

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Background

This Final Design Report/Final Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Evaluation (FDR/FEIS/4(f)) for PIN 5044.01 is prepared for the Southtowns Connector/Buffalo Outer Harbor (STC/BOH) Project to meet requirements established for the review of a highway design project. These requirements are set forth by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and implemented in New York by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) through the *Design Procedure Manual*. Accordingly, this report has been prepared to fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

The proposed action has been categorized as a NEPA Class I action, an action that may have a significant social, economic, or environmental effect. A NEPA Class I action requires the preparation of a single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to satisfy federal review requirements as well New York State requirements under SEQRA. The EIS process involves evaluating a reasonable range of alternatives to a proposed action, and results in a recommendation for an alternative that best addresses the objectives of the project while minimizing impacts. In the development of an EIS under FHWA requirements, a DR/DEIS is prepared and circulated for a minimum 45-day public review and comment period. A Public Hearing is normally conducted during this period. At the hearing, the project alternatives are presented and explained in terms of their relative social, economic, or environmental effects compared to future "Null Alternative" conditions (i.e., future conditions without the proposed action). Verbal and written comments on the DR/DEIS are then received and recorded at the hearing.

A combined corridor-design hearing process was conducted for this project, and hearings were held at two separate locations -- Erie Community College-City Campus (ECC) and Lackawanna Senior Center on August 10 and 11, respectively. At the close of the public review period (August 31, 2005), all substantive comments received were evaluated and have been addressed in this document. Upon further public review and comment, if no substantial comments are received on the FDR/FEIS/4(f), a Design Recommendation and a Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued. If a Build Alternative is chosen, and funding is available, the project will proceed through final design to construction.

This FDR/FEIS/4(f) presents the results of the various social, economic, and environmental analyses conducted for the project corridor and surrounding area. It further presents the Preferred Alternative which is then carried into final design and construction. Substantive public comments are presented as an Appendix to this report, and have been addressed within the body of this report where deemed relevant and necessary. The initial analyses performed for the DEIS were guided by the preliminary scope of issues presented in the Scoping Report, March



2002 and through subsequent public involvement and agency coordination activities. The proposed action is intended to facilitate economic development activities by:

- Improving road access to target redevelopment sites in the vicinity of the Lake Erie waterfront in the City of Buffalo, City of Lackawanna, and Town of Hamburg;
- Enhancing local road vehicular access and access for other modes of travel (bicycles, pedestrian, transit) along the Lake Erie waterfront; and
- Maintaining adequate service for commuter/commercial traffic between Downtown Buffalo and Southtowns communities (i.e., Lackawanna, Hamburg, and other outlying towns and villages south of the City of Buffalo).

B. Preferred Alternative

Identification

The NYSDOT, the lead agency for this project recommends that the **Improvement Alternative**, as described in the June 2005 Design Report/Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Draft 4(f) Evaluation (DR/DEIS/Draft 4(f)) and modified as described in the description portion of this recommendation be progressed.

Description

The plans, profiles and typical sections for the recommended alternative are located in **Appendix A** of the FDR/FEIS/4(f) document but are described here:

- a. Reconfiguring the NY Route 5/Fuhrmann Boulevard complex along the Buffalo Outer Harbor into a system designed to be more compatible with the proposed land uses included in local plans. The Modified Improvement Alternative shall consist of:
 - A new diamond interchange constructed just south of the southern terminus of BIN 1001579 (Skyway) to improve local access to a reconstructed Fuhrmann Boulevard and the NFTA Outer Harbor lands.
 - Replacement of BIN's 1001559, 1001549, 1001539, with more aesthetically sensitive structures and the removal of BIN's 1001569 and 1074270 on NY Route 5 and the removal of BIN 2260780 on Fuhrmann Boulevard.
 - The original proposal to lower the elevation of NY Route 5 will not be included in the preferred alternative. Public comments related to the NY Route 5 elevation indicated a desire to retain the embankment section to lessen the effects of snow drifting on NY Route 5, reduce the frequency of vehicular/animal accidents and to reduce project costs. The NY Route 5 embankment that currently exists shall remain from BIN 1001559 ("Beachline") to BIN 1001579 (Tifft Street) as currently exists.



- The original proposal to construct a pedestrian structure over NY Route 5 has not been included in the preferred alternative. The proposed pedestrian structure has been replaced with a more cost effective pedestrian/eco-sensitive underpass. This structure will be aesthetically sensitive and allow for direct access to Tifft Nature Preserve from the Small Boat Harbor and connect the Multi-use paths that exist now or those that will be constructed. This structure, along with BIN 1001579 (Tifft Street) and BIN 1001549 (Ohio Street) shall also provide a means of travel for small and median size animals to limit vehicle-animal collisions.
- Reconstruction of Fuhrmann Boulevard into a two way roadway on the western side of NY Route 5 from the Union Ship Canal to the U.S. Coast Guard Station.

