



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

South Carolina

August 8, 2013

1835 Assembly Street, Suite 1270
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-765-5411
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In Reply Refer To:
HDA-SC

Mr. Randall Williamson, P.E.
Environmental Engineer
South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT)
955 Park Street, P.O. Box 191
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

Dear Mr. Williamson:

The FHWA has received your letter requesting a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) determination for the proposed Interstate 26 (I-26) and Charleston Port Road Interchange Project in Charleston County, South Carolina. Based on the information provided to complete the environmental process FHWA finds that the project will have no significant impacts; therefore a FONSI is justified. Please proceed accordingly with the publication of the notice of availability of location and preliminary design approval and availability of the FONSI. The final documentation is to be made available to the public upon request. A notice of the FONSI approval shall be sent to the affected units of Federal, State, and local government. A notice shall also be sent to the State inter-governmental review contacts established under Executive Order 12372.

By our adoption of the FONSI and completion of the public comment/hearing requirements of 23 U.S.C. 128, the SCDOT is authorized to proceed with further project development.

Sincerely,


(for) Robert L. Lee
Division Administrator

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Chad Long, SCDOT NEPA Coordinator, RPG1
Mr. David Kinard, P.E., SCDOT Program Manager (via e-mail)
File 10.037345A

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
SOUTH CAROLINA DIVISION OFFICE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for

Interstate 26 and Port Access Road Interchange Project

PIN 37345 – File 10.037345A

Project Description

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) proposes a new freeway interchange on I-26, located south of the existing Meeting Street ramps (Exit 217) in the City of North Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina (Figure 1).

The Charleston region is accessed via I-26, which is an east-west freeway (but physically more northwest-southeast) connecting to I-95 corridor and Columbia to the west. The region is also served by a loop freeway – I-526 (Mark Clark Expressway) connecting Mt. Pleasant to the east and West Ashley to the west. The proposed Port Access Road interchange is located in the City of North Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina, in the industrial “Neck” area near the old Charleston Navy Base. The proposed project is a new freeway interchange on I-26, located south of the existing Meeting Street ramps (Exit 217).

The proposed interchange project will remove the existing Spruill Avenue ramps (Exit 218) and build a new full movement directional T-interchange connecting to the new Port Access Road. The new Port Access Road will connect to the Navy Base Terminal that is currently under construction by the South Carolina State Ports Authority on the west banks of the Cooper River at the old Navy Base.¹

The proposed interchange project will remove the existing Spruill Avenue ramps (Exit 218) and build a new full movement directional T-interchange connecting to the new Port Access Road. The new Port Access Road will connect to the NBT that is currently under construction by the SCSPA on the west banks of the Cooper River at the old Navy Base.²

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed interchange is to provide a direct connection between the Port Access Road and the Interstate System, while maintaining adequate service for local, commuter, and commercial traffic.

¹ Parsons Brinkerhoff, *I-26/Naval Base Terminal Access Road Interchange, Interchange Modification Report*, prepared for SCDOT, May 2012, p.3.

² Parsons Brinkerhoff, *I-26/Naval Base Terminal Access Road Interchange, Interchange Modification Report*, prepared for SCDOT, May 2012, p.3.

