

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Town and Village of Colonie and Albany County have initiated this Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) to evaluate socio-economic and physical environmental impacts to the Study Area resulting from a reasonable development scenario for a 15-year planning period. Impacts associated with current development proposals and projected development will be evaluated. Appropriate mitigation measures to minimize any identifiable impacts as well as potential costs for mitigation will also be examined.

The Study Area covered in this report encompasses the geographic area adjacent to the Albany County Airport. It contains approximately ± 8,500 acres and is bordered, generally, on the north by the Mohawk River, on the west by New Karner Road (County Route 157) and Denison Road, on the south by the municipal boundaries of the Town and Village of Colonie, Sand Creek Road, I-87 and Central Avenue, and on the east by Wertman Lane, Albany Shaker Road (County Route 155), I-87, and Forts Ferry Road (Exhibit 1-A-1).

Existing land use within the Study Area includes institutional, residential, commercial, and agricultural uses. Wolf Road, British American Boulevard, Northway Lane, and Avis Drive are predominantly developed as commercial, office park, or light industrial uses. Large areas of residential development are located north of Route 7, east of Forts Ferry Road, and to a lesser extent on both sides of Vly and Denison Roads.

Albany County institutional facilities include the jail and nursing home. The County also owns and operates the Albany County Airport and along with the Town

of Colonie jointly operates the Heritage Park Sports Facility. Several large parcels of undeveloped land in close proximity to these facilities are also under County ownership.

Immediately west and south of the airport is the Ann Lee Pond Nature and Historic Preserve. This unique natural and historic resource consisting of 170.2 acres of public land is owned by Albany County. A portion of the nature preserve lies within the Watervliet Shaker Historic District. The nature preserve provides important educational and recreational opportunities for people living and/or working in or near this rapidly developing area.

Active agricultural lands, which total approximately 810 acres, exist within the Study Area and include the Wertman, Engel and Coleman farms located along Albany Shaker Road. Other farms located south of Route 7 near Wade Road are in areas that have experienced some development pressure. Additional large agricultural parcels are located north and south of Route 155 at South Family Drive, east and west of Old Niskayuna Road, west of Vly Road, and west of Buhrmaster Road.

B. PROJECT NEED

Large areas of land surrounding the Albany County Airport are currently undeveloped. Due to commercial and residential development pressures as well as plans for expansion of the airport and potential sale/lease of this facility by the County, the preparation of the GEIS to evaluate development related impacts has been authorized by the Town of Colonie, Village of Colonie and Albany County. The findings resulting from the GEIS will allow appropriate agencies to assess the environmental and socio-economic impacts of development and estimate the scope of capital improvements and other mitigation measures necessary to accommodate future growth.

Past and future development in the Study Area has, and will continue to have, local as well as regional significance. As a result, this FGEIS will evaluate both the local impacts from development while weighing the general needs of the region. The types of development that are recognized as regional in nature include the Albany County Airport sale, lease and/or expansion and development of other County owned lands to support the comprehensive needs of the area's population, e.g., support services for airport operations, and regional recreation facilities. This approach will provide the Town of Colonie Planning Board, as Lead Agency in the preparation of the GEIS, and all involved agencies with the information necessary to promote growth patterns which serve both local and regional needs.

The development review process in the Study Area is complicated by the various levels of government which have review authority over projects. This study will identify potential conflicts between government regulations and policies, as well as means to resolve these conflicts, so that future development will take place in an orderly manner, and in harmony with its surroundings.

Projections of growth in this study were based on estimates developed in the Traffic Assessment for the Albany County Airport Area and Proposed Transportation System Plan for the Wolf Road Airport Area prepared by the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) in 1988, and through consultation with the Town and Village of Colonie and Albany County. These projections were updated to the 1989 base year through information provided by the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC). Section II, A, Demographics, outlines the data and assumptions used to develop these projections. Included are currently proposed commercial and residential subdivisions within the Study Area which have been submitted to the Town and Village Planning Boards for review. The location of the proposed developments have been identified on Exhibits II-B-3 and II-B-4.

Currently, the Town and Village of Colonic Planning Boards have over 60 individual projects in various stages of review. These projects, along with additional projected development, include nearly 1,600 new single family and multi-family housing units. However, the greatest impacts are expected to be associated with the numerous potential commercial development proposals. Some of the notable projects expected to be built during the 15-year planning period include: 480,000 square feet of additional office space on lands owned by British American Development Corporation, development of the Idlewood Swim Club into 350,000 square feet of commercial space, construction of over 500,000 square feet of office space on Airline Drive adjacent to the Ann Lee Pond Nature & Historic Preserve, and development of 112 townhouses and 375,000 square feet of commercial office space on land east of Wolf Road between Sand Creek and Albany Shaker Road.

Enplanements at Albany County Airport are expected to more than double by the end of the planning period (2005). As a result, this facility is likely to continue to spur development within the Study Area. By evaluating impacts associated with future growth in the Study Area, the FGEIS will provide information to facilitate orderly development through the year 2005. Necessary capital improvements which will mitigate impacts associated with this growth in the areas of transportation, infrastructure, open space and recreation facilities, schools, and municipal services will also be identified.