



Federal Aviation  
Administration

**Scoping Summary Report for the Draft  
Environmental Assessment for the  
SpaceX Starship/Super Heavy Launch  
Vehicle Program at the SpaceX Boca  
Chica Launch Site in Cameron County,  
Texas**

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# Scoping Summary Report

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## 1.1 Introduction

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is conducting an environmental review of Space Exploration Technologies Corporation's (SpaceX) Starship/Super Heavy proposal for launch operations at the Boca Chica Launch Site. As part of this environmental review, SpaceX is working with the FAA to prepare a draft Environmental Assessment (EA). The FAA held a public scoping period to determine the scope of issues for analysis in the draft EA. This report provides an overview of the FAA's scoping process for the project and the comments received during the public scoping comment period for the EA.

Scoping is an open process for determining the range of issues to be addressed in an environmental review. Scoping helps federal agencies determine the scope of issues for analysis, including identifying potential significant issues and eliminating non-significant issues from further study. Scoping also serves to identify cooperating and participating agencies.

## 1.2 Proposed Action

The FAA is evaluating SpaceX's proposal to operate the Starship/Super Heavy launch vehicle at its Boca Chica Launch Site in Cameron County, Texas. SpaceX must obtain an experimental permit and/or a vehicle operator license from the FAA to operate the Starship/Super Heavy launch vehicle. Issuing an experimental permit or a vehicle operator license is considered a major Federal action under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Therefore, the Proposed Action for this project is for the FAA to issue experimental permits and/or a vehicle operator license to SpaceX that would allow SpaceX to launch Starship/Super Heavy from the Boca Chica Launch Site. SpaceX's goal is to use Starship/Super Heavy for low Earth orbit, sun-synchronous orbit, geostationary transfer orbit, and interplanetary missions for cargo and humans. SpaceX's proposed launch operations include suborbital launches and orbital launches. The Proposed Action also includes pre-flight operations (tank tests, mission rehearsals, and static fire engine tests) and construction activities associated with launch activities, including expanding the solar farm, adding infrastructure and facilities at the vertical launch area (referred to as the VLA), parking lots, a liquid natural gas pretreatment system, a liquefier, a payload processing facility, and trenching and pull-offs along State Highway 4. At the vertical launch area, SpaceX is proposing to construct a redundant launch pad and commodities, a redundant landing pad, two integration towers, tank structural test stands, a desalination plant, additional support buildings, and a power plant.

## 1.3 Scoping Process

The FAA sent an email on November 23, 2020 to interested parties notifying them that the FAA was in the beginning stages of conducting an environmental review for SpaceX's Starship/Super Heavy proposal. The email noted that SpaceX's proposal falls outside of the scope of the 2014 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision and requires additional environmental review. The email further stated the FAA is working with SpaceX to prepare a draft EA, which would allow the FAA to determine one of the following three appropriate courses of action:

- preparation of an EIS because the Proposed Action’s environmental impacts would be significant;
- issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI); or
- issuance of a “Mitigated FONSI,” providing for mitigation measures to address the Proposed Action’s environmental impacts.

The email provided a link to the FAA’s project website.<sup>1</sup> The FAA’s website includes information about the proposed project and a link to subscribe to the project mailing list.

The FAA sent an email on December 22, 2020 stating that the agency was holding a public scoping period to determine the scope of issues for analysis in the draft EA. This email provided an overview of the Proposed Action, as well as an overview of the FAA’s environmental review process. The FAA requested public comments on potential alternatives and impacts, and identification of relevant information, studies, or analyses concerning impacts affecting the quality of the human environment. The FAA also requested input regarding the preparation of a programmatic EA. The scoping comment period was open through January 22, 2021.

## 1.4 Scoping Comments

A total of 321 comments were received between December 22, 2020 and January 26, 2021. Of the 321 comments received, 122 comments were provided by various agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Concerns raised by commenters about the Proposed Action included the following:

- Potential impacts on protected species and habitat
- Potential cumulative effects of the proposed project and other development projects in the Rio Grande Valley
- Closure of public areas such as local roads and Boca Chica Beach
- Level of environmental review (i.e., the appropriateness of an EA versus an EIS)
- Potential impacts on airspace
- Potential impacts on minority and low-income residents
- Potential impacts on land of cultural importance
- Safety of launch operations given the proximity to nearby liquified natural gas facilities
- Degradation of the environment due to test and launch operations

Positive impacts raised by commenters included the following:

- Economic benefits to the regional economy

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/space/stakeholder\\_engagement/spacex\\_starship/](https://www.faa.gov/space/stakeholder_engagement/spacex_starship/)

- Continued innovation and progress in commercial space transportation
- Benefits of reusable launch vehicles
- Job creation
- Ideal southerly location

All comments received during the scoping period are given equal consideration in the preparation of the draft EA. The FAA will consider relevant information received from the scoping process in preparing the draft EA.