The reconstructed Fuhrmann Boulevard will include the installation of sidewalks and/or multi-use paths along with architectural lighting, a new closed drainage system, landscaping, signage and striping from the Union Ship Canal to the U.S. Coast Guard Station.

The recommended roadway section of Fuhrmann Boulevard shall consist of:

Union Ship Canal to Tifft Street

2 – 3.30 m (11 ft.) lanes (one lane in each direction)

Tifft Street to Michigan Street

4 – 3.30 m (11 ft.) lanes (two lanes in each direction) with a 2.40 m (8 ft.) median. A new roundabout at the new interchange cross road and Fuhrmann Boulevard is also proposed.

Michigan Street to the U.S. Coast Guard Station

3 – 3.30 m (11 ft.) lanes (one lane in each direction with a continuous two-way center left turn lane)

- b. The reconstruction/rehabilitation of NY Route 5 from Ridge Road south to NY Route 179 into a six lane (three lanes in each direction) boulevard with a 3.60m (12') wide landscaped median.
This portion of the project will include the installation of sidewalks and multi-use paths along with architectural lighting along the western side of NY Route 5.
- c. The construction of a new arterial road, called the **Tifft Street Arterial** through the former LTV/Republic Steel site connecting I-190 (at an improved interchange in the Seneca/Elk/Bailey area) to Tifft Street, aligned east of the existing CSX railroad corridor.



This will include the installation of sidewalks and/or multi-use paths along with architectural lighting along the length of the new arterial.

- d. Reconstruction of Ohio Street into a landscaped arterial. This will include the installation of sidewalks and a multi-use path along the western side of Ohio Street.

The pedestrian facilities along Ohio Street include architectural lighting, signing and site specific markers in conjunction with the Industrial Heritage Trail. These elements are in concert with the 4(f) Evaluation which resulted in a signed Memorandum of Agreement between the Federal Highway Administration, New York State Department of Transportation and New York State Historic Preservation Office.

The current total estimated construction cost for the recommended alternative is \$95.1 million.

Justification

This preferred alternative has been recommended based upon it most appropriately meeting the stated project objectives, balancing major stakeholder concerns and addressing public comments received on the project during the public comment period. The proposed changes to the Improvement Alternative as described in the DR/DEIS/Draft 4(f) document dated June, 2005 are the direct result of major stakeholder input and public comments received.

The project as proposed while addressing project issues maintains independent utility in conjunction with regional transportation plans and transportation system components. Segments within the overall project may be built over a period of years while still maximizing positive results in areas of public access and economic development.

Project Limits

The overall project limits as described in the DR/DEIS/Draft 4(f) document dated June, 2005 remain the same. It is recommended that the project be staged though due to the overall project cost of \$95.1 million.

The recommended first portion of the project to be constructed is the northern portion of NY Route 5 (north of the Union Ship Canal) and all of Fuhrmann Boulevard, north of the Union Ship Canal. This first segment would consist of all work described in a. in the description above and would approximately \$35.01 million.

C. Next Steps

This FDR/FEIS/4(f) will be submitted to the FHWA office in Albany, New York and the NYSDOT regional office in Buffalo. The report will be filed for review and copying at the following locations during normal business hours:



**Buffalo and Erie County Public Library
Central Library
Lafayette Square
Buffalo, New York 14203**

**Lackawanna Public Library
560 Ridge Road
Lackawanna, New York 14218**

**Hamburg Public Library
102 Buffalo Avenue
Hamburg, New York 14075**

This FDR/FEIS/4(f) will also be made available for downloading on NYSDOT's STC/BOH Project website by selecting the "Southtowns Connector/Buffalo Outer Harbor Project" link at:

www.dot.state.ny.us/r5pc.html

Copies of this report and additional information can be obtained from:

**Mr. Alan E. Taylor
Regional Director, Region 5
New York State Department of Transportation
William J. Donovan State Office Building
125 Main Street
Buffalo, New York 14203
Phone: (716) 847-3238**

**Mr. Robert Arnold
Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
Leo W. O'Brien Federal Building
9th Floor
Clinton Avenue and North Pearl St.
Albany, New York 12207
Phone: (518) 431-4127**

This project should be identified in all correspondence requiring additional information as:

PIN 5044.01: Southtowns Connector/Buffalo Outer Harbor Project



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