

Georgia on the Move

Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Project



Introduction

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), recently reached a major milestone for Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) Project, which considered high speed passenger service that would connect Atlanta, Georgia to Chattanooga, Tennessee. On October 7, 2016, the FRA released the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 DEIS) for the Project. The result of over six years of technical study and collaboration with agencies and the public, the Tier 1 DEIS is a key step in the selection of a transportation corridor in which to implement HSGT.

The Tier 1 DEIS presents three Corridor Alternatives to connect the two cities, along with a broad evaluation of the potential environmental impacts of each alternative. The FRA, GDOT, and TDOT are encouraging the public, agencies, and interested organizations to comment on the Tier 1 DEIS. The comments received will help inform the identification of a Preferred Corridor Alternative to be advanced into the Tier 1 Final EIS (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD). The public comment period is open until November 22, 2016. Substantive comments received after this date will be considered to the maximum extent possible. The Tier 1 Draft EIS and associated materials are available on the project website (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoChattanooga>) and in public libraries along the proposed corridors. All are invited to attend one of the public meetings that will be conducted at the following locations (addresses located on page 5):

- **Tuesday, November 15 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**
 - GDOT General Office
Atlanta, GA
- **Wednesday, November 16 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**
 - Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency
Development Resource Center
Chattanooga, TN
- **Thursday, November 17 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**
 - City of Dalton City Hall And Administration Building
Dalton, GA

Project Overview

The introduction of HSGT along the 110-mile corridor between Atlanta and Chattanooga is intended to provide a high capacity alternative to roadway and air travelers. The study involved the development of a Tier 1 DEIS to ensure that alternatives for the proposed action are evaluated. The Tier 1 DEIS evaluated potential HSGT corridor alternatives, which include general station locations, and storage and maintenance facilities. The Tier 1 DEIS assessed the broad impacts of the three Corridor Alternatives against a No-Build Alternative. It considered impacts to transportation, the built environment, and natural resources. The Tier 1 DEIS provides the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT, with sufficient information to determine a corridor in which to implement HSGT, general station and maintenance facility locations.

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Project Purpose and Need

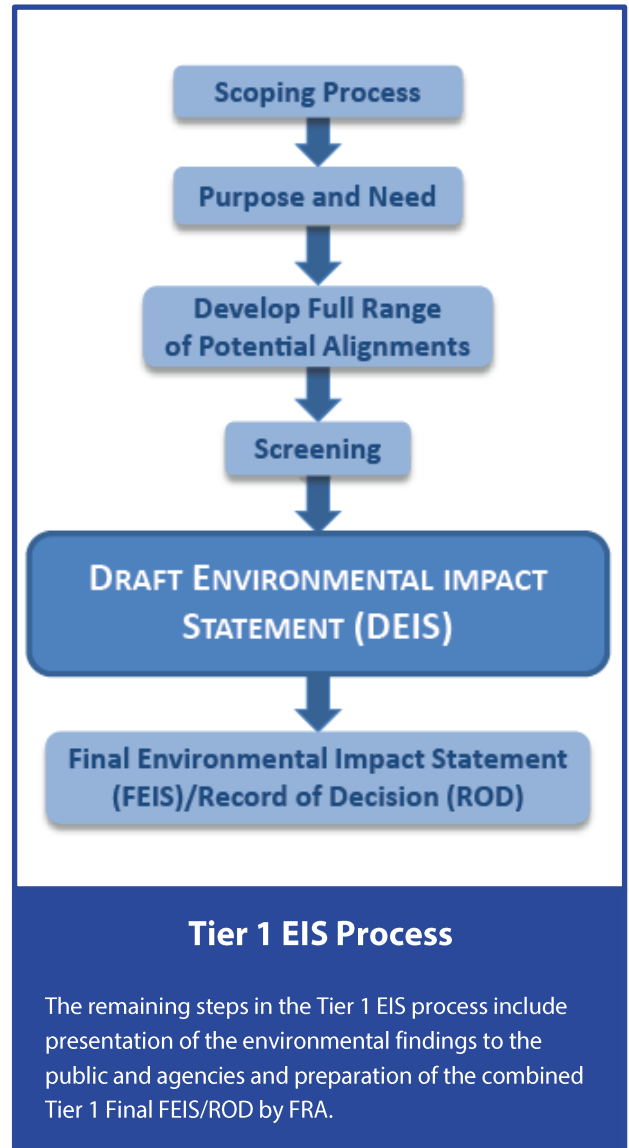
According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, a Purpose and Need Statement is one of the most important parts of an EIS. They explain, "It establishes why the agency is proposing to spend large amounts of taxpayers' money while at the same time causing significant environmental impacts. [It] explains to the public and decision makers that the expenditure of funds is necessary and worthwhile . . . and should justify why impacts are acceptable based on the project's importance."