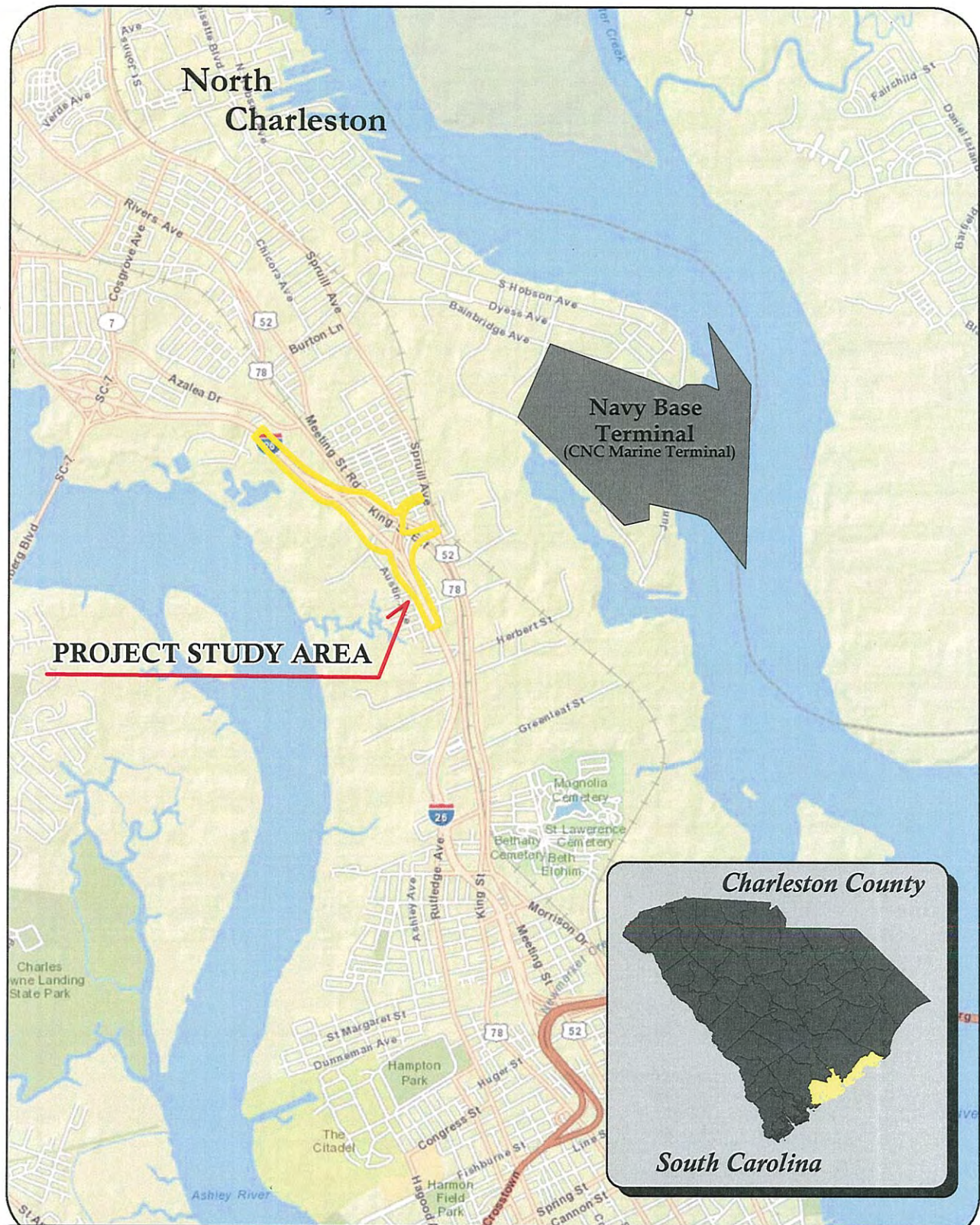


Figure 1

PROJECT AREA



Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

During the Port EIS study, numerous geometric designs and alternate alignments were considered for the proposed interchange with I-26, see Table 1 for a summary of the alternatives evaluated. The evaluation process is documented in detail in the Appendix W of the Port EIS (Access Road Feasibility Study and Supplemental Report).³

Table 1
Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

Alt. #	Alternative Description	Evaluation Results & Decisions
A	New high design speed access road (1.1 mile) parallel to Pittsburg Avenue and connecting to I-26 with a new interchange just south of current Exit 218 and replacing the ramps at Exits 217 and 218	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Passed Conceptual Alternatives Screening. Carried forward in the DEIS as Alternative 1a. The DEIS further refined Alternative 1a. In addition, a derivative Alternative 1c was developed with an alternate interchange design. Alternative 1c was selected as the best alternative during the DEIS. The Alternative 1c was further refined into Alternative 1d during the FEIS, which was selected as the Preferred Build Alternative.
B	Similar to Alternative A, with the exception of the curved alignment to avoid crossing the Copper Yard property.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Passed Conceptual Alternatives Screening. Carried forward in the DEIS as Alternative 1b and further refined.
C	Similar to Alternative A, with the exception of roadway alignment and interchange location. The roadway alignment has been pushed to the north parallel to the Spruill Avenue ramps. The new interchange was placed in between the current Exits 217 and 218.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Passed Conceptual Alternatives Screening. Carried forward in the DEIS as Alternative 2 and further refined.
D	Similar to Alternative A, with the exception of roadway alignment and interchange location. The roadway alignment has been pushed to further north parallel to Boxwood Avenue. The new interchange was placed in near Exit 217.	Community Impacts deemed a fatal flaw. Dropped from further consideration.
E	Similar to Alternative A, with the exception of roadway alignment and interchange location. The roadway alignment has been pushed to further north parallel to Stromboli Avenue. The new interchange was placed north of Exit 217.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Passed Conceptual Alternatives Screening. Carried forward in the DEIS as Alternative 3 and further refined.
F1	Arterial access road, first connecting to existing Spruill Avenue and then connecting to the existing I-26 interchange at SC 7. The alternative assumed minor interchange improvement at SC 7.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Failed Conceptual Alternatives Screening.
F2	Arterial access road, first connecting to existing Spruill Avenue and then connecting to the existing I-26 interchange at Dorchester Road via Cosgrove Avenue. The alternative assumed minor interchange improvement at Dorchester Road.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Failed Conceptual Alternatives Screening.
G	Arterial access road, first connecting to existing Spruill Avenue and then connecting to the existing I-526 interchange at Rivers Avenue. The alternative assumed minor interchange improvement at Rivers Avenue.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Failed Conceptual Alternatives Screening.

³ Parsons Brinkerhoff, *I-26/Naval Base Terminal Access Road Interchange, Interchange Modification Report*, prepared for SCDOT, May 2012, p.66.

