

EAST → Planning & Environment Linkages (PEL) Study Being Prepared for I-526 LCC EAST

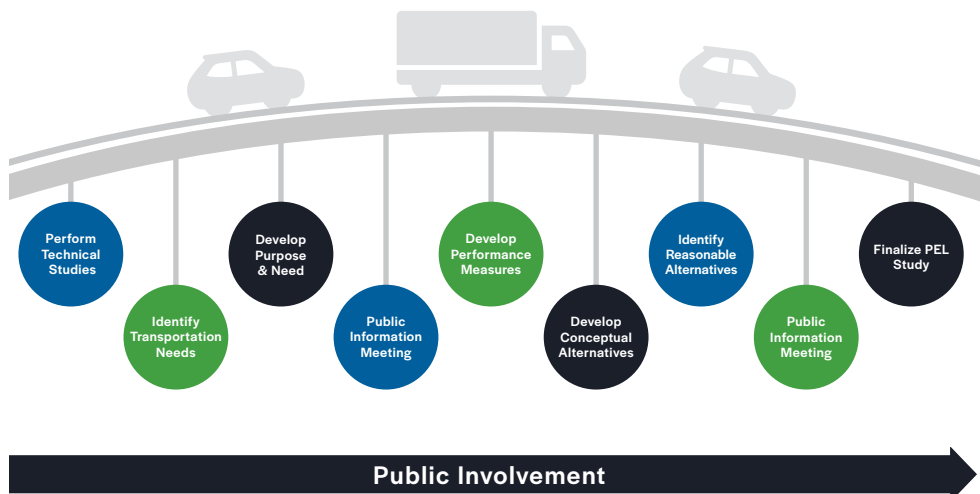
I-526 Lowcountry Corridor EAST (I-526 LCC EAST) project runs from approximately Virginia Avenue in North Charleston to US 17 in Mount Pleasant. Due to the major river crossings along the I-526 LCC EAST corridor, identifying feasible project alternatives and cost estimates are challenging without extensive planning efforts. Additionally, this corridor serves as a major economic connector in the lowcountry, linking the goods that flow to and from South Carolina's busiest port terminal with Interstate 26 and other integral components of the state's freight network. For these reasons, the I-526 LCC EAST project will move forward with a PEL Study. This will allow the project team to extensively study the challenges and

opportunities present in the area, and will allow public engagement regarding possible solutions.

A PEL study is a collaborative approach to decision-making used to identify transportation issues and environmental concerns. This integrated approach considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the planning process and uses this information to streamline the transportation project development and environmental review process. The resulting information of a PEL study will be carried forward into the next phase of the project development process, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

The I-526 LCC EAST PEL study may result in the identification of multiple potential projects, such as intersection improvements or capacity improvements along the corridor, that could be phased and prioritized for implementation. This will help SCDOT understand the potential number of project packages, delivery methods, schedules, and costs to complete the improvements on this corridor.

I-526 LCC EAST PEL Study Process



PEL Study Benefits

As described by FHWA, potential benefits of a PEL study include:

- ▶ Improved sharing of information
- ▶ Elimination of duplicative efforts in planning and NEPA processes
- ▶ Improved communication and stronger relationships
- ▶ Early consultation and collaboration among stakeholders to identify potential impacts
- ▶ Accelerated project delivery
- ▶ Better environmental outcomes
- ▶ Timely permit decisions
- ▶ Mutually beneficial outcomes

For More Information Visit:

www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_initiatives/pel.aspx

I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST: Where We've Been

WEST



Left: Joy Riley presents at a speakers bureau event in summer of 2017. Right: Check-in table at a Community Meeting.

The I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST (I-526 LCC WEST) will host a public information meeting on November 21, 2019 at the Charleston Area Convention Center. As we look ahead to this meeting in which alternatives will be presented to the public, we thought a look back at how we arrived at this point was important.

The I-526 LCC WEST project was born out of a 2013 planning study—the I-526 Lowcountry Corridor Analysis project. The purpose of this study was to evaluate potential approaches for improving traffic flow through the corridor. While this report included conceptual interchange and road widening alternatives, these were only evaluated from a traffic analysis standpoint.

Enter the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. In January 2016, the I-526 LCC WEST, initially called the 526 Lowcountry Corridor (Phase I), began the NEPA process to conduct an

Environmental Assessment along existing I-526 between Paul Cantrell Boulevard in West Ashley to Rivers Avenue in North Charleston.

Shortly thereafter, the newsletter, website, and social media were launched, and the first round of community, stakeholder, and local business meetings were held (July, October 2016).



Above: Community members engage in dialogue at a West Ashley Community Meeting.

Key issues raised included congestion and safety. Additional analysis conducted during this time included: traffic

studies; a survey for historic buildings and archeological sites; environmental studies; a hazardous materials study; and a topographical conditions study.

Following this initial level of analysis, the public was invited to participate in a virtual public meeting (October 2016.) During this time, several other local and regional planning efforts were underway, such as the I-26 Corridor Management Plan which includes consideration of managed lanes along I-526. Since these studies were in various stages of completion, the I-526 LCC WEST project's schedule was revised so the results of these transportation planning efforts could be part of the alternatives development and the NEPA documentation processes.

In the spring of 2018, the I-526 Lowcountry Corridor EAST project (formerly known as Phase II) was announced, extending along existing I-526, east from the Rivers Avenue interchange to US 17 in Mount Pleasant.

I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST: Where We've Been (Continued)

Initial studies showed severe congestion and safety concerns around the North Rhett/Virginia Avenue interchange resulting in revisions to both projects' limits to ensure the areas with the greatest challenges would be prioritized. I-526 LCC WEST would now extend from Paul Cantrell Boulevard in West Ashley to Virginia Avenue in North Charleston (as opposed to Rivers Avenue), and the I-526 LCC EAST project would pick up there instead. Additionally, the I-526 LCC WEST project was elevated to an Environmental Impact Statement. The project purpose was refined: to increase capacity and improve operations at the I-26/I-526 interchange and along the I-526 mainline from Paul Cantrell Boulevard to Virginia Avenue.

The upcoming public information meeting will provide the results of this extensive work to date and ask for your feedback on the purpose and need, the roadway improvement concepts (draft reasonable alternatives), community impacts, and more.



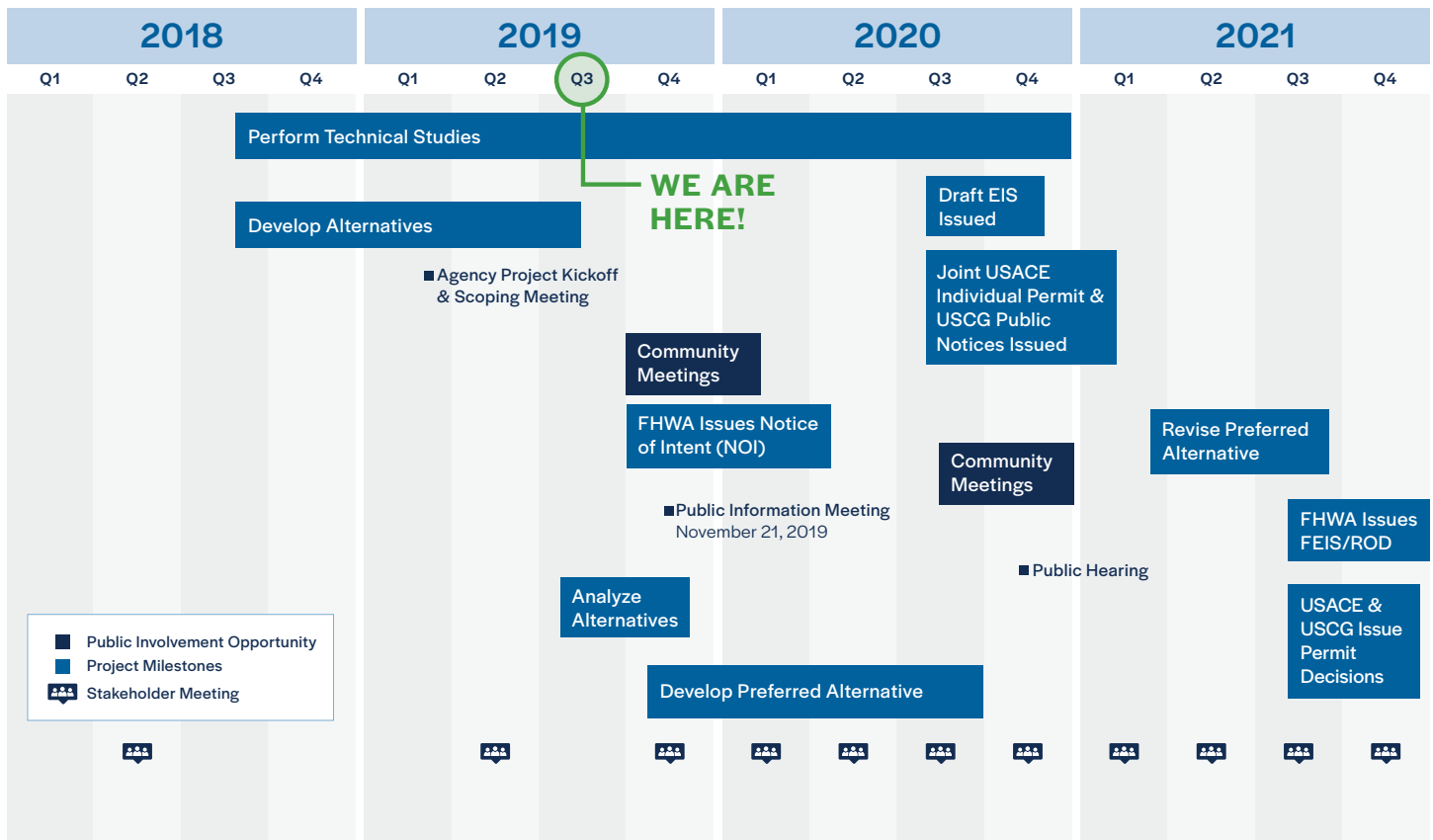
Above: Joy Riley speaks at a West Ashley Community Meeting.

