

I-81 VIADUCT PROJECT

SECTION 6-4-11

FARMLANDS

This section describes the potential effects of the project alternatives on protected farmlands. New York State and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have designated protected farmlands to curtail the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of productive farmland to nonagricultural uses. Many areas within and around the Project Area have soils that meet state and Federal classifications for important farmland; however, only one location is actively farmed.

Federal agencies must comply with the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA), which intends to “minimize the impact Federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses.” The FPPA includes three classes of farmland:

- Prime farmland, defined as land with “...the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses”;
- Unique farmland, defined as “land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops”; and
- Farmland of statewide or local importance, defined as “land other than prime or unique farmland that is of statewide or local importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, or oilseed crops.”

As set forth in 7 CFR § 658.2(a), FPPA-protected farmland does not include land that is within or committed to urban development or water storage, which includes lands identified as “urbanized area” on U.S. Census Bureau Maps.

NYSDOT must comply with Article 25-AA of New York State’s Agricultural and Markets Law, which allows for the designation and protection of agricultural districts. If a project will result in the acquisition or conversion of one or more acres of active farmland or more than 10 acres of farmlands in an agricultural district to nonagricultural uses, the law requires notification procedures and coordination with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

6-4-11.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Figure 6-4-11-1¹ identifies soils meeting Federal requirements as protected farmland and **Figure 6-4-11-2**² shows New York State Agricultural Districts within the Project study areas. Potential for effects to farmland soils and agricultural districts would occur in areas of direct ground disturbance or land acquisition. Therefore, the figures show where the project limits overlap with these resources in each of the study areas. **Figure 6-4-11-1** also shows urbanized areas per the U.S. Census Maps,

¹ Soil Survey Staff, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Database, <http://sdmdataaccess.nrcs.usda.gov>. April 5, 2019. Accessed November 13, 2019.

² New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, <http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/ap/agservices/agricultural-districts.html#>. April 5, 2019. Accessed November 13, 2019.

which encompass most of the project limits, except for a portion in the I-481 East Study Area and the footprint of proposed Noise Barrier 16A&B, which is associated with the Northern Study Area.

Soils meeting Federal requirements for prime farmland, unique farmland (prime farmland if drained), and farmland of statewide importance are present throughout the study areas. However, these areas are largely developed with urban and suburban uses, classified as “urbanized area,” and within existing transportation rights-of-way, or they are undeveloped or forested, without active farming. The only agricultural use is a parcel within the I-481 North Study Area adjacent to I-81 at South Bay Road.

The project limits are not within any designated New York State agricultural district. One designated district is located in the I-481 North Study Area and consists of the parcel located on South Bay Road previously noted (see **Figure 6-4-11-2**). This district is located adjacent to, but not within, the project limits.

6-4-11.2 NO BUILD ALTERNATIVE

The No Build Alternative would maintain the highway in its existing configuration with ongoing maintenance and repairs. Since the highway would not be expanded beyond its current right-of-way, the No Build Alternative would not affect any State- or Federally- protected farmland.

6-4-11.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE VIADUCT ALTERNATIVE

6-4-11.3.1 PERMANENT/OPERATIONAL EFFECTS

The Viaduct Alternative would be contained primarily in the Central Study Area where there are some areas classified as Federal farmland soils, but no New York State agricultural districts. The Viaduct Alternative would result in the reconstruction of I-81 generally within the existing NYSDOT right-of-way and improvements to local streets. The highway would expand beyond its current right-of-way in some locations, and soils mapped as prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance were identified in some of these areas. However, this entire study area is classified as “urbanized area” and therefore the FPPA does not apply.

The Viaduct Alternative would include the construction of noise barriers along portions of I-81, I-481, and I-690. The construction of these noise barriers would occur within the existing NYSDOT right-of-way and/or on land that is classified as “urbanized area” and is not currently used for farming.

None of the property that would be acquired under the Viaduct Alternative is currently used for farming, and the alternative would not result in any effects on farmland. Therefore, Article 25-AA of New York State’s Agricultural and Markets Law does not apply.

6-4-11.3.2 CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

As stated above, the proposed work is primarily located within existing right-of-way in land classified as “urbanized area.” Thus, construction of the Viaduct Alternative would not affect farmland.

6-4-11.3.3 INDIRECT EFFECTS

The Viaduct Alternative would result in the replacement of an existing use in-kind, and therefore, would not result in substantial induced development. As such, the Viaduct Alternative would not indirectly result in the acquisition or conversion of protected farmlands.

6-4-11.3.4 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Since the Viaduct Alternative would not result in direct or indirect effects related to farmlands, it would not have the potential to result in cumulative effects to farmlands.

6-4-11.3.5 MITIGATION

The Viaduct Alternative would not result in any effects on farmland. Therefore, mitigation is not required.

6-4-11.4 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMMUNITY GRID ALTERNATIVE

6-4-11.4.1 PERMANENT/OPERATIONAL EFFECTS

The Community Grid Alternative would involve highway improvements in all four study areas. A designated New York State agricultural district is located in the I-481 North Study Area and consists of the parcel located on South Bay Road noted above (see **Figure 6-4-11-2**). This district is located adjacent to, but not within, the project limits. The Community Grid Alternative would not incorporate this land into the transportation right-of-way.

The Community Grid Alternative would expand beyond the current transportation right-of-way in some locations where there are soils mapped as prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance. However, the project limits in the Central Study Area, the I-481 North Study Area, and the I-481 South Study Area are classified as urbanized area and therefore, the FPPA does not apply. As shown on **Figure 6-4-11-1**, a portion of the project limits in the I-481 East Study Area is outside the urbanized area boundary, but these project limits would remain within the NYSDOT right-of-way and would not affect farmland.

The Community Grid Alternative would include the construction of noise barriers along portions of I-81, I-481, and I-690. The noise barriers would be within the existing NYSDOT right-of-way and/or on land that is classified as “urbanized area” and is not at present used for farming.

None of the property that would be acquired under the Community Grid Alternative is currently used for farming, and the alternative would not result in any effects on active farmland. Therefore, Article 25-AA of New York State’s Agricultural and Markets Law does not apply.

6-4-11.4.2 CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

As stated above, most of the project limits are in areas classified as “urbanized area.” Outside of the urbanized area boundary, the project limits would remain within the NYSDOT right-of-way. Thus, construction of the Community Grid Alternative would not affect farmland.

6-4-11.4.3 INDIRECT EFFECTS

The Community Grid Alternative would result in excess transportation right-of-way that NYSDOT could deed to another owner. This entire study area is classified as “urbanized area” and therefore, the land in the immediate vicinity is not classified as FPPA-protected farmland. Therefore, any excess right-of-way in Downtown Syracuse associated with the Community Grid Alternative would not result in the acquisition or conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses.

6-4-11.4.4 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Since the Community Grid Alternative would not directly or indirectly result in the acquisition or conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses, no cumulative effects on farmland would occur.

6-4-11.4.5 MITIGATION

The Community Grid Alternative would not result in any effects on farmland. Therefore, mitigation is not required.