State Environmental Quality Review Act

POSITIVE DECLARATION

Notice of Intent to Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Date Issued: September 18, 2019

Proposed Action: Implementation of a Staten Island North Shore Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project

SEQR Classification: Type I

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REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This document is a Positive Declaration prepared pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) 6 NYCRR 617.2, Article 8 of the Environmental Conservation Law. The Proposed Action would involve the introduction of new and enhanced public transit service along the North and West Shores of Staten Island between South Avenue (West Shore Plaza, located near the intersection of South Avenue and Chelsea Road) and St. George (St. George Terminal, located near the intersection of Richmond Terrace and Bay Street) in Richmond County, New York. Refer to *Proposed Action Description and Background* for additional project detail. Since the project may cause one or more significant impacts to the environment and may have temporary environmental effects during construction, MTA-NYCT will adhere to the procedures developed under SEQRA when conducting its environmental review of the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action is classified as a Type I Action under SEQRA. A Type I action is one that has the potential to have a significant impact on the environment (see 6 NYCRR Part 617.4 "Type I Actions"). The Proposed Action would meet one or more of the criteria identified below:

> *any Unlisted action... substantially contiguous to, any historic building, structure, facility, site or district...that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (volume 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, parts 60 and 63, which is incorporated by reference pursuant to section 617.17 of this Part), or that is listed on the State Register of Historic Places or that has been determined by the Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to be eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places pursuant to sections 14.07 or 14.09 of the Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law*
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> and,
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> *[a]ny Unlisted action, that exceeds 25 percent of any threshold in this section, occurring wholly or partially within or substantially contiguous to any publicly owned or operated parkland, recreation area or designated open space...*

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Proposed Action is in response to a high demand for public transit along the North and West Shores, which is expected to grow in the future. This demand is not effectively served by existing transit routes, which creates a need for transit improvements.

Several planning studies, including the 2012 Staten Island North Shore Alternatives Analysis (SINSAA)[1], North Shore 2030[2], Working West Shore 2030[3], and studies for the Port Richmond[4] and West Brighton[5] Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOAs), have identified pressing transportation-related issues within the North and West Shores of Staten Island. The North Shore has a discontinuous street grid that physically constrains the roadway network, with only one east-west route—Richmond Terrace—running the east-west length of Staten Island north of the Staten Island Expressway (I-278). This limited network is inadequate to accommodate the shared movement of automobiles, trucks, bicycles, pedestrians and transit vehicles.

Demand for transit among North Shore residents is high and growing. However, the North Shore's constrained infrastructure makes it difficult to serve the area's transit needs efficiently. Service on the area's four primary bus routes (S40/S90, S44/S94, S46/S96, and S48/S98) is characterized by: overcrowding of buses during peak commute periods; inconvenient transfers between travel modes; and a lack of reliability, with nearly two-thirds of bus trips running five or more minutes late. The potential to add future transit capacity to meet growing demand is severely constrained by the physical limitations of the existing roadway network.

These limitations on expanded transit capacity inhibit local economic growth and the quality of life for residents along the North and West Shores. Providing a direct, reliable transit connection along South Avenue and across the North Shore (between the West Shore and St. George) would help address service and capacity issues, support economic growth, and provide for projected ridership demand. Such a connection would provide faster and more consistent travel times and improve overall transit access and connectivity between the commercial hub at West Shore Plaza, various existing and planned West Shore and North Shore activity centers such as the Teleport Business Park, Matrix Global Logistics Park, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, civic and commercial concentrations in St. George, and the St. George Terminal.

PROPOSED ALIGNMENT

The approximately 8-mile alignment would comprise approximately 5.3 miles of right-of-way (ROW) from the former North Shore Railroad and approximately 2.7 miles of City roadways such as Richmond Terrace and South Avenue. The proposed alignment would operate as a two-lane, dedicated busway on existing at-grade, elevated viaduct, and below-grade open-cut sections of the former North Shore Railroad ROW, with street-running portions along South Avenue (mixed traffic) and Richmond Terrace (exclusive two-lane

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[1] http://web.mta.info/mta/planning/nsaa/pdfs/FinalReport.pdf

[2] https://www.nycedc.com/sites/default/files/filemanager/Resources/Studies/Staten_Island_North_Shore_Study/Documents_and_Reports/NorthShore2030_Part1.pdf

[3] https://www.nycedc.com/sites/default/files/filemanager/Resources/Studies/Working_West_Shore_2030/WestShoreThreeYearWorkPlan.pdf

[4] https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/port-richmond-boa/port-richmond-boa.page

[5] https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/west-brighton-boa/west-brighton-boa.page

median busway). Construction of seven new BRT stations is anticipated in addition to a reconfiguration of the existing bus terminal at St. George and potential upgrades to existing bus stops along South Avenue.

On Richmond Terrace, the proposed BRT route would operate in a new median busway, transitioning to the former North Shore Railroad ROW at Nicholas Street via a new ramp. At Heritage Park, the at-grade segment of the proposed alignment would transition to an approximately 1-mile existing viaduct structure, part of the former North Shore Railroad, that extends past the Port Richmond Water Pollution Control Plant and Bodine Creek, shifting slightly inland as it crosses through Port Richmond over Richmond Terrace. East of the Bayonne Bridge, near John Street, the viaduct transitions to the 0.9-mile open-cut section of the ROW, which extends west toward the existing freight terminal. Near Roxbury Street, the proposed alignment would leave the open-cut and rise to grade, joining South Avenue at approximately Cable Way. From here, it would operate in mixed traffic along South Avenue to West Shore Plaza.

Design Options

In several locations along the alignment, design options are being considered to avoid or minimize the potential impacts (e.g., parks, visual, wetlands, etc.) of the Proposed Project. These design options involve potential shifts in the alignment to move farther away from protected resources or established waterfront businesses through which the ROW passes. As a result of natural erosion, severe weather events, and vessel traffic, the right-of-way and bulkhead in the vicinity of Sailors' Snug Harbor have sustained substantial damage and have largely been submerged by the Kill Van Kull. Conceptual design options under consideration for this area may include an in-water causeway or shifting the proposed BRT busway away from the shoreline and closer to Richmond Terrace. The ROW also bisects two active water-dependent industrial uses situated along the Kill Van Kull (Caddell Dry Dock and Atlantic Salt). A shift in alignment to the south will be evaluated to determine if it would enable these property owners to maximize waterfront access for their business functions.

Stations

Along the proposed alignment, seven BRT stations, with amenities such as platforms and shelters, would be provided:

- Eastern terminus: St. George Terminal
- At-grade: West Brighton Station, Livingston Station, and New Brighton Station
- Viaduct: Port Richmond Station
- Open-cut: Mariners Harbor Station and Elm Park/Morningstar Station

Additionally, existing on-street (South Avenue) stops that would potentially be served by the BRT include:

- Teleport Station, Lois Lane Station, Bloomfield Station, Goethals Road Station, Forest Avenue Station, and Arlington Station
- Western terminus: West Shore Plaza

The specific locations and layouts of the proposed stations will be determined based on their ability to maximize the transportation goals of the project while minimizing environmental impacts where practicable.

Service

An operating plan for BRT service will be developed and refined by MTA-NYCT; additional detail will be provided in the MTA-NYCT's SEQRA EIS. At present, it is anticipated that two new BRT routes operating as

the S1 and S2, as well as extended/rerouted existing bus service (feeder routes), would make use of the proposed BRT alignment. BRT service would be provided at frequent headways to meet anticipated demand. It is anticipated that the newly proposed BRT routes would utilize a fully electric fleet.

ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT

In August 2012, MTA-NYCT published the Staten Island North Shore Alternatives Analysis, which assessed the implementation of new or enhanced transit service along the North Shore of Staten Island between West Shore Plaza and St. George Terminal (http://web.mta.info/mta/planning/nsaa/pdfs/FinalReport.pdf). The SINSAA identified and evaluated eight alternatives representing a mix of modes, routes, alignments and termini with a desired re-use of the former North Shore Railroad right-of-way for transit service. Five of the alternatives were eliminated because they would not meet the need for the project or would be infeasible due to extraordinary engineering and cost factors or operational implications. Three of the eight alternatives were advanced and further developed as part of a "short list," including transportation systems management (TSM), electric light rail transit (LRT), and bus rapid transit (BRT). The short list alternatives were subject to additional analysis of engineering/operation, economic and environmental factors in the SINSAA. Ultimately, after extensive analysis as well as stakeholder and public outreach, the SINSAA identified BRT as the preferred alternative based on its potential to reduce travel time, improve transit access, and attract the most riders with lower capital and operating costs than the LRT alternative.

Since the publication of the SINSAA in 2012, changes in land use and access near NYCDOT's St. George Terminal have precluded the original concept for the St. George BRT terminal. A Supplement to the 2012 SINSAA ("the Supplement") was published in June 2019 (https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2019-06/FINAL%20Staten%20Island%20North%20Shore%20Alternatives%20Analysis%20Supplement.pdf). The Supplement builds on the substantial work that was previously completed, reassesses the potential accessibility of the SINSAA BRT and LRT alternatives to St. George Terminal, and re-evaluates those alternatives against the Proposed Project's goals and objectives.

The analysis concluded that a BRT terminal at St. George was feasible and that the BRT alternative still provided greater potential to attract transit riders at a lower cost than the LRT alternative. Following public input and outreach to stakeholders and elected officials, the BRT alternative was reconfirmed as the preferred alternative for new transit service on the North Shore. Accordingly, the MTA-NYCT proposes to advance the BRT alternative through the SEQRA process.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Potential significant environmental effects/impacts that may result from the implementation (construction and operation) of the proposed Staten Island North Shore BRT service identified in the Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) include:

- **Impact on Land.** Construction associated with the Proposed Action may involve the excavation and removal of natural materials exceeding 1,000 tons.
- **Construction Impact.** Construction associated with the proposed busway and ancillary facilities such as station areas would continue for more than one year.
- **Impacts on Surface Water and Flooding.** The Proposed Action would be developed within portions of the 100-year and 500-year floodplains and may result in the modification of existing drainage patterns. Given that a portion of the right-of-way and bulkhead is submerged near Snug

Harbor, the Proposed Action could potentially involve effects to waterbodies including the dredging of materials exceeding 100 cubic yards, including siltation and disturbance of sediment. Additionally, the Proposed Action may result in construction within or adjoining freshwater or tidal wetlands.

- **Impacts on Air Quality, Noise, Odor and Light.** Construction associated with the Proposed Action may produce sound above established noise levels. The Proposed Action would also introduce outdoor lighting and associated adjacency lighting impacts to properties (especially near the elevated viaduct).
- **Impacts on Transportation.** Given the potential reconfiguration of a portion of Richmond Terrace to accommodate the proposed busway, the Proposed Action could result in alterations to the existing pedestrian and bicycle networks.
- **Impact on Energy.** The proposed BRT service is anticipated to use an electric fleet. As such, the Proposed Action may utilize more than 2,500 MW hours of electricity per year.
- **Impacts on Open Space and Recreation.** The former rail right-of-way is adjacent to a number of designated park and open space areas under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks. Accordingly, the Proposed Action may result in direct effects to parkland resources.
- **Impacts on Cultural and Aesthetic Resources.** The Proposed Action may occur within or substantially contiguous to one or more listed or potentially eligible State or National Register of Historic Places (S/NRHP) properties or archaeologically sensitive areas. With respect to visual resources, the Proposed Action may be visible from publicly accessible vantage points and during routine activities such as travelling to and from work.
- **Impact on Human Health.** Given the industrial waterfront uses along significant portions of the right-of-way, as well as the longstanding historic use of the right-of-way as a transportation corridor, the Proposed Action may have an impact on human health from exposure to new or existing sources of contaminants.

DETERMINATION TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Considering the potential environmental impacts outlined above, MTA-NYCT, acting as Lead agency for SEQRA, has determined that the Proposed Action may cause one or more significant impacts to the environment, and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be prepared. The Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS/FEIS) will be prepared in accordance with Article 8 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law and in compliance with all applicable state laws and regulations.

PUBLIC SCOPING

A Draft Scoping Document outlining the content of the DEIS has been prepared. The purpose of the Draft Scoping Document is to provide the public and state and local agencies with an initial opportunity to comment on the DEIS process, including the project's purpose and need, and the study areas/methodologies to be used in the technical analyses. The Draft Scoping Document and the EAF for the Proposed Action may be downloaded at https://new.mta.info/system_modernization/northshoreeis or obtained in hard copy from the MTA-NYCT at the address listed below.

A public scoping meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 17, 2019**, at which time the public will have an opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Scoping Document. The meeting date, location and time are as follows:

Thursday, October 17, 2019

6:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Gardens, Lower Great Hall, 1

1000 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, New York 10301.

*A presentation will be given at 6:30 pm and repeated at 7:30 pm

**Please bring Photo ID for entrance into the meeting location.

Public and agency written comments can also be submitted through the close of the public comment period at **5:00 pm EST on November 18, 2019** via the following:

Project website feedback form: https://new.mta.info/system_modernization/northshorebrt

Email: NorthShoreEIS@nyct.com

Phone: 511 (MTA General Call Center)

Mail*: MTA New York City Transit
Staten Island North Shore EIS
C/O Government & Community Relations
2 Broadway, D17.112
New York, NY 10004

*All mailed comments must be postmarked by **November 18, 2019.**

Should you have any questions pertaining to this Positive Declaration, you may contact Melissa Farley, Assistant Director of Government and Community Relations, by email at Melissa.Farley@nyct.com.

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