

POTOMAC YARD METRORAIL STATION ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Scoping Summary Report

June 2011



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1.0 ABOUT THE PROJECT

1.1 Purpose of the Scoping Summary Report

This report summarizes comments, feedback, and input received from the public, agencies, and stakeholders in the winter of 2011 during scoping for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The scoping process included agency and public scoping meetings held on February 10, 2011. The scoping meetings provided an opportunity for interested agencies and the general public to comment on the project purpose and need, alternatives considered, the agency and public involvement process, and the issues to be studied in the EIS. The scoping meetings are described in more detail in Section 2.3 of this document.

1.2 Project Background and Description

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), as the federal lead agency, in cooperation with the City of Alexandria, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and the National Park Service (NPS), is initiating the preparation of an EIS for the proposed Potomac Yard Metrorail Station (or “the project”).

The proposed project consists of construction of a new Metrorail Station located at Potomac Yard within the City of Alexandria along the existing Metrorail Blue and Yellow Lines between the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport Station and the Braddock Road Station. Figure 1-1 on the following page shows the location of the project in north Alexandria and depicts the alternative station sites under consideration for further study in the EIS process. The project would serve existing neighborhoods and retail centers as well as high-density, transit-oriented development planned by the City of Alexandria. The project would provide access to the regional Metrorail system for the U.S. Route 1 corridor of north Alexandria, which is currently without direct access to the system. The potential project alternatives presented at the project scoping meetings are described in more detail in Section 1.2.2 below.

1.2.1 Project Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to improve accessibility of the Potomac Yard area and provide more transportation choices for current and future residents, employees, and businesses by establishing a new access point to the regional Metrorail system. This additional access point is needed to address existing and future travel demand in the area resulting from the City of Alexandria’s planned development of a major transit-oriented mixed-use activity center in the vicinity of the proposed station.

1.2.2 Initial Alternatives Considered

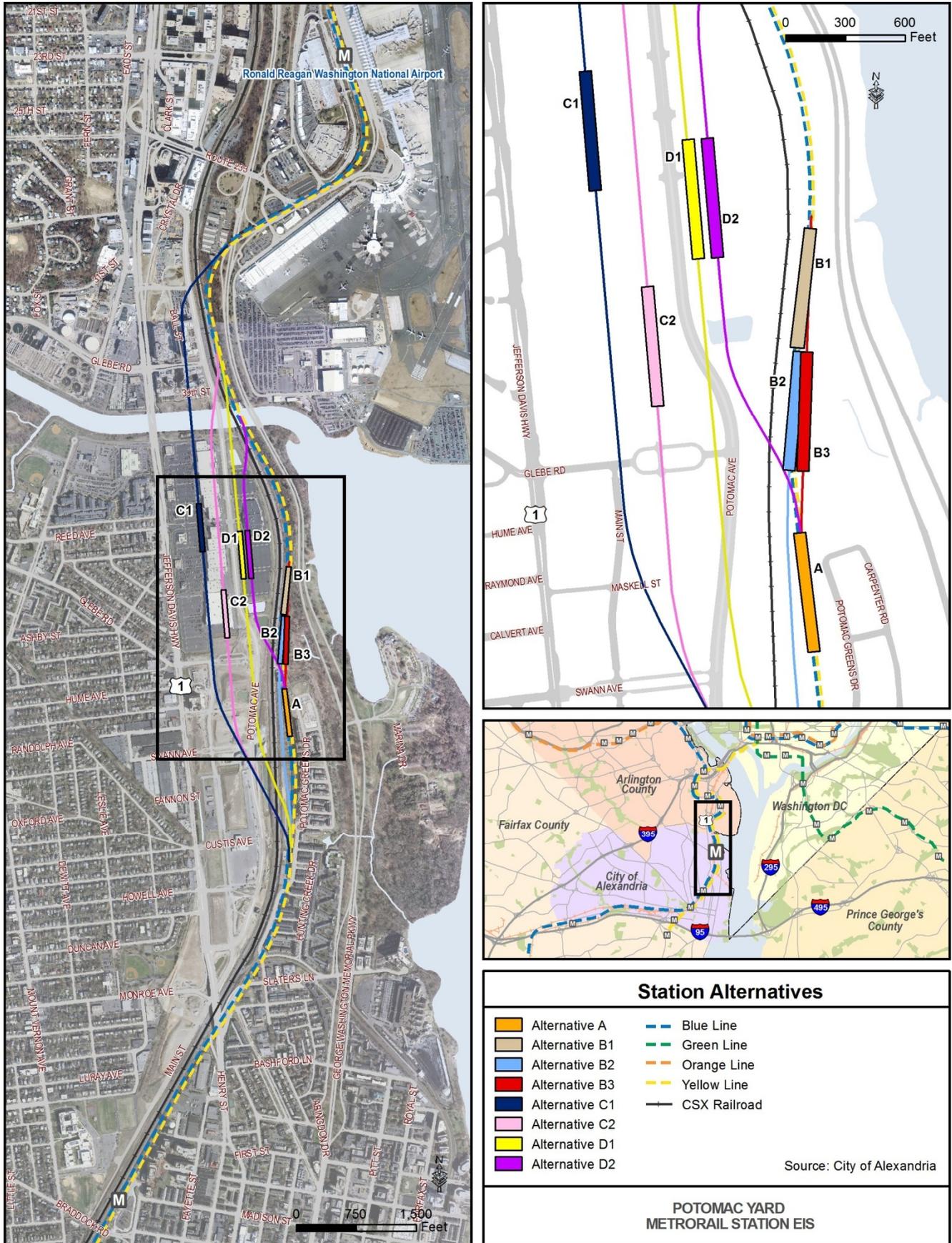
The EIS will evaluate a No Build Alternative and several Build Alternatives for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Project.

