1 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 USC 4321-4347), as amended, to address potential environmental impacts associated with design refinements to the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project (formerly known as the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project).

The EA describes the modifications that have been made to the design of the project since the publication of the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation (Final EIS) in December 2004 and since the issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) for the project by FTA in March 2005. This document presents the anticipated changes in effects from those documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The design refinements came about as the project proceeded through the preliminary engineering phase of project development. Some of the refinements resulted from a greater understanding of site conditions, the planned construction approach, and the need to comply with design standards or regulatory criteria. However, many of the design refinements were required because an updated capital cost estimate for the project significantly exceeded the costs previously identified in the Final EIS.

This chapter describes the basis for the EA and summarizes the purpose and need for the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project based on the information presented in the Final EIS. The role of the EA in supporting the overall project development process and public and agency coordination efforts for the EA are also described.

1.1 BASIS FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DRPT, in cooperation with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Fairfax County, Loudoun County, and the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA), is planning to construct a 23.1-mile extension of the Metrorail system in the rapidly growing Dulles Corridor in Fairfax and Loudoun counties, Virginia. As shown in Figure 1-1, the project will extend Metrorail service from the existing Orange Line in Fairfax County through Tysons Corner to Reston, Herndon, Washington Dulles International Airport (Dulles Airport), and beyond the airport to Route 772 in Loudoun County. Most of the extension will be constructed in the median of the Dulles International Airport Access Highway (DIAAH) and Dulles Connector Road, but the alignment also provides direct service to Tysons Corner and Dulles Airport. The extension will include 11 new Metrorail stations, a new rail yard on Dulles Airport property, and improvements to the existing rail yard at West Falls Church.

DRPT is currently seeking financial assistance from FTA for the first phase of the project (the Extension to Wiehle Avenue), which will extend from the existing Metrorail Orange Line near the West Falls
Church Station to Wiehle Avenue in Reston, and plans to apply for separate FTA funding for the subsequent extension west of Wiehle Avenue to Dulles Airport and eastern Loudoun County (the Extension to Dulles Airport/Route 772). FTA’s Annual Report on New Starts for Fiscal Year 2007 (February 2006) documents the current performance of the Extension to Wiehle Avenue relative to FTA’s New Starts evaluation criteria.

In July 2004, the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project entered the preliminary engineering phase of project development. Since the publication of the Final EIS, the design of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project has evolved based upon additional engineering analyses; more detailed information on site conditions, soils, and anticipated construction techniques; and the need to reduce capital costs. Several refinements affecting the Extension to Wiehle Avenue phase are being incorporated into the project’s design, some of which require additional environmental review to ensure the project’s continued compliance with NEPA. FTA has prepared this EA in conjunction with DRPT to assess the potential environmental impacts associated with the design refinements and compare the impacts to those associated with the Wiehle Avenue Extension documented in the project’s Final EIS. In addition, the EA includes an updated assessment of any potential temporary impacts associated with the project’s construction.

In accordance with the terms of the project’s Record of Decision, FTA will review the findings presented in this document to determine whether the design refinements substantially change the project definition or whether the design refinement results in new significant environmental impacts that were not evaluated in the Final EIS. This EA and associated public involvement activities will also be used to satisfy applicable WMATA Compact requirements associated with the design refinements.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The Dulles Corridor, located in Northern Virginia, west of the nation’s capital, is home to several of the Washington metropolitan region’s most dynamic and rapidly growing activity centers. Extending from the vicinity of West Falls Church Metrorail Station in Fairfax County, Virginia, to Route 772 in Loudoun County, Virginia, the 23.1-mile corridor includes the high-density office buildings and regional shopping centers of Tysons Corner; the residences, shopping centers, and suburban office complexes of the Reston-Herndon area; the rapidly growing Dulles Airport; and an emerging residential and employment center in eastern Loudoun County.

With the Dulles Corridor’s increasing attractiveness as a place to live and work, travel in the corridor has been steadily growing over the past 15 years. This increasing travel demand has strained the capacity of the existing transportation network, causing delays and increasing travel times between activity centers within the corridor and the region. The central and eastern portions of the corridor currently experience some of the region’s worst traffic congestion.

Over the next 25 years, continued development of the corridor as a regional employment destination and the maturation of residential communities and commercial areas within the corridor are expected to far outpace the growth of the region as a whole. Parallel increases in travel demand are projected to exceed the capacity of the corridor’s already overburdened transportation system, resulting in severely congested conditions on numerous routes, further degradation of air quality, and a threat to the valued quality of life in the Dulles Corridor.

