, New Jersey and New York, New York. The aging Portal Bridge owned by Amtrak is a bottleneck along the Northeast Corridor that conflicts with marine traffic and impedes efficient and reliable passenger rail service. The existing Portal Bridge poses reliability concerns, capacity constraints, and operational inflexibility. This Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) examines four build alternatives in addition to the "no build" scenario. The build alternatives, which were identified through a comprehensive alternatives development and screening process, involve two new bridges to replace the existing bridge and differ primarily with respect to the location of the southern bridge and the type of grade-separated crossing, either track fly-over or duck-under, included to improve railroad operations.

Considered in the analyses and impact assessments in the DEIS are the benefits of an improved rail corridor between Swift Interlocking and Secaucus Transfer Station and the potential effects on railway and highway systems, land use and social conditions, historic resources, visual and aesthetic considerations, air quality, noise and vibration, ecology, contaminated materials, coastal zone management, and environmental justice. Conceptual mitigation measures to reduce anticipated localized impacts are discussed in the document. Also considered in the DEIS is the financial feasibility and cost-effectiveness of each alternative.

Comments on this DEIS may be submitted by March 31, 2008 to Mr. John Wilkins at the address below.

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