

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations state that agencies must “make diligent efforts to involve the public in preparing and implementing their NEPA procedures.”¹

For the development of this project, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) coordinated with the following three distinct groups to ensure meaningful involvement and input:

- Federal, state, and local agencies
- The public
- Stakeholders, including public officials, business owners, and other groups with an interest in this project

Public and agency involvement are critical components of the transportation planning process.

This chapter describes the initial and continuous efforts to engage with these three groups. Engaging these groups at the very early stages helps ensure decisions consider and benefit public needs and preferences, while developing potential alternatives for the proposed project area.

6.1 What are the Goals and Objectives of Resource and Regulatory Agency Involvement?

Effective interagency coordination is the key to achieving environmentally responsible transportation decisions.² To meet this goal, SCDOT and FHWA have invited federal and state agencies to be involved in the project as cooperating or participating agencies.

6.1.1 Who are the Lead Agencies and what are Their Responsibilities?

FHWA and SCDOT are the Joint Lead Agencies and share the responsibility of identifying the status and level of involvement of other agencies during the environmental process. This includes the identification of cooperating and participating agencies.

23 United States Code (USC) Part 139 also requires the Lead Agency to:

- Establish a plan for agency and public participation in the review process
- After consultation and concurrence of each cooperating and participating agency, set a schedule for the review process, including deadlines for agency and public comments
- Involve the cooperating and participating agencies in the development of the purpose and need, the alternatives analysis and development, and the designation of a Preferred Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality Regulation requires a Lead Federal Agency to oversee the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and that Cooperating Agencies be identified.³

1 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1506.6(a)

2 FHWA https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/nepa/trans_decisionmaking.aspx, 1/6/2020

3 40 CFR 1501.5

6.1.2 What are the Cooperating and Participating Agencies?

The roles and responsibilities of cooperating and participating agencies are similar. However, cooperating agencies have a higher degree of authority, responsibility, and involvement in the environmental review process.

Cooperating agencies are agencies with jurisdiction by law or by virtue of special expertise.⁴ They are to identify information needed to complete their review, limit their comments to their areas of expertise, make personnel and/or expertise available to the Lead Agency, and complete their reviews following the prearranged project schedule. Refer to Table 6.1 for the Cooperating Agencies for this project.

Participating agencies are identified as those federal, state, tribal, regional, and local agencies with an interest in the project and who have specific responsibilities in the process. Participating agencies, identified in accordance with 23 USC Part 139, provide information and identify and resolve issues. Refer to Table 6.2 for the Participating Agencies for this project.

Table 6.1 Cooperating Agencies

Agency	Primary Responsibility	Contact Person	Contact Information
US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Jurisdictional Area Determination and Section 404/10 Permitting; Wetlands and Streams Expertise	Lt. Col. Jeffrey Palazzini Travis Hughes Amanda Heath Richard Darden	Travis.G.Hughes@usace.army.mil 843-329-8046 Amanda.L.Heath@usace.army.mil 843-329-8025 Richard.L.Darden@usace.army.mil 843-329-8043
US Coast Guard (USCG)	Navigational Permitting for Bridges	Barry Dragon Randall Overton	Barry.Dragon@uscg.mil 305-415-6743 Randall.D.Overton@uscg.mil 305-415-6736
National Park Service (NPS)	Review and Concurrence of any Section 6(f) Conversion	Alexis John	Alexis_John@nps.gov 404-507-5834

Table 6.2 Participating Agencies

Agency	Primary Responsibility	Contact Person	Contact Information
Federal Agencies			
US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act, Fish & Wildlife Coordination Act Consultations; Wetlands and Streams Expertise	Tom McCoy Mark Caldwell	Thomas_McCoy@fws.gov 843-727-4707 x227 Mark_Caldwell@fws.gov 843-727-4707 x215
US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)	NEPA/Environmental Justice Review; Section 404, Section 401, Water Quality	Ntale Kajumba Alya Singh-White Kelly Laycock	Kajumba.Ntale@epa.gov Singh-White.Alya@epa.gov 404-562-9339 Laycock.Kelly@epa.gov 404-562-9132
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries	Essential Fish Habitat	Pace Wilber Cynthia Cooksey	Pace.Wilber@noaa.gov 843-762-8601 Cynthia.Cooksey@noaa.gov 843-460-9922
	Endangered Species Act/Marine	Dr. Roy Crabtree	Roy.Crabtree@noaa.gov
	Section 7	Andrew Herndon	Andrew.Herndon@noaa.gov 727-824-5312
	MMPA	Jaclyn Daly	Jaclyn.Daly@noaa.gov 301-427-8438
	Correspondence	Noah Silverman Richard Fickley	Noah.Silverman@noaa.gov 727-824-5353 Richard.Fickley@noaa.gov 727-551-5705
State Agencies			
South Carolina Department of Archives & History (SCDAH)	Archaeological and Historical Resources Consultation, Section 106 Review	Elizabeth Johnson	EJohnson@scdah.sc.gov 803-896-6168
South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control (SCDHEC); Ocean & Coastal Resource Management (OCRM)	Jurisdiction of Critical Areas, Critical Area Permitting, Air Quality, Section 401 Water Quality, Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Consistency Determinations; Wetlands and Streams Expertise	Chuck Hightower (SCDHEC) Blair Williams (OCRM) Chris Stout (OCRM)	HightoCW@dhec.sc.gov 803-898-0369 WilliaBN@dhec.sc.gov 843-953-0232 StoutCM@dhec.sc.gov 843-953-0691
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR)	State Protected Species; Wetlands and Streams Expertise	Robert H. Boyles, Jr. LoriAnn Riggin Susan Davis	BoylesR@dnr.sc.gov 803-734-4007 RigginL@dnr.sc.gov 803-734-4199 DavisS@dnr.sc.gov 803-953-9003
South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT)	Consultation on Section 6(f) Properties Funded by Land and Water Conservation Fund Act	Justin Hancock	JHancock@scprt.com 803-734-1658
Sovereign Nations			
Catawba Indian Nation	Historic/Cultural Resources Review	Wenonah Haire, THPO Caitlin Totherow	WenonahH@ccppcrafts.com 803-328-2427 x224 CaitlinH@ccppcrafts.com 803-328-2427 x226
Eastern Shawnee Tribe	Historic/Cultural Resources Review	Brett Barnes, THPO	BBarnes@estoo.net 918-666-5151 x1845
Muscogee (Creek) Nation	Historic/Cultural Resources Review	Corain Lowe-Zepeda, THPO LeeAnne Wendt	CLowe@mcn-nsn.gov 918-732-7835 LWendt@mcn-nsn.gov 918-732-7852