Planned roadways enhancements in the corridor are not expected to relieve the current levels of congestion, and the ability to further expand roadway capacity beyond currently planned improvements is
Figure 1-1
Project Map
constrained by right-of-way limitations and federal air quality standards. For these reasons, alternative transportation improvements in the Dulles Corridor that would increase capacity and improve mobility without further expanding roadways have long been the focus of public and private sector studies.

The purpose of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project is to provide high-quality, high-capacity transit service in the Dulles Corridor. The introduction of Metrorail to the corridor would offer an alternative means of travel for the growing number of residents, employees, and visitors in the Dulles Corridor and, as a link to the Metrorail system, would improve mobility throughout the region. By providing a high-capacity transportation choice for travelers, the proposed project would be better able to meet the anticipated increases in travel demand and help reduce future congestion in the corridor. Moreover, the ability of the proposed improvements to increase person-moving capacity over long distances with fewer numbers of vehicles should help minimize future increases in vehicle miles traveled in the corridor and vehicle emissions.

1.3 PLANNING CONTEXT

Over the last four decades, the transportation needs of the Dulles Corridor and potential improvements for the corridor have been the subject of several studies conducted by public agencies and private businesses. Most of the studies have identified mass transit alternatives as part of the transportation solution for the corridor. Numerous comprehensive and regional plans have included references to specific transit alternatives, supportive land use measures, and potential funding sources for the Dulles Corridor. Proposed transit solutions for the Dulles Corridor have also been recognized at the federal level, including the identification of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project as one of the candidate projects to receive federal funding in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the federal law that authorizes the government to fund transportation projects through 2009. The project was also included in the previous authorization, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

1.3.1 Project History

Rapid transit in the Dulles Corridor was initially explored in the 1950s as part of the planning of Dulles Airport. At that time, the median of the DIAAH, previously known as the Dulles Airport Access Road, was reserved for future transit access to the airport. Subsequently, the need for transit in the corridor was evaluated in the late 1960s during the planning of the regional Metrorail system. While Metrorail’s original Adopted Regional System (ARS) did not include a connection to Dulles Airport, extending rapid transit service to the airport has remained a local and regional goal. The current ARS is shown in Figure 1-2.

In the 1990s, providing a rapid transit connection to Dulles Airport was evaluated in the Dulles Corridor Transportation Study (1997) and the Supplement to the Dulles Corridor Transportation Study (1999). The former, a Major Investment Study (MIS), recommended developing a rail line between the Metrorail Orange Line and Route 772 primarily using the median of the DIAAH.

More recently, these recommended transit alternatives for the Dulles Corridor were evaluated in the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation (Draft EIS) published in June 2002. Based on the analysis contained in the Draft EIS, public comments received on the document, and agency coordination, in late 2002 an extension of the WMATA Metrorail system from the existing Orange Line to Route 772 in Loudoun County was selected as the
Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the project by both the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) and the WMATA Board of Directors. The rail line would primarily use the median of the DIAAH, leaving the highway to directly serve Tysons Corner and Dulles Airport. Unlike the recommendations of the MIS Supplement, the selected LPA was not proposed to be developed through a phased implementation program that included bus rapid transit as an interim step to rail.

Following publication of the Draft EIS and selection of the Metrorail Alternative as the LPA, additional agency and public coordination resulted in revisions to the selected LPA. The potential effects of these changes—which included design modifications to the preferred alignment and facilities, adjustment of opening years, and scheduling construction of the project in two phases—were documented in the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation (Supplemental Draft EIS) published in October 2003. Based on the analysis contained in the Supplemental Draft EIS, public comments received on the document, and agency coordination, the CTB approved the revision of the LPA in March 2004 and then recommended its implementation in the Public Hearing Report for the Supplemental Draft EIS. In April 2004, the WMATA Board of Directors also approved the revision of the LPA. The Final EIS, published in December 2004, was prepared to identify the improvements of the LPA, document the basis for the decision, and commit to mitigation measures that will offset adverse effects. A comparative evaluation of the No Build Alternative and LPA and associated costs was included, as well as public comments received on the Draft EIS and Supplemental Draft EIS and responses to those comments. Based on the information contained in the Draft EIS, the Supplemental Draft EIS, and the Final EIS, a Record of Decision was issued by FTA in March 2005. The ROD describes the project, summarizes the environmental findings from the EIS documents, and identifies the mitigation requirements associated with project implementation.

