

Finding of No Significant Impact for Proposed Welcome 480-foot Self-Support Communications Tower

INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina (NC) Highway Patrol – Department of Crime and Public Safety proposes to construct a 480-foot (ft) self-support lattice tower in Davidson County, North Carolina. The Proposed 480-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in the Community of Welcome, NC (Davidson County) Environmental Assessment (EA), further referenced as the Welcome EA, provides an analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with the use of grant funds issued by the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program, administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, to construct this tower and associated equipment.

SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The proposed Welcome tower project would apply funds issued by the PSIC Grant Program. The PSIC Grant Program was developed to assist State, local, tribal, and non-governmental agencies in developing interoperable communications as they leverage the newly available spectrum in the 700 megahertz (MHz) band. As a condition of the PSIC Grant Program, grantees must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

The NTIA has specified that PSIC grant funds must be used for projects that would improve communications in areas at high risk for natural disasters and in urban and metropolitan areas at high risk for terrorism threats and should include pre-positioning or securing of interoperable communications for immediate deployment during emergencies or major disasters. Investments receiving PSIC funds can range from the installation of new large-scale infrastructure (e.g., communications towers) to the acquisition of mobile / portable handheld radios. As outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA (February 2009) and Final Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the proposed Welcome tower project is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Welcome tower project would allow for the following:

- Increased radio frequency (RF) coverage area for Federal, State, and local emergency first responders connected through the North Carolina Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER) network;
- Updated equipment to support new frequencies to improve and expand voice and data coverage;
- Facilitate reliable interoperable communications among first responder organizations; and
- Enhanced security and facility control.

The EA examines the Proposed Action to construct the Welcome tower project in the Community of Welcome, Davidson County, North Carolina. The proposed project would include the construction of a 480-ft (495-ft with appurtenances) self-support lattice tower that would be enclosed within an irregular shaped fenced compound. The proposed facility is located northeast of the Community of Welcome, in central Davidson County, North Carolina. The parent property is primarily occupied by previously disturbed vacant land, immediately adjacent to a Norfolk Southern Railroad trestle. The proposed communications tower compound would include one 11.5-ft by 24-ft equipment shelter and a standalone 40-kilowatt (kW) diesel powered emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft by 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. The total area of disturbance associated with the proposed fenced compound is anticipated to total approximately 0.096-acres.

The EA analyzes existing conditions and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action for 11 resource areas: noise, air quality, geology and soils, water resources, biological resources, historic and cultural resources, aesthetic and visual resources, land use, infrastructure, socioeconomic resources, and human health and safety.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) is to implement the Welcome tower project in its entirety, consisting of a 480-ft (495-ft with appurtenances) self-support lattice tower that would be enclosed within an irregular shaped compound with dimensions measuring 30-ft by 49-ft by 10-ft by 54-ft by 35-ft by 39-ft. The area surrounding the proposed Welcome communications tower facility consists of commercial, low-density residential, undeveloped forested and municipal land uses. The proposed facility is located northeast of the Community of Welcome, in central Davidson County, North Carolina. The parent property is primarily occupied by previously disturbed vacant land, immediately adjacent to a Norfolk Southern Railroad trestle. The proposed communications tower compound would include one 11.5-ft by 24-ft equipment shelter and a standalone 40-kW diesel powered emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft by 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. All of these components would also be contained within the enclosed irregular shaped fenced compound. The total area of disturbance associated with the proposed fenced compound is anticipated to total approximately 0.096-acres. The proposed would be located on an approximately 0.42-acre parcel of real estate, owned by the NC Department of Transportation. The proposed 12-ft wide access drive would proceed southeast from Old U.S. Highway 52 for approximately 75-ft until reaching the proposed fenced compound located within the northeastern portion of the parent property.