The No Build Alternative presented at the project scoping meetings includes the existing transportation network, plus committed improvements. The No Build Alternative includes the Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transitway but does not include a Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. Current and future year conditions for the No Build Alternative will be used as a basis for identifying the transportation, environmental, and community impacts of the proposed Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Build Alternatives and used as a baseline from which to compare each proposed action alternative.

The following potential Build Alternatives, shown in **Figure 1-1**, were presented to agencies and the general public at the project scoping meetings:

- **Metrorail Station Alternative A** would be located between the CSX Railroad tracks and the Potomac Greens Neighborhood on the north end of the neighborhood.
- **Metrorail Station Alternative B1** would be located between the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the CSX Railroad, north of Alternative A.
- **Metrorail Station Alternative B2** would be located between the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the CSX Railroad, north of Alternative A and south of Alternative B1.
- **Metrorail Station Alternative B3** would be located between the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the CSX Railroad, just east of Alternative B2.

Figure 1-1: Location Map



- **Metrorail Station Alternative C1** would be located between the CSX Railroad and U.S. Route 1.
- **Metrorail Station Alternative C2** would be located between the CSX Railroad and U.S. Route 1, just east of Alternative C1.
- **Metrorail Station Alternative D1** would be located between the CSX Railroad and U.S. Route 1, just east of Alternative C2.
- **Metrorail Station Alternative D2** would be located between the CSX Railroad and U.S. Route 1, just east of Alternative D1.

1.2.3 Agency Coordination and Public Involvement

The goal of agency coordination is to improve the environmental review process and expedite project delivery. An Agency Coordination Plan has been developed to facilitate and document FTA's interaction with other agencies and to inform them how the coordination will be accomplished. This plan is presented in **Appendix A**. This plan proposes time frames for input by those organizations and agencies. In addition, the plan includes meetings at key coordination points and identifies which persons, organizations, or agencies should be included. The meetings will include cooperating agencies, which are agencies specifically requested by FTA to participate in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the project; as well as participating agencies, which are governmental agencies that have an interest in the project because of jurisdictional authority, special expertise, or statewide interest.

