



Memorandum

U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

Subject: MTA New York City Transit Second Canarsie Tunnel Project Environmental Re-Evaluation No.1: Revised Alternative Service Plan, Revised Construction Means and Methods, and Extended Work Hours Date: April 18, 2019

From: Nina Chung
Community Planner Reply to
Attn. of:

To: Stephen Goodman, P.E.
Regional Administrator 
Environmental File

Through: Charles Dyer
Regional Counsel
and
Donald Burns, A.I.C.P.
Director, Planning and Program Development

INTRODUCTION

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's New York City Transit (MTA NYCT) is proposing changes to the Canarsie Tunnel Project (Project) and has submitted information in the attached document titled "Environmental Re-Evaluation Consultation" (referred to as "Re-Evaluation"), dated April 17, 2019 for Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) review. The Re-Evaluation provides information on potential impacts of the proposed changes to determine if the changed Project will result in significant environmental impacts. This Memorandum and attached Re-Evaluation document FTA's re-evaluation analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) pursuant to 23 C.F.R. §771.129 of the MTA NYCT's proposed modified design of the Project. The purpose of this re-evaluation is to determine whether the previously completed environmental documents for the Project require supplemental analysis or whether the previous environmental decision documents remain valid.

Based on review of the Re-Evaluation, including proposed measures to minimize impacts, the proposed Project changes will not result in significant environmental impacts. The NEPA requirements pursuant to 23 C.F.R. §771.129 have been met, and I recommend that no further environmental review is necessary and request your concurrence that the previous environmental decision documents remain valid.

BACKGROUND

MTA NYCT will restore and improve the resiliency of the Canarsie Tunnel (tunnel), located below the East River, which provides the sole connection between Brooklyn and Manhattan for the MTA NYCT Canarsie L subway line. The tunnel consists of two (2) cast-iron tubes, each with one track. FTA previously issued the following four separate NEPA findings for activities at the tunnel or taking advantage of a tunnel closure, as detailed in the Re-Evaluation. For purposes of this re-evaluation review, Canarsie Tunnel Project and Project refer to all 4 previously approved activities.

- A) February 11, 2015: FTA issued a Categorical Exclusion (c)(8) for the Canarsie Tube Restoration activity (“CEc8”)
- B) February 11, 2015: FTA issued a Categorical Exclusion (c)(3) for the Canarsie Tube Resiliency activity (“CEc3”)
- C) August 24, 2016: FTA issued a Categorical Exclusion (d)(6) for the Canarsie Core Capacity and State of Good Repair activity (“CED6”)
- D) September 13, 2018: FTA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Canarsie Tunnel Project Alternative Service Plan (“2018 ASP”). FTA’s determination was based on the “Canarsie Tunnel Project Supplemental Environmental Assessment and Section 4(f) Review” (SEA), dated July 2018 and public comments.

Each previous NEPA evaluation noted above resulted in a determination of no significant environmental impacts.

PROPOSED CHANGES and ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The Re-Evaluation addresses potential impacts of proposed changes to the following construction-related elements of the Project to determine if the proposed modifications will result in any significant impacts:

- 1) Tunnel construction means and methods
- 2) Alternative Service Plan (ASP)
- 3) Work hours for surface construction activities

Proposed Project changes only relate to temporary activities during construction; any potential change in impacts described in the Re-Evaluation and this Memo will be temporary in nature. Therefore, the subject of the analysis under this re-evaluation is on the proposed changes during construction; it does not include aspects that are not proposed to change or aspects unaffected by the proposed changes. Additionally, as described in the Re-Evaluation, the existing conditions since the issuance of the 2015 CE determinations have not significantly changed along the L train corridor.

1) Tunnel Construction Means and Methods

For changes related to tunnel construction means and methods, potential impacts of the proposed changes are compared to impacts related to the CEc8 and CEc3 activities. The CED6 activity does not relate to the proposed tunnel construction means and methods, and the subject of the SEA and FONSI was the 2018 ASP. The proposed change to construction means and methods do not change the purpose of any previously approved activities. A brief description of the approved and proposed tunnel construction means and methods is provided below. For more details, please refer to the attached Re-Evaluation.

