



U.S. Department
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**Federal Transit
Administration**

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December 20, 2011

Timothy H. Hoeffner, P.E.
Administrator, Office of Rail
Michigan Department of Transportation
425 W. Ottawa Street
Lansing, MI 48909

Carmine Palombo
Direct of Transportation Programs
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments
535 Griswold Street, Suite 300
Detroit, MI 48226

RE: Resuming the NEPA process for the Ann Arbor – Detroit Commuter Rail Project

Dear Mr. Hoeffner and Mr. Palombo:

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is committed to working with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to plan and implement a commuter rail project between Ann Arbor and Detroit, MI. A major step toward moving this project forward is to complete an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA process for this project may resume when the project is sufficiently developed to: 1) offer FTA sufficient detail for a meaningful environmental assessment, and 2) ensure that it complies with the requirements of the Michigan Line Joint Operations Agreement (specifically that the project construct additional capacity to handle such proposed commuter rail operations) .

In order for FTA to conduct a meaningful environmental analysis, a project must be defined in enough detail so that staff can quantify impacts to a range of environmental resources. The detail needed to conduct this analysis should be captured in a detailed project description. For the Ann Arbor Commuter Rail project, MDOT has already developed track schematics representing the most recent iteration of the project's alignment. Prior to formally launching into the NEPA process, FTA requests that MDOT and SEMCOG, based on the track schematics if appropriate, prepare a project description with narrative and graphics describing the location, construction requirements, and operational characteristics of all project components. Both the FTA and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will need to concur that the project description is satisfactory.

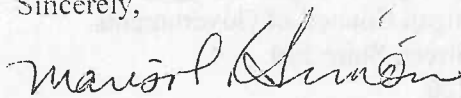
Also, before resuming the NEPA process, FRA must concur that the track modeling and simulation supporting the commuter rail project is consistent with the Michigan Line Joint Operations Agreement, accounts for the full build-out of the project, and preserves sufficient capacity for intercity passenger rail.

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As such, MDOT must revise the modeling and prepare a complete project description. The FTA anticipates MDOT will complete the revised modeling by April 2012, and will submit a project description by June 2012.

It is my understanding that FRA will be funding the revised capacity analysis to support the modeling and simulation. The FTA will commit staff resources to assist with coordination during the project development and the NEPA process. If issues arise, the FTA should be contacted as soon as practicable in order to avoid delays.

Sincerely,



Marisol R. Simón
Regional Administrator

cc: Robert Kuehne, Michigan Department of Transportation
Wynne Davis, Federal Railroad Administration
Sean Libberton, Federal Transit Administration
Adam Stephenson, Federal Transit Administration