Alt. #	Alternative Description	Evaluation Results & Decisions
H	Arterial access road, first connecting to existing Spruill Avenue and then connecting to the existing I-526 interchange at Rhett Avenue. The alternative assumed minor interchange improvement at Rhett Avenue.	Community and Environmental Impacts deemed as fatal flaws. Dropped from further consideration.
I1	Arterial access road, first connecting to existing Spruill Avenue and then connecting to the existing I-526 interchange at Rhett Avenue via North Carolina Avenue, Noisette Boulevard, Virginia Avenue, and a new connector road parallel to the railroad tracks. The alternative assumed minor interchange improvement at Rhett Avenue.	Passed Fatal Flaw analysis. Failed Conceptual Alternatives Screening.
I2	Arterial access road, first connecting to existing Spruill Avenue and then connecting to the existing I-526 interchange at Virginia Avenue via North Carolina Avenue, Noisette Boulevard, and Virginia Avenue. The alternative assumed minor interchange improvement at Virginia Avenue.	Environmental Impacts surrounding a full movement interchange deemed a fatal flaw. Dropped from further consideration.
<i>Source: Parsons Brinkerhoff, I-26/Naval Base Terminal Access Road Interchange, Interchange Modification Report, prepared for SCDOT, May 2012, p.67.</i>		

No-Build Alternative

With the No-Build alternative, no interchange modifications or improvements would be made within the project area. The No-Build alternative was eliminated because it does not meet the transportation goals of the State of South Carolina or the transportation needs of the region. Also, by failing to provide solutions to high traffic volumes in the area, connectivity to other traffic corridors, and increased safety, this alternative does not satisfy the purpose and need for this project. The No-Build alternative does, however, provide a basis for comparing the benefits and adverse impacts of the alternatives.

Preferred Alternative

The Port EIS study determined that Alternative 1D was the best alternative for meeting the purpose and need of the project and it was designated as the Preferred Alternative.⁴ See Figure 3.

The Preferred Alternative is a ‘Semi-Directional Tee’ interchange at the location of the existing Exit 218. The new interchange will provide full access to and from westbound and eastbound I-26 to the Port Access Road. Existing Exit 218 (Sпруill Avenue) will be removed to accommodate the new interchange (the new interchange will reconstruct Exit 218 and access to both I-26 and Spruill Avenue will be maintained). Existing Exit 217 (Meeting Street) will be reconstructed however, the location and configuration of this interchange will generally be the same and the connection point to Meeting Street will remain at the current location.⁵ All interchange ramps have a design speed of 45 mph (i.e. posted speed of 35 mph).

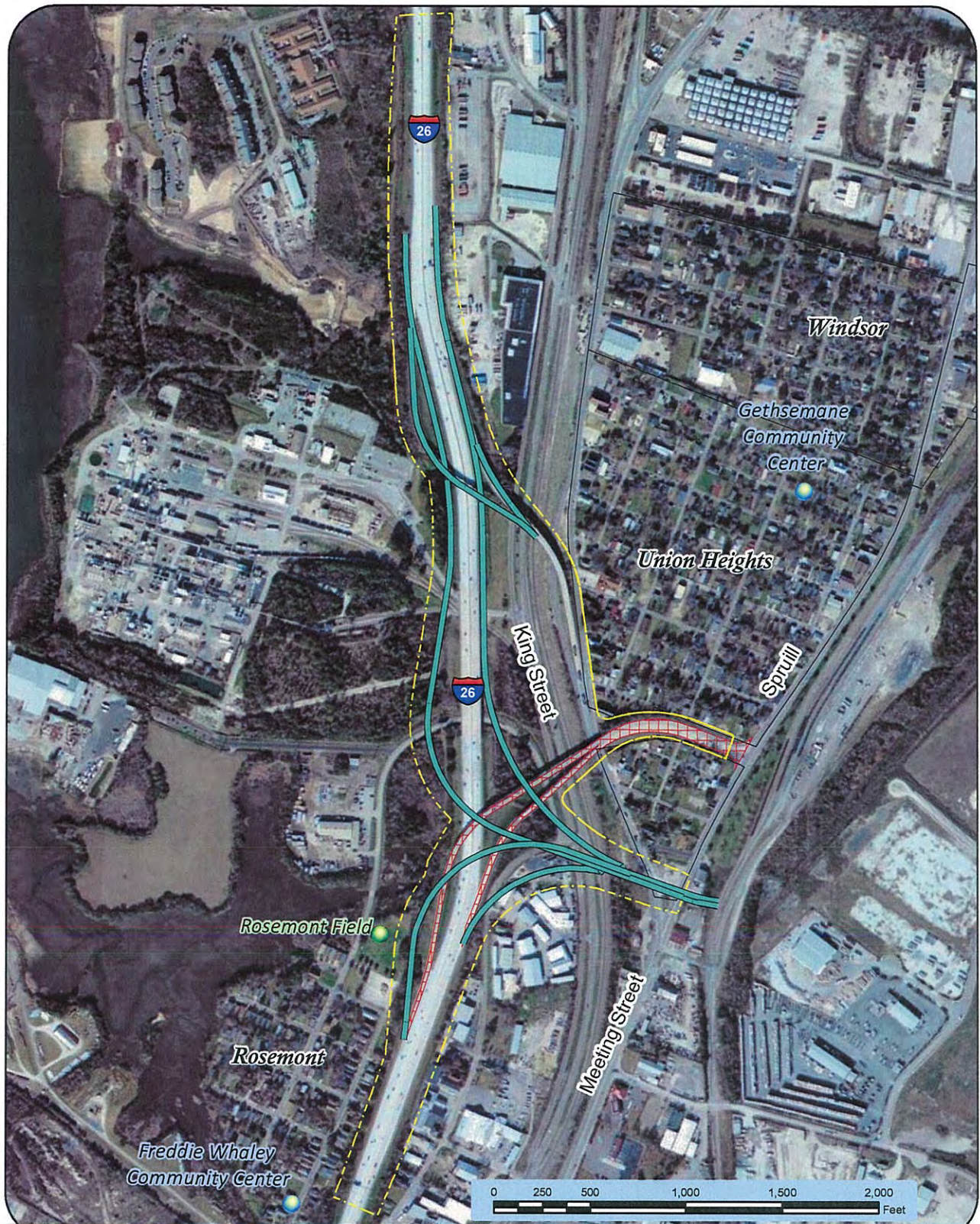
The functional design of the new I-26 interchange includes collector-distributor roads between Exit 217 and Exit 218, which allows a single, combined merge point with westbound I-26 for both Port Access Road and Meeting Street traffic. Similarly, there is a single exit point for eastbound traffic for both Meeting Street and Port Access Road.

