Since the early 1970’s, the original plan for the Mark Clark Expressway included a connection between West Ashley, Johns Island, and James Island. In order to complete this plan, the voters of Charleston County approved a transportation half-cent sales tax in November 2004 and applied for and received funding from the South Carolina Transportation Infrastructure Bank (SIB) in 2006. Today, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) will move this important project forward through the planning phase with a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), with the eventual goal of acquiring right-of-way and construction.

The proposed completion of I-526 will add approximately seven miles of new roadway between its current endpoint at US 17 (Savannah Highway) and the James Island Expressway Interchange at Folly Road. Charleston County proposes to construct a multi-lane, controlled-access roadway with a grade-separated interchange at Maybank Highway (SC 700) and two bridges over the Stono River.

In association with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Charleston County and the SIB, the SCDOT will develop the EIS, a process that will include looking at alternatives and comparing the impacts on both the natural and human environment. Efforts will be focused on public involvement and communication to ensure the successful development of the environmental process. Due to the major roles state and federal resource and regulatory agencies play, the project team will work closely with them in completing the environmental review process.

**What is an EIS?**

The FHWA NEPA process allows transportation officials to make project decisions that balance engineering and transportation needs with social, economic, and natural environmental factors. During the process, a wide range of partners including the public, businesses, interest groups, and agencies at all levels of government, provide input into project and environmental decisions.

NEPA requires Federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major Federal actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. An EIS is a full disclosure document that details the process through which a project is developed, the consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives, the potential impacts of the alternatives, and compliance with applicable environmental laws.

The EIS document consists of:

- a description of the project,
- the purpose and need for the project,
- an analysis of possible alternatives for the project,
- studies of the existing human and natural environment,
- a summary of potential effects on the environment that each alternative may have,
- identification of a preferred alternative,
- a summary of public involvement, input, and comments,
- and a summary of coordination efforts with resource and regulatory agencies.

### The EIS Process Flow Chart

**Scoping**
Gather comments from the public and federal and state agencies to identify potential issues.

**Purpose and Need**
Define the problems to address and the goals the project will accomplish.

**Develop Alternatives**
Identify potential alignments that meet the purpose and need of the project.

**Study Environmental Impacts**
Consider the existing human and natural environment and how each alternative may impact the area.

**Field Studies**
The project team conducts field studies of the preferred alternative and makes adjustments to the project according to the findings and comments from the public.

**Draft EIS**
A report presented to the public that discusses the alternatives studied and the impacts they may cause and identifies the preferred alternative.

**Public Hearings**
Opportunity for the public to review and discuss the findings of the EIS and the recommended preferred alternative.

**Public Review and Comment**
A 45-day period during which the public may submit comments on the Draft EIS.

**Final EIS**
A report that addresses agency and public comments, documents potential environmental impacts of the preferred alternative and presents how these impacts shall be mitigated.

**Record of Decision (ROD)**
Documents the final decision and summarizes mitigation measures to be implemented into the project.

**What is a Scoping Meeting?**
The purpose of the public scoping meeting is to introduce the project to the public, gather initial comments from the public, identify the needs for the project and to help identify concerns the public may have about the project or its impact to the human and natural environment.
What environmental issues will be studied?

- Land use
- Communities
- Environmental Justice
- Section 4(f)/6(f) Resources (parks)
- Cultural Resources (historic/archaeological)
- Hazardous Materials
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Construction Impacts
- Farmlands
- Shore erosion and accretion
- Recreation
- Water supply and conservation
- Safety
- Food and fiber production
- Wetlands
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Water Quality
- Floodplains
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Coastal Zone Resources
- Wildlife Refuges
- Energy
- Indirect and Cumulative Impacts
- Conservation
- Economics
- Aesthetics
- Fish and wildlife values
- Navigation
- Mineral needs

What is the difference between a Draft EIS and a Final EIS?

A Draft EIS is a report presented to the public that discusses alternatives that have been studied and their impacts. Upon completion of alternative studies, the Draft EIS recommends a Preferred Alternative. This report is made available for public review at local libraries and at Public Hearings. Public comments are solicited during and immediately after public hearings.

After the Draft EIS Public Hearing, a Final EIS will be developed to study the Preferred Alternative in more detail. At this time, intensive field surveys are conducted on the Preferred Alternative. A detailed analysis of impacts to the environment and communities and mitigation for these impacts is presented in a Final EIS. A Final EIS also includes responses to substantial comments received from the agencies and the public on the Draft EIS.

HOTLINE: 1-888-MCE-I526
(1-888-623-4526)

The project hotline will include a recorded message that will provide information on upcoming project events/meetings, a brief project status and other project contact information. When you call, you may leave a project-related message that will be incorporated into the project file.

Website:
www.scdot.org/I526

Project information can be found on the website. Comments can also be made via the website.

Contact information:
David A. Kinard, P.E.
SCDOT Project Manager
PO Box 191
Columbia, SC 29202-0191

You can find information on the National Environmental Policy Act in the Council on Environmental Quality’s “A Citizens Guide to the NEPA” at the website below:
http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/nepanet.htm

This guide provides an explanation of NEPA, how it is implemented, and how people outside the Federal government — individual citizens, private sector applicants, members of organized groups, or representatives of Tribal, State, or local government agencies — can better participate in the assessment of environmental impacts conducted by Federal agencies.