Due to the elevation of the proposed site and the topographic features of the surrounding area, the proposed site would provide suitable RF coverage for Davidson County as well as increased interoperability network opportunities for similar sites in the region. The proposed site would provide reliable interoperable communications and a significantly increased coverage area for emergency first responders. The elevation and topography of the proposed site would provide a natural height advantage, resulting in enhanced coverage with the proposed 480-ft (495-ft with appurtenances) self-support lattice tower. The site is strategically located, expanding the coverage radius for Davidson County, as well as portions of the surrounding counties within North Carolina.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, the current emergency services radio system coverage would not be met causing serious limitation on emergency response, funding for interoperable communications and information systems infrastructure would not be released, and infrastructure would neither be developed nor enhanced. The No Action alternative would not address the needs for the NC Highway Patrol. The Proposed Action would not move forward using PSIC grant funds or any alternate funding sources. The No Action alternative served as the baseline for assessing the impacts of the alternatives in the EA.

Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward

Two alternative sites were examined to determine the range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Proposed Action. One alternative examined was located within the cloverleaf intersection of U.S. 52 and Old U.S. 52 on property owned by the NC Department of Transportation. The Proposed Action was not permitted by the NC Department of Transportation at this location and discussion ceased between the interested parties, thus this site was abandoned as a reasonable alternative. The second alternative examined was a site located on property currently occupied by the Midway Fire Department. The NC Highway Patrol made several attempts to contact the Midway Fire Department Fire Chief to discuss the possibilities of locating the Proposed Action on the aforementioned property; however, the Fire Chief did not respond or discuss the option with the NC Highway Patrol, thus the site was abandoned as a reasonable alternative. Based on these concerns, the proposed alternatives were not carried forward as reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action.

One collocation opportunity located north of the Community of Midway was examined to determine if the proposed collocation would satisfy the RF coverage needs for the State VIPER network. The collocation opportunity would not satisfy the RF coverage needs for the State VIPER network and coverage needs for northern Davidson County would not be met; thus, county wide coverage would suffer using the collocation opportunity at the aforementioned location. There were no viable collocation opportunities that would satisfy the RF coverage needs of the State VIPER Emergency Services Communications System. Collocating equipment onto existing towers was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) to construct the proposed Welcome tower project is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Davidson County and the NC Highway Patrol to improve and facilitate reliable interoperable communications, significantly increase the RF coverage area for emergency first responders through the State VIPER network, and provide greater security and facility control. The No Action Alternative would not address the communications needs for Davidson County.

CONSULTATIONS

The proposed site is located on a 0.42-acre parcel primarily occupied by commercial, low-density residential, undeveloped forested and municipal land uses. Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act was accomplished through a preliminary review of protected species from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Endangered Species Web site to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed site. The USFWS Web site and correspondence with the USFWS Asheville Field Office identified two endangered species for Davidson County, including the Bog turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*) and Schweinitz's sunflower (*Helianthus schweinitzii*). Site surveys were conducted at the proposed site; no burrows, nests, wetlands, coastal areas or other signs of listed species and/or critical habitat were readily observable. It is anticipated that the proposed tower and equipment compound should have no effect on listed species or their critical habitats. Coordination of this analysis with the USFWS Asheville Field Office resulted in their concurrence with the determination that the proposed action would have no effect on any federally listed species.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished with the NC State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the NC Office of State Archeology to determine whether the construction of the proposed site may generate any short- or long-term indirect impacts to historic and cultural resources or may be located within the viewshed of any historic and cultural resources. An archaeological evaluation was conducted to assess the potential direct effects the Proposed Action may have on archaeological resources. The archaeological evaluation was conducted of the pertinent U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute topographic map (Midway) to assess the potential significant impacts to architectural, historic or archeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed site. One National Register property, five "study listed" properties, and four surveyed properties were identified while reviewing the pertinent USGS 7.5-minute topographic map (Midway) during consultation with the NC SHPO and the NC Office of State Archeology. However, the one identified National Register property was reportedly "demolished" in the early 2000s and two of the five "study listed" properties were reportedly "gone" as documented by the NC SHPO.