6.1.3 How are the Agencies Involved in the Proposed Project?

The Agency Coordination Plan (ACP) establishes the framework for regular communication among the agencies involved in the environmental review process and ensures an interdisciplinary approach to decision-making. More detailed information on the ACP is available in Appendix A.

Effective interagency coordination is the key to achieving environmentally responsible transportation decisions.⁵ Coordination occurs at the following major concurrence points in which the cooperating and participating agencies are offered the opportunity to comment and provide input:

- Agency Coordination Plan/Purpose and Need Statement
- Permitting/Milestone Timetable
- Range of Alternatives/Alternatives Carried Forward
- Preferred Alternative

In addition to coordination at these concurrence points, monthly discussions are held regarding key topics such as draft document review, mitigation, general project concerns, updates on public involvement efforts among others. The permitting timetable, although not an official concurrence point, was reviewed by the agencies and added to the project process. Participating and cooperating agencies should be aware of any changes and cooperating agencies need to approve any changes. Table 6.3 lists the agency meetings conducted as part of the project.

Monthly meetings are scheduled, as necessary, for consultation with the agencies concerning the information needed in the EIS for permitting decisions, the identification of the Proposed Reasonable Alternatives and the designation of a Recommended Preferred Alternative.

Table 6.3 Agency Meetings

Date	Topic	Agencies Participating
3/14/2019	Agency Project Kickoff and Scoping Workshop	USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, SCDHEC, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDAH, SCDNR, SCPRT
4/23/2019	Agency Coordination Plan, Permitting Timetable, Purpose and Need Statement	USACE, USEPA, USFWS, SCDHEC, SCDHEC OCRM
7/10/2019	Agency Meeting to Discuss Permitting Timetable and Agency Milestones	USACE, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDAH, SCDHEC, SCDHEC OCRM, SCPRT
7/25/2019	Follow-up Meeting to Review Milestones Specific to Section 7 and MMPA	NOAA Fisheries
8/14/2019	Alternatives Evaluation Criteria, Alternatives Analysis Process, and Preliminary Range of Alternatives	USACE, USCG, USEPA, NOAA Fisheries, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR
9/11/2019	Mitigation Needs Assessment	USACE, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR, SCPRT
10/9/2019	Initial Alternatives Analysis and Reasonable Range of Alternatives	USACE, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM
10/21/2019	Section 6(f) Process	NPS, SCPRT
11/13/2019	Concurrence Points and Upcoming Milestones	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR, SCPRT
12/9/2019	Section 6(f) Conversion Process	NPS, SCPRT
12/11/2019	Potential Mitigation Options	USACE, USCG, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR
1/8/2020	Public Involvement Update	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR
2/12/2020	Reasonable Alternatives Discussion and the Alternatives Evaluation Process Workshop	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, SCDHEC OCRM
3/11/2020	Project Update and Mitigation Needs Assessment	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR, SCPRT
4/8/2020	DEIS Update and Preliminary Evaluation of Floodplain Mitigation	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDAH, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR, SCPRT
5/13/2020	Review of Recommended Preferred Alternative	USACE, USCG, USEPA, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDAH, SCDHEC, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR, SCPRT
6/10/2020	Project Mitigation Strategy Update	USACE, USEPA, NOAA Fisheries, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDAH
8/12/2020	Section 6(f) Update	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDHEC, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR
9/9/2020	Environmental Justice (EJ) Community Mitigation Plan	USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, NPS, SCDHEC, SCDHEC OCRM, SCDNR, SCPRT

6.1.4 What is the One Federal Decision Process?

The I-526 LCC WEST project follows the One Federal Decision Process, which is a new streamlined environmental process mandated by Executive Order 13807: Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure Projects. Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Implementing One Federal Decision (OFD) Under Executive Order 13807, federal agencies agree to actively participate in environmental reviews and communicate with one another in a structured process that starts early in the project development process so agencies can “identify concerns, raise potential issues early in the review process, and identify solutions.” The MOU also calls for cooperation to accomplish several relevant goals:

- Completion of all environmental reviews and permