

Transportation-focused Generic Environmental Impact Statement (t-GEIS)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a transportation-focused Generic Environmental Impact Statement (t-GEIS)?

A transportation-focused GEIS (t-GEIS) is a generic environmental impact statement that will identify, examine, and evaluate Cornell University's transportation-related impacts and possible mitigations for hypothetical Cornell University population growth scenarios, over the next decade. Unlike an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), a GEIS is flexible enough to explore hypothetical or alternative scenarios.

The t-GEIS, fully funded by the applicant (Cornell University), is based on the framework defined under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act, commonly referred to as SEQR (pronounced "seeker"). SEQR is a comprehensive, well-established process that is widely recognized as a tool for publicly examining environmental impacts and identifying mitigation measures (see process flow chart). It incorporates public participation and review by all involved agencies.

What is the purpose of the t-GEIS?

The t-GEIS is a proactive initiative. The desired outcome will be strategies that promote a "Best in Class" transportation system with greater participation in walking, bicycling, transit use, park-and-rides, and other alternatives to single-occupant vehicle commuting. The bottom-line goal of this effort is the development of Ten-Year Transportation Mitigation Strategies (TIMS) that will identify ways to reduce adverse transportation impacts of potential Cornell population growth.

How will this differ from other studies?

Unlike the usual site plan or other application with an Environmental Impact Statement, Ten-Year Transportation Impact Mitigation Strategies (TIMS) will not be written before the GEIS. Strategies will evolve in response to the data and the public feedback obtained from the GEIS process. In this proactive way, the t-GEIS mitigations will shape the strategies. By providing this anticipatory, comprehensive review, the t-GEIS will assist the lead and involved agencies in environmental reviews of the transportation-related impacts of individual Cornell projects in the future.

Why do this study now?

As a successful teaching and research institution, Cornell University has been growing. As a result, in recent years,

there has been considerable interest in Cornell-related parking, commuting, and bus ridership. For several years, the Town of Ithaca and Cornell have participated in countywide discussions on these issues, while the town, simultaneously, has worked proactively to develop its own transportation plan. For the past several months, the Town and Cornell have discussed transportation-related challenges and opportunities and agree the t-GEIS is the next logical step.

How long will the t-GEIS process take?

We anticipate that the Scope will be adopted in January 2006. The balance of calendar year 2006 will be spent preparing the draft t-GEIS, with input solicited from stakeholders. The draft will be offered for a period of public comment. The final t-GEIS will then be prepared incorporating this feedback. The TIMS will be developed out of the mitigations section of the draft t-GEIS. The entire process will take 18 to 24 months.

What is the Scope?

The Scope is an outline of what will be addressed in the t-GEIS. For details refer to the Draft Scoping Document.

What is the scoping process?

Scoping is the process by which the Lead Agency identifies the significant issues related to the proposed action, which are to be addressed in the draft t-GEIS. For details refer to the Draft Scoping Document.

Why is the Town of Ithaca Planning Board lead agency?

On an average workday, 80 percent of Cornell's employees travel through the Town of Ithaca on their daily commute. Its boundaries include most of Cornell's main campus, encircle the City of Ithaca, and abut most of the county's other municipalities. Transportation impact mitigations need to be devised that capture and minimize traffic originating in the Town or entering the Town from outlying areas (through park-and-ride lots, a more effective transit system, etc.). These factors combine to make the Town of Ithaca Planning Board the logical municipality to serve as lead agency in the t-GEIS initiative.

The Town of Ithaca has a key role in the county's overall transportation system, and is in the process of completing its own transportation plan. The Town will involve additional

governmental agencies, as appropriate, including Tompkins County, City of Ithaca, Town of Dryden, Village of Cayuga Heights, New York State Department of Transportation, and others.

What role will the City of Ithaca, other municipalities, and the campus community have?

The City of Ithaca Planning Board and other municipal boards/councils will make their own findings with respect to any action they undertake that relies in any part on the t-GEIS, whether it be the transportation-related impacts of a future Cornell project they approve, or perhaps a transportation-related improvement the City or other municipality makes. The City and other municipalities will have representatives on the Resource Committee. In addition, the t-GEIS project team will provide regular updates to Cornell's Ad Hoc Committee on Sustainable Transportation.

What is the Resource Committee?

The Resource Committee consists of individuals with technical expertise in transportation or transportation planning. This committee has representatives from the City of Ithaca, Town of Ithaca, Town of Dryden, Town of Lansing, Village of Cayuga Heights, Village of Lansing, Tompkins County, Cornell University and their consultants, NYSDOT, the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council (ITCTC), and Tcat. The Resource Committee is charged with providing technical assistance and guidance to the Town of Ithaca and Cornell University project team in the development of the t-GEIS, and serving as a communications and feedback link between the t-GEIS project team and the Committee members' respective municipalities or agencies.

