

526 LOWCOUNTRY CORRIDOR NEWSLETTER



ISSUE IV, Spring 2018

GETTING IT RIGHT FOR THE LOWCOUNTRY 526 LOWCOUNTRY CORRIDOR EAST HAS BEGUN!

As noted in the last newsletter, new work on a portion of existing I-526 has begun. Phase II of the project, 526 Lowcountry Corridor EAST, will extend east from the Rivers Avenue interchange to US 17 in Mount Pleasant. Initial survey and aerial mapping efforts are now underway, along with preliminary traffic and planning studies.

The first portion, formerly referred to as Phase I, is now called the 526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST, and extends west from the Rivers Avenue interchange to the Paul Cantrell Boulevard interchange in West Ashley.

The South Carolina Department of Transportation's 526 Lowcountry Corridor Project team understands that this may be the best opportunity for the foreseeable future to make

significant improvements to the 526 Lowcountry Corridor. We heard the primary concern expressed in public comments, which was that the solution not be a short-term "Band-Aid" that does not fix the problem. This project must provide designs that not only address the current problems in the corridor, but these improvements must work well into the future. The team's approach is that it is much better to come up with the right approach for long-term benefits for the traveling public than to develop a "quick fix for 526."

To that end, the team has been working diligently to complete initial studies needed to begin developing conceptual alternatives for improving the project corridor. Since the start of the project, the team has completed many tasks, including:

- Aerial photographic mapping of the project area
- Baseline conditions hydrology report
- Wetland and stream survey
- Threatened and endangered species survey
- Historical and archaeological sites survey
- Underwater archaeological survey
- Hazardous material sites survey
- Crash analysis to identify problem areas
- Traffic modeling of existing/forecasting future conditions
- Preliminary concepts for improvements

During the course of these and other studies, the team identified many important issues, including the dynamic nature of growth in the Charleston area, the high cost of construction in the Lowcountry, and factors limiting options to improve existing transportation facilities. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 »)



DESIGNING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE

Between June and November, residents in the Charleston region are on high alert regarding the potential for a hurricane to make landfall in the Southeast. Fortunately, well-planned evacuation routes and procedures are in place if that occurs.

SCDOT's evacuation protocol for the Lowcountry region consists of reversing the eastbound lanes of I-26 to provide four lanes of westbound traffic flow. The lane reversal begins at the interchange of I-26 and I-526 and continues west until the I-26 interchange with I-77 just east of Columbia in Lexington County.

The 526 Lowcountry Corridor project must consider hurricane evacuation strategies, and design alternatives accordingly. Specifically, all interchange design concepts at the I-526/I-26 interchange must include hurricane lane reversal compatibility.

Under the existing plan, I-526 traffic approaching I-26 from the east is split into two lanes. The right lane exits normally to westbound I-26. Traffic in the left lane uses the I-26 East exit, but is diverted to travel west on the reversed lanes of I-26. This diversion takes place at a temporary crossover near the base of the ramp.

Traffic on I-526, approaching I-26 from the west, is directed to the I-26 East exit, but is then diverted to travel west on the reversed lanes of I-26. This diversion also takes place at a temporary crossover near the base of the ramp.



(DON'T) BRING THE NOISE

NOISE ANALYSIS OF HIGHWAY PROJECTS

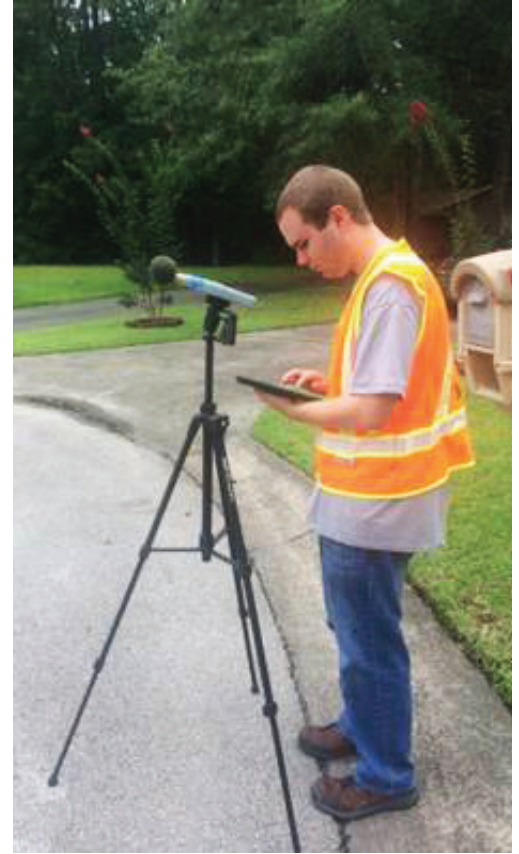
The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) regulation on highway traffic noise requires that we conduct noise studies when building new highways or changing or expanding existing ones. The purpose of a noise study is to learn whether highway traffic sounds will have an impact on nearby outdoor areas frequently used by people. All traffic noise studies and analyses prepared for SCDOT projects adhere to procedures and requirements established by Federal law and follow SCDOT noise analysis guidelines. Key steps in the process of analyzing highway traffic noise include:

✓ **Identification** of land uses in the project corridor that may be impacted by traffic noise. Residences, libraries, houses of worship, preschools and daycares, hospitals, schools and parks are the most common locations where a lowered noise level would be of benefit.