A consultation letter was submitted to the NC SHPO related to any potential impacts to historical or archaeological resources within a 1.5 mile visual area of potential effect (APE) of the site. Letters were sent to the Thomasville Historic Preservation Commission, Lexington Historic Preservation Commission, and Davidson County Planning and Zoning Department on June 2, 2011, inviting them to be a consulting party regarding any potential impact to historical or archaeological resources in the area. In addition, the NC SHPO and the appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officers of the federally recognized Native American tribes with known ancestral rights to Davidson County were consulted, including Tuscarora Nation, Cherokee Nation, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Shawnee Tribe, and the Catawba Nation. Concurrence from, or lack of comment, from all of the aforementioned applicable tribes were received. A public notice was issued related to impacts to historic and cultural resources in *The Dispatch* on June 1, 2011. No comments have been received to date. Additional concurrence was received for the 1.5 visual mile APE from the NC SHPO on June 23, 2011 that the Proposed Action would "not adversely effect" historic properties.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The proposed Welcome tower project is not likely to result in any environmental impacts and does not involve any unusual risks or impacts to sensitive areas. The Proposed Action would require construction of a 480-ft (495-ft with appurtenances) self-support lattice communications tower and associated equipment with ground disturbance activities totaling 0.096 acres. In accordance with 47 Code of Federal

Regulations Section 1.1307(a) (1) through (8), an evaluation was made to determine whether any of the listed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) special interest items would be significantly affected if a tower structure and associated equipment control cabinets were constructed at the proposed site location. No FCC special interest items were identified.

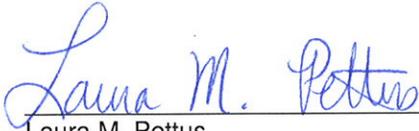
NTIA REVIEW

NTIA determined that the August 2011 Proposed 480-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in Welcome, NC (Davidson County) EA accurately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed development including a 480-ft self-support lattice communications tower and that the scope, alternatives considered, and content of the EA are adequate.

This FONSI is based on the attached EA which has been independently evaluated by the NTIA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the environmental issues and impacts of the proposed project and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Based on the best available information and NTIA's independent review, NTIA has decided to adopt the August 2011 EA for the Proposed 480-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in Welcome, NC (Davidson County). The EA is available for public review at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA_sub3.html. This FONSI has therefore been prepared and is being submitted to document environmental review and evaluation in compliance with NEPA. The decision documents for the environmental review of the Proposed Action are attached.

I have considered the information contained in the EA, and supporting documentation, which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the EA, would have no significant impact on the environment.



Laura M. Pettus

Responsible Program Manager

Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration



Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: Proposed 480-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in Welcome, NC (Davidson County) EA

Proponent: North Carolina (NC) State Administrative Agency

Location of current proposal: No postal address, east-southeast of Old U.S. Highway 52, north of Tal Pines Road, west of the Norfolk Southern Railroad, Welcome (Davidson County), North Carolina

Agency that prepared document being adopted: NC Highway Patrol – Department of Crime and Public Safety

Date adopted document was prepared: August 4, 2011

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The Proposed Action is to implement the Welcome tower project in its entirety, consisting of a 480-foot (ft) (495-ft with appurtenances) self-support lattice tower that would be enclosed within an irregular shaped compound with dimensions measuring 30-ft by 49-ft by 10-ft by 54-ft by 35-ft by 39-ft. The area surrounding the proposed Welcome communications tower facility consists of commercial, low-density residential, undeveloped forested and municipal land uses. The proposed facility is located northeast of the Community of Welcome, in central Davidson County, North Carolina. The parent property is primarily occupied by previously disturbed vacant land, immediately adjacent to a Norfolk Southern Railroad trestle. The proposed communications tower compound would include one 11.5-ft by 24-ft equipment shelter and a standalone 40-kilowatt diesel powered emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft by 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. All components would be contained within the enclosed irregular shaped fenced compound. The total area of disturbance associated with the proposed fenced compound is anticipated to total approximately 0.096-acres. The proposed site would be located on an approximately 0.42-acre parcel of real estate, owned by the NC Department of Transportation. The proposed 12-ft wide access drive would proceed southeast from Old U.S. Highway 52 for approximately 75-ft until reaching the proposed fenced compound located within the northeastern portion of the parent property. The tower and site construction for this Proposed Action do not have any significant environmental impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

The document is available to be read at: http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA_sub3.html

The Department of Commerce has identified and adopted this document as being appropriate for National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) purposes after independent review. The document meets its environmental review needs for approval under the PSIC Grant Program and will accompany the proposal to the decision maker.

Name of agency adopting the document: NTIA

Responsible Official: Laura M. Pettus

Position/Title: Responsible Program Manager

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Signed:

Date:

Laura M. Pettus

9/1/11