Section

1 INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) addresses the proposal by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to improve high speed passenger rail service between Chicago, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri (a distance of approximately 284 miles), including the rail lines through Springfield, Illinois. This Tier 1 DEIS for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail (HSR) Corridor Program has been prepared by IDOT and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508).

In general, the proposed project improvements would include the development of double tracking along the existing Amtrak railroad corridor to improve high-speed passenger service reliability and safety, and to increase the number trips between Chicago and St. Louis. In addition, multiple alternative alignments along existing railroad corridors were considered and evaluated between Chicago and Joliet, through Springfield, and between Alton and St. Louis. A timeline for future environmental studies, final design, and construction is not known at this time and would be contingent on funding availability. The project would also include improvements to railroad crossings, signals, and stations. It is important to note that these proposed improvements are in addition to those improvements associated with the 2004 Record of Decision for the Chicago-St. Louis High-Speed Rail Project and the 2011 Environmental Assessment (EA)/Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) for the UPRR's Track Improvement Project from Joliet to Dwight, IL.

1.1 Tiering Process

For this project, IDOT and FRA are using a tiered environmental process, a phased environmental review used in the development of complex projects. Under this process, the Tier 1 EIS (Volume I of this document) addresses broad, corridor-level issues and alternatives. Tier 2 environmental documents (Volume II of this document is one such Tier 2 document) address individual component projects of the Selected Alternative carried forward from the Tier 1 study in more detail.

Concurrently with this Tier 1 study of the full Chicago to St. Louis corridor, IDOT and FRA are conducting a Tier 2 analysis for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project. The Springfield Rail Improvements Project Tier 2 Environmental Evaluation, found in Volume II of this document, considers the Springfield portion of the corridor in more detail, evaluating alternative alignments through the City of Springfield. The Springfield Rail Improvements Project Tier 2 Environmental Evaluation is the only Tier 2 study being advanced at this time.

1.2 Anticipated Decisions

The anticipated decisions to be made as part of this process are:

1. Identification of a Preferred Alternative in the Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Program.

2. As part of the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Program Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement, Sections of Independent Utility (SIUs) will be identified for Tier 2 studies. For example, this may include:

    a. Identification of priority construction sections such as Chicago to Joliet, a proposed rail flyover in Springfield, and additional capacity over the Mississippi River.

    b. Improvements for each station could also be advanced as individual Tier 2 studies. A station Tier 2 study could encompass facility improvements such as building expansion, parking, and vehicular circulation, as well as associated double track construction to allow for simultaneous boarding of northbound and southbound trains and passenger grade separations.

    c. Double track sections between stations could be another set of SIUs identified for Tier 2 studies.

3. Selection of an alternative with a Record of Decision (ROD) on the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Program.

4. Identification of a Preferred Alternative by FRA in the Tier 2 Environmental Evaluation for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project, which is currently being advanced.

5. Selection of an alternative with a ROD for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project.

Additional information is provided in Chapter 7.