Based on analysis of previous studies and through feedback from the public and agencies during the Scoping Process, the study team finalized the Purpose and Need Statement for the project.

The purpose of the Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) project is to enhance intercity passenger mobility in northwest Georgia and part of Tennessee, by expanding passenger transportation capacity, increasing mobility, and providing an alternative to highway and air travel that is safe, reliable, and cost-effective while avoiding, minimizing, and/or mitigating impacts on neighborhoods and the environment.

The needs for the HSGT project are summarized as follows:

- Enhance regional transportation mobility and accessibility
 - Population and employment growth
 - Congested transportation corridor with increasing demand
 - Limited transportation options
- Spur Economic Growth and Regional Vitality
- Provide safe, efficient, reliable transportation
- Enhance airport access and intermodal connections
- Improve air quality nonattainment areas and minimize environmental impacts.



High Speed Ground Transportation Technologies



During the Tier 2 NEPA phase, a technology will be selected. High-speed is defined as above 180 mph.

Two Types:

- Steel-Wheeled
 - Steel-wheel vehicles on steel rail
- Maglev (Magnetic Levitation)
 - Uses electromagnetic forces to lift and propel a train along a guideway, with power supplied to the magnets through the track

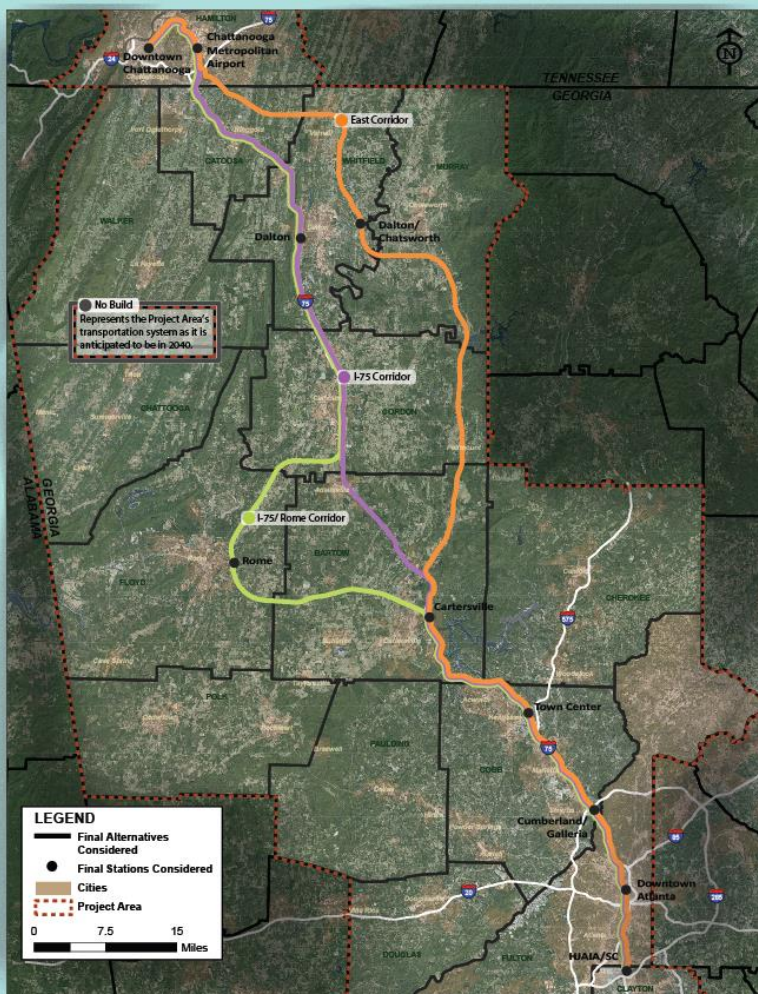
Both types:

- Operate on a grade-separated right-of-way, which eliminates potential points of conflict with pedestrians or other non-rail vehicles.
- Appropriate for intercity use, and can provide a travel time competitive with automobile travel within the Atlanta-Chattanooga corridor.

