

A.0 ABSTRACT

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), prepared this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the extension of the LYNX Blue Line, called the LYNX Blue Line Extension Northeast Corridor Light Rail Project (LYNX BLE) in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The Draft EIS will allow decision-makers to evaluate the social, economic, environmental and transportation effects associated with a proposed light rail extension from Center City Charlotte to I-485 near the Mecklenburg-Cabarrus County line, relative to a No-Build Alternative.

Part of the project development process for projects seeking federal funding is preparation of an EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended. NEPA requires that federal decision-making take into account the potential impacts of a proposed project and its alternatives on the natural and human environment. If substantial environmental impacts are anticipated and cannot be avoided, a plan for mitigating these impacts must be proposed. As part of the decision-making process, reasonable alternatives that would avoid or reduce adverse impacts must be considered, analyzed, and documented. In addition, the public must be given adequate opportunity to comment on a proposed project, and the project must be coordinated with appropriate agencies.

The purpose of a Draft EIS is to document the purpose and need for the project; present a discussion of all reasonable alternatives considered; describe in detail the anticipated social, environmental, economic, and transportation-related effects of the proposed project; and identify appropriate mitigation measures to offset unavoidable impacts. This detailed analysis of costs, ridership, and environmental consequences will assist decision-makers and the public in evaluating the relative merits of the proposed project.

The information presented in this Draft EIS is based on numerous technical studies and reflects comments or suggestions from interested and affected parties made during the evaluation of alternatives. Impact information is based on design assumptions as shown in the *30% Preliminary Engineering Design Plans* completed March 2010. Figures are located at the end of each chapter, where applicable. Supporting documentation can be found in Appendices D through H. The document has been circulated to federal, state, and local agencies as well as the general public to solicit comments. Copies of this document have also been made available for public review.

Written comments will be accepted for a period of 45 days from the date of distribution of the Draft EIS and the publication of the formal Notice of Availability in the Federal Register and local newspapers. Comments will also be accepted in writing and verbally at formal public hearings scheduled during the public comment period.

Based on the review of the analysis presented in the Draft EIS and comments received, decision-makers will determine whether to advance the proposed light rail line in the Northeast Corridor and whether to advance the Light Rail Alternative or the Light Rail Alternative – Sugar Creek Design Option. A Final EIS will be prepared to respond to the comments and issues raised during the circulation of the Draft EIS. The document will be circulated for agency review and then FTA, as the lead Federal agency, will render its formal decision on the proposed project in a Record of Decision (ROD).

A public hearing will be held on September 22, 2010 to provide the public with opportunities to comment on this Draft EIS and the proposed project. Comments will be accepted until October 12, 2010. More detailed information about public and agency involvement activities is provided in Chapter 22.0.

For further information about this Draft EIS, or to provide formal written comments on this document, please contact:

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Northeast Corridor Project Development Process



*CATS Decision points

** FTA Decision Points