

# Overview of the CONNECT NEC (Northeast Corridor) 2035 Outline

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## 1. Introduction

The Northeast Corridor (NEC) is a section of railroad between Washington D.C. and Boston boasting the largest numbers of passengers transported in the United States, and is used by both the intercity railroad service Amtrak and multiple commuter rail providers.



Source) Extracted from the NEC official website

Figure 1: Northeast Corridor Region <sup>Note 1)</sup>

In July 2021, the Northeast Corridor Commission, consisting of representatives from every state along the NEC, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and Amtrak, announced "CONNECT NEC 2035," a plan aimed to strengthen the Corridor's railway functions.<sup>1)</sup> By investing \$117 billion, the plan aims to add transportation services to new regions, increase the number of transportation units,

and shorten travel time by 2035. At the time of the announcement, the Northeast Corridor Commission positioned the multi-year action plan as "the most ambitious reinvestment program in the NEC's history."<sup>2)</sup> Because the United State government, local municipalities, and railroad companies are also collaborating in its execution, an overview of the plan will be shared below, as it seems to be how new plans should ideally be carried out.

## 2. Background

Amtrak and commuter railroads that operate the NEC have supported people's lives for the past 150 years, but some parts of the Corridor depend on 100 year old bridges, tunnels, and electrical facilities that urgently need investments for restoration. Aware of this issue, in 2017 the Federal Railroad Administration announced "NEC Future,"<sup>3)</sup> a long-term vision of what the NEC should aim for, and CONNECT NEC 2035 can be perceived as the first step to accomplish these goals. Additionally, although the spread of the novel coronavirus has reduced the use of railroads in the United States, the NEC Commission estimates that railroad ridership will steadily recover in the future and that building a railway system that meets various mobility demands will be important in the mid-to-long term.

## 3. Plan Outline

This plan consists of more than 150 large-scale renovation projects centered on aging infrastructure.

Considering that usage of these segments of track span multiple states and railway companies, a feature characteristic is that coordination of each of the projects is in place. It is impressive that the burden on riders is minimized during project work through efforts to clarify the priorities of each project, organization of the construction process, and maximization of work productivity during line closures.

An introductory outline of the plan, divided in four categories, can be found below:

① Improve Mobility and Connections

- Travel time can be shortened by replacing old railroad tracks and electrical equipment that have limited speed limits. By taking Acela, a limited express train, riders could travel 54 minutes faster from Washington D.C. to Boston and 25 minutes faster from New Haven, CT to New York.
- Daily Amtrak NEC service will increase by roughly 30% and double for other commuter railroads.
- New limited express services will be launched to allow for direct routes between Connecticut/Massachusetts and New York without the need for commuters to change trains.
- New stations will be set up in areas where existing commuter rail services are inadequate.

② Create Economic Opportunity

- By investing \$117 billion by 2035, NEC will generate more than \$90 billion in earnings across the United States and contribute to the economic growth of states and regions across the Corridor.
- Nearly 1.7 million new jobs, mainly in railway construction, will be generated by 2035. Wages for infrastructure-related work will also be 30% greater than average, creating opportunities for low-income and disadvantaged people to find employment with higher earnings.
- New off-peak and reverse-peak services will be introduced for low-income earners who may work outside normal working hours.

③ Combat Climate Change

- 60 million new rail trips will be instituted using a lower carbon emitting mode than airplanes and automobiles.

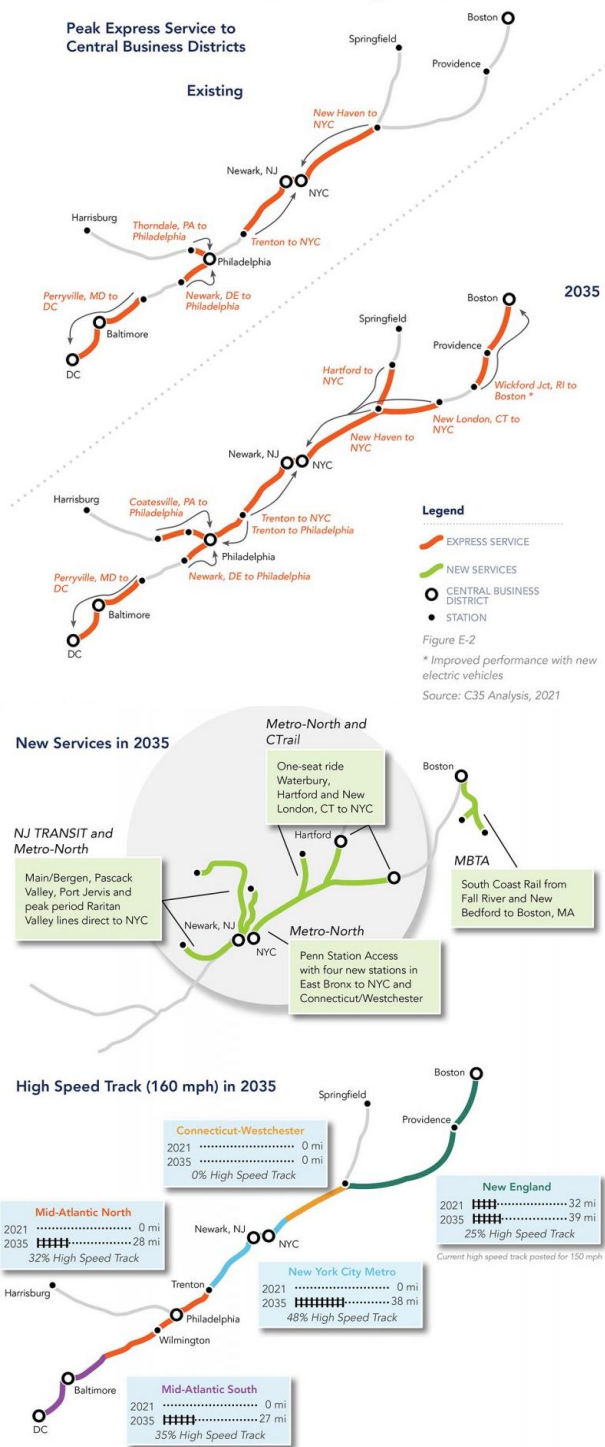
④ Support Desirable Cities and Communities

- Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) will be promoted to enable life without a car by providing commutes between affordable residential neighborhoods to areas with higher income jobs.

4. Financial Requirements

While the total investment needed for the project over the 15-year period is estimated to be \$117 billion, there is currently a funding gap of approximately \$100 billion. Although it has been said that the shortfall will be shared between the federal government and the states along the NEC, no concrete or realistic procurement plan has been disclosed. One can presume that this may be the largest issue for the plans future. Moreover, as the NEC Commission centrally manages many projects, rather than having individual planning units, it's inconclusive whether funding can be received as a whole.

## C35 Delivers Faster and More Convenient Service by 2035



By stating that "the corridor supports more than 800,000 daily passenger trips between the greater Washington D.C. and Boston regions. It is imperative that together we seize this once-in-a generation opportunity to replace aging assets, add rail capacity, improve performance, and enhance the customer experience along the entire corridor through the advancement of the vital and ambitious C35 plan," Kevin Corbett, President & CEO of NJ TRANSIT and NEC Commission co-chair, indicates that supporting the plan will allow for the Northeast Corridor to look to a future with sustainable growth. Furthermore, it is impressive that the majority of the goals described in the plan are analyzed quantitatively with clear standard levels. On the other hand, there are still many issues that remain unresolved, such as precuring funding for the large financial gap (budget shortages) and clarification on how the labor force will be secured. The plan is stated to be rolling continuously, and in 2023, CONNECT NEC would be scheduled to be completed in 2037.

In addition to growing awareness of climate change, passing of a bipartisan infrastructure investment plan in the US Senate, and so on, major changes have occurred within the railway industry. Because there is an expected tailwind for this plan expected in the future, further close observance will be conducted.

### Notes:

Note 1) As shown in Figure 1, the Northeast Corridor is divided into five regions: New England, CT / Westchester, NYC Metro, Mid-Atlantic North, and Mid-Atlantic South.

### Citations / References / Sources

- 1) CONECCT NEC 2035 Passages  
<http://nec-commission.com/documents/?type=connect-nec-2035>
- 2) CONECCT NEC 2035 Press Release  
<https://nec-commission.com/app/uploads/2021/07/C35-Press-Release.pdf>
- 3) NEC (Northeast Corridor) FUTURE Official Website  
<https://www.fra.dot.gov/necfuture/>

Source) An excerpt from the Northeast Corridor's "CONNECT NEC 2035" publication

Figure 2: Comparison of the NEC presently and in 2035  
(Upper Figure) Present and future comparisons of express trains expansions  
(Lower Figure) Present and future comparisons of added transport services to new areas and shortened travel times