Alternatives Considered

The FRA, GDOT, and TDOT identified three Corridor Alternatives and a No-Build Alternative for the HSGT Project. The Alternatives described in the Tier 1 DEIS are:

- No-Build Alternative
- I-75 Corridor Alternative
- East Corridor Alternative
- I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative



Map of Alternative Corridors Considered in the Tier 1 DEIS

No-Build Alternative:

The No-Build Alternative represents the Project Area's transportation system as it is anticipated to be in the planning horizon year 2040 including the existing transportation system and assuming that there would be no new HSGT improvements in the Project Area. This Alternative assumes that all transportation system improvements that are currently listed in local, regional, and state transportation plans and that have identified funds for implementation will be implemented including the highway and transit projects in each of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO's) transportation plans within the Project Area as well as aviation projects identified in the Master Plans of the two airports, which currently provide passenger carrier service to the Project Area.

I-75 Corridor Alternative:

The I-75 Corridor Alternative begins on the east side of the Hartsfield–Jackson Atlanta International Airport (HJIA), immediately adjacent to I-75, and follows I-75 to a point south of the proposed downtown Atlanta station. The corridor continues north underground through downtown Atlanta. The approach into Atlanta will be determined during the Tier 2 NEPA phase. It continues north along the I-75 ROW to the proposed Town Center, Cartersville, and Dalton stations. North of I-24 in Tennessee, the corridor continues along an existing CSX rail ROW to proposed stations at the Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport (CMA) and in downtown Chattanooga.

East Corridor Alternative:

The East Corridor Alternative follows the same alignment as the I-75 corridor to the proposed Cartersville station. North of the Cartersville station, the corridor deviates from I-75 and continues along existing CSX ROW generally parallel to US 411, stops at the Dalton-Chatsworth and CMA stations, and continues to the proposed downtown Chattanooga station.

I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative:

The I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative follows the same path as the I-75 and East corridors to the proposed Cartersville station. From the proposed Cartersville station, the corridor follows US 411 to Rome, continues north along an existing CSX rail ROW to rejoin I-75 between the proposed Cartersville and Dalton stations. The corridor continues north along the I-75 ROW to the proposed stations at Dalton and CMA and in downtown Chattanooga.

Key Findings of the Tier 1 DEIS

FRA, GDOT, and TDOT have striven to avoid or minimize effects during the Tier 1 analysis by aligning the Corridor Alternatives primarily along existing transportation corridors as opposed to creating wholly new corridors. The buffer areas provide opportunities to avoid or minimize impacts in future design. Yet some potential effects may not be avoidable given the developed character of some communities the Project is intended to serve, the design requirements of the Project, and the need to avoid adversely affecting future operations of the existing transportation facilities. Consequently, the decision to advance one alternative to the next phase of study involves recognizing and understanding that FRA, GDOT, and TDOT are working to balance the trade-offs between the benefits and effects of the alternatives.

Each Corridor Alternative would enhance intercity mobility and economic growth throughout the Project Area by providing faster and more reliable ground transportation service between Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. Each Corridor Alternative would provide a highway, intercity bus, or air travel option that would be safe and cost-effective, while avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating impacts on the human and natural environment.

Despite the differences among the Corridor Alternatives, each Corridor Alternative demonstrates some level of achievement of the Project purpose based on the data available at this Tier 1 level of study and shown in the table below. The East Corridor Alternative has the highest potential for impacts on known historic resources and floodplains, while the I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative has the highest potential to impact wetlands and stream crossings. Compared to the other Corridor Alternatives, the I-75 Corridor Alternative has the lowest potential for impact on known historic resources, streams, and floodplains; impacts on wetlands are similar to the East Corridor Alternative. The I-75 Corridor Alternative is also the best performing Corridor Alternative with regards to travel time, capital cost, use of existing transportation corridors, and potential noise and vibration impacts.

Summary of Distinguishing Performance Measures of the Corridor Alternatives

Needs	Measures	Corridor Alternative		
		I-75	East	I-75/ Rome
Enhance regional transportation mobility and accessibility	Time to Travel Corridor Alternative End to End (minutes)	88	95	102
	Daily Ridership (number of boardings)	11,725	8,556	13,204
Spur economic growth and regional vitality	Capital Cost (2014 \$ millions)	\$8,760	\$10,420	\$9,811
Improve air quality nonattainment areas and minimize environmental impacts	Proportion of Corridor Alternative within Existing Transportation Corridor	76%	31%	53%
	Noise-sensitive Land Uses (acres)	5,914	7,519	8,425
	Vibration-sensitive Land Uses (acres)	891	1,695	1,372
	Known Historic Resources (number)	26	66	33
	Wetlands (acres)	205	205	251
	Stream Crossings (number)	21	18	35
	Floodplains (acres)	1,563	2,576	1,689
	Parks & Wildlife Refuges (number)	25	19	30
Known Threatened and Endangered Species Habitats (number)	21	38	21	

Key Findings of the Tier 1 DEIS

The No-Build Alternative would not achieve the Project purpose as it would not reduce travel time or enhance passenger mobility throughout the Project Area between the metropolitan areas and airports of Atlanta and Chattanooga. As the geographic scope and nature of the No-Build Alternative projects is limited, the potential effects of the projects are likely to be limited. While the No-Build Alternative has the potential to cause fewer effects on the human and natural environment than the Corridor Alternatives, it does not improve air quality because it would not reduce the quantity or the growth rate of mobile source emissions resulting from vehicle miles traveled on the highway network in the Project Area.

Public Meetings

The public comment period on the Tier 1 DEIS is open until November 22, 2016. During this period, all interested persons are encouraged to comment on the Tier 1 DEIS. Comments may be submitted at a public meeting, by email, or by mail (see box below). The FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will conduct three public meetings throughout the Project Area to present the Tier 1 DEIS and receive public comments. Each meeting is scheduled at 6 p.m. Following each presentation, there will be an opportunity to provide comments to a court reporter or comment card. In the event of inclement weather, hearings may be canceled or rescheduled. Please check the website for updates: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoChattanooga>. If you require assistance to attend, please contact the Project team at least five days prior to the meeting you wish to attend at AHeckler@dot.ga.gov. Public meetings will be held at:

- **Tuesday, November 15 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**
 - GDOT General Office, One Georgia Center – ROOMS 403 and 404
600 West Peachtree Street, NW, Atlanta, GA 30308
- **Wednesday, November 16 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**
 - Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency Development Resource Center
Conference RM 1A-50
1250 Market Street #2000, Chattanooga, TN, 37402
- **Thursday, November 17 – 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**
 - City of Dalton City Hall And Administration Building – Auditorium
300 W. Waugh Street, Dalton, GA 30720

Next Steps: Tier 1 FEIS/ROD

Following public comment on the Tier 1 DEIS, GDOT, and TDOT will identify a Preferred Corridor Alternative. The Preferred Corridor Alternative will be based on alternatives presented in the Tier 1 DEIS and will reflect stakeholder and public input. The FRA will select the Preferred Corridor Alternative in the FEIS/ROD in summer 2017. The combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD will describe the Preferred Corridor Alternative. After the combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD is issued in summer 2017, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will consider whether to advance the Preferred Corridor Alternative for further evaluation and engineering in a Tier 2 NEPA evaluation. If advanced, Tier 2 analysis would identify a preferred technology, identify specific locations for stations and maintenance facilities, and will define the alignment on which the HSGT would operate. Future study of the high speed ground transportation between Atlanta and Chattanooga will be dependent of available funding, which has not yet been identified.

Contact Us

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Can't attend a meeting?

Submit comments online to:
AtlChatt@dot.ga.gov
Comments must be received by:
November 22, 2016
Project Website:
<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoChattanooga>