

4. Public and Agency Involvement

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that agencies “make diligent efforts to involve the public and resource and regulatory agencies in preparing and implementing their NEPA procedures.”¹ Public and agency participation has been an important part of the Carolina Crossroads I-20/26/126 Corridor Improvement Project (Carolina Crossroads), and the project team made a commitment at the beginning of the project to encourage and solicit public and agency participation and feedback. Communication tools that best addressed the public’s need for information were selected and a variety of methods for public comment were provided. By providing both wide-reaching and targeted public and agency consultation methods, the project team was able to gather important information for the decision-making process. The public engagement tools described in this chapter helped identify important issues related to traffic impacts, community impacts, and natural resources impacts. These tools assisted the project team develop alternatives and focus the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) analysis. The public and agency involvement process was comprehensive in nature, using the media, mailers, websites, and meetings to ensure that all stakeholders who could be affected were aware of the project and understood the methods for providing input. When preparing the DEIS, the project team worked to address the issues that were identified, and when necessary, held meetings to better understand the issues that needed to be considered when developing alternatives and evaluating impacts.

This chapter describes the early and continuous efforts to involve the public; interested and affected parties; government officials; federal, state, and local agencies; and other stakeholders in the project from project initiation through completion of this DEIS. It summarizes the activities implemented during scoping, development of the purpose and need (Chapter 1), alternatives development (Chapter 2), and the DEIS development. This chapter also describes the communication tools used throughout all phases of the project to date.

4.1 What are the goals and objectives of Public and Agency Involvement?

Throughout the development of this DEIS, the Carolina Crossroads project team has proactively shared project information and sought input from the public, resource agencies, counties/municipalities, and other interested stakeholders. The primary goal of agency and public Involvement was to foster open communication between a diverse public, agencies, and the project team in order to gain productive input leading to better decisions that meet the community’s needs and the Purpose and Need of the proposed project. In accordance with Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA- LU), as amended by 1604 Fixing America’s Transportation Act (FAST), an Agency and Public Involvement Plan was developed by the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) at the beginning of the project to define the process that they would use to communicate and solicit input on about the project (Appendix M).

¹ 40 CFR 1506.6(a)

4. Public and Agency Involvement

The Agency and Public Involvement Plan objectives were to:

- Inform and educate the public and stakeholders about the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Seek participation and views of the agencies and public in order for proposed improvements to reflect the needs of the community.
- Incorporate feedback from a diverse group of stakeholders at all levels of the decision-making process, including residents of potentially affected areas, commuters, interstate commerce, businesses in the corridors, elected officials and community organizations.
- Encourage elected officials, area businesses, and civic and community organizations to represent their constituents' interests and to promote direct participation by their constituents throughout the process.
- Ensure that minority and low-income populations have equal access to the decision-making process.

4.2 Who are the cooperating and participating agencies?

4.2.1 LEAD AGENCIES

SCDOT and FHWA are the joint lead agencies for this project. As lead agencies, SCDOT and FHWA are responsible for scoping, inviting cooperating and participating agencies, developing consensus among a wide range of stakeholders with diverse interests, resolving conflict, and ensuring that quality transportation decisions are fully explained in the EIS.

SCDOT and FHWA adhere to the standards set by Section 6002 of SAFETEA- LU (as amended by Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century [MAP-21] and Fixing American's Surface Transportation Act [FAST Act]) which requires lead agencies to identify and involve cooperating and participating agencies, develop coordination plans, provide opportunities for the public and agencies to be involved in defining the purpose and need statement and determining the range of alternatives to be studied in the DEIS. According to the regulation, SCDOT and FHWA will also be responsible for collaborating with cooperating and participating agencies to determine methodologies and the level of detail for analyzing alternatives. The Lead agencies will also provide oversight with regard to managing the NEPA process and resolving issues.

4.2.2 COOPERATING AGENCIES

Cooperating Agencies are involved in the NEPA process in accordance with CEQ regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1501.6). Like lead agencies, cooperating agencies were determined and assigned responsibilities in accordance with federal standards, like CEQ regulations and Section 6002.

According to CEQ (40 CFR 1508.5), "cooperating agency" means any Federal agency, other than a lead agency, that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any

Cooperating Agency - A cooperating agency is any agency, other than a lead agency, that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposed project or project alternative (40 CFR 1508.5).

4. Public and Agency Involvement

environmental impact involved in a proposed project or project alternative. In addition to participating in scoping, Cooperating Agencies become involved in the review of NEPA documents before public distribution. This cooperation facilitates the development of the NEPA document so that it may be adopted by the Cooperating Agencies in at least partial satisfaction of the agencies' NEPA obligations for future approvals associated with the Project.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is the only cooperating agency for this project, since a Section 404 Individual Permit would be required.

4.2.3 PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

SCDOT and FHWA consulted with Participating Agencies to ensure that the joint effort makes the best use of the areas of jurisdiction and of special expertise of the Participating Agencies, that their views are considered in the course of the NEPA analysis and documentation process, and that the substantive and procedural requirements of all Participating Agencies are met.

Participating Agency - A participating agency is a federal, state, tribal, regional, or local government agency that might have an interest in the project.

Participating agencies are those with an interest in the project. Their roles and responsibilities defined in Section 6002 include, but are not limited to:

- Participating in the NEPA process starting at the earliest possible time, especially with regard to the development of the purpose and need statement, range of alternatives, methodologies, and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives.
- Identifying, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the project's potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts. Participating agencies also may participate in the issue resolution process described later in this guidance.
- Providing meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues.
- Participating in the scoping process. The scoping process should be designed so that agencies whose interest in the project comes to light as a result of initial scoping activities are invited to participate and still have an opportunity for involvement.

Table 4.1 Participating Agencies

Agency	Jurisdiction
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Federal
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Federal
South Carolina Department of Archives and History	State
South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control	State
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources	State
South Carolina Department of Public Safety	State
Central Midlands Council of Governments	Regional
Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority	Regional

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Agency	Jurisdiction
Richland County	Regional
Lexington County	Regional

Other agencies, including tribal entities, were invited to be Participating but either declined the invitation or did not respond. The project team will continue to consult with these agencies as the project moves forward. A copy of invitation letters and responses can be found in Appendix B.

4.3 Who else is participating in the project?

The outreach process was developed to reach key audiences, including:

- Residents, property owners, and businesses potentially affected by the Project
- Traveling public
- Neighborhood associations
- Special interest groups (rail, transit, bike/pedestrian, etc.)
- Environmental justice and special consideration groups and organizations (minorities [race, color, and national origin], low-income populations, the elderly [seniors], disabled, and Limited English Proficiency [LEP] populations)
- Community leaders
- Community organizations
- Elected officials (senators, congressional representatives, senators, representatives, office of the governor, and local elected officials)

4.4 What tools are used to communicate information?

4.4.1 MEETING NOTIFICATIONS

All public meetings are advertised through the following methods:

- Postcard Mailing - Postcard mailings are sent to all individuals on the project mailing list two weeks prior to each meeting.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Change is coming!

The South Carolina Department of Transportation invites you to be a part of the process to fix Malfunction Junction.

You're Invited!

 **Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

 **12:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Drop in any time!
(No formal presentation will be given)

 **Columbia Conference Center**
169 Laurelhurst Avenue
Columbia, SC 29210

The purpose of the meeting is to present and solicit comments from the public on the Reasonable Alternatives that are recommended to move forward in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Information will be provided to explain the process used to evaluate and eliminate interchange design options introduced at the October 2016 public meeting and to develop holistic representative alternatives.

For those unable to attend the meeting in person, an online version of the meeting will be available from September 5 to October 19, 2017 on the project website at www.SCDOTCarolinaCrossroads.com. Comments are due by October 19, 2017 and may be submitted at the meeting, emailed to info@CarolinaCrossroadsSCDOT.com, or recorded via the Project Hotline number at 800-601-8715.




The meeting location is ADA accessible. Persons in need of a sign language interpreter, spanish or other language interpreter, an assistive listening device, large print or Braille material, or other accommodations to participate should contact Ms. Nicole Riddle at 803-737-0841. For the hearing impaired, please call 855-GO-SCDOT for assistance.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
SCDOT will take reasonable steps to ensure that no person shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.


Interactive display maps showing details of the Reasonable Alternatives will be available for review, and the project team will be available to answer questions.


Figure 4.1 Sample meeting postcard-front

Carolina Crossroads Corridor Project
C/O South Carolina Department of Transportation
Midlands Regional Production Group, Room 418
PO Box 191
Columbia, SC 29202-0191

Carolina Crossroads I-20/26/126 Corridor Project
Reasonable Alternatives
Public Information Meeting

 **Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

 **12:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Drop in any time! (No formal presentation will be given)


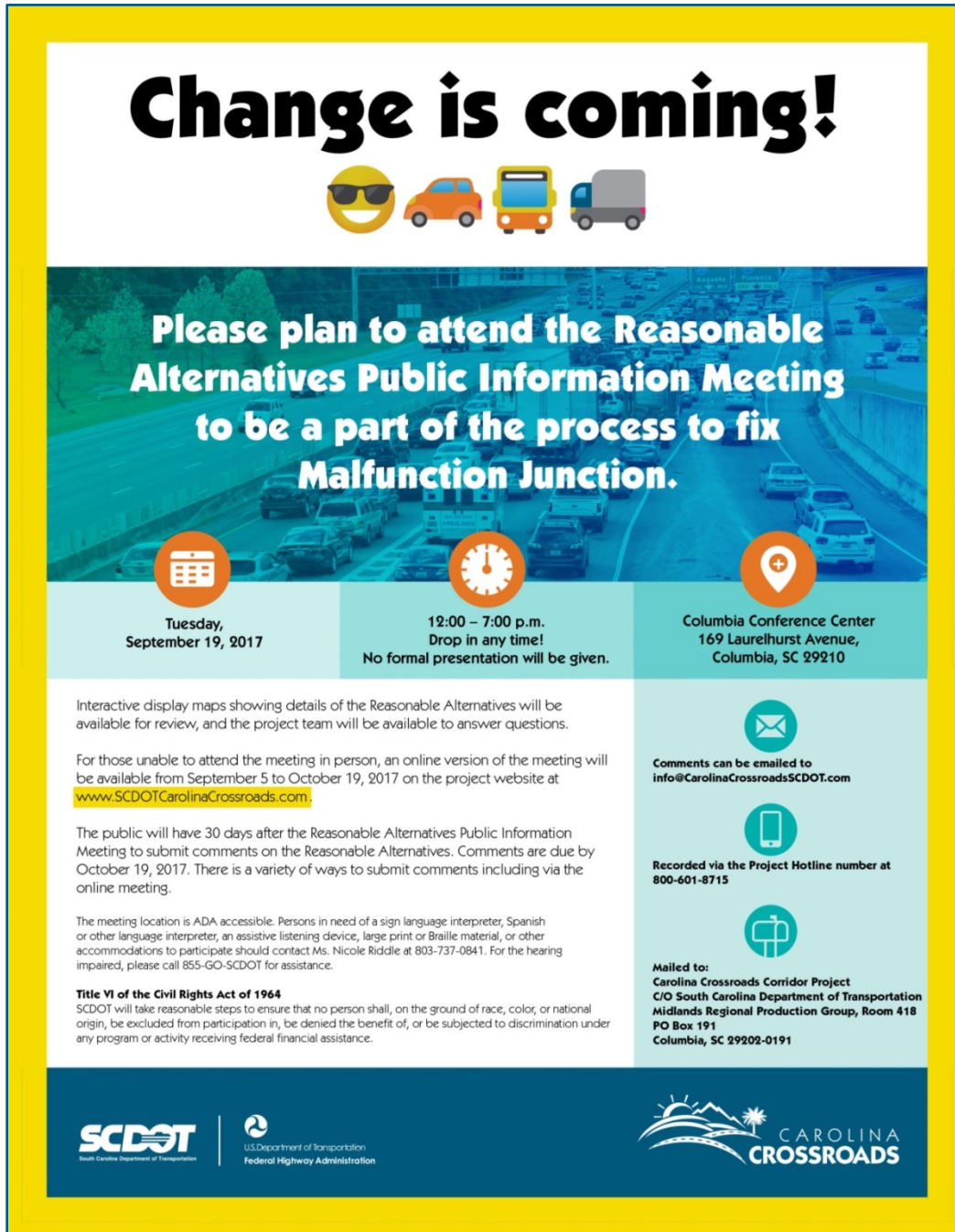
 **Columbia Conference Center**
169 Laurelhurst Avenue, Columbia, SC 29210





Figure 4.2 Sample meeting postcard -back

4. Public and Agency Involvement


- Fliers - Informational fliers are printed and distributed at community gathering places prior to public meetings to broaden the awareness and diversity of our participants. Locations include libraries, recreation centers, restaurants and businesses. Distribution focuses on low income neighborhoods or ethnic neighborhoods, based on project corridor demographic information.





Change is coming!

Please plan to attend the Reasonable Alternatives Public Information Meeting to be a part of the process to fix Malfunction Junction.

 **Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

 **12:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Drop in any time!
No formal presentation will be given.

 **Columbia Conference Center**
169 Laurelhurst Avenue,
Columbia, SC 29210


Interactive display maps showing details of the Reasonable Alternatives will be available for review, and the project team will be available to answer questions.


For those unable to attend the meeting in person, an online version of the meeting will be available from September 5 to October 19, 2017 on the project website at www.SCDOTCarolinaCrossroads.com.


The public will have 30 days after the Reasonable Alternatives Public Information Meeting to submit comments on the Reasonable Alternatives. Comments are due by October 19, 2017. There is a variety of ways to submit comments including via the online meeting.

The meeting location is ADA accessible. Persons in need of a sign language interpreter, Spanish or other language interpreter, an assistive listening device, large print or Braille material, or other accommodations to participate should contact Ms. Nicole Riddle at 803-737-0841. For the hearing impaired, please call 855-GO-SCDOT for assistance.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
SCDOT will take reasonable steps to ensure that no person shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

 **Comments can be emailed to**
info@CarolinaCrossroadsSCDOT.com

 **Recorded via the Project Hotline number at**
800-601-8715

 **Mailed to:**
Carolina Crossroads Corridor Project
C/O South Carolina Department of Transportation
Midlands Regional Production Group, Room 418
PO Box 191
Columbia, SC 29202-0191




  

Figure 4.3 Sample flier

4. Public and Agency Involvement

- E-mail Invitation - A series of e-mails are sent prior to public meetings and comment periods. The first e-mail is sent three to four weeks in advance of the meeting; the second e-mail is sent the week of the meeting and the third e-mail just prior to the end of the comment period. E-mail recipients are given an option to opt out if they no longer wished to receive meeting invitations.
- Newspaper Ads - Public meeting notice advertisements are placed in the *The State* newspaper in accordance with SCDOT Public Participation Plan and 23 CFR Part 771. This public notice announces the date/time/location/format of the public meetings, availability of the project information, comment opportunities, alternative methods to participate by attending the online meeting and comment deadlines. A public notice is also printed in the legal section of pre-approved newspapers in accordance with the SCDOT Public Participation Plan and 23 CFR Part 771.
- Road Signs – Road signs are placed along the corridor at exit ramps. The signs provide the date, time and location of the public meetings.
- Social Media - Meeting announcements are posted on Twitter and Facebook. Meeting and comment reminders were also posted. The posts included links to information and visuals whenever possible.
- Project Website - Meeting details, materials, and comment forms are made available on the Project Website. (See section 3.4.3)
- Press Release/Media Advisory - Press releases and media advisories are distributed in advance of public meetings and/or comment opportunities. The media is invited to attend meetings and encouraged to interview the project spokesperson(s).
- Elected Officials Letter - Letters are sent to all elected officials (senators, congressional representatives, senators, representatives, office of the governor, and local elected officials) prior to each public meeting.

4.4.2 MEETING MATERIALS

All public information meetings included the following meeting materials:

- Display Boards
- Project Area Map
- Project Handout
- Project Comment Form
- Noise Analysis/Noise Advisory Board information
- Project Sign-In Sheet

Additional, meeting-specific materials included:

- Interchange-specific maps (alternatives meeting)
- Presentation (all meetings except for the reasonable alternatives meeting)
- Exit Survey ((reasonable alternatives meeting)
- Community Characterization Map (scoping meeting)
- Project Overview Video (reasonable alternatives meeting)

Information presented at public meetings can be found in Appendix N or on the Carolina Crossroads Project website, www.scdotcarolinacrossroads.com

4.4.3 WEBSITE

4. Public and Agency Involvement

A project website was created at www.SCDOTCarolinaCrossroads.com to provide up-to-date information about the project and announce upcoming events.

Information posted on the website includes project videos, public meeting materials, links to the online meetings, EIS-related documents, frequently asked questions, and general project background information. Individuals had the opportunity to submit comments via the website, join the project mailing list, or link to the project's social media sites.



Figure 4.4 Carolina Crossroads website

4.4.4 ONLINE MEETINGS

In order to reach a broader audience, online meetings complementary to the in-person public meetings were developed and made available through the project website. The online meetings are available in advance of the in-person public meetings and were live through the end of the comment period for each key milestone. The online meetings include the board content from the in-person meeting and an electronic comment form.

Table 4.2 Online Meetings

	Date	Number of unique visitors
Online Meeting 1: Kick-off	May 12-28, 2015	217
Public Meeting 2: Scoping	August 27-September 25, 2015	982
Public Meeting 3: Preliminary Alternatives	October 4-November 30, 2016	10,052
Public Meeting 4: Reasonable Alternatives	September 5 – October 19, 2017	3,774

4.4.5 SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+ pages were created for the project. The purpose of these sites is to create a network of followers, share information, promote upcoming events, provide an opportunity for followers to share messages to their networks, gather information and answer questions, and engage in dialogue. Posts included information on how to access meeting materials following events, as well as images and videos of meetings and interviews.

Comments obtained through all social media were not included as part of the formal record. Disclaimers noted that comments posted on social media would not be considered “formal” comments for the record. Individuals seeking to comment were directed to other sites, such as e-mail addresses or e-comment forms to make formal comments. All conversations through social media were monitored and recorded.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Table 4.3 Social Media Followers (as of June 30, 2018)

Platform	Followers
Twitter (@scdotCrossroads)	237
Facebook (SCDOT Carolina Crossroads)	745
Google+ (SCDOT Crossroads)	3
Instagram (@scdotcrossroads)	97

4.4.6 POP-UP EVENTS

Pop-up events offer underrepresented community members and those who traditionally do not attend public meetings to participate in project outreach. These events were scheduled in a way that made it easy and convenient for community members to participate and provide comments. These pop-up events took project staff to where the community already was to share project information and to gather additional input.



Pop-up events engaged community members who otherwise would not attend a public meeting.

Table 4.4 Pop-Up Events

Event name	Date	Location
38 th Annual Jubilee: Festival of Black History	September 17, 2016	Mann-Simons Site, Columbia, SC
Irmo-Okra Strut and Jubilee Festival	September 24, 2016	Irmo Community Park, Irmo SC
38 th Annual Jubilee: Festival of Black History	September 16, 2017	Mann-Simons Site, Columbia, SC
44 th Annual Irmo-Okra Strut	September 30, 2017	Irmo Community Park, Irmo SC
First Thursdays on Main	October 5, 2017	Main Street, Columbia, SC
Soda City Farmer's Market	October 7, 2017	Main Street, Columbia, SC

4.4.7 NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters provide regular correspondence regarding the progress of the project and were primarily distributed via email. For those without access to email, a hardcopy of the newsletter was mailed to those who requested it. The newsletters summarized recent outreach results, provided updates, announced upcoming outreach opportunities, and shared information about the project. Completed newsletters can be found on the project website.

Table 4.5 Newsletters

	Date	Topic
Newsletter 1	July 2017	Reasonable Alternatives
Newsletter 2	July 2018	Reasonable Alternatives Features

4. Public and Agency Involvement

4.4.8 SPEAKERS BUREAU

Speakers Bureau presentations were an opportunity to provide project information and updates to interested organizations. Presentations were made by request to the organizations listed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Speakers Bureau Events

	Date
Chamber of Commerce	April 22, 2015
Spring Valley Rotary Club	July 23, 2015
Quail Hollow Et Al Joint Homeowners Association Meeting	November 10, 2016
Columbia-St. Andrews Rotary Club	November 15, 2016
Lexington-Richland Principal's Meeting	December 7, 2016
Corley Elementary School Improvement Council	January 11, 2017
St. Andrews/Irmo Richland County Democrats	January 14, 2017
Central Midlands Council of Governments Presentation	January 27, 2017
Central Midlands Council of Governments Presentation	May 25, 2017
Newmark Grubbs Wilson Kibler	June 13, 2017
Woodland Hills Civic Association	September 28, 2017
SC DHEC	October 4, 2017
Forest Acres Rotary Club	October 4, 2017
Bush River Road Business Meeting	March 1, 2018
Central Midlands Council of Governments Presentation	March 8, 2018
St. Andrews Rotary Club	April 3, 2018
Leadership Lexington	April 26, 2018
Central Midlands Council of Governments Presentation	May 24, 2018
Carolinas Engineers Conference	June 8, 2018
Richland County Transportation Committee	June 27, 2018

4.4.9 MEDIA RELATIONS

The project team engaged with local and statewide media to communicate where project stakeholders could obtain information about the project. The project team made project spokespeople available for interviews on request at each of the public meetings, including at the kick-off, scoping, preliminary alternatives, and reasonable alternatives meetings. Press kits were provided to reporters and editors upon request. The contents of the press kits included press releases, background information, fact sheets, maps, and public meeting handouts. Press releases were distributed to 52 media outlets statewide to announce an upcoming public meeting. As of June 30, 2018, 63 news stories were published or broadcasted in local and statewide media during the EIS process.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

4.4.10 ADVERTISING

Paid advertising methods are used to increase awareness of the project and drive people to the project website for more information.

- Public service announcements - Public Service Announcements (PSAs) were disseminated to the media with the objective of raising awareness about issues related to SCDOT infrastructure projects with a specific tie-in to the I-20/26/126 project.
- Radio and print advertising - Billboards, back of buses, radio, and newspaper advertising were used to market project initiatives and to ensure time-sensitive messages were conveyed broadly and effectively to residents and stakeholders.
- Social media advertising - Paid advertisements were placed on Twitter and Facebook to educate followers about upcoming project milestones, potential impacts, upcoming meetings, and media events.



Figure 4.5 Billboard

4.5 How were project mailing lists developed?

To reach out to interested and other potentially affected parties regarding the project, the project team researched and identified public stakeholders and stakeholder groups to form a contact database. The contact database was updated throughout the project and served as the distribution mailing list and as a tracking list for all outreach activities. A list of property owners within a 500-foot buffer of the corridor and alternatives was developed based on publically available property tax and GIS data. As the project moves forward, this mailing list will continue to be updated to include any others who wish to be added to the list or who may be affected by the project.



Figure 4.6 Sample Facebook ad

All project materials included the project website and a request for individuals to sign up for future electronic project announcements. Individuals who signed in at public meetings or who visited the project website were able to “opt-in” to receive future project emails.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

4.6 What public meetings were held?

4.6.1 WHAT MEETINGS WERE HELD FOR THE PUBLIC?

Four in-person public information meetings were held during the EIS process. The format of each of the in-person public meetings was an open house with a presentation and a one-on-one question-and-answer session. A combination of traditional and non-traditional meeting times and locations were considered in order to accommodate varying schedules of interested persons. All of the public meetings were held adjacent to the project study area. Specific information on each meeting is included in the sections that follow.

Table 4.7 Public Meetings

	Date	Location	Topic	Format	Number of participants
Public Meeting 1	May 12, 2015	Seven Oaks Elementary, Columbia SC	Kick-off meeting: announce EIS process and invite public input	Open house	157
Public Meeting 2	September 10, 2015	Seven Oaks Elementary, Columbia SC	Scoping meeting	Open house/tour guide with presentation	87
Public Meeting 3	October 4, 2016	Seven Oaks Elementary, Columbia SC	Preliminary alternatives	Open house/tour guide with presentation	186
Public Meeting 4	September 19, 2017	Columbia Conference Center, Columbia SC	Reasonable alternatives	Open house with rolling presentation	340

4.6.2 KICK-OFF MEETING

A kick-off meeting was held on May 12, 2015, to discuss the Carolina Crossroads project and begin gathering input on study issues; 157 people attended. Information about the corridor, the EIS process, and proposed project phasing was provided through handouts, boards, and a presentation. Meeting materials included project boards and handouts, as well as a presentation (Appendix N). A sign language translator translated the presentation for the hearing impaired. A project video that gave an overview of the project and process was set up near the display boards and set on a continuous loop. During the presentation, participants had the option of participating in a live survey using their phones to respond to questions about their use of the project corridor. Electronic tablets with the project survey were also available adjacent to project display boards. A total of 68 individuals participated in the survey. A total of 158 comments were received as a result of the Community Kickoff Meeting, the majority of those comments were received by email. For more details on comments received and how they were incorporated in the project, please see section 4.10.

A corresponding online meeting was available May 12-28, 2015.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

4.6.3 SCOPING MEETING

Scoping is the process of involving stakeholders in identifying major and important issues that need to be considered as part of the environmental review process. A project scoping meeting was held September 10, 2015, to obtain public input on project purpose and need, transportation deficiencies, study boundaries, potential alternatives, and environmental factors. Eighty-seven people attended. Meeting materials included project boards and handouts, as well as a presentation (Appendix N). A corresponding online meeting was available August 27-September 25, 2015.

Scoping helps to identify alternatives, as well as social, economic, and/or environmental concerns related to the proposed project.

A total of 63 comments were received as a result of scoping, and ranged from congestion concerns to residential property questions. A scoping summary report is included in Appendix N.

An agency scoping meeting was held on April 9, 2015, and 25 people attended, representing five agencies, including:

- SCDOT
- SCDNR
- USACE
- USFWS
- NOAA NMFS

Meeting materials included project information sheet and project maps. A summary of the Scoping Meeting can be found in Appendix N.



Members of the public were encouraged to provide comments on roll plots during the Scoping Public Meeting.

A Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting was held on April 22, 2015 and 11 people attended. Meeting materials included a project handout, survey and presentation (Appendix N). Members of the SAC provided the project team with information about how to provide information to the public, social media, speaking engagement opportunities and who else should provide input through the SAC.

4.6.4 PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES MEETING

A public meeting was held on October 4, 2016, to present a range of alternatives for the project, answer questions about the screening process, and gather input on the preliminary alternatives. A total of 186 people attended. Meeting materials included project boards, handouts, maps of the alternatives and a presentation (Appendix N).

4. Public and Agency Involvement

A corresponding alternatives tool was available online to review each alternative and the corresponding interchange options and receive comments October 4 through November 30, 2016. There were 10,052 total unique visitors to the site during the aforementioned time period.

A total of 1,324 comments were received as a result of the Alternatives Public Information Meeting. The majority of the comments (559) were submitted via the Alternatives Tool through the Carolina Crossroads website. Following the preliminary alternatives meeting comment period, comments were analyzed for issues to be addressed in the alternatives development process. Comment issues discovered ranged from general project opposition to bicycle and pedestrian concerns. More details on comment response can be found in section 4.10.

4.6.5 REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES MEETING

A public meeting was held on September 19, 2017, to present the reasonable alternatives for the project, present and solicit comments from the public on the Reasonable Alternatives that will move forward in the DEIS. Interactive display maps were available for review and the project team was available to answer questions. A total of 350 people attended. Meeting materials included interactive display maps and magazine handouts.

A total of 173 comments were received as a result of the Reasonable Alternatives Public Information Meeting comment period. The majority of these comments was received through email and covered a variety of topics, most notably, greenway projects. Further discussion of comment analysis and how public feedback was used in the DEIS may be found in section 4.10.

4.6.6 NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY AND PUBLIC HEARING FOR DEIS

This DEIS was distributed to federal, state, and local agencies and parties of interest listed in Chapter 6 and a Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in the Federal Register. The following methods were also used to notify the public about the Draft EIS availability and public process:

- Legal notices in local newspaper
- Email notifications to email addresses in the project database
- Letters
- Library boards
- Social media
- Notices posted to the project website
- Billboards
- Press Releases

An electronic copy of the DEIS was posted on the project website, and hard copies were distributed to the SCDOT Headquarters in Columbia, SCDOT District 1 office, and local libraries. The public comment period began upon publication of the NOA for the DEIS in the Federal Register and will last for 45 days. A public hearing will be held within the public comment period timeframe to present the DEIS findings, including associated environmental impacts and mitigation measures, and the recommended preferred alternative. The public hearing will consist of an open house to present the DEIS findings and project team members will be on hand to

4. Public and Agency Involvement

answer questions and talk to the public. In addition, the public hearing will have formal verbal comment sessions that adhere to SCDOT Public Participation Policy, where those who want to speak in public in front of an audience will have an opportunity to do so. Their comments will be transcribed by a court reporter and made part of the official record. Comments will be accepted in writing, transcribed by a court reporter, or through e-mail during the public hearing comment period.

4.7 Noise Advisory Board

The purpose of the Noise Advisory Board (NAB) is to involve representatives from each subdivision/community within the project study area. NAB members, who represented a variety of non-governmental and civic organizations, were invited to participate in meetings designed to provide the project team with specific feedback related to noise concerns. NAB representatives were requested to share information with the community at-large.

At the onset of the project, it was determined that members of the NAB should be volunteers from subdivisions and neighborhoods that fall within the noise study area boundary. This boundary is a 500-foot buffer outside of the project study area boundary and consists of 49 identified subdivisions and neighborhoods. During the Community Kickoff and Public Input meetings, a station was set up to explain the NAB and its purpose. If a person was interested in serving on the NAB, he or she could express their interest by leaving their name and contact information on the sign-in sheet that was located at the station. Between the two meetings, 17 individuals expressed an interest in being part of this advisory board. Of the 17 individuals, nine live within, or just outside of, the noise study area boundary. Those nine individuals are primarily located near to the I-20/26 interchange. To provide for greater geographic coverage within the noise study area, additional NAB members would be needed.

In order to identify additional potential board members, information was drawn from the public involvement database to determine active participants in the project. Active participants were identified as having attended the Community Kickoff Meeting, Public Input Meeting, and/or submitted a comment via online, email, in-person comment form, or hotline voicemail. Approximately 230 individuals were identified, with an approximately 54 of them being located within or just outside of the noise study area boundary.

Following the identification of potential members, a letter/postcard was distributed with information regarding the NAB, the anticipated commitment, and a request for an alternative candidate if they were uninterested. Social media outlets were used to solicit participation as well. Content was posted on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram requesting that interested parties contact the project hotline or project email with their information and interest in volunteering on the NAB.

The first NAB meeting was held Tuesday March 15, 2016. Fifteen participants attended the meeting and represented neighborhoods and businesses across the study area. During the meeting, project team members explained the goals and objectives of the NAB, what noise is, and what noise reducing features are recognized by federal and state policies. The noise data collection process was also explained.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

It is important to note, NAB participants were made aware during outreach and meetings that the function of the NAB is not to vote on a noise abatement, rather to inform the analysis process. SCDOT's Traffic Noise Abatement Policy is applied to every appropriate project where abatement is warranted. The next NAB meeting will be held following the public hearing comment period for the DEIS.

Table 4.8 Noise Advisory Board Meetings

	Date	Location	Topic	Number of attendees
Noise Advisory Board Meeting 1	March 15, 2016	Hampton Inn at Lake Harbison, 101 Woodcross Drive in Columbia, SC	NAB kick-off and noise collection overview	15

4.7.1 STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) was created to act in an advisory capacity to the project team and includes key stakeholders within the project area and the region (meeting summaries are included in Appendix N). The SAC meets at key milestones to guide the decision-making process for the initial stages of the project. Non-governmental and civic organizations within the project area were invited to participate. Other members of the public were encouraged to attend following the initial community kick-off. The following describes the role of Stakeholder Advisory Committee members:

- To be briefed on major project milestones.
- To meet quarterly, as needed.
- To serve as advisors to SCDOT.
- To provide input to complete certain parts of the project.
- To keep appropriate stakeholder organization staff (attorneys, engineers, modelers, etc.) and community members informed of project progress and invite them to participate in SAC meetings as needed.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Table 4.9 Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meetings

	Date	Location	Topic	Number of participants
Stakeholder Meeting 1	April 22, 2015	Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Columbia, SC	Provide information on EIS process and role of Stakeholder Advisory Council	11
Stakeholder Meeting 2	August 27, 2015	Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Columbia, SC	Provide information on EIS process and project need	16
Stakeholder Meeting 3	September 19, 2016	Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Columbia, SC	Provide an update on the EIS and alternative screening process	25
Stakeholder Meeting 4	August 31, 2017	Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Columbia, SC	Provide an update on the EIS process and reasonable alternatives	18

4.7.2 ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

One-one-one meetings occurred as needed and took place in the form of in-person meetings or virtual meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to provide continual education regarding the project to newly elected officials or officials wanting more context. As of June 2018, representatives from SCDOT staff have participated in 17 one-on-one meetings.

Table 4.10 Other Meetings with the Public

Audience	Date	Format
Joe Byrd	April 13, 2015	Phone call
Casey Himmell	April 28, 2015	Phone call
Mark Fuge	May 7, 2015	Phone call
Senator Courson*	May 21, 2015	In-person
Donna McGreevy	February 18, 2016	Phone call
Central Electric Power Cooperative	April 26, 2016	In-person
Sharon Shirah	September 1, 2016	Phone call
Ann Schirmer	January 12, 2017	Phone call
Stan Gooding (Quail Hollow HOA)	March 21, 2017	In-person
Joel Merrill	June 1, 2017	Phone call
River's Edge and Quail Hollow HOA	June 2, 2017	Phone call
Councilman Tolar*	July 1, 2017	Phone call
Frank Dubose	July 25, 2017	Phone call
Lloyd Hendricks	August 28, 2017	Phone call
Satish Patel	December 13, 2017	Phone call

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Audience	Date	Format
Ann August	December 14, 2017	In-person
Suki Patel and Chip Huggins*	January 29, 2018	In-person
Chris Wooten*	April 13, 2018	In-person

* elected official

4.7.3 MOBILITY INPUT GROUP

A Mobility Input Group was created to solicit input on mobility topics ranging from freight and shipping to public transportation from key stakeholders in the region. A meeting was held on Tuesday, December 19, 2017 at SCDOT Headquarters with project team members and members of the Mobility Input Group. The project team provided an update on the project, reviewed schedules relating to the DEIS and the upcoming public hearing, and discussed the studies used during mobility considerations on the project. Members of the Mobility Input Group then provided feedback on the mobility considerations and asked questions related to mobility on the project.

4.7.4 BUSH RIVER ROAD BUSINESS MEETING

The project team attended a meeting with business owners along Bush River Road on March 1, 2018 to discuss the relocation of the Bush River Road and I-26 interchange. The meeting was requested and organized by a local business owner to discuss the project and provide feedback on the relocation of this exit. The project team met with 14 local business owners and provided an overview of the project process, the reasonable alternatives, and discussed the upcoming public hearing. Business owners expressed their concern regarding the relocation of this interchange and potential impacts to their businesses. Attendees of this meeting were encouraged to view the project website, provide comments and attend the upcoming public hearing.

4.8 How were communities of concern included?

SCDOT and FHWA are committed to complying with environmental justice requirements under Executive Order 12898, by identifying and addressing disproportionately high adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. As such, SCDOT identified communities of concern along the proposed project corridor where the community is comprised mostly of low-income and/or minority citizens. Concentrations of special population groups such as those with LEP were also identified. Additional information about these communities of concern is detailed in Chapter 3.3.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

4.8.1 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/LEP OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Outreach to minority, low income, and LEP populations was customized to specifically target environmental justice and LEP communities. Outreach to these communities included:

- Seeking out, building and maintaining a comprehensive database of mail and e-mail contact information for environmental justice groups and advocacy groups
- Partnering with senior, disability, social service, transit, and area Hispanic liaison offices to provide information regarding the project. Offices include Hispanic Connections and SC Commission for Minority Affairs.
- Advertising meetings in high activity centers along the project corridor using fliers and static displays. Centers include Richland County Recreation facilities and City of Columbia Parks and Recreation facilities; area churches, gas stations and grocery stores.
- Translating newspaper ads and press releases to Spanish for Hispanic publications
- Translating other project materials to Spanish, as needed
- Providing Spanish translators free of charge at public meetings
- Engaging audiences through greater use of visuals, larger font and simpler language in fliers, display boards, and presentations
- Translating features on the project website
- Coordinating information distribution to focused communities based on GIS mapping and socioeconomic and demographic information such as EJ insight

SCDOT will continue to target outreach to communities of concern. Notification that the DEIS is available for public review and comment, as well as the location of the public hearing were sent using the aforementioned methods.

Environmental Justice:

Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice), issued by the President in February 1994, directs federal agencies to develop strategies to address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs on minority and low-income populations.

Limited English Proficiency:

Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are people who do not speak English as their first language and may have limited ability to read, write, or speak English, especially as it relates to particular services or activities.

Executive Order 13166, issued by the President in August 2000, requires federal agencies to identify any need for services to those with LEP*. Agency plans must provide for meaningful access.

*** *Federal Register 2002***

4. Public and Agency Involvement

4.8.2 AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

SCDOT complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). All meetings were held in ADA-accessible locations. Additional accommodations included:

- Providing American Sign Language translation services for public meeting presentations.
- Providing font enlargement features on the project website

4.9 What agency meetings were held?

All federal, state and regional agencies listed in Chapter 1, Section 1.2 were invited to participate in the project as either participating or cooperating agencies and to attend an agency scoping meeting to learn more about the project and to provide early input on the Purpose and Need.

The Agency Scoping Meeting was held early in the EIS process to provide information about the Project, obtain comments, and discuss issues related to the Project as identified by affected federal, state, and local agencies, as well as Native American groups, including Tribes. The dates, times, and locations were held in coordination with the Agency Coordination Effort (ACE) meetings. At the end of the Scoping Meetings, a Scoping Summary was completed (Appendix N). Concerns discussed included the possibility of shifting project area limits to exclude the river bridges on I-20, field work and anticipated threatened and endangered species.

Cooperating and participating agencies were also invited to participate in a field review of the project study area. This meeting was held on Thursday, August 13, 2015. Eighteen participants attended including representatives of SCDOT, USACE, and FHWA.

4.9.1 AGENCY COORDINATION EFFORT (ACE) MEETINGS

Additional ACE and web-based meetings were used to present the following information:

- Response to Notice of Intent/Invitation to be a Cooperating and Participating Agency
- Project Study Area
- Schedule for the Environmental Review Process
- Methodology Reports
- Agency/Public Involvement Coordination Plan
- Purpose and Need
- Alternative Analysis and Methodologies to Use in Analyzing Alternatives
- Preliminary DEIS chapters for comment and feedback

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Table 4.11 Agency Meetings

	Date	Topic	Agencies participating
Agency Meeting 1	April 9, 2015	Scoping	SCDNR, USACE, FHWA, NOAA NMFS
Agency Meeting 2	August 13, 2015	Environmental studies update	USACE, FHWA
Agency Meeting 3	April 12, 2016	Preliminary jurisdictional determination; purpose and need; preliminary alternatives	FHWA, USFWS, SCDNR, USACE, SCDHEC
Agency Meeting 4	October 13, 2016	Alternatives, next steps	NOAA, USACE, SCDHEC, SCDNR, USFWS, FHWA, EPA, SCDAH
Agency Meeting 5	September 14, 2017	Alternatives screening	USACE, SCDNR, FHWA, USFWS

To streamline the document review process, agencies were involved in early review of chapters of the DEIS in which they have special expertise to provide preliminary comments on the document prior to the publishing of the DEIS. Agencies provided comments on the chapters of the documents and the project team reviewed these comments and incorporated changes where needed in the DEIS. Meeting summaries are included in Appendix M.

4.10 How were public and agency comments incorporated into the proposed project?

The project utilizes a comment tracking database to document public participation events, contact lists, and public and agency comments. Comments can be submitted at any time during the EIS process via letter, e-mail, and comment forms at public meetings, telephone call, survey, or project website. Comments received via social media were not considered in the public record since social media was informational in nature and not considered a format for making formal comments.

Upon receipt, comments (including commenter name, date received, and comment method) were entered into the database. Each comment received a distinct tracking code.

Comment reports were generated for the project team to review on a monthly or weekly basis (depending on the volume of comments). Over 2,000 comments were received prior to the release of the DEIS. The number of comments generally increased when the project team provided new public information and held public meetings.

Following initial data entry, comments were categorized by NEPA topic or issue area, with the most common issue areas related to alternatives, residential/community impacts, and project cost. See Table 4.12 for a summary of comments received. Comments received in official comment periods during the NEPA process were reviewed by a project team member. If a comment included a specific question or a request for a response, a project team member responded by e-mail, a letter, or a phone call. As a rule, responses were also sent to those who submitted to at least confirm receipt of that comment.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Table 4.12 Pre-DEIS Summary of Comments Received

Public & Agency Comments – Kick-off Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recommendations for better lighting in the corridor, lower speed limits, elevated highways and additional off ramp lanes. – General concerns about alternatives, schedule, noise, congestion, signage, cost, safety and agency coordination. – Concerns about impacts to wetlands, waterways and commercial and residential property.
Public & Agency Comments – Scoping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recommendations related to highway widening BRT, bypasses and HOV lanes. – General concerns about alternatives, schedule, noise, congestion, signage, cost, safety, public involvement and agency coordination. – Concerns about impacts to wetlands, waterways and commercial and residential property. Bicycle and pedestrian concerns were also raised.
Public & Agency Comments – Preliminary Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recommendations related to signage and access points. – Attendees voiced general support or opposition to the project. – General comment topics included: aesthetics, alternatives, biological resources, community facilities & services, conservation, construction, cost, cumulative impacts, economics, flooding/floodplains, land use, mobility, noise, parks and recreation, real estate, traffic, safety, utilities, water resources and wetlands. – Concerns about impacts to property value, residential/community displacement, threatened/endangered species.
Public & Agency Comments – Reasonable Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Attendees voiced general support of the project. – Recommendations raised included adding a greenway projects and public transit. – General comment topics included: aesthetics, alternatives community facilities & services, conservation, public transit, flooding/floodplains, public involvement, mobility, noise, representative alternative 1, representative alternative 5, property value, biking and pedestrians, traffic safety and wetlands.

Public and agency input shaped the definition of the project’s purpose and need statement, the definition of alternatives, and the development of public information materials and outreach methods. For example, public scoping comments about a possible new location alternative linking I-26 to I-77 prompted the project team to analyze that concept. Public and agency comments, particularly those relative to the I-20/I-26 Connector, from the preliminary alternatives meeting further refined the results of the screening process from nine alternatives to two. Questions and comments about the environmental process and specifically potential noise impacts led the project team to post a video describing the noise analysis process. Concerns about right-of-way acquisition and the impacts associated with the alternatives led the team to provide responses to frequently asked questions about right-of-way issues. Tables were also provided that compared the impacts of each alternative and helped the public analyze the data used by the team.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

Table 4.13 Type and Number of Comments Received

Type	Total comments received (2015 through June 30, 2018)
Web comment	577
In-person meeting comment form	102
Public involvement hotline	113
Project E-mail comment	366
Alternatives tool	563

4.11 What are the next steps in agency and public involvement?

A public hearing will be held on this project and comments will be received.

- Agency Meeting and Public Hearing held to present the RPA. The comment period will last for 45 days from the issuance of the NOA
- Comments will be reviewed and design changes to the RPA will be considered where warranted
- An FEIS/ROD will be prepared and FHWA will issue its final decision on the project.

SCDOT will continue to keep the public informed and involved in the Carolina Crossroads project through a variety of methods that have been previously discussed in this chapter.

4. Public and Agency Involvement

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