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Authority: Pub. L. 105-78, section 2009, and Pub. L. 102-240, section 4002.

Issued on: February 22, 1999.

Michael J. Vecchietti,

Director, Office of Information and Management Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Transit Administration****Environmental Impact Statement on the Central Phoenix /East Valley Light Rail Transit System**

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

SUMMARY: The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Phoenix Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA), in cooperation with the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) on the proposed Central Phoenix/East Valley light rail transit project in Maricopa County, Arizona. The EIS will evaluate the following alternatives: a no-build alternative and light rail transit alignment options (including station locations, support facilities, and a supporting bus system) plus any additional alternatives that emerge from the scoping process. Scoping will be accomplished through correspondence and discussions with interested persons, organizations, and Federal, State and local agencies, and through public meetings.

DATES: Comment Due Date: Written comments on the scope of alternatives and impacts to be considered should be

sent to the RPTA, 302 N. First Avenue, Suite 600, Phoenix, AZ 85003 by April 2, 1999.

Scoping Meetings: RPTA and the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa will conduct public scoping meetings on the following dates and locations:

- Tuesday, March 16, 1999, 5:00 pm—7:00 pm—Program Room, Tempe Public Library, 3500 S. Rural Road, Tempe, Arizona
- Wednesday, March 17, 1999, 5:00 pm—7:00 pm—Music Room (4th Floor), Central Phoenix/Main Library (Burton Barr Public Library), 1221 N. Central Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona.
- Thursday, March 18, 1999, 5:00 pm—7:00 pm, Saguaro Room, (2nd Floor), Mesa Public Library, 64 East 1st Avenue, Mesa, Arizona and
- Friday, March 19, 1999, 10:30 am—1:00 pm, Phoenix City Hall Assembly Room, A&B, 200 W. Washington Street, Phoenix, Arizona.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the project scope should be sent to Mr. Wulf Grote PE, Project Director, RPTA, 302 N. First Avenue, Suite 600, Phoenix, AZ 85003. Scoping meetings will be at the locations stated above.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Robert E. Hom, Director, Office of Planning and Program Development Federal Transit Administration, Region IX, (415) 744-3133.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**I. Scoping**

The FTA and the RPTA, in cooperation with the cities of Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa invite written comments until April 2, 1999.

During scoping, comments should focus on identifying specific social, economic, or environmental impacts to be evaluated and suggesting alternatives that are less costly or less environmentally damaging which achieve similar objectives. Comments should focus on the issues and alternatives for analysis, and not on a preference for a particular alternative. Individual preference for a particular alternative should be communicated during the comment period for the Draft EIS. If you wish to be placed on the mailing list to receive further information as the project continues, contact Mr. Wulf Grote at the RPTA; (see ADDRESSES above). A scoping package describing the light rail alignment alternative in greater detail is also available by mail from Mr. Wulf Grote at (602) 262-7242.

II. Description of Study Area and Project Need

The proposed project for environmental review consists of

approximately a 25-mile total light rail transit system. An initial operating segment consisting of approximately 13 miles, in the core of the corridor, has been identified as the focus of the preliminary engineering effort. The total corridor links Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa from Mesa Drive in downtown Mesa, through Tempe, west to downtown Phoenix and north along the Central Avenue Corridor to the vicinity of 19th Avenue and Bethany Home.

For the 25-mile segment, two terminal locations in Phoenix will be evaluated during the NEPA process. One terminal location is in the vicinity of Central Avenue and Camelback Road. The other is located in the vicinity of 19th Avenue and Bethany Home Road, integrated with the Chris-Town Mall. For the initial operating segment, the exact length of the LRT segment, station locations, and supporting facilities would also be determined during the NEPA process.

The new light rail transit alignment will be located either within existing arterial streets or in the parallel Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) corridor or a combination of the alignment locations. The light rail transit alignment provides the opportunity to connect several regionally significant activity centers, entertainment venues, and special event locations. In addition, the light rail project is being coordinated with the City of Phoenix, Aviation Department and is included as an integral mobility component of the Sky Harbor International Airport master plan update. The light rail corridor also parallels Interstate 10, Interstate 17, and US 60 (Superstition Freeway) generally considered to be the spine of Maricopa County's freeway transportation system, carrying the greatest number of people and vehicles of any corridor in the region and serving many of the region's primary activity centers. Congestion and delays along these freeways and along the parallel arterial streets are now considered to be the major transportation problem facing this rapidly growing region. With the prospect of continued and accelerated growth in population and tourism in Maricopa County, travel conditions will continue to deteriorate at an increasing rate. Between 1990 and 1995, Maricopa County grew by more than 15 percent to a current population of 2.7 million. By 2020, it is estimated that the population of Maricopa County will exceed 4 million. The County's growth rate was the third fastest among the nation's top fifty counties from 1980 through 1994. In response to this need, the RPTA in cooperation with the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa have completed a

Major Investment Study (MIS) for the Central Phoenix/East Valley corridor. The MIS study resulted in a recommended design concept and scope consisting of a light rail transit alternative operating in one of several alignment options and a supporting bus system to provide the required mobility in the Central Phoenix/East Valley corridor and the region. Copies of the MIS are available from Mr. Wulf Grote at the RPTA (see Addresses above).

III. Alternatives

The alternatives proposed for evaluation include: (1) No-action, which involves no change to transportation services or facilities in the corridor beyond already committed projects, (2) a new light rail transit alignment located either within the UPRR right-of-way or selected surface streets or a combination of the UPRR corridor and surface streets.

IV. Probable Effects

FTA and the RPTA in cooperation with the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, and

Mesa will evaluate all significant environmental, social, and economic impacts of the alternatives analyzed in the EIS. Primary environmental issues include: neighborhood protection, traffic diversion, business access, aesthetics, bicycle facilities, contamination, alternative modes of transportation, stormwater management, and archaeological and cultural resources. Environmental and social impacts proposed for analysis include land use and neighborhood impacts, traffic and parking impacts near stations, visual impacts, impacts on cultural resources, and noise and vibration impacts. Impacts on natural areas, air quality, groundwater and potentially contaminated sites will also be covered. The impacts will be evaluated both for the construction period and for the long-term period of operation. Measures to mitigate any significant adverse impacts will be developed.

V. FTA Procedures

The EIS for the Central Phoenix/East Valley project will be prepared simultaneously with preliminary engineering for the approximately 13-mile initial operating segment in the core of the corridor. The EIS/preliminary engineering process will assess the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed alternatives while refining their design to minimize and mitigate any adverse impacts. After its publication, the Draft EIS will be available for public and agency review and comment, and a public hearing will be held. Based on the Draft EIS and comments received, the RPTA and the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa will select a preferred alternative to be further detailed in the Final EIS.

Issued on: February 24, 1999.

Leslie T. Rogers,

Regional Administrator.

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