⁴ Parsons Brinkerhoff, I-26/Naval Base Terminal Access Road Interchange, Interchange Modification Report, prepared for SCDOT, May 2012, p.66.

⁵ Access Road Feasibility Study for the CNC Marine Terminal EIS Proposed Alternative, Supplemental Report, November 2006, p.3-4.

The existing partial Spruill Avenue interchange (Exit 218) that only serves traffic movements to and from Charleston will need to be demolished to accommodate the new full-movement Port Access Road interchange. To accommodate the traffic movements from the eliminated Spruill Avenue ramps, the new Port Access Road design provides a new half-diamond interchange just north of the future Macalloy Industrial Park site with a new Local Access Road connecting to the north with Spruill Avenue at Stromboli Avenue and with Bainbridge Avenue just south of Viaduct Road. The Local Access Road will also have a connection to the south to Tidewater Road to provide an employee-only entrance for the NBT and access to and from the Cooper River Marina. This half-diamond interchange will also provide access to the future Macalloy Industrial Park.⁶

⁶ Parsons Brinkerhoff, *I-26/Naval Base Terminal Access Road Interchange, Interchange Modification Report*, prepared for SCDOT, May 2012, p.11.



- - - - Study Area Boundary
- Proposed Ramps
- ▨ Ramps to be removed



Port Access Road Interchange Design **Figure 2**
PORT ACCESS ROAD INTERCHANGE AT I-26
Environmental Assessment

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The environmental impacts of the resources for the Preferred Alternative are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2
Proposed Interchange Alternatives Matrix

	Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1D)	No-Build Alternative
Purpose and Need	Meets	Does not Meet
Neighborhood impacts	2	3
Commercial Relocations	6	0
Residential Relocations	1	0
EJ Block Groups	3	3
Total Wetland Acres	0.057 acre	0
Critical Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species (Y/N)	No	No
Historic buildings/Site Impacts (#/type)	0	0
4 f impacts (Y/N)	No	No
Noise		
Residential impacts (#)	52	52
Recreation Areas	2	2
Empty Lots	1	1
Hazardous Materials Sites	12	0

Impacts Summary

This section includes a summary of the potential environmental effects of the project. Expanded discussion regarding the probable impacts on the environment is included in **Section 4** of the approved Environmental Assessment.

Relocations/Right-of-Way Impacts

There are 22 tracts making up 14 properties which are considered as relocations. Of the 14 properties, four of the relocations are identified as billboards, three as personal property, six businesses, and one residential relocation. The amounts of right of way required from each site would vary from minor amounts to total takes.

The relocation program was conducted in accordance with the *Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970*, as amended (Public Law 91-646, as amended by 100-17; 49 CFR Part 24).

Farmland

The project has been assessed under the provisions of the Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981. As a result of this analysis, it was determined that the project area is located within the incorporated limits of

the City of North Charleston and is presently highly developed with urban and commercial land uses. Therefore, the Farmland Protection Policy Act does not apply, and no further studies are required.

Floodplains

Based on the preliminary hydrology analysis completed on August 28, 2012, the proposed project should to achieve a "No-Rise" certification (refer to the Bridge Replacement Scoping Trip Risk Assessment Form in Appendix A). The proposed project is not a crossing a water body, and the interchange would be located over the 100-year floodplain that is based on hurricane storm surge from the Atlantic Ocean. Any fill or bridge piers needed for the proposed project would have minimal effects to the 100-year floodplain.

Detailed hydrologic studies would be completed during future design phases of the project, as required by 23 CFR Part 650, Subpart A, Location Floodplains, as well as coordination with the Charleston County Flood Administrator to ensure that the project will meet state and federal requirements.

Wetlands and Streams

For this analysis, USACE-approved wetland boundaries were obtained from an approved wetland jurisdictional determination associated with USACE Permit Number 2005 1N-440 that was issued in April 2007. The jurisdictional wetlands observed within the study area were identified as freshwater marsh and salt marsh.

Along the west side of the proposed project, just northwest of the point where I-26 crosses Austin Avenue, a small (approximately 0.7 acre) isolated wetland that is transitional between a typical freshwater marsh community and more of a shrub and tree dominated wetland habitat was identified.

A small, approximately 0.32 acre, area of tidal marsh occurs along the west side of the proposed project, between Austin Avenue and the ramp from Spruill Avenue to I-26.

No streams occur within the project area, but a small section of a tidally influenced ditch approximately 115 feet in length occurs within the limits of the wetland determination that was provided for the project. This ditch drains into the salt marsh described above. No other non-wetland waters of the U.S. are depicted on the approved wetland determination.

Based on preliminary construction limits, the proposed project would result in 0.057 acre of clearing and grubbing impact to the isolated freshwater marsh wetland described above. A small portion of the tidally influenced ditch and a small portion of the salt marsh would be crossed by an interchange ramp associated with the proposed project, but the ramp would be elevated, would be supported by piers, and would span these jurisdictional areas without impacting them.

Required Permits and Mitigation

Environmental permits and/or certifications from both state and federal regulatory agencies would be needed for the construction of the Preferred Alternative. Permits are required for activities that are located in or affect waters of the United States, which includes jurisdictional wetlands.

The proposed project was included in the Section 404 Permit for the Port Access Roadway, which was issued April 2007 (USACE Permit Number 2005 1N-440). Mitigation for the 0.057 acre of impact to the freshwater marsh wetland from the proposed project is being provided by debiting credits from the SCDOT's Black River Mitigation Bank as part of the Port Access Roadway project.

The SCDHEC-OCRM issued a Section 401 Water Quality Certification, Critical Area Permit, and Coastal Zone Consistency Determination in November 2006 (P/N 2005 1N-440), which was modified in a supplemental decision in February 2007. The proposed project was included as part of this certification.

Threatened and/or Endangered Species

Based on a review conducted using the USFWS' Critical Habitat Mapper utility, no designated critical habitats for listed species occur within 10 miles of the project area.⁷ A Geographic Information Systems dataset detailing documented occurrences of federally listed species was also obtained from the SCDNR Heritage Trust Program. According to this dataset, which was last updated on June 15, 2012, there are no documented occurrences of federally protected species within the study area.

Of the 21 species listed for Charleston County by the USFWS, ten are found in marine or subtidal estuarine aquatic habitats. Three additional species, sea-beach amaranth, the red knot, and the piping plover, require beachfront dune habitat (see species marked with "b" in table). No marine, subtidal estuarine, or beachfront dune habitats exist in the study area; therefore, no further discussion of these species is necessary.

No potential habitat for American chaffseed, Canby's dropwort, Pondberry, Bachman's warbler, Red-cockaded woodpecker, the frosted flatwoods salamander was identified within the project corridor; suitable foraging habitat for the bald eagle occurs east and west of the proposed project within the Ashley River and the Cooper River, but these waterbodies will not be affected by the proposed project. A small amount of tidal marsh that is suitable foraging habitat for the wood stork occurs within the limits of the proposed project however, given the amount of urbanization, development, and human activity in the vicinity of the proposed project, it is highly unlikely that the tidal marsh habitat within the limits of the proposed project would be a significant foraging site for wood storks. No suitable nesting habitat for the wood stork occurs in the limits of the proposed project. Therefore, it is determined that the project will have a biological conclusion of "no effect" on any of these species.

Essential Fish Habitat

EFH in waters of the study area consists of tidal salt-marsh and adjoining tidally influenced waters. The portion of the study area that contains EFH is limited to a small area of salt-marsh wetlands located between Austin Avenue and I-26, north of Peace Street. The other wetland within the study area, which is located north of Austin Avenue on the west side of I-26, is an isolated freshwater wetland. Because it is isolated and non-tidal, it is not considered essential fish habitat.

The proposed project would not result in direct impacts to the EFH within the tidal marsh associated with an un-named tidal tributary to the Ashley River and the tidally influenced ditch between Austin Avenue and I-26. The portion of the wetland area that is within the limits of the proposed project would be crossed by an elevated ramp that would span the jurisdictional wetland limits; therefore only minor

⁷ Ibid.

shading would occur. Because the elevated ramp would be situated along the southeastern edge of the salt marsh and would range from 20 to 26 feet above the marsh, shading would occur from mid-morning to mid-day. Pilings would not be placed within the salt marsh, but would be immediately adjacent to them. To minimize the potential for noise impacts to fish species, these could be driven during low tide periods. If these areas were to be disturbed during construction, EFH impacts could occur due to disturbance of sediment that could affect the adjacent salt-marsh and un-named tidal creek. No direct EFH impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed project therefore coordination with NOAA-NMFS is not required. However, an on-site meeting was held on March 18, 2013 and NMFS indicated that due to the fact the wetlands are of poor quality and would be spanned, they have no EFH impact concerns. If as the project moves forward it becomes apparent that impacts to the salt marsh would result from construction of the interchange, coordination with NOAA-NMFS would be initiated at that time.