Upcoming I-526 LCC WEST Public Information Meetings:

- ▶ **November 21, 2019 from 11 AM – 7 PM at the Charleston Area Convention Center**
- ▶ **Virtual Online Public Information Meeting will be available mid-November through January 4, 2020**



I-526 LCC WEST Timeline



* Current Schedule. Subject To Change.

Understanding Right-Of-Way Acquisition

Frequently Asked Questions

When SCDOT builds or improves roads and bridges, we often have to acquire property, known as right-of-way, or ROW. We have uniform practices for conducting property acquisitions, providing relocation assistance, and preparing appraisals. We follow the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policies Act of 1970, which protects property owners' rights and ensures everyone is treated fairly and equitably during property acquisitions. Below includes several Frequently Asked Questions about ROW Acquisition. For more, visit our project website at 526lowcountrycorridor.com/west/faqs/ and watch our new video explaining this process!

Q: What is the process for determining the project footprint and which homes/businesses will be impacted by the project?

A: SCDOT roadway and bridge improvement projects are planned and developed through an extensive environmental review process, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). During this environmental review process, SCDOT performs environmental and community surveys and evaluates all the potential project alternatives that could be considered to meet the purpose and need of the highway improvements. The new right of way is established by standard offsets from proposed bridges, roadway fills, and drainage facilities that are required for SCDOT maintenance and service operations, as well as for incorporating modern design and safety standards into the proposed improvements. SCDOT seeks to find the project alternative that strikes the best balance between meeting the transportation needs and minimizing the impacts to the natural and human environments.

Community impacts, such as right-of-way impacts and property owner relocations, are considered as a part of the NEPA process. The public and potential impacted communities will be engaged throughout the NEPA process to gather input on the proposed project alternatives.

Q: When does the ROW process start?

A: The ROW acquisition process does not typically start until the NEPA process is completed and a NEPA decision has been issued by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), who is overseeing the project. If a build alternative is selected, SCDOT will develop the final ROW plans for the project. Once ROW plans are finalized, the plans will be provided to the SCDOT ROW agents and ROW acquisition activities would begin. In some cases, FHWA will allow an early ROW phase of work for complex project corridors with significant ROW impacts anticipated. SCDOT is currently seeking funding for an Early ROW phase on this project due to the complexity.

Q: How are you looking to minimize residential and commercial displacements along the I-526 LCC WEST corridor?

A: Finding the right balance between the project footprint and displacements is one of the most difficult challenges to any roadway project. SCDOT is minimizing ROW impacts through design by:

- ▶ Widening to the inside of the roadway first
- ▶ Bridges and retaining walls are being proposed through developed areas to greatly reduce the impacts that would be incurred with the use of a more cost-effective roadway section of fill
- ▶ Proposed roadway alignments have been located away from private properties as much as possible while still allowing for a safe and sufficient operating roadway to be built
- ▶ Minimum offsets from existing structures are being used that will still allow for construction and maintenance of traffic during construction to occur

Contact Us:

We Want to Hear from You!



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Your comments and suggestions are important to the development of a quality transportation project. We have multiple ways for you to stay informed about upcoming project-related events and information updates.



Website

[Visit](#) our website to join our mailing lists, stay up to date, and get notified of public involvement opportunities.



Social Media

Follow us on our social media channels for regular updates at @526Corridor on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).



Mail

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Text / SMS

Text 1526 to 555.888 for project updates via text message.



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