
EXPLANATION OF SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

AMTRAK SUNNYSIDE YARD SITE, OPERABLE UNIT 4



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Long Island City / Queens County / Site No. 241006 / April 2025

Prepared by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Environmental Remediation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this notice is to describe the progress of the cleanup at Operable Unit (OU) 4 of the Amtrak Sunnyside Yard Site and to inform the public about a change in the Site remedy. The Amtrak Sunnyside Yard (Yard) site is located in Long Island City, NY. OU4 is defined as the soil above the water table and soil below the water table within 8 acres in the north central portion of the site. On March 31st, 2009, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) which selected a remedy to clean up the site. The Remedial Action Work Plan (RAWP) dated September 24, 2009, as amended August 26, 2010, included excavation of twelve individual hot spots containing either lead or polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) exceeding the site-specific soil cleanup objectives (SCOs) established in the ROD.

Remedial Zone PCB-4 is located in the Track 26 area of OU4 and beneath the Honeywell Street Bridge, which spans over the Yard. Within Remedial Zone PCB-4 the RAWP for OU4 required excavation of soil exceeding 25 parts per million (ppm) PCBs (industrial use SCO) in an area 12 feet wide by 222 feet long to a depth of 4 feet below grade, and additional excavation to 8 feet below grade within a 12-foot by 70-foot area located in the center of the larger excavation. The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (the Remedial Party) recently notified NYSDEC that due to structural integrity concerns with the support structures associated with the Honeywell Street bridge that were found after the RAWP was approved, the excavation depth cannot exceed 3 feet in Remedial Zone PCB-4.

This Explanation of Significant Difference (ESD) will become part of the Administrative Record for this site. The information here is a summary of what can be found in greater detail in documents that have been placed in the following repositories:

DECinfo Locator

[Index of /data/DecDocs/241006](http://data/DecDocs/241006)

Queens Public Library – Sunnyside Branch

43-06 Greenpoint Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 784-3033

Although this is not a request for comments, interested persons are invited to contact NYSDEC's Project Manager for this site to obtain more information or have questions answered.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION AND ORIGINAL REMEDY

2.1 Site History, Contamination, and Selected Remedy

Site Description: The site is a railroad maintenance and storage facility that currently encompasses approximately 133 acres. The Site is bordered by to the north by commercial/residential properties

followed by Northern Boulevard, to the east by 42nd Place, to the south by Skillman Avenue, and to the west by Thompson Avenue. Newtown Creek, which defines the border between Queens and Kings Counties, is located less than 0.5-mile south of the western portion of the site.

Sunnyside Yard was originally constructed in the early 1900s by the Pennsylvania Tunnel and Terminal Company, a subsidiary of Pennsylvania Railroad (later known as the Penn Central Transportation Company). On April 1, 1976, the Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) acquired the site, and the same day conveyed it to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (a.k.a., Amtrak), which has continued to operate it as a storage and maintenance facility for railroad rolling stock. Prior to September 29, 1961, a portion of the yard was owned by Long Island Rail Road (LIRR). Today, the LIRR maintains a right-of-way through the Yard.

Summary of the Investigation: After remedial investigation, the site is divided into six Operable Units (OU). OU4, the subject of this ESD, is defined as the soil and separate phase petroleum hydrocarbon accumulation above the water table and soil below the water table within 8 acres in the north central portion of the site, and is contaminated with PCBs, lead, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

Elements of the Selected Remedy:

- A remedial design program to provide the details necessary for the construction, operation, maintenance, and monitoring of the remedial program, which includes pre-excavation soil characterization.
- Excavation and offsite disposal of soil classified as PCB hazardous waste.
- Excavation and offsite disposal of soil exceeding the Yard SCOs for PCBs, PAHs, and lead.
- Removal of the Track 4 maintenance pit, characterization of soil surrounding the inspection pit, and excavation of surrounding soil with concentrations exceeding the Yard SCOs, if required.
- All excavations will be backfilled with clean fill from offsite sources. Imported material will meet the more stringent requirements for protection of public health for commercial use or protection of groundwater as defined in 6 NYCRR Part 375-6.7(d).
- Existing surface covers in the active rail yard will be maintained. A one-foot thick, clean cover consisting of clean fill or ballast will be established and/or maintained over areas that are not presently covered by buildings, tracks, or pavement.
- Imposition of an institutional control in the form of an environmental easement.
- Development of a Site Management Plan.

3.0 CURRENT STATUS

Portions of OU4 are currently being upgraded, which includes installing subsurface utilities, new rail track, multiple structures, and access roads. As part of this work, Track 26 will be closed temporarily in part to allow access to perform the remedial excavation that is the subject of this ESD.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

4.1 New Information

In preparation for conducting remedial excavation in the Track 26 area of OU4, a structural engineering analysis was performed by the Remedial Party. The results of this analysis found that the previously proposed excavation depth would severely impact the structural integrity of the Honeywell Street Bridge supports. The same structural analysis found that an excavation to a depth of 3 feet below grade could be performed safely, and this would remove a majority of the PCB contamination in this area. The request to modify the excavation depth for Remedial Zone PCB-4 is contained in the "Proposed RAWP Modification for Remedial Zone PCB-4 (Track 26) in Operable Unit 4" dated December 10, 2024, which was prepared by Roux Environmental Engineering and Geology, D.P.C. on behalf of the Remedial Party.

4.2 Comparison of Changes with Original Remedy

The original remedy proposed excavation of a 12-foot by 222-foot area to 4 feet below grade, and additional excavation to 8 feet below grade within a 12-foot by 70-foot area located in the center of the larger excavation. The change to the remedy would be to excavate the original 12-foot by 222-foot area to a depth of 3 feet below grade.

5.0 SCHEDULE AND MORE INFORMATION

In order to access and implement any remedial action in this area, the scope must be closely coordinated with Amtrak to coincide with their scheduled track maintenance and replacement schedule. Upcoming maintenance activities are expected to temporarily shut down Track 26 for approximately 45 days while the track is replaced. The maintenance activities are tentatively scheduled to begin in July 2025.

If you have questions or need additional information you may contact any of the following:

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Figure 1 – Site Location