In addition to FTA, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) participated in the project’s NEPA review as a cooperating agency because construction of the project requires the use of airport property for non-airport purposes. FAA determined that the use of airport property for the project is consistent with the terms of Section VIIG of FAA’s Policy and Procedures Concerning the Use of Airport Revenue (64 FR 7696-7723) and issued a separate ROD in July 2005.

1.3.2 Local and Regional Plans

Several local and regional plans identify the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project as an element of the future transportation network. The project or supportive measures for the project are included in these plans as essential elements in meeting future transportation and development goals.

- **Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan** (2000, amended through 2002) includes specific measures supporting transit improvements, calling for dense development in the corridor. Higher-density, mixed-use development will be allowed in Tysons Corner and Reston near proposed rail stations. The Transportation Plan Map (1991, amended through 2001) accompanying the Comprehensive Plan identifies the Dulles Corridor as an enhanced public transportation corridor, in which future rapid rail transit would be developed.

- **Loudoun County Revised General Plan** (2001, amended through 2005) allows for higher-density development adjacent to transit stations along the Dulles Greenway. The plan also includes public support for transit services that would use the corridor, such as carpools,
Regional Metrorail System (2005)

Legend:
- Red Line • Glenmont to Shady Grove
- Orange Line • New Carrollton to Vienna / Fairfax-GMU
- Blue Line • Franconia-Springfield to Largo Town Center
- Green Line • Branch Ave to Greenbelt
- Yellow Line • Huntington to Mt Vernon Sq / 7th St - Convention Center

Figure 1-2

DULLES CORRIDOR METRO RAIL PROJECT

© COPYRIGHT 2004 WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY
vanpools, bus and rail services, and other alternative modes, with specific funding support for bus services.

- *Loudoun County Revised Countywide Transportation Plan (2001)* identifies the project as a County priority, and encourages higher-density, mixed-use development in transit nodes along the southeastern end of the Dulles Greenway to support the development of rail in this corridor. *2003 Update to the Financially Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan for the National Capital Region (2004)* identifies the project as the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project, a 23.1-mile extension of the existing Metrorail system from the Orange Line in Fairfax County through Tysons Corner to Dulles Airport and Route 772 in Loudoun County. The project will be constructed in two phases.

- *Transportation Improvement Program for the Washington Metropolitan Region FY2006-2011 (2005)* includes construction of Phase 1 of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project from East Falls Church Metrorail Station to Wiehle Avenue.

- *Plan to Improve Air Quality in the Washington, DC-MD-VA Region, State Implementation Plan (“Severe Area SIP”) (2004)* identifies the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, as defined in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), as a transportation emissions control measure intended to bring the region into attainment for ozone. The Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) and TIP have been found to be in conformity with the SIP.

### 1.3.3 Environmental Review and Project Development Process

DRPT is seeking Federal New Starts funding from FTA for the Extension to Wiehle Avenue phase of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project and plans to seek separate FTA funding for the subsequent Extension to Dulles Airport/Route 772 phase. Part of FTA’s project development process is preparation of environmental documentation in accordance with NEPA.

NEPA requires that federal agencies consider the potential impacts of projects involving federal action on the natural and human environments. If substantial environmental impacts are anticipated and cannot be avoided, a plan for mitigating these impacts must be proposed. As part of the decision-making process, reasonable alternatives that would avoid or reduce adverse impacts must be considered, analyzed, and documented. In addition, the public must be given adequate opportunity to comment on a proposed project, and the project must be coordinated with appropriate agencies. This evaluation of environmental consequences is required to assist decision-makers and the public in evaluating the relative merits of the project and in selecting a preferred course of action from the alternatives evaluated.

The level of documentation required by FTA regulations for compliance with NEPA varies depending on the class of the proposed action. Class I actions—such as construction of new highway or rail transit facilities, extensions of rail transit facilities, or construction of separate roadways for buses or High Occupancy Vehicles (HOVs)—require the preparation of an EIS. An EIS describes in detail how project actions would affect the environment, as well as any proposed mitigation.

As described in Section 1.3.1, a series of EIS documents was prepared for the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, culminating in FTA issuing a ROD for the project in March 2005 and FAA issuing a separate ROD in July 2005. Design refinements developed after the issuance of the RODs could result in impacts different than those identified in the Final EIS for the project. To ensure continued compliance with NEPA, this EA was prepared to determine whether the preliminary engineering design refinements result in new
significant environmental impacts that were not documented in the Final EIS and RODs. Following public
review and comment on the document, FTA will review the findings of this EA and the Public Hearing
Report to decide whether to revise the project’s March 2005 ROD, issue a separate “Finding of No
Significant Impacts” (FONSI), or prepare a Supplemental EIS.