Approved

There needs to be a full-tunnel or partial-tunnel closure to conduct tunnel restoration and resiliency activities. The construction means and methods for tunnel restoration and resiliency activities evaluated under the previous NEPA evaluations included demolition and reconstruction of the entire length bench wall and duct banks with replacement of power and communication cables housed within the duct bank. This construction method was based on MTA NYCT’s previous experience completing similar projects in other subway tunnels and their customary practice when replacing encased subway tunnel power and communication cables in duct banks. The approved Project also included the following within the tunnel: reconstruction of the track bed and use of a moveable ventilated gantry system to isolate and filter dust generating activities to manage dust and silica. Tunnel construction would take approximately 15 months.

Proposed

In response to continued public concerns regarding service disruption, MTA NYCT proposes to modify the tunnel construction means and methods to avoid full-tunnel closure. MTA NYCT is

proposing to conduct tunnel restoration and resiliency work using an innovative approach without demolishing and replacing the full-length bench wall. Instead of the customary approach, MTA NYCT proposes using a racking system to hang new replacement cables along the tunnel wall. Damaged cabling within the existing duct bank bench walls would be abandoned in place. Because this approach would significantly reduce demolition activities, MTA NYCT is proposing to conduct the tunnel work with a partial-tunnel closure overnight and on weekends. Additionally, MTA NYCT proposes to repair the track bed, as needed, instead of reconstructing it, and proposes a combination of engineering controls (including tools with dust extractors, localized portable air scrubbers, and wet methods), instead of the moveable gantry system, to manage dust and silica. Tunnel construction would take up to 18 months.

2) Alternative Service Plan (ASP)

For changes related to the ASP, potential impacts of the proposed changes are compared to impacts previously presented in the SEA and FONSI; the CE activities are not relevant because the alternative transportation services were not yet developed in detail at the time of the CE evaluations and the subject of the SEA/FONSI was the 2018 ASP. The proposed changed ASP (“2019 ASP”) does not change the purpose of the “2018 ASP” presented in the SEA and FONSI. A brief description of the “2018 ASP” and “2019 ASP” is provided below. For more details, please refer to the attached Re-Evaluation.

Approved (2018 ASP)

The “2018 ASP” evaluated in the SEA was based on a full-time, double track, tunnel closure for 15 months with no L train service between Manhattan and Brooklyn and within Manhattan diverting 275,000 L train riders. The “2018 ASP” included the following temporary and new services: ferry service, M14 SBS and busway, interborough bus services, HOV3+ on the Williamsburg Bridge, street enhancements, pedestrian and bicycle enhancements, temporary subway service enhancements at other lines; some of these temporary elements have been constructed or partially implemented. It also included permanent physical changes at certain station entrances that have been completed or are nearly complete.

Proposed (2019 ASP)

While the SEA presented a full 15-month double track tunnel closure with suspension of all L train service within Manhattan and between Manhattan and Brooklyn, under the redesigned Project, that is no longer the case, and MTA NYCT does not presently anticipate that a full-tunnel closure or the “2018 ASP” will be required. Implementation of the “2018 ASP”, including the Measures to Minimize Harm (FONSI Attachment B), that was analyzed in the SEA and FONSI has been suspended. Should MTA NYCT later seek to reintroduce the suspended “2018 ASP” or any element of the “2018 ASP”, FTA would first require and undertake a new re-evaluation pursuant to 23 C.F.R. 771.129.

With the proposed partial-tunnel closure, under the proposed “2019 ASP,” L train service would be maintained during construction significantly reducing the number of diverted L train riders than previously anticipated. The proposed ASP (“2019 ASP”) eliminates implementation of all primary elements of the 2018 ASP, including elimination of ferry service, M14SBS and busway, interborough bus services, HOV3+ on the Williamsburg Bridge, street enhancements, pedestrian and bicycle enhancements all of which would have been provided 24/7. Certain 2018 ASP subway services will remain (as noted below), but only during weeknights and weekends when L train service is reduced.

The 2019 ASP includes the following temporary services during tunnel restoration on weeknights and weekends (or as noted below):

- reduced L train service due to single tracking (the 2018 ASP was based on no L train service during full tunnel closure)
- increased service on the existing G, M, and 7 (weeknight only for 7) train lines (the 2018 ASP included this 24/7)
- free MetroCard transfers between G and J/M at Broadway/Hewes Street/Lorimer Street and at L and 3 at Livonia Avenue/Junius Street (the 2018 ASP included these transfers 24/7).
- additional M14A bus service on the existing M14A bus route
- new bus routes in Williamsburg

The alternative subway and bus services are intended to provide competitive options for L train riders during weeknights and weekends to facilitate connections with other lines and disperse demand during periods of limited L train service.