The public will have several opportunities to participate in the EIS process and offer input during the course of the environmental study. Opportunities for public involvement include the public scoping meetings that were held in February 2011 to solicit input on alternatives being reviewed and resource areas to be studied in the EIS and future agency and public meetings to review EIS results. The process also includes a public hearing to give the public and agencies an opportunity to provide comments on the Draft EIS. The scoping process and the public hearing are conducted in compliance with federal regulations as set out in NEPA.

1.3 NEPA Requirements and Procedures and other Federal Regulations

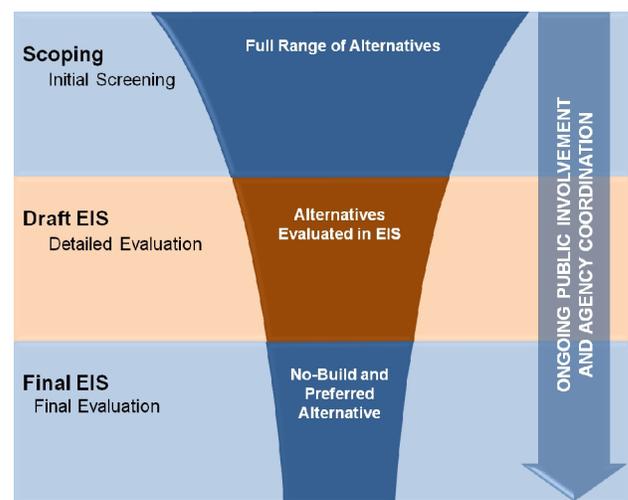
The Potomac Yard Metrorail Station EIS will be prepared in a manner that is consistent with the U.S. Department of Transportation NEPA Process under the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) Section 6002.

NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the potential impacts of their actions on the human and natural environment. Throughout the EIS process, the public is provided with opportunities to review and comment on various elements of the study.

For an EIS, the NEPA process begins with the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register. The NOI initiates the EIS scoping process and provides information on the proposed project including the time and location of public and agency scoping meetings. The scoping process is described in more detail in Section 1.4.

Figure 1-2 shows the general evaluation framework used to identify a preferred alternative during the NEPA process. This begins with identifying a full range of project alternatives and through a series of successive screenings and evaluations during the Scoping, Draft EIS, and Final EIS Phases a preferred alternative is identified. The concurrent Section 4(f) evaluation and Section 106 process will also be used to help identify the preferred alternative.

Figure 1-2: Evaluation Framework



1.4 Scoping Process

Scoping, as the name implies, is the process of determining the scope of the EIS. It takes place at the beginning of a study and serves the following purposes:

- Identifying a range of actions, reasonable alternatives, and impacts to be considered;
- Connecting previous planning decisions with current project development;
- Establishing a decision-making framework;
- Looking for opportunities to streamline the project and collaborate with partners; and
- Organizing the study and defining boundaries and responsibilities.

During the scoping process, agency and public comments are solicited in response to the information provided and are used to identify reasonable alternatives and potential environmental effects in the preparation of the EIS. SAFETEA-LU Section 6002 specifies that the lead agencies must provide participating and coordinating agencies and the public the opportunity for involvement during the development of the purpose and need statement and the identification of the range of alternatives.

2.0 SUMMARY OF SCOPING ACTIVITIES

2.1 Notice of Intent

The NOI was issued on Thursday, January 27, 2011 in the Federal Register, Vol. 76, No. 18, to advise the public of FTA's intention to prepare an EIS to assess the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed Potomac Yard Metrorail Station project. The NOI alerted interested parties regarding the intent to prepare the EIS, provided information on the nature of the proposed project and possible alternatives, and invited public participation in the EIS process. The NOI also provided information on how and when comments on the scope of the EIS should be submitted. Additionally, the NOI supplied information, including the dates, times and locations, of the public and agency scoping meetings. The published NOI is provided in **Appendix B**.

