



Executive Summary

S.1 Federal Highway Administration

Administrative Action - Environmental Impact Statement

() Draft (X) Final (X) Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation Attached

S.2 Contacts

The following individuals may be contacted for additional information concerning this project:

Mr. Patrick Tyndall
Environmental Program Manager
Federal Highway Administration
1835 Assembly Street, Suite 1270
Columbia, South Carolina 29201-2430
(803) 765-5460

Mr. Mitchell Metts, P.E.
Pee Dee Regional Production Engineer
South Carolina Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 191
Columbia, South Carolina 29202
(803) 737-1421

S.3 Project Description/Purpose

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), in association with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), proposes to construct Interstate 73 (I-73) on new alignment in northeastern South Carolina. The portion of the project to be analyzed in this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is located mostly in the northeastern corner of South Carolina, with a small portion in North Carolina. The project study area, shown in Figure 1-2 (refer to page 1-3) extends northwest from I-95, and is bounded to the east by the North Carolina/South Carolina state line, to the north by a line just north of future I-73/74 (I-74) in North Carolina, and to the west by the eastern edge of the Great Pee Dee River floodplain. The project would extend from I-95 in Dillon County, through Marlboro County, South Carolina, and into Richmond County, North Carolina. It would terminate at I-74 in Richmond County, North Carolina. Since approximately four miles of the proposed project would be located in North Carolina, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has agreed to collaborate, by resolution between SCDOT and NCDOT, (refer to Appendix A).

A typical section was developed to accommodate a six-lane facility with corridors for future rail lines and allowances for frontage roads where needed. Figure 1-3 (refer to page 1-5) represents the interim design, which is proposed to be constructed initially. It would accommodate two lanes of traffic in each direction. In the future, when traffic volumes increased to a point that additional lanes would be necessary in order to maintain an acceptable level of service, an additional lane in each direction could



be added within the median (refer to Figure 1-4, page 1-6). An estimated 400-foot wide right-of-way would be acquired where frontage roads would be needed. Where frontage roads are not required, an estimated 300-foot wide right-of-way would be adequate. The Preferred Alternative is 36.6 miles long, and would have interchanges with I-95, S.C. Route 34, S.C. Route 381, U.S. Route 15/401, S.C. Route 79, N.C. Route 1803, and I-74.

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide an interstate link between the southernmost proposed segment of I-73 (from I-95 to the Myrtle Beach Region) and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 Corridor, to serve residents, businesses, and travelers while fulfilling congressional intent in an environmentally responsible and community-sensitive manner. The proposed project would promote economic development in Dillon, Marlboro, Richmond, and Scotland Counties, improve travel efficiency, reduce traffic volumes on local roadways, and provide a corridor for future rail access.

S.4 Other Government Actions

In consultation with the SCDOT, the following projects were identified as other important planned improvements to be implemented in the vicinity of I-73:

- I-73/74 construction in North Carolina;
- I-73 South between I-95 and S.C. Route 22 in Horry County is being evaluated. An FEIS and ROD were completed for this project that includes paved shoulders for S.C. Route 22 so that it could be made part of I-73;
- The widening of S.C. Route 38 is on-going. The at-grade intersection with U.S. Route 501 is being replaced with a grade-separated interchange;
- The Southern Evacuation Lifeline project is currently being evaluated; an EIS is in preparation to determine the most feasible alternative to meet the needs of improving hurricane evacuation, traffic congestions, and access for the southern Grand Strand and the Conway area;
- The widening of U.S. Route 52 from two to four lanes for approximately four miles from just north of Darlington to Dovesville;
- The widening of S.C. Route 9/S.C. Route 38 (Cottingham Bypass) on the western side of Bennettsville from two to five lanes for two miles between S.C. Route 385 and where S.C. Route 9 and S.C. Route 38 separate; and,
- A bridge replacement project is proceeding on the S.C. Route 917 crossing of the Little Pee Dee River.



S.5 Alternatives Considered

Initially there were over 1,800 potential alternatives developed for this project. They were evaluated and reduced to three primary corridors with segments that allowed some interchangeability between them that made it possible to combine the corridors in different ways. The Reasonable Alternatives for the proposed project include the No-build Alternative, and three Build Alternatives (Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, refer to Figure 2-7, page 2-24; Figure 2-8, page 2-27; and Figure 2-9, page 2-30). These were developed in conjunction with agency and public involvement. Alternative 2 was designated as the Preferred Alternative (refer to Table S.1, page S-5).

The No-build Alternative would fail to satisfy the stated Purpose and fulfill the primary and secondary Needs for the project. The Purpose of the proposed project is to provide an interstate link between proposed I-73, between I-95 and the Myrtle Beach Region, and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 Corridor. The primary Needs for the project are to provide system linkage and to enhance economic opportunities in the project study area, while the secondary Needs are to improve access for tourism, improve safety of existing roadways, and provide multimodal planning.

The No-build Alternative would not provide:

- A direct link between I-95 and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 Corridor to improve system linkage. I-73 has been named as a High Priority Corridor (number five) by the U.S. Congress. This section of I-73 is needed to provide the connection between North Carolina and I-95. Without this link, the planned High Priority Corridor between Michigan and South Carolina would not be completed;
- Opportunities for economic growth. The interstate would provide economic opportunities to the project study area that would result from the connectivity to the interstate system. Dillon and Marlboro Counties in South Carolina are two of the most economically depressed counties in the state. They have high unemployment and low income levels. The trend in Marlboro County has been for negative population growth over the past 20 years. I-73 is seen locally as a key to improving the economic prospects within the project study area;
- Improved access for tourism. The construction of the interstate would result in savings to the traveling public resulting from increased travel efficiency. This travel efficiency is reflected in reduced travel times. A key to maintaining and improving tourism is the ability of tourists to easily access destinations. The connection provided by I-73 would increase the travel efficiency for tourists traveling through North and South Carolina;
- Improved safety on local roads. The diversion of traffic to the interstate from the local road network that would result from the construction of the proposed interstate would improve safety on the local



network by removing the vehicles making through trips. This would take persons unfamiliar with the local roads off of that network and put them on the interstate, a more familiar situation for those traveling long distances. It would also remove truck traffic from the local network; or,

- A future provision for a multimodal facility. The I-73 Corridor includes within the proposed right-of-way the potential for two rail corridors that would allow for future passenger and/or freight rail. This has the potential for providing additional rail connectivity to northeastern South Carolina.

The No-build Alternative would not provide the interstate link between I-95 and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 Corridor. Failure to provide this link would lead to the loss of economic opportunities, the potential loss of tourism, longer travel times, and the loss of the multimodal opportunities provided by the corridor.

The projected economic benefits from constructing I-73 are summarized in Section 2.6.1.2 (refer to page 2-33). This analysis shows that the project study area would benefit in terms of the number of jobs and money flowing into the area from any of the reasonable Build Alternatives.

The No-build Alternative in 2030 provides the benchmark for impacts against which the Build Alternatives are measured. In all cases, the No-build Alternative was evaluated along with the Build Alternatives. For some categories of impacts the No-build Alternative may be more negative than the Build Alternatives. The economic scenario for Marlboro County is more negative with the No-build Alternative than it would be for the Build Alternatives. In other categories the No-build Alternative may have different impacts than the Build Alternatives that can be positive from one sense, but negative for another. For example, land uses will change by the Year 2030, even for the No-build Alternative. The projected land use changes for the No-build Alternative were lower, when compared against the Build Alternatives. This would be positive from a natural resource standpoint, but negative from an economic development viewpoint.

S.6 Preferred Alternative

Each of the Build Alternatives satisfied the Purpose and Need for the project. However, two of the three Build Alternatives were eliminated based upon their potential impacts. Alternative 2 was designated as the Preferred Alternative because it would have the least amount of wetland impacts (114.3 acres), the least impact to total farmland (1,505 acres), the least impact to prime farmland (805 acres), the lowest cost, low number of relocations, would be in close proximity to existing infrastructure, would be centrally located to serve the communities of the project study area more equally, and is supported by many agencies, local governments, and the public. Once the Preferred Alternative was selected, Public Hearings took place. In response to agency and public comments, shifts were made to the Preferred Alternative, and detailed fieldwork was completed. Due to this, the amount of impacts lowered for some resources, and are shown in Table S.1.