1.4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY COORDINATION

A comprehensive public involvement program has been implemented throughout the project development
and environmental review process to support decision-making for the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project.
In addition, extensive coordination efforts with federal, state, and local resource agencies were conducted
throughout the NEPA process. A summary of public involvement and agency coordination during the
EIS process is included in Chapter 11 of the Final EIS. For the EA, DRPT incorporated public
involvement activities in its ongoing outreach program for the preliminary engineering efforts. The
public involvement program used to support the EA also meets necessary WMATA Compact
requirements.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), FAA, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT),
WMATA, MWAA, and Fairfax County are all participants in the project and have been actively engaged
in the decision-making for the project including the recent cost reduction efforts. In addition, some of
the design changes recently implemented, such as those to the future layout of Route 7, were made at the
request of the agencies. Formal agency coordination occurs at least bi-weekly through a Technical
Advisory Group.

Public outreach for the design refinements formally began on August 10, 2005, with the announcement of
the refinements. Following this announcement, project staff presented the design refinements at project
update meetings held with elected officials, business leaders, corridor citizens, and home owners.
Between August 2005 and January 2006, more than 60 meetings were held with stakeholders throughout
the corridor. The public also had the opportunity to learn about the design refinements at the following
special community events where project information was displayed: South Riding Fall Business Expo
(September 10, 2005), Falls Church Fall Festival (September 17, 2005), Fall for Fairfax and Dulles Plane
Pull (October 1, 2005), and Falls Church Chamber of Commerce Business Expo (November 4, 2005).

A public information meeting was held on December 8, 2005, at Spring Hill Elementary School, 8201
Lewinsville Road, McLean, Virginia. At this meeting, the proposed design refinements for the project
were presented and project staff responded to public questions. The meeting used a workshop format
with information stations, an oral presentation, and detailed handouts. Before and after the presentation,
the public was able to circulate among information stations, and project staff was available to answer
questions.

The information session was announced through a number of communications channels, including: direct
mail to area residents, door-to-door outreach to businesses, email alerts, press announcements and on the
project's Web site (www.dullesmetro.com). The team also distributed information through key third-
party groups, such as homeowners associations, civic groups and property management companies. Fliers
were posted at area business locations, libraries and community centers. Local community newspapers
posted meeting announcements in their community calendars and referenced the upcoming meeting in
news articles.
More than 200 people attended the public information meeting. The project team received feedback about the Metrorail project including some of the design refinements. Many people supported the elimination of the service roads along Route 7 in Tysons Corner and the team’s close coordination and responsiveness to property owners affected by the project. Concerns raised about the project centered around access to the new Metrorail stations in Tysons Corner. More specifically, citizens expressed concern about sidewalk extensions beyond the project limits that would provide connectivity to the stations; the lack of parking at the stations; and shuttle service and/or lack of information regarding shuttle service to future stations.

Although the overall sentiment about the elimination of the service roadways along Route 7 was positive, some questions were raised by local business owners and citizens regarding future access to businesses along Route 7 due to the limitations on left- and u-turns as a result of the Metrorail alignment in the median of Route 7 and the elimination of the service roads. Residents of the neighborhood adjacent to the West Falls Church Service and Inspection (S&I) Yard asked questions about planned substations, soil erosion along Pimmit Run, vegetation screening for a new stormwater pond at the yard, and noise.

Following its publication, the EA will be distributed to the agencies, organizations, elected officials, and public libraries listed in Appendix B. A complete copy of the EA will also be posted to the project’s website (www.dullesmetro.com) and made available for review at DRPT’s project office in Vienna, Virginia. A notice of availability for the EA will be published in local newspapers and on the project’s website. Recipients of the project’s Final EIS will also be notified via mail of the EA availability.

A public hearing on the EA will be held to provide citizens and agencies an opportunity to comment on the proposed design refinements to the project. Information on the date, time, and location of this hearing will be posted on the project’s website or can be obtained by contacting the project’s information line at (703) 288-7000. Comments on this document may be made orally at the public hearing or submitted in writing.

After the public hearing and the close of the comment period, a public hearing report will be prepared to formally document and respond to comments received at the hearing and during the comment period. FTA will then review the findings of the EA and the responses to comments and will make its formal NEPA determination on the design refinements. The public hearing report will also be made available for review in accordance with WMATA’s Compact procedures. Following FTA’s formal NEPA determination on the design refinements, the WMATA Board will subsequently take the necessary actions to meet applicable Compact requirements.
This page intentionally left blank.