How can I be involved?

There will be numerous opportunities for public input throughout all phases of this project (see process flow chart). The list of meeting times, dates, and places can be found under the meeting schedule portion of this site. In addition, there will be regular communication and outreach to many area organizations and neighborhoods (see List of Stakeholders).

Will the t-GEIS address student parking on campus?

The t-GEIS looks at the pros and cons of a wide range of transportation-related issues and potential mitigations, and on-campus parking is a part of that mix. Other topics that will likely be addressed are current and potential parking inventories, alternative forms of transportation (walking, bicycling, etc.), and transportation demand management programs (carpooling, park-and-ride, transit use, etc.)

Will the t-GEIS give blanket approvals to Cornell projects for the foreseeable future?

No. Individual project approvals would continue to occur in the usual manner. The t-GEIS will not be an approval, but rather an assessment of the anticipated cumulative transportation-related impacts of hypothetical Cornell University population growth. This will allow the Town, City and other involved agencies to review individual projects in a larger context and to plan proactively.

What about new Cornell projects that come up before the t-GEIS is completed?

Projects that are proposed before completion of the t-GEIS will be considered and reviewed as they are now. Traffic-related information developed during this time could be used as part of the project's analysis.

How will this initiative affect surrounding communities?

The t-GEIS will evaluate transportation-related impacts of campus population growth on a regional basis and will provide useful insights to surrounding communities. Background population growth of the surrounding communities as it pertains to transportation impacts will also be included in the study.

Will the t-GEIS improve evening parking on campus?

As described in the Final Scope, "A major objective of the t-GEIS is to develop ways to reduce the number of trips by motor vehicles traveling through residential neighborhoods to and from Cornell. It will identify ways of getting people, not vehicles, to campus." While campus parking demands are not our primary focus, by encouraging individuals to use modes other than single-occupant vehicles, evening parking constraints may be improved.

How will the t-GEIS and the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) relate to one another?

The Draft t-GEIS process and findings over 2006 are expected to inform transportation planning for the campus as well as the planning and stakeholder process for the master plan for their duration. It needs to be understood that the nature of the interaction depends on their respective schedule and timeline of each initiative. Specifically, the t-GEIS can inform the CMP of the impacts of population growth during the next 5 -10 years on area-wide transportation systems, and depending on the schedules of both initiatives, of feasible and appropriate mitigations alternatives that may be considered.

How is the t-GEIS different from the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP)?

The t-GEIS and the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) are different from each other in several respects. While both are broadly planning initiatives, the timelines, scope, process and deliverables are very different.

- The t-GEIS looks at the transportation-related impacts of CU's population growth on the surrounding community over the next decade. The CMP will guide the long-term physical development of the Ithaca campus in concert with the University's academic goals over the next 10 to 25 years.
- The t-GEIS process will result in Transportation Impact Mitigation Strategies (TIMS) to address the impacts mentioned above. The CMP will provide a flexible physical planning and decision-making structure to accommodate the development of the University's research, teaching, residential and recreational priorities and programs; serve as a campus-wide frame of reference for the University's current Capital Plan; and link local and precinct plan goals to the broader plan.
- The focus of the t-GEIS is transportation systems beyond the campus and in the greater Ithaca area. The CMP will comprehensively look at land use, landscape, transportation and service infrastructure systems on the Cornell campus within the context of academic planning for the future.
- Both processes will engage the community beyond the campus. However, the t-GEIS is a joint effort with Cornell University and the Town of Ithaca and guided by the NYSEQR process. The Town of Ithaca will include other governmental agencies as appropriate. The CMP is being undertaken by Cornell University and will have its own independent process. The master planning process will invite broad input and participation from the community and local leaders, in particular, during the initial fact-finding stages of the process.
- The transportation Study is in the format of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement under the NYSEQR process. The TIMS will be an action approved by the Town of Ithaca Planning Board, while the CMP is subject to approval only by Cornell University's Board of Trustees.

Will the t-GEIS address housing issues in areas around Cornell and elsewhere?

The t-GEIS will document where Cornell employees live and analyze how they commute to and from the Cornell campus. It will provide a description of the relationships among land use policy, housing, and transportation. To understand transportation impacts of hypothetical Cornell population growth, the t-GEIS will contain information about where zoning policy makers, planners, and private developers are considering new housing. The t-GEIS will not examine comprehensive housing issues such as quantity, quality, or affordability.

Cornell's Comprehensive Master Plan will utilize data from the t-GEIS and explore relationships between where people live and where they work and study within the larger context of future development options.

Cornell is also involved with local officials and other groups in ongoing conversations regarding the affordability and availability of housing, and the range of housing options in Tompkins County.

Was your question answered here?

If your question has not been answered, please send it to tgeis@cornell.edu.