Table S.1
Preferred Alternative Impact Matrix

Category	Unit of Measure	Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2)	
Purpose And Need	System Linkage	Yes	
	Economic Development	Yes	
	Improved Access for Tourism	Yes	
	Increased Safety on Existing Roads	Yes	
	Multimodal Planning	Yes	
Engineering Criteria	Length	36.6 Miles	
	Design Criteria	Meets/Does Not Meet	
	Constructability	Ranking	
	Construction Cost (year 2013)	\$ Millions	
		1,125	
Natural Features	Threatened and Endangered Species	Yes (#) / No	
	Species of Concern	Yes (#) / No	
	Wetlands	Acreage	
	Fill	Acreage	
	Bridge	Acreage	
	Wetland Quality	Value	
	Fill	Value	
	Bridge	Value	
	Streams (Jurisdictional)		
	Total Crossings	# of Crossings (Linear Feet)	
	Perennial	# (Linear Feet)	
	Intermittent	# (Linear Feet)	
	Water Quality		
	Outstanding Resource Water	# of Crossings	
	303(d) Impaired (2008 Draft List)	# of Crossings	
Habitat	Unique		
Uplands (Fill Only)	Acreage		
Floodplains	Acreage		
		23 (14,994)	
		11 (5,188)	
		12 (9,806)	
		0	
		0	
		No	
		923.4	
		15.4	
Man-Made Features	Hazardous Material Sites	#	
	Parks and Wildlife Refuges	Yes (#) / No	
	Historical Structures	#	
	Potentially Eligible Archaeological Sites	#	
	Noise (R= Residential, B= Business)	#	
	Farmland	Acreage	
	Prime	Acreage	
	Unique	Acreage	
	Statewide Important	Acreage	
	Poultry Farm	#	
	Hog Farm	#	
			1
			Auction Water - Hamlet
			No
			1 (Beauty Spot Motor Court Office Building)
		4	
		8 R, 1 B, and Beauty Spot Cemetery	
		1,578	
		849	
		0	
		729	
		0	
		0	
Socioeconomic Issues	Direct Community Impacts	#	
	Indirect Community Impacts	#	
	Total Relocations	#	
	Residential Relocations	#	
	Commercial Relocations	#	
	Environmental Justice	# of Block Groups	
			11
			Adamsville, Bennettsville, Bingham, Brightsville, Clio, Dunbar, Hamlet, Hebron, Lester, Newtonville, Tatum
			11
			Adamsville, Bennettsville, Blenheim, Brightsville, Chavistown, Clio, Dunbar, Hamlet, Hebron, McColl, and Minturn
		28	
		24	
		4	
		8	
Infrastructure	Airports	#	
	Fire Stations	#	
	Schools	#	
	Churches	#	
	Cell Phone Towers	#	
	Cemeteries	#	
	Railroad Crossings	#	
	Gas Line Crossings	#	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		1	
		0	
		4	
		2	





S.7 Major Environmental Impacts

The environmental consequences that would result from implementation of the proposed action are impacts to wetlands of approximately 57.2 acres (plus approximately 5,188 linear feet of perennial stream impacts), loss of 849 acres of prime farmland, the potential relocation of 24 residences and four commercial establishments, and potential noise impacts to eight residences and one business (refer to Table S.1, page S-5).

S.8 Areas of Concern

The Alternatives described in this document were presented to the public. The Alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative, were presented at two Public Hearings. After the Public Hearings, the Preferred Alternative was modified in response to comments received.

The mitigation of impacts to wetlands and streams has been a significant natural resource concern for this project. Impacts to farmland and potential economic impacts are other areas that have been of concern throughout the evaluation.

Cultural resource issues have also been identified that could be impacted by the Preferred Alternative. It would impact a historic structure eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the Beauty Spot Motor Court site. A Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation has been completed (refer to Appendix E). Section 106 mitigation for the impacts has been developed in coordination with the SHPO and a Memorandum of Agreement was signed July 2008 (refer to Appendix A). Four archaeological sites have been identified as potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP. These sites will be further evaluated and, if necessary, data recovery could be performed at one or all of them. Many residents along the potential alignments have expressed concern over the proximity of the alignment to them. Petitions have been submitted on behalf of several of these residents.

S.9 Unresolved Issues

A wetland delineation has been performed for the Preferred Alternative. It was submitted to the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for review. The South Carolina portion was submitted to the Charleston District office and the North Carolina portion was submitted to the Wilmington District office. The delineation was reviewed in the field by both offices and delineation approval letters are pending from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Also, a protected species survey was performed to determine the location of any previously unrecorded federally threatened and endangered species. None were found and the approval of the Biological Assessment is pending. An archaeological survey for the Preferred Alternative was performed in South Carolina. Three sites have been identified as potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP. Further testing will be done at these sites to resolve their eligibility and, if



eligible, recovery of data will be performed. In North Carolina, the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology and the NCDOT have agreed it would be appropriate to initiate the survey after the Least Environmentally Damaging Preferred Alternative was further developed and made available for review and further consultation (refer to Appendix A). This detailed design and mapping will guide the designation of the archaeological Area of Potential Effect in North Carolina.

A proposed plan for addressing wetland mitigation has been developed in conjunction with the Agency Coordination Team (ACT). This plan has not been finalized at this time. The construction methodology that could affect wetlands has not been specified at this time. The design of the proposed stream crossings will be subject to review by the ACT. The funding for construction of the project is not currently available. At present, the project delivery method is uncertain. Options being considered include the purchase of right-of-way, construction of a portion of the project, or a sale of a “concession” to a private entity to finance, design, and operate the facility (refer to Chapter 1, Section 1.4, page 1-33). Depending upon the method of funding, I-73 may be built as a toll road. This FEIS was prepared based upon the impacts of a non-tolled highway, which provides a “worst-case scenario” analysis for most impact categories, based upon traffic volumes. Further NEPA analysis would be completed if the facility is tolled in the future.

