

# What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

*Frequently asked questions about the EIS for the Southwest Corridor light rail project*

September 1, 2016

Metro, TriMet and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Southwest Corridor light rail project. This in-depth process ensures communities benefit, and are not harmed, from federally-funded projects.

Here are answers to several common questions about the purpose, process and outcomes of this environmental review.

## What is an EIS?

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), FTA requires that projects applying for federal transit funding such as the Southwest Corridor light rail line complete an EIS if the project could have significant impacts. An EIS is a detailed study of the anticipated positive and negative impacts a proposed project would have on communities and the built and natural environment. It includes strategies for avoiding, minimizing or mitigating significant negative impacts. The EIS process also documents agency and public comments related to those impacts to inform public officials before making decisions. For the Southwest Corridor project, the EIS will assess the impacts of the proposed light rail line as well as roadway, bicycle and pedestrian improvements that could be constructed with the transit project.

## What is the difference between the draft and final versions of the EIS?

The draft EIS, known as the DEIS, compares the impacts of several transit alignments and identifies potential strategies to avoid, minimize or mitigate significant impacts. For transit projects, this analysis informs community and partner agency input to determine a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The LPA which includes the mode (bus, light rail, etc), final route, terminus, station locations and general design of the project.

The final EIS, or FEIS, includes the comments the public and partners have made on the DEIS, defines the single transit alignment that will be built, clarifies the specific impacts of that project, and solidifies the mitigation measures to be implemented.

## What topics are typically assessed in an EIS?

Common issues addressed in an EIS for a high capacity transit project include:

- Air quality and greenhouse gas emissions
- Acquisitions and displacement
- Biological resources and ecosystems, including threatened and endangered species
- Characteristics that affect livability
- Energy use
- Environmental justice
- Geology and soils
- Hazardous materials
- Historic, archeological and cultural resources
- Land use and economics
- Noise and vibration
- Parks and recreational areas
- Safety and security
- Transportation, including vehicle traffic, transit, bicycles, pedestrians, parking and freight
- Utilities and public services
- Visual quality and aesthetics
- Water quality and hydrology, including floodplains
- Wetlands

## What is the Southwest Corridor EIS schedule?

- **September 2016:** Scoping period to get public and agency input to finalize the transit alternatives and issues to study during the draft EIS
- **October to December 2016:** Review scoping comments, steering committee decision on alternatives to study in the DEIS, begin DEIS
- **January to November 2017:** Research, analysis and internal review
- **December 2017:** Release DEIS for public and agency comment
- **Spring 2018:** Identify Locally Preferred Alternative
- **Fall 2018 through June 2019:** Preparation of the FEIS

**When can the public provide comments?**

Although opportunities for public input to shape the project will continue throughout the environmental review phase and beyond, the EIS emphasizes two formal public comment periods: during the scoping period and after the DEIS is released. Both comment periods will include opportunities to provide input in person and online. For more information on public input opportunities go to [www.swcorridorplan.org](http://www.swcorridorplan.org) or contact [swcorridorplan@oregonmetro.gov](mailto:swcorridorplan@oregonmetro.gov).

**What is DEIS scoping?**

The DEIS scoping period is the opportunity for the public and government agencies to provide input on what to study in the DEIS. The scoping period specifically seeks feedback on:

- Has the project identified the right alignment choices and bike/pedestrian/road projects to study during the DEIS? Are there changes to the project purpose, need, goals and objectives for the Southwest Corridor Steering Committee to consider?
- Has the project identified the right topics to study during the DEIS? Are there additional issues or locations of concern the project team should evaluate or consider? How should these impacts be studied?

**What are the roles of FTA, Metro and TriMet during environmental review?**

FTA will approve the Southwest Corridor light rail EIS documents, and will also coordinate with other federal agencies as well as tribal governments during the environmental review process.

With FTA guidance, Metro and TriMet will manage preparation of the EIS documents, public engagement, and coordination with state and local agencies.

**What level of project design detail will be studied in the DEIS?**

The project designs will be approximately “10 percent” planning level conceptual designs for the DEIS. This means that the designs will be preliminary, but able to provide enough detail to assess impacts such as stormwater runoff or property acquisitions. The designs used in the DEIS are not final, they will continue to be refined based on public input, results from the DEIS analysis and mitigation strategies. More detailed designs, such as the look of transit shelters or the species of trees to plant, will be developed later.

**Will the DEIS explain how the project would affect my home or business?**

The DEIS will assess a number of potential impacts to homes and businesses along the proposed light rail alignments, such as roadway modifications, visual quality and aesthetics, property acquisitions and displacements, noise and vibration, and construction impacts.

Because the project is still early in the design process and multiple alignment options remain, none of the potential impacts identified are certain to occur. The DEIS helps identify significant impacts so that they can be avoided, minimized or mitigated. During the environmental review phase project staff will work with any home or business owner whose property may be impacted.

**What is the Southwest Corridor light rail project timeline?**