Noise

Noise level projections were conducted for the 2035 No-Build and 2035 Build scenarios and compared to existing noise levels. In the existing 2009 scenario, noise levels approached or exceeded the FHWA noise abatement criteria of 66 dBA at 50 receptors representing 47 residences, one baseball field and one picnic area; in addition, noise levels approached or exceeded the NAC of 66 dBA at one receiver representing 3 empty lots. The existing noise levels ranged from 51.7 dBA to 74.4 dBA.

In the future 2035 No-Build scenario, noise levels approached or exceeded the FHWA noise abatement criteria of 66 dBA at 55 receptors representing 52 residences, one baseball field and one picnic area; in addition, noise levels approached or exceeded the NAC of 66 dBA at one receiver representing 3 empty lots. The predicted noise levels ranged from 52.4 dBA to 75.1 dBA.

The future 2035 Build scenario, noise levels approached or exceeded the FHWA noise abatement criteria of 66 dBA at 55 receptors representing 52 residences, one baseball field and one picnic area; in addition, noise levels approached or exceeded the NAC of 66 dBA at one receiver representing 3 empty lots. The predicted noise levels ranged from 52.0 dBA to 75.2 dBA.

Table 3
Summary of Impacted Receivers

NAC Category	Land Use Type	NAC Criteria dBA	Impacted Receivers			Impact Type (Build)
			2009 Existing	2035 No-Build	2035 Build	
B	Residences	66	47	52	52	Sound Level
C	Recreation Area	66	2	2	2	Sound Level
C	Empty Lots	66	1	1	1	Sound Level

Noise Abatement

As part of the Record of Decision (ROD) for Port EIS project a noise barrier was identified as part of the compensatory mitigation for residences in the Rosemont neighborhood. Based on the preliminary study completed by SCDOT thus far, SCDOT agrees, that highway traffic noise abatement measures in the form of a barrier (Barrier 1) is warranted. Barrier 1 is located along the southwestern lanes of I-26, beginning

at Hagood Street and extending approximately 2,119 feet northwest along I-26, near Rosemont Field in Rosemont neighborhood. A final design including the installation of the abatement measure will be made upon completion of the project's design build phase of project development.

Cultural Resources

The architectural survey conducted for the project in 2005 identified all historic resources that could potentially be affected by the project. Based on the results of the original survey (Poplin et al 2005) and the 2013 review, it was determined that no historic properties would be affected by the project. Due to the amount of time that had lapsed since the original cultural resources survey, SCDOT contacted the SHPO and the Catawba Indian Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office (CIN-THPO) in an effort to evaluate the validity of the survey. Based on a review of the original survey report and the project's Area of Potential Effects, the Department concluded that no additional survey was necessary and that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed undertaking. The CIN-THPO and SHPO concurred with the Department's findings on March 21, 2013 and March 22, 2013 respectively.

Section 4(f) Resources

There is one public park and recreational facility that is publicly-owned in the project area, Rosemont Field, and no wildlife/waterfowl refuges.

"The City of Charleston entered into a lease agreement with Liquid Transport Corporation for property in which Rosemont Field is located. The lease agreement states, "in the event that the premises shall be taken for public use by the city, state federal government, public authority or other corporation having the power of eminent domain, then this Lease shall terminate...."

Therefore, Section 4(f) is not applicable for this resource.

Hazardous Material Impacts

A Phase I environmental site assessment was completed for the Port Access Road, which included the proposed interchange. This environmental site assessment revealed a total of twelve sites containing 23 tracts of land that were identified within the project study area. Of the twelve sites, three have been identified on regulator databases, and nine were identified as sites of environmental concerns due to historic uses. These twelve sites have been identified as being impacted by the proposed right of way (ROW) and are described in **Table 4**.

Table 4
Potentially Impacted Hazardous Materials Sites

Tract	Site Name	Address	Description of Activity	Type of Impact
1/66	Swift Agri-Chem Corporation	See Map	Brownfields, VCP, CERCLIS, SHWS, GWCI, FINDS, and Allsites database	Minor ROW required
4/4A/4B 4C/4D	Rhodia and Mobile Chemical Company	See Map	GWCI, , LUST, UST RCR, Spills, Corraacts, ARIS, CERC-NFRAP, SHWS, SSTS, RCRA-LQG, TRIS, and RCRA TSDF	Minor ROW required from 4 and 4A and all the remaining parcels will be total takes.
5/68	Van Ness Sign & Leasing Site	See Map	Brownfields, VCP, SHWS, and Allsites database	Minor ROW required
6	Gas tank	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
9/10/11	Southern Chemical and Professional Carpet Sales	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
20	Machine shop	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
22	Automobile junk yard/ auto shop	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
24	Gasoline station	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
25	Repair shop	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
26	Atlantic Pest Control Company	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
28/61	Truck repair shop	See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required
1/2/3		See Map	Historical	Minor ROW required

Source: Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Port Access Road, North Charleston, South Carolina, January, 2011, S&ME Project No. 1131-08-554

A Phase II Environmental Site Assessment has been initiated and according to a memo dated June 29, 2012 (see Appendix E) sampling has occurred at 26 locations. Currently all of the sample locations have been within SCDOT right of way. Sampling at a majority of the properties impacted by the proposed interchange including both the Rhodia and Rick Bybee sites have not been completed due to accessibility and/or other issues. At this time in project development construction impacts are preliminary and these sites will need to be kept in mind as the project develops. The Phase II progress should be continued to be tracked throughout project development and be made a part of the construction documents.