The “2019 ASP” is based on a partial-tunnel closure (with single-tube, one track at a time closures) on nights and weekends for up to 18 months with L service maintained between Manhattan and Brooklyn and within Manhattan, but with reduced frequencies on weekday evening and nights and on weekends. The “2019 ASP” also includes measures to minimize impacts, as described in the attached Re-Evaluation. Those temporary elements associated with the approved 2018 ASP that have been partially installed or already implemented and those permanent station improvements that have been completed are no longer part of the “2019 ASP”. It is the responsibility of the MTA NYCT, in coordination with the NYCDOT, to fund those elements and to comply with applicable processes and requirements related to those elements.

3) Work hours for surface construction activities

For changes related to work hours for surface construction activities, potential impacts of the proposed changes are compared to impacts related to the CEc8, CEc3, and CED6 activities. The SEA and FONSI are not relevant because the proposed change to work hours only affect the CE activities and the SEA and FONSI activities are not related to the surface construction activities associated with the tunnel work. The proposed change to construction work hours does not change the purpose of the CE activities for the Canarsie Tube Restoration, Canarsie Tube Resiliency, and Canarsie Core Capacity and State of Good Repair activities. A brief description of the approved work hours and proposed work hours is provided below. For more details, please refer to the attached Re-Evaluation.

Approved

The approved street-level construction work hours are weekdays between 7:00am to 6:00pm, which is the typical construction work period permitted by the local oversight agencies New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) and the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT). Short-term phases of street-level construction work, such as deliveries, that must occur outside these hours are also permitted.

Proposed

The proposed street-level construction work hours need to be extended to weekdays between 7:00am to 7:00pm and on Saturdays between 7:00am to 5:00pm to address unforeseen field conditions and to maintain the construction schedule. These extended work hours have been coordinated with and approved by the NYCDEP and NYCDOT.

SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The Re-Evaluation presents analysis of impacts during construction on eleven (11) environmental topic areas. As noted above, each previous NEPA evaluation resulted in a determination of no significant environmental impacts. Descriptions of the potential change in impacts as a result of the proposed design changes compared to the approved Project for each environmental topic area can be found in the Re-Evaluation. In summary,

there will be reduced impacts, eliminated impacts, or no change to impacts for all environmental topic areas except for Noise and Vibration during construction.

There would be increased potential noise impacts due to extended construction work hours. In December 2018, MTA NYCT conducted a noise and vibration study (“2018 Study”) to model the predicted impacts of the extended work hours. Based on the 2018 Study, the extended work hours would not result in new vibration impacts but it was predicted that the extended work hours would likely result in potential significant noise impacts during the extended work hours. Although the 2018 Study predicted severe noise impacts based on noise modeling, actual noise readings measured daily in March 2019 from excavation, concrete work, and debris removal activities did not result in exceedances of New York City Noise Code thresholds and were below FTA’s severe impact criteria. Future noise is not expected to exceed either New York City Noise Code or FTA’s noise thresholds because the March 2019 activities will be representative of the types of activities that will be undertaken in the future.

Overall, the proposed Project will not result in significant environmental impacts.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Re-Evaluation includes a L Project Public Outreach Summary, which includes MTA NYCT’s outreach plan and summaries of comments received from elected officials, community boards, and the public. MTA NYCT has been conducting ongoing public outreach related to the Canarsie Tunnel work, including proposed changes to the construction methods and alternative service plan, to inform the public of the proposed changes and to solicit comments. MTA NYCT will post answers to comments on the L Project website. In addition, MTA NYCT will continue conducting outreach prior to and during construction. Based on comments, MTA NYCT may modify plans to improve service and meet the needs of the customers, where feasible.

SUMMARY

Based on our independent review of the environmental implications of the proposed changes to the Project as well as proposed measures to minimize impacts, as described in the attached MTA NYCT’s “Environmental Re-Evaluation Consultation Form”, dated April 17, 2019, and coordination with FTA TPE staff, no significant impacts since the issuance of FTA’s previous NEPA determinations have been identified by FTA as a result of the proposed changes to the Canarsie Tunnel Project. The revised Project continues to meet the specific conditions or criteria for the categorical exclusions issued for the Project activities, and the proposed 2019 ASP, now based on a partial-tunnel closure, will continue to result in no significant impacts. FTA affirms the previous environmental decision documents associated with the Canarsie Tunnel Project remain valid. The NEPA requirements pursuant to 23 C.F.R. §771.129 have been met, and FTA determines that no further environmental review is necessary.

Concur



Stephen Goodman, P.E.
Regional Administrator

4/19/19

Date