S.10 List of Other Government Actions Required

The following governmental agencies are involved in review of this project: United States Army Corps of Engineers, United States Environmental Protection Agency; United States Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service; National Marine Fisheries Service; United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service; South Carolina Department of Commerce; South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism; South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control; South Carolina Department of Archives and History (State Historic Preservation Officer); South Carolina Department of Natural Resources; North Carolina Department of Natural Resources; North Carolina Office of State Archaeology; North Carolina Department of Water Quality; and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

The following types of actions have been, or will be, needed for the proposed project:

- Section 7 (*Endangered Species Act of 1973*, as amended) compliance;
- Section 402 (*Clean Water Act of 1972*, as amended) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit;
- Compliance with the *South Carolina Stormwater Management and Sediment Reduction Act* (1991);
- Section 106 (*National Historic Preservation Act*) cultural resource compliance; and,
- Sections 401 and 404 (*Clean Water Act*) wetland and stream impact permit.



S.11 Project Commitments

The following is a list of commitments made in the FEIS:

- To provide an interstate link between I-95 and I-74 to serve residents, businesses, and tourists while fulfilling congressional intent in an environmentally responsible and community sensitive manner (refer to page 1-11).
- In the event I-73 is tolled, additional NEPA analysis would be performed (refer to page 1-37).
- A minimum design speed of 45 miles per hour, where appropriate, is necessary to be maintained in construction areas in order to minimize undue traffic backups and delays (refer to page 1-38).
- Relocation will be conducted in accordance with the *Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970*, as amended. Relocation resources will be available to all relocates without discrimination (refer to pages 3-86 and 3-87).
- Bridges constructed to elevate roadways over the interstate would have 10-foot shoulders, which would accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists safely (refer to page 3-88).
- In the event that previously unknown cultural resources are discovered during construction, the resources will be handled according to 36 CFR §800.11 in coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office and appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (refer to page 3-110).
- Detailed archaeological investigations will be completed on the Preferred Alternative in North Carolina prior to purchase of right-of-way (refer to page 3-110).
- Phase II archaeological testing will be performed on four sites in South Carolina determined to be potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP. If any of these sites are found to be eligible for listing, then avoidance will be evaluated and/or mitigation will be performed (refer to page 3-110).
- Mitigation for the impacts to the former Beauty Spot Motor Court office will be performed in accordance with the terms in the signed Memorandum of Agreement between the SHPO and SCDOT (refer to Appendix A).
- Should previously unknown hazardous material contamination be discovered as the project moves forward, the contamination would be removed and properly disposed of prior to the initiation of construction activities at that site (refer to page 3-114).



- The contractor will comply with applicable federal, state, county, and other local air pollution regulations during the construction of the project (refer to page 3-135).
- The Preferred Alternative will cross the five major riparian wetland systems (Little Reedy Creek, unnamed tributary to Little Reedy Creek, Hagins Prong, Cottingham Creek, and Beverly Creek) primarily on structure. Hydraulic studies during final design will determine whether the minor crossings of ten unnamed tributaries of Crooked Creek will be piped or culverted (refer to pages 3-173 and 3-176).
- A more detailed screening was performed within a one-mile wide corridor along the Preferred Alternative and it was determined that sufficient upland areas that could be utilized for borrow activities appear to be present in close proximity to the Preferred Alternative alignment. Wetland areas should not be used for borrow areas. Borrow activities will be done in accordance with the SCDOT Engineering Directive (*EDM- Borrow Pit Location and Monitoring*) (refer to page 3-174).
- Where appropriate, pipe and culvert bottoms would be recessed below the bottom of perennial stream channels to allow movement of aquatic species through the structure (refer to page 3-176).
- If temporary roads in wetlands are used for bridge construction, the fill material would be removed and the areas reseeded with native riparian species seed mixes (refer to page 3-183).
- Best Management Practices in accordance with local, state, and federal guidelines will be incorporated during the design and construction of the project to minimize impacts to water quality and wetlands (refer to pages 3-184 and 3-260).
- A Section 404 permit from the USACE will be obtained for unavoidable impacts to wetlands and waters of the United States and mitigation will be completed for these impacts (refer to page 3-185).
- Preventive measures will be taken to minimize the spread of invasive plant species (refer to page 3-193).
- A Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures (SPCC) Plan will be developed to address potential impacts from construction activities (refer to page 3-260).
- In the event that a geodetic control monument would be impacted, notification would be provided to NOAA no less than 90 days in advance of such activities in order to plan for their relocation (refer to page 4-28).