Should previously unknown contamination be discovered as the project moves forward, the contamination (contaminated soil and/or groundwater within the right of way) would be removed and properly disposed of prior to the initiation of construction activities at that site.

Air Quality Impacts

The study area is located in Charleston County, which is currently in attainment for all NAAQS criteria pollutant standards.⁸ Section 176(c) of the CAA requires that proposed projects by federal agencies conform to their respective State Implementation Plans. However, if the proposed project is located

⁸ USEPA, Office of Air and Radiation, "Green Book: Currently Designated Nonattainment Areas for All Criteria Pollutants," <http://www.epa.gov/air/oagps/greenbk/ancl3.html> (August 26, 2012).

entirely within an attainment area, then a general conformity analysis is not required by the CAA. Therefore, the conformity requirements would not apply to the proposed project.

In addition to regulation of "criteria" pollutants, the FHWA provides guidance on addressing mobile source air toxics (MSATs) in the environmental review process for highway projects. For the Preferred Alternative, the amount of MSAT emitted would be proportional to the vehicle miles traveled (VMT), assuming that other variables such as fleet mix are the same for each alternative. The VMT estimated for the Preferred Alternative is slightly higher than that for the No-Build Alternative, because the interchange would facilitate new development that attracts trips that would not otherwise occur in the area. This increase in VMT means MSAT under the Preferred Alternative would probably be higher than the No-Build Alternative in the study area. There could also be localized differences in MSAT from indirect effects of the project such as associated access traffic, emissions of evaporative MSAT (e.g., benzene) from parked cars, and emissions of diesel particulate matter from delivery trucks (modify depending on the type and extent of the associated development). Travel to other destinations would be reduced with subsequent decreases in emissions at those locations.

For the Preferred Alternative, emissions are virtually certain to be lower than present levels in the design year as a result of EPA's national control programs that are projected to reduce annual MSAT emissions by 83 percent from 1999 to 2050. Local conditions may differ from these national projections in terms of fleet mix and turnover, VMT growth rates, and local control measures. However, the magnitude of the EPA-projected reductions is so great (even after accounting for VMT growth) that MSAT emissions in the study area are likely to be lower in the future than they are today.

The interchange ramps planned as part of the proposed project would have the effect of providing traffic a method for connecting to the interstate that does not use local streets; thereby moving traffic away from most nearby communities. However, there may be localized areas where ambient concentrations of MSAT would be higher with the Preferred Alternative due to the new interchange ramps being constructed to replace the existing ramps on Spruill Avenue currently located approximately 700 feet to the north of the proposed interchange on Meeting Street. The localized differences in MSAT concentrations would likely be most pronounced along the existing roadway sections of Spruill Avenue and Meeting Street near the existing and proposed interchanges under the Preferred Alternative. However, the magnitude and the duration of these potential increases cannot be reliably quantified due to incomplete or unavailable information in forecasting project-specific MSAT health impacts. Further, overall future MSAT are expected to be substantially lower than today due to implementation of EPA's vehicle and fuel regulations.

Socio-Economic Impacts

The proposed project would result in travel benefits to the existing neighborhoods and to the region. It would also support future jobs and industry in the area. Although the Preferred Alternative would have a minimal impact on nearby housing conditions, the potential adverse impacts have been minimized to the degree practicable during the planning phases of the proposed project. The removal of the Exit 217 ramps will reduce the amount of through traffic cutting through the neighborhoods. In addition, the removal of these ramps could help reunite the southern portion of the Union Heights neighborhood that is currently split by the I-26 on/off ramp. In addition, the transportation improvement and redevelopment benefit for the local communities would help to offset these impacts.

Environmental Justice

The construction of the Preferred Alternative would require some land acquisition. SCDOT and FHWA regulations provide for fair and equitable compensation for necessary property acquisition. The majority of the affected land parcels consist of commercial and light industrial properties, as well as several vacant properties. The Preferred Alternative would not divide any existing neighborhoods or communities. No residences or community facilities would be directly impacted by the construction of the Preferred Alternative. If relocations were determined to be necessary in the future, they would be conducted in accordance with the *Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970*, as amended (P.L. 91-646, as amended by 100-17; 49 CFR Part 24.205(A)-(F)).

It was determined that the study area meets the criteria set for an environmental justice population. Impacts to this environmental justice population would include a minimal increase in mobile air emissions, increases in noise and light (in terms of sky glow), and changes to the visual character of the area. The visual changes would be considered minimal as the study area and vicinity are developed in similar land uses.

The proposed project would result in travel benefits to the region and would support future job growth and industrial development. In addition, the transportation improvement and redevelopment benefit for the local communities would help to offset these impacts.

Project Coordination

Throughout the development of the project, coordination has occurred with state and federal regulatory and resource agencies. A letter of intent (LOI) announcing the intent of the proposed project were distributed in December 2012. Appendix A of the approved Environmental Assessment includes a detailed distribution list and agency responses letters that were received.

