

Finding of No Significant Impact

America's Marine Highway Program Programmatic Environmental Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (2007 Energy Act) directed the Secretary of Transportation to establish a "short sea" transportation program, and to designate transportation projects to be conducted under the program, for the purpose of mitigating landside congestion. Pursuant to the statutory mandate, in 2010 at 46 CFR 393 the Maritime Administration (MARAD) of the Department of Transportation established the "America's Marine Highway" Program (the Program), designating criteria, eligibility requirements and information for applicants seeking to establish America's Marine Highways (AMH). Section 405 of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2012 expanded the geographic scope of the program to include ports nationwide, and added the purpose of increasing the efficiency of waterborne freight and passenger transportation.

The Program itself does not develop or operate marine highway services. Rather, the program administered by MARAD provides a set of tools for use by state and local governments, and private industry, to consider expansion of Marine Highway services. Where such designations are made, MARAD may encourage development of particular Marine Highway projects or services when funding is available.

MARAD has prepared a programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) to analyze the potential environmental impacts of continuing to execute the AMH program, as opposed to not developing the program further (the No Action alternative). As stated, the AMH program exists to identify opportunities to reduce landside congestion and to optimize the transportation of goods and passengers. State and local governments and private industry – not the federal government – are the authorities that elect to establish and support marine highway programs.

As a programmatic document, the PEA does not analyze the environmental impacts of specific Marine Highway route designations – such analysis can only be done in the context of specific proposals, with known ports, infrastructure, natural environments, transportation volumes, etc. MARAD envisions that additional environmental analyses of the federal aspects of future project and service development along designated Marine Highway routes will be necessary. Those future analyses may use this PEA as a starting point, tiering off it to analyze the specific environmental impacts of each particular proposal.

PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to fulfill MARAD's legislative responsibilities under the 2007 Energy Act, and to carry out the Agency's mission to develop, improve and strengthen the U.S. Maritime Transportation System in order to meet the economic, environmental and security needs of the nation.

The need for the Proposed Action is to alleviate landside transportation congestion along inland and coastal waterways, by enabling more goods and people to travel by water, thereby striking an appropriate balance between the demand and capacity on the nation's highways, railways and Marine Highway routes.

Finding of No Significant Impact America's Marine Highway Program Programmatic Environmental Assessment

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to continue execution of the AMH program in order to identify opportunities to relieve landside congestion and improve efficiency and resiliency in America's transportation, by offering waterborne alternatives to landside transportation modes. This would be accomplished by taking advantage of existing capacity within the nation's existing river, canal, lakes and coastal waterway system, without the need for additional in-water construction or dredging activities.

For purposes of this PEA, a range of notional Marine Highway services were identified in five regions: East Coast, West Coast, Gulf Coast, Great Lakes, and Inland Waterways. Three to five potential Marine Highway services were considered for each region, and each service could choose to call at many different ports, 10 or more in some cases. Because several ports could support each Marine Highway service, to simplify the analysis the PEA selected representative pairs of ports ("port pairs") within each region to examine the potential Marine Highway services that could be provided.

The representative port pairs for each region are as follows:

- East Coast: NY/NJ to Norfolk, VA; Norfolk, VA to Port Canaveral, FL; and NY/NJ to Portland, ME
- West Coast: Los Angeles/Long Beach, CA to Tacoma, WA and Oakland, CA to Stockton, CA
- Gulf Coast: Brownsville, TX to Port Manatee, FL and Fulton, MS to Mobile, AL
- Great Lakes: Oswego, NY to Toledo, OH; Duluth, MN to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario; and Toledo, OH to Montreal, Quebec
- Inland Waterways: Peoria, IL to New Orleans, LA

The PEA analyzed representative vessel types, carrying capacities, engine configurations, cruising speeds and frequency of trips between port pairs. The following permutations among these variables were analyzed:

- Ocean going vessels (OGV) of mid- to small size
 - Capacity of 600 to 800 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs)
 - Category 3 (C3) engine
 - Cruising speed of 20 knots
- Ocean going tug/barge (typically an articulated tug/barge (ATB) unit)
 - Capacity of 100 to 400 TEUs
 - Category 2 (C2) engine

Finding of No Significant Impact America's Marine Highway Program Programmatic Environmental Assessment

- Cruising speed of 12 knots
- Inland towboat/barges
 - Capacity of 100 to 350 TEUs
 - Category 2 (C2) engine
 - Cruising speed of 8 knots

Marine Highway services are intended to use existing waterways, ship channels, and ports. Channels and waterways are maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Because existing routes and port infrastructure would be used in the operations of Marine Highway services, the PEA assumed there would be no dredging or major port infrastructure development associated with Marine Highway projects. The PEA also assumed that all vessel types used for Marine Highway services would comply with all applicable environmental regulations.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the AMH program would not be developed further. MARAD would stop identifying waterborne alternatives to landside transportation modes. The nation would be less able to reduce landside transportation congestion; potential improvements in transportation resilience and efficiency afforded by the AMH program would be foregone. DOT would be unable to implement statutory direction from Congress in the 2007 Energy Act. The No Action alternative is analyzed in the PEA principally as a baseline from which to compare the impacts of the Proposed Action.

SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ALTERNATIVES

This AMH Program PEA is intended to serve as a guidance document from which site-specific NEPA analyses may be tiered when state or local governments and the private sector consider designation of specific AMH projects or services along designated Marine Highway Routes. The Program itself neither develops nor operates AMH services. When establishment of specific AMH projects are considered, project-based NEPA analysis of any federal aspects of the program, such as funding or permitting, may be required.

This PEA evaluates potential environmental impacts of the proposed action (continuation of the AMH program) based on notional marine vessels calling on potential designated port pairs in each region. These potential environmental impacts are understood by reference to those of the No Action alternative, under which the AMH program would not be further developed. The potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action are summarized below.

Air Resource Impacts

Anticipated air emissions resulting from waterborne versus truck transportation of goods between port pairs were analyzed for designated routes. Landside traffic and congestion were not factored into the analyses. Because marine vessels can carry a substantially larger amount of cargo per trip as compared to trucks, overall emissions of most criteria pollutants are reduced or are comparable with trucks. These reductions in air emissions would be expected to have a

Finding of No Significant Impact America's Marine Highway Program Programmatic Environmental Assessment

beneficial impact on air quality in a given region. Therefore no significant impacts are expected to air resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Water Resource Impacts

As stated above, the Program is premised on the use of existing sea lanes, channels and port infrastructure. No specific dredging activities or major port infrastructure activities were projected in the analysis, and the PEA assumed that marine vessel operations would be in compliance with applicable environmental regulations and US Coast Guard safety regulations. Given these assumptions, a small increase in ship operations resulting from the Program would not result in significant impacts to water quality.

Biological Resource Impacts

Given the assumptions stated under "Water Resource Impacts" above, no significant impacts to biological resources are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Action.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The PEA assumed that there would be no construction, renovation, or demolition associated with the Proposed Action. Therefore, there would be no significant impacts to historic properties eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Land Resources

Marine Highway operators would use existing ports, sea lanes, and channels. No major infrastructure improvements are anticipated to result from the Program. Therefore, no significant impacts to land resources are expected as a result of the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomics

Establishment of Marine Highway services may result in a reduction in the volume of long-haul truck or rail traffic along designated routes, which in turn could result in reduced employment in these industries. However, it should be noted that new job creation will result in the maritime sector – both on the waterfront and at marine terminal facilities. Short-haul trucking from terminal facilities to ultimate destinations would remain in place. This potential socioeconomic impact is therefore not expected to be significant. Site-specific NEPA analysis in connection with designation of a particular Marine Highway would need to further address this issue.

Noise

Marine Highway services would operate on established waterways and would use existing port facilities. Establishment of new Marine Highway services could result in a nominal increase in new vessel trips and operation of equipment at ports. Any such increase would be accompanied by a decrease in noise from long-haul truck and rail traffic. A nominal increase in vessel trips or port operation is not expected to produce significant noise effects.

Recreation

Establishment of new Marine Highway services could result in an increase in the use of waterways by commercial vessels. Any increase is expected to be small, and confined to

Finding of No Significant Impact
America's Marine Highway Program Programmatic Environmental
Assessment

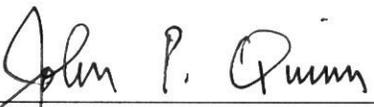
existing waterways, channels and port infrastructure. The impact to recreational interests is therefore expected to be negligible.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative the Program would not be developed further. There would be no environmental impacts caused by the Proposed Action.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the information contained in the PEA, and in accordance with NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality Regulations, DOT Order 5610.1C, and MARAD Administrative Order 600-1, I find that implementation of the Proposed Action would not either directly or indirectly significantly affect the quality of the human or natural environment. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is therefore not required. For actions with impacts not described in the PEA, or for specific projects associated with an AMH, MARAD will prepare or oversee preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Assessment or other appropriate environmental documentation.



John P. Quinn
Associate Administrator
Environment and Compliance
Maritime Administration
Department of Transportation

9/11/14

Date