2.2 Scoping Booklet

A scoping booklet was published to help inform interested parties of the formal scoping process required under NEPA. The scoping booklet provided information about the project including the project background and description, NEPA requirements, procedures and schedule, project's purpose and need, initial alternatives considered, issues to be considered in the EIS, agency involvement, and outreach and public participation. Copies of the scoping booklet were made available to participants at the public and agency meetings. The published scoping booklet is provided in **Appendix C**.

2.3 Public Scoping

Members of the public were invited to participate in two public scoping meetings. The meetings were intended to inform the public of the EIS process; and provide an opportunity to ask questions and comment on the purpose and need of the project, alternatives being considered, key environmental considerations, and the public and agency coordination process.

WMATA issued a press release, which was distributed to local media outlets, advertising the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station EIS and the public scoping meetings. Articles about the project were featured on www.nbcwashington.com and in the Washington Post Express daily circular. WMATA also posted an announcement of the meetings on their website. The WMATA press release can be found in **Appendix D**.

In addition to the WMATA press release, the public was notified of the public scoping meetings through print advertisements in three local newspapers. Advertisements were published in the *Alexandria Times* and the *Alexandria Gazette Packet* on February 3, 2011, and in *El Tiempo Latino* on February 4, 2011. The print advertisements are provided in **Appendix E**.

2.3.1 Public Scoping Meetings

The two public scoping meetings were held at the Cora Kelly Recreation Center in Alexandria on Thursday, February 10, 2011. The first meeting started at 4:30 pm and the second meeting started at 6:30 pm. Meeting participants were asked to sign in and were given a handout and a copy of the scoping booklet. If any member of the public wanted to give oral comments, they were asked to sign in again on a separate "speaker" sign-in sheet at the check-in desk, or with a project staff member. An "Open House" format was followed in which participants

were able to walk around the room and learn more about the project via display boards. Project staff was available to answer any questions. Following the open house, a brief presentation was given to summarize the purpose of the project, an initial set of alternative station locations, and key environmental considerations. Participants were then given a chance to make oral comments. A court reporter was present to record all comments during this time. Participants were also able to provide comments directly to the court reporter, on comment sheets, or on one of the sketch pads located around the room. Completed comment sheets could be submitted at the meeting or mailed in after the meeting.

A total of 65 members of the public attended the scoping meetings. Of these, ten members of the

public offered oral comments at the meetings, and seven comments were provided on the sketch pads. One comment sheet from the public was submitted at the meetings.

2.4 Agency Scoping

2.4.1 Agency Coordination

Letters inviting potential cooperating and participating agencies to the agency scoping meeting were sent in January 2011. The letters sent to potential cooperating and participating agencies are provided in **Appendix F. Table 2-1** lists the agencies invited to attend the agency scoping meeting.

Table 2-1: Cooperating and Participating Agencies Invited to Attend the Agency Scoping Meeting – bold denotes agency attendance at the February 2011 scoping meeting

Cooperating Agencies	
Federal	National Park Service (Department of Interior)
State	Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Participating Federal Agencies	
Federal	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
	Federal Aviation Administration (U.S. Department of Transportation)
	Federal Highway Administration (U.S. Department of Transportation)
	Federal Railroad Administration (U.S. Department of Transportation)
	National Capital Planning Commission
	U.S. Department of Defense
	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Participating Non-Federal Agencies	
Regional	Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
	Northern Virginia Transportation Commission
	Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission
	Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Commission
State	Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
	Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
	Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
	Virginia Department of Historic Resources
	Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
	Virginia Department of Transportation
	Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Local	City of Alexandria
	Arlington County

2.4.2 Agency Scoping Meeting

The agency scoping meeting was held at the Cora Kelly Recreation Center in Alexandria on Thursday, February 10, 2011. The agency scoping meeting, which followed the same format as the public scoping meetings, preceded the public scoping meetings. The purpose of the agency scoping meeting was to provide an opportunity for the early identification of significant issues related to the project.

Agency and public meeting materials, including the handout, comment sheet, boards and presentation, can be found in **Appendix G**. Spanish language meeting materials were also available at the meetings and are also included in **Appendix G**.