✓ **Measurement** of existing traffic noise levels throughout the project corridor. The measurements are taken at representative locations to ensure the noise model will predict realistic results. Some may ask why noise measurements were not taken at their house and assume that they were not considered for noise abatement. The measurements, however, are only used to set and verify the prediction model and not as a basis for noise abatement decisions.

✓ **Noise Modeling** is performed using an FHWA approved, computer-based noise model to predict future conditions with the proposed project. Noise projections are reported in decibels (dBA) and based on design year (typically 20 years in the future) traffic forecast information. The project's design details and terrain modifications are included in the model. SCDOT considers a location to be impacted when predicted noise levels reach or approach (within 1 dBA) the criteria for a specific activity area, or if the predicted noise substantially exceeds (more than 15 dBA) existing levels. In either of these situations, noise abatement is considered.

✓ **Noise Abatement** is considered for all noise-impacted locations. Consideration is based on feasibility (Can it be built?) and reasonableness (Does it fit in the community and is it cost effective?). Feasible noise abatement measures are those that provide a noise reduction of at least 5 dBA for 75% of the receptors in an impacted area and pose no safety, engineering, or access restrictions. Reasonableness is based on property owner input, the number of impacted locations that are benefited and the cost per benefited location.



For more information about SCDOT's traffic noise abatement policy and how it is applied, or about how noise is measured please [click here](#) and select 'Traffic Noise' from the dropdown menu.

In addition to the initial studies, the team reached out to the public by hosting nine meetings in communities along the corridor that could be directly impacted by the project. Public outreach activities also included frequent educational postings about the project on social media, implementing a project website that provides the public with information and the opportunity to ask questions and submit comments, and hosting multiple meetings for small businesses, large businesses, and other organizational stakeholders from the project area.

The team also became aware of many regional efforts to address transportation needs, some of which are on-going and some of which are completed. These endeavors include:

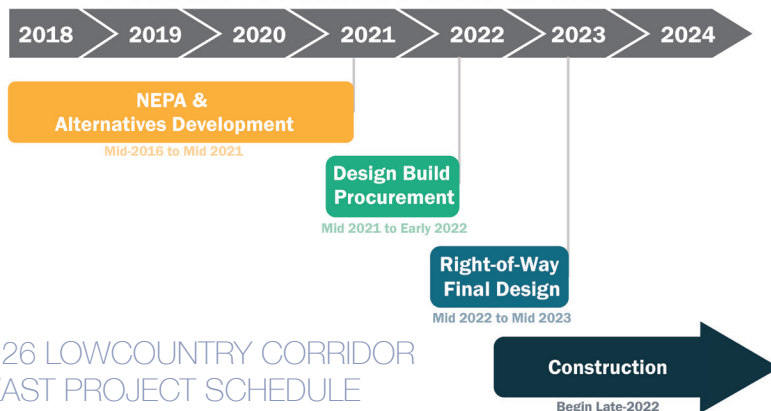
- The 526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST Traffic Operations Study (SCDOT)
- The 526 Lowcountry Corridor EAST Traffic Operations Study (SCDOT)
- The I-526 Corridor Management Plan (SCDOT)
- [The Regional Park and Ride Study \(Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Council of Governments, BCDCOG\)](#)
- [Lowcountry Rapid Transit \(Charleston Area Transportation Study, CHATS\)](#)

- [Lowcountry Go Travel Demand Marketing/Strategy Project \(BCDCOG\)](#)
- [The Regional Transit Framework Plan \(BCDCOG\)](#)
- The I-26 Corridor Management Study (SCDOT, which will include consideration of managed lanes)
- [Walk Bike BCD Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan \(BCDCOG\)](#)

These plans, studies, and projects are to be incorporated into a comprehensive CHATS Regional Interstate Congestion Management Plan (SCDOT).

The best path forward to developing a sustainable solution for the 526 Lowcountry Corridor is to consider the results of these studies and the ultimate recommendations of the CHATS Regional Interstate Congestion Management Plan. This will ensure that the appropriate options for addressing congestion are appropriately evaluated in the NEPA analysis process. Since these studies are in various stages of completion, the 526 Lowcountry Corridor project schedule has been revised so that the results of the transportation planning efforts can be part of the alternative development and the NEPA documentation processes. A copy of the new schedule for 526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST is shown below.

LOWCOUNTRY CORRIDOR WEST PROJECT SCHEDULE



526 LOWCOUNTRY CORRIDOR
EAST PROJECT SCHEDULE
COMING SOON.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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