Public Involvement

Numerous opportunities for public involvement and public input were available during the development of the Port EIS study, including:

- One public scoping meeting
- Six public information workshops
- One tour of the Draft EIS
- Six Neighborhood outreach meetings
- One public hearing.

Public Hearing

Following availability of the Environmental Assessment, a Combination Location and Design Public Hearing was advertised and conducted at the Military Magnet Academy, located at 2950 Carner Avenue, North Charleston, South Carolina. Fifty-eight individuals from the public signed the attendance sheets. Four attendees made formal verbal comments. Six (6) written comments were received at the public hearing, and no (0) written comments were received within the 15-day comment period following the public hearing.

The most commonly expressed comment (3) was a request for a noise wall at the Rosemont community. Two (2) comments requested that lighting be limited near the Rosemont community. One comment asked about property and funding available for mitigating impacts to the Union Heights community. One comment expressed concern about construction staging occurring within the Rosemont community. One comment expressed concern about an existing flooding problem at Meeting Street and Spruill Avenue and one comment requested that SCDOT begin right of way acquisition immediately. SCDOT responded in writing to the comments regarding both the Rosemont and Union Heights communities with an explanation that a community mitigation plan was already in place for these communities. SCDOT responded to concerns about flooding at Meeting Street and Spruill Avenue by forwarding the comment to the local maintenance office to look into the problem. SCDOT responded to comments about right of way acquisition by providing information about the scheduling of property acquisitions in the project area.

Agency Comments

The Environmental Assessment was made available for review in accordance with 23 CFR 771.119(d). SC Department of Natural Resources commented that the Environmental Assessment was sufficient in addressing the full range of potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed project and the project would not result in significant impacts to natural resources.

No other agency comments were received.

Project Commitments

The following special commitments have been agreed to by the SCDOT:

Table 5
Project Commitments

Commitment	EA Reference Page(s)
Stormwater control measures, both during construction and post-construction, are required for SCDOT projects constructed in the vicinity of 303(d), TMDL, ORW, tidal, and other sensitive waters in accordance with the SCDOT's MS4 permit.	Section IV: Water Quality, page 30
<p>Construction would be performed to comply with all federal, state, and local laws governing safety, health, and sanitation. Procedures would apply all safeguards, safety devices, protective equipment, and any other action reasonably necessary to protect the life and health of employees on the job, the safety of the public, and the property in connection with the performance of the work. The following items would be utilized, where necessary, to maintain public safety and the flow of traffic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Constructing and maintaining temporary detours, temporary structures, temporary approaches, crossings, and intersections with streets and roads, as well as using aggregates for the maintenance of traffic and water for use as a dust palliative. o Furnishing flaggers, pilot trucks, and drivers. o Furnishing, erecting, and maintaining warning devices such as signs, auxiliary barriers, channelizing devices, hazard warning lights, barricades, flares, and reflective markers. If a street must be closed to traffic, traffic control devices would be illuminated during hours of darkness. 	Section IV: Construction Impacts, page 56.
An erosion control plan would be developed and implemented prior to construction using BMPs that reflect policies contained in 23 CFR 650 B and SCDOT's Supplemental Specifications on Seeding and Erosion Control Measures (August 15, 2001). The plan would incorporate measures to control non-point source impacts. These practices include, but are not limited to: using berms, dikes, silt barriers, and catch basins; vegetating or covering disturbed areas as soon as possible; and conforming to proper clean-up practices.	Section IV: Water Quality, page 28; Construction Impacts, page 56
Contractors will be required to comply with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations concerning noise attenuation devices on construction equipment. Construction activities could be limited during the evening, weekends, and holidays. Storage and staging areas would be located as far from noise sensitive areas as practicable.	Section IV: Construction Impacts, page 55
<p>Dust control will be the responsibility of the contractor and may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Minimizing exposed earth surface o Temporary and permanent seeding and mulching o Watering work and haul areas during dry periods o Covering, shielding, or stabilizing material stockpiles o Using covered haul trucks 	Section IV: Construction Impacts, page 55
All construction waste material generated during clearing, grubbing, and other construction phases would be removed from the project site and burned or disposed of by the contractor in accordance with state and local regulations.	Section IV: Construction, page 56
Although no relocations are anticipated, any relocation would be conducted in accordance with the <i>Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970</i> , as amended. Relocation resources will be available to all relocates without discrimination.	Section IV: Relocations, page 49

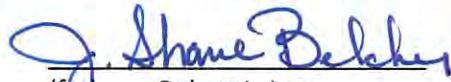
Should previously unknown contamination be discovered as the project moves forward, the contamination (Contaminated soil and/or groundwater within the right of way) would be removed and properly disposed of prior to initiation of construction activities at that site.	Section IV: Hazardous Materials and Underground Storage Tanks, page 45
Should any Native American artifacts and/or human remains be located during ground disturbing activities, SCDOT will notify the Catawba Indian Nation.	THPO letter, 10/10/12

FHWA Decision

The FHWA has determined that this project will have no significant impact on the human environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the Environmental Assessment and other supporting information, which have been independently evaluated by the FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. The Environmental Assessment provided sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope and content of the Environmental Assessment and other environmental documentation for this project.

Date:

8/8/13


(for) Robert L. Lee

FHWA Division Administrator