3.0 SUMMARY OF SCOPING COMMENTS

The scoping period was open from publication of the NOI until March 15, 2011. Below is a summary of the comments received, with general responses. The scoping comments are provided in **Appendix H**.

3.1 Summary of Public Scoping Comments

Over the course of the scoping period, a total of 72 individual comments were received. Fifty (50) comments were received via email, four letters were received via the U.S. mail, and ten verbal comments were received at the public scoping meetings. One comment sheet was received at the public scoping meetings, and seven comments were written on the sketch pads provided at the meetings. The comments are summarized below by topic.

3.1.1 Purpose and Need and Goals and Objectives

Summary of Comments

While several commenters supported the purpose and need for the project, several other commenters disputed the need. Commenters who supported the purpose and need pointed to existing traffic congestion, which was perceived as discouraging shoppers from visiting Potomac Yard, as well as the scale of new development planned for the area, which they thought would be well served by a Metrorail station. However, other commenters maintained that the area is already well served by Metrorail and does not have the same level of congestion as other areas of the city. The ability of a Metrorail station to relieve congestion on U.S. Route

1 was also questioned. Commenters also questioned whether it makes sense to build a new Metrorail station when the system needs funds for maintenance and upgrades to existing infrastructure, and believed that an additional stop at Potomac Yard would degrade the quality of service offered by the Metrorail system.

Response

The purpose and need for transportation improvements in Potomac Yard will be addressed in Chapter 1 of the Draft EIS. In addition, this chapter will include the goals and objectives, which will be used to evaluate the performance of each of the alternatives. The purpose and need and goals and objectives will address issues raised by the public, including traffic congestion, travel demand, and cost effectiveness.

3.1.2 Alternatives

Summary of Comments

Commenters offered opinions on the initial alternatives presented in the scoping materials, and also proposed the consideration of additional alternatives. Suggestions and expressions of support are described in more detail below:

- *No Build Alternative*: The No Build Alternative includes the Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transitway, which some commenters suggested would be sufficient to serve the project goals. Commenters suggested the transitway would be more accessible to residents west of U.S. Route 1 and would be easier and cheaper to implement than a new Metrorail station. However, other commenters noted that the transitway would not serve the needs of the area and would be less convenient for shoppers visiting Potomac Yard.
- *Build Alternatives*: Various commenters expressed preference for specific alternatives. These included the C and D alternatives, due to their proximity to existing and planned development. The C and D alternatives were also supported because it was assumed they would have fewer environmental impacts due to the use of developed land. Some commenters opposed the A and B alternatives due to impacts to parkland and wetlands.
- *Additional Alternatives*: Additional alternatives proposed by commenters included:

- A non-metro alternative based on the Transportation Management Plan developed in 1999 for the Potomac Greens site;
- Bus and trolley service (in addition to the planned Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transitway);
- A “D3” alternative, located to the east of the existing movie theater. It was stated that this alternative would require less new track, would be on land for which an EIS has already been completed, and would be on land which is already developed;
- A parking deck located off of U.S. Route 1 to accommodate travel demand;
- A Metrorail station located elsewhere in Alexandria, where need is greater, such as “downtown” or in the West End; and
- A Virginia Railway Express (VRE) alternative.

Commenters also noted concerns regarding station design. Concerns included attention to aesthetic details, accessibility to neighborhoods and activity centers, and connections to other transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. Several commenters noted the importance of minimizing walking distance.

Response

The alternatives presented during the scoping process, as well as alternatives suggested during the scoping process, will be considered and subjected to an initial alternatives screening process, which will assess whether or not each alternative is technically feasible, financially feasible, and whether it meets the project purpose and need. Alternatives which meet the screening criteria will be developed in more detail and evaluated in the Draft EIS. The Alternatives Considered chapter (Chapter 2) of the Draft EIS will describe the details of each alternative, the planning process used to identify the alternatives, the initial screening results, alternatives dismissed, and the evaluation process used to identify a preferred alternative. As alternatives are developed in further detail and evaluated, the comments received during scoping will be considered as part of the process.

