



ISSUE NO. 1 ■ APRIL 2005

Environmental Impact Statement

Project I-73 Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of the I-73 Newsletter, which will be periodically published by the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to inform residents and businesses within the Project Study Area, as well as other interested members of the public about the progress of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Public involvement in a project such as this is extremely important, and the SCDOT will utilize this newsletter as one of several ways to inform the public about the project. Other methods the Project Team are using to inform the public include a Project Website and a Project Hotline. Please note the Website address and telephone number in this newsletter.

Description of The Project

The current phase of the I-73 Project involves the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for a new interstate in South Carolina. I-73 will be approximately 85 miles long and run generally from the South Carolina/North Carolina state line near Hamlet, NC to the Myrtle Beach area. This new interstate facility would initially be constructed as a four-lane, divided interstate highway that could be upgraded to a six-lane highway. The right of way width will vary between 300 feet and 400 feet, depending on the need for frontage roads. As this project will address multi-modal issues, the roadway design and new right of way obtained will allow for the possible future construction of rail lines by others.

In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) identified I-73 as a high-priority corridor extending from Detroit, Michigan to Charleston, South Carolina. In 1998, Congress passed the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) which amended the previous I-73 legislation. It indicated that I-73 would extend through the Myrtle Beach /



Conway region to Georgetown, rather than the Charleston area. The route will be selected during this EIS process.

The Project Study Area is outlined in red on the map to the above. It is generally bounded, the eastern limits of the floodplain of the Great Pee Dee River, US Route 378, US Route 501, the Grand Strand (Myrtle Beach) area, and the South Carolina/North Carolina state line.

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"Pathway to Progress"

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SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



Federal Highway
Administration

Description of The Project, continued

The I-73 Project is actually divided into two projects. The first, often referred to as the southern project, consists of an area from I-95 to the Myrtle Beach area. It includes Horry County, Marion County, and a portion of Dillon County. The Project Team, consisting of the SCDOT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Consultant Team, and several resource and regulatory agencies, has been working on the preparation of the EIS document for this project since the

Summer of 2004. Currently, a set of Potential Alternative Corridors has been developed and was presented to the public during three Public Information Meetings conducted in March 2005. We anticipate developing a recommended Preferred Alternative late in 2005, which will be presented during additional Public Information Meetings. To date, all of the activities on this project have been performed in this southern project area.

The second project, often referred to as the northern project, consists of a Study Area between I-95 and I-74 in North Carolina, near Hamlet. This area includes the remaining portion of Dillon County and Marlboro County, South Carolina and a portion of Richmond County, North Carolina. An EIS will be prepared for the northern project area which is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2005. ■

Public Meetings

In September of 2004, the Project Team conducted two Public Scoping Meetings, one in Mullins and one in Conway. The purpose of these meetings was to inform the public about the project, ask their opinion of the project and get comments on the scope of the study effort. Attendees were given comment cards and issues surveys to fill out and return to the Project Team. It was important to the Project Team that the public have a basic understanding of the process involved with the preparation of an EIS. With an understanding of the process, the public has an idea of the overall project schedule and is better prepared to participate in the process.

In March 2005, the Project Team conducted three Public Information Meetings in Dillon, Myrtle Beach, and Aynor to present the Potential

Alternative Corridors to the public. The meetings were conducted in an informal, open-house format that allows each member of the public to speak directly with a member of the Project Team. The purpose of these meetings was to present information about the project to interested members of the public, as well as to obtain input and feedback from residents within the Project Study Area. Local residents know important things that could affect the location of a particular corridor under consideration. The Project Team is able to use the information provided by these

people as an important resource as we assemble environmental and community information about the Project Study Area. The Project Team has received many comments during and following these meetings, and will be spending the next month or so evaluating the various suggestions



made. These comments will be a factor in modifying proposed alignments and identifying a recommended Preferred Alternative.

There will be more opportunities for the public to meet with the Project Team and learn more about the project. We anticipate conducting additional Public Information Meetings in the southern project area late in 2005 to present the recommended Preferred Alternative. Following extensive field studies, more evaluation, and slight alignment modification we expect to conduct another round of Public Meetings in mid-2006.

In addition, public meetings will be scheduled in the northern project area. As of yet, those dates have not been set, but all meetings will be advertised in the local media and on the I-73 Project Website. The Website address is www.I73inSC.com. ■



What Is An Environmental Impact Statement?

An EIS is a document that includes the evaluation of the impacts that would result if a specific action, in this case the construction of a new interstate, is accomplished. The EIS is prepared by the SCDOT and is approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This document, and the process involved in its preparation, is governed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. NEPA does not prohibit a



project from impacting the environment. However, it does require that the prospective impacts be understood and disclosed in advance. The EIS is a formal public document and involves a detailed study of the reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts, both positive and negative, of a proposed action. The development of the document includes a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which is prepared prior to a Public Hearing. Following a review and comment period, a Final Environmental

Impact Statement (FEIS) is completed. The approval and acceptance of the FEIS by the FHWA is accomplished with the issuance of a Record of Decision.

The NEPA process places high importance on public involvement as a way to help the SCDOT and the FHWA make good decisions about the project. The goal is to provide an opportunity for frequent and meaningful public input during the entire process. Ways to participate include:

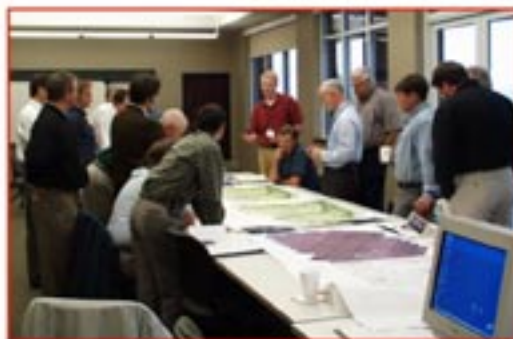
- ◆ *Attending Public Meetings and providing your comments*
- ◆ *Leaving a message on the Project Website (www.173inSC.com)*
- ◆ *Leaving a message on the Project Telephone Hotline (1-866-173-inSC)*
- ◆ *Sending a letter to the SCDOT Project Manager, Mitchell Metts (to the address shown near the address label)*
- ◆ *Reading this newsletter and passing it along to a friend or neighbor.*

The Role of the Agency Coordination Team

In each edition of the I-73 Project Newsletter, we will be highlighting an aspect of this project that may be of special interest or is unique. In this edition, we would like to introduce an aspect of the EIS process that has been developed to change the way major projects are developed in South Carolina.

The SCDOT and FHWA have entered into a unique working relationship with various federal and state resource and regulatory agencies. This group of agencies is referred to as the Agency Coordination Team (ACT) and it includes the US Army Corps of Engineers, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration - National Marine Fisheries, US Coast Guard, SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, State Historic Preservation Office, SC Department of Health and Environmental Control-Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, SC Department of Natural Resources, SC Emergency Management Division, SC Department of Parks Recreation and Tourism, Federal Highway Administration,

and SCDOT, all of the agencies that would have information that is critical to the performance of a comprehensive environmental study and/or will be involved in the document approval and permitting process. From the beginning of the project, the SCDOT has been committed to a program of extensive



coordination with these agencies through meetings scheduled to coincide with key project milestones.

The purpose of the ACT is to help streamline the environmental process by soliciting recommendations and suggestions from the agencies as the study progresses. The NEPA and Section 404 (wetland) permitting are being done

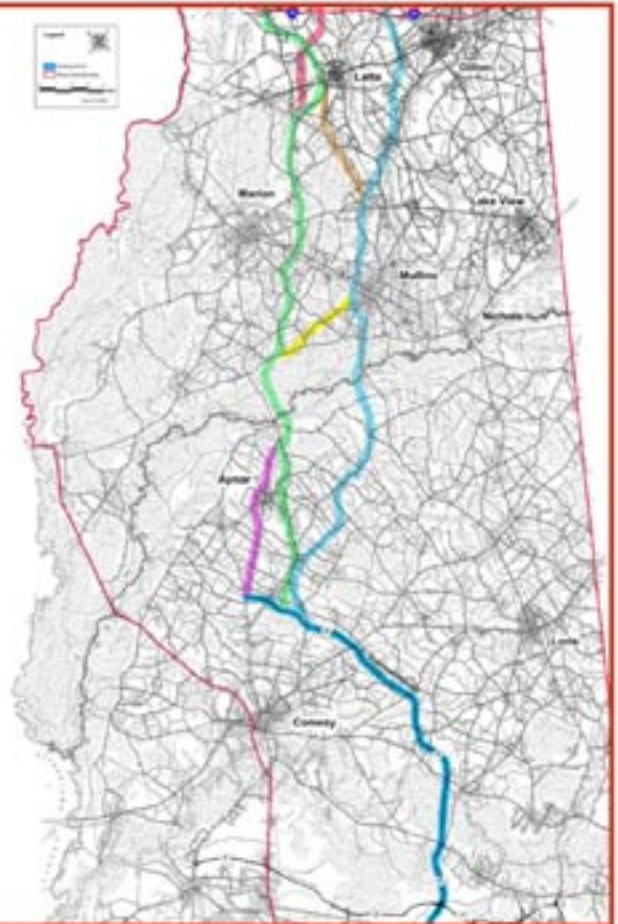
concurrently. This means that the corridors that are being developed for the EIS are also the corridors to be considered in the Section 404 permitting process. By performing both processes concurrently, the time it takes to obtain the EIS and the permit should be decreased.

This process actually benefits the project and the participants in two ways. Through this coordination with the SCDOT, the agencies become aware of project issues outside their normal considerations, gain an understanding of why certain decisions were made, and are involved in key decisions during project development. Additionally, the Project Team is made aware of the specific concerns that the agencies have about this major project. In this way, the Project Team is able to develop and focus on corridors that include consideration of the regulatory requirements of each agency. Many people familiar with this project and other previous projects have told us that the development and inclusion of the ACT on the I-73 project has made a positive difference. ■



Stay Informed / Stay Involved

We want and need the public to play an integral role in this project. In addition to attending the various public meetings, we encourage you to visit the I-73 Project Website (www.I73inSC.com) to receive current information on the project. The Website will be periodically updated to include reports on significant progress and other pertinent project information. Visitors to the Website may also leave a comment or ask a question of the Project Team. Persons interested in this project may also leave a message on the **I-73 Project Hotline**. The number is **1-866-I73-inSC (1-866-473-4672)**.



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**PROJECT WEBSITE:
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