3.1.3 Key Environmental Considerations

Summary of Comments

Comments regarding environmental concerns addressed a range of topics, including:

- impact to wetlands due to construction and run-off from impervious surfaces;
- potential for the release of methane from disturbed wetlands;
- potential for disturbance of contaminated soils;
- impact to Potomac Greens Park;
- impact to the view along the George Washington Memorial Parkway;
- access for sites located east of the WMATA and CSX tracks in the event of an emergency;
- air quality impacts;
- noise and vibration impacts to the Potomac Greens neighborhood;
- impacts to safety and security in the Potomac Greens neighborhood;
- light pollution from the Metrorail station;
- traffic and parking impacts;
- construction impacts to wildlife; and
- construction impacts to the Potomac Greens neighborhood, including traffic, emissions, noise, and vibration.

Response

The potential environmental impacts of each alternative, including the issues identified during scoping, will be assessed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences. Measures that would minimize impacts will also be identified in Chapter 3. The analysis will be completed in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidance. The specific environmental concerns noted during the scoping process will be included in the analysis.

3.1.4 Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Process

Summary of Comments

Commenters stressed the importance of continuing and regular public involvement, as well as cooperation between FTA, the City of Alexandria, NPS, and Arlington County.

Response

Public involvement will be ongoing throughout the NEPA process. In addition to the outreach during scoping, public involvement will include attendance at community meetings, information provided via the website and newsletters, participation at public

meetings, and a public hearing to solicit comments on the Draft EIS.

3.2 Summary of Agency Comments

Over the course of the scoping period, four comments were received via email from participating agencies. In addition, three comments were written on the sketch pads provided at the agency scoping meeting, and three verbal comments were received at the meeting.

3.2.1 Purpose and Need and Goals and Objectives

No agency comments were submitted on this topic.

3.2.2 Alternatives

Summary of Comments

One comment was submitted supporting the full development of alternatives that do not utilize George Washington Memorial Parkway land.

Response

The initial range of alternatives presented during scoping includes some options that do not utilize George Washington Memorial Parkway land. All of the alternatives identified will be subjected to the initial screening which considers factors such as technical and financial feasibility, and whether alternatives meet the project purpose and need. Alternatives which meet the screening criteria will be developed in more detail and evaluated in the Draft EIS.

3.2.3 Key Environmental Considerations

Summary of Comments

Agencies requested consideration be given to the following environmental factors:

- impacts to the George Washington Memorial Parkway, including impacts to visual conditions, noise, the tree canopy and vegetation, stormwater management, water quality, wetlands, transportation, air quality, pedestrian access, park uses, and changes to the character of the Parkway;
- conformance with applicable plans and policies;
- wetlands;
- effect of building height on airport air space interactions; and
- transportation, including parking needs and impacts.

Response

The potential environmental impacts of each alternative including the issues described above will be assessed in detail in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences. Measures that would minimize impacts will also be identified in Chapter 3. The analysis will be completed in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidance. The specific environmental concerns noted during the scoping process will be included in the analysis.

3.2.4 Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Process

No agency comments were submitted on this topic.

4.0 SCOPING RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

4.1 Alternatives Resulting from Scoping

Based on the comments received during the scoping process, four new alternatives will be advanced into the initial screening of alternatives, which is described in **Section 4.2**. The new alternatives to be included in the screening are described in the following sections.

4.1.1 Metrorail Station Alternative D3

This additional Metrorail station alternative would be located closer to the CSX Railroad than the D alternatives presented during scoping, in the area generally behind the existing movie theater.

4.1.2 VRE Station Alternative

The VRE Station Alternative would involve construction of a new VRE station at Potomac Yard. This station would be located at grade along the existing CSX tracks. VRE is a commuter rail service that operates almost exclusively during peak periods and in the peak direction. Unlike Metrorail, it does not provide service during the midday (except for a single midday departure on each line), nighttime, or weekends. The system has two lines that extend further out into suburban Virginia than Metrorail but with fewer stations than Metrorail. Transfer service between Metrorail and VRE is available at the King Street, Crystal City, L'Enfant Plaza and Union Station Metrorail and VRE stations.

4.1.3 Bus Alternative

The Bus Alternative is a non-Metrorail alternative including changes to area bus routes and improvements to the transportation network intended to support increased trips within the corridor and provide direct access to the regional Metrorail system. This alternative would include enhancements beyond those included in the No Build Alternative. The alternative would provide enhanced transit service from the Potomac Yard area to the Crystal City and Braddock Road Metrorail stations. It would supplement the planned Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transitway service by increasing the overall service frequency along the U.S. Route 1 Corridor and providing direct service between the Metrorail stations and multiple points within Potomac Yard. The operations would correspond to Metrorail frequencies and hours of service.

4.1.4 Parking Garage Alternative

The Parking Garage Alternative would include construction of a parking deck located off of U.S. Route 1 and is intended to accommodate trips with a destination in Potomac Yard.

4.2 Key Environmental Considerations

The following key environmental considerations to be addressed in the EIS were identified at the outset of the scoping process for review and comment by the scoping process participants:

- neighborhood and community resources
- noise and vibration
- historic and cultural resources
- parks and parklands
- water resources, wetlands, and habitats
- air quality and climate change
- land use and zoning
- consistency with local plans
- environmental justice
- economic development
- visual and aesthetics
- transportation
- hazardous materials/contamination
- soils and geologic resources
- utilities
- energy
- construction

- secondary and cumulative effects
- Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) resources

One additional environmental consideration, Safety and Security, was suggested during the scoping process. Agency representatives and the public emphasized the importance of considering the effects of the project on the following:

- wetlands
- hazardous materials/contamination
- parkland including the George Washington Memorial Parkway
- visual resources
- air quality
- noise and vibration
- safety and security
- transportation including access, traffic, parking, and airport airspace
- construction impacts
- consistency with local plans and policies

The environmental considerations identified at the outset of the scoping process plus the added Safety and Security consideration will be addressed in the EIS.

4.3 Next Steps

The alternatives presented during the scoping process, described in **Section 1.2.2**, as well as the four new alternatives suggested during the process and described in **Section 4.1**, will be advanced to the initial screening of alternatives. This screening will assess each alternative based on technical and financial feasibility and consistency with the project's purpose and need. Those alternatives which meet the initial screening criteria will be developed more fully and evaluated as part of the Draft EIS.

An annotated outline has been developed for the Draft EIS based on NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act, and Section 4(f) requirements and the comments received during the scoping period. This outline is presented in **Appendix I**. The Draft EIS will begin with the identification of the alternatives considered in the EIS based on the results of the scoping process and the initial feasibility screening. The Draft EIS will also include documentation of the affected environment, which includes identifying existing conditions and potential opportunities and constraints relative to the proposed project. Based on this information, the potential

impacts of each of the remaining project alternatives will be assessed and documented. The project alternatives will also undergo a detailed evaluation based on potential impacts and their performance relative to the project purpose and need, the project goals and objectives, as well as financial feasibility.

Upon completion of the Draft EIS, a Notice of Availability will be published and the Draft EIS will be circulated to all interested parties and those having jurisdiction over the proposed action. The Draft EIS will also be available for public review for a minimum period of 45 days, beginning no later than 15 days prior to a public hearing for the project and extending for 30 days after the hearing. The Draft EIS will provide decision-makers with valuable information on which to base the selection of a preferred alternative.

The Final EIS will then be prepared, documenting the preferred alternative and comparing its impacts to the No Build Alternative. In the Final EIS, a greater level of detail on design, impacts and mitigation, and mitigation commitments, where applicable, will be provided. Finally, Records of Decision (RODs) will be issued by FTA and NPS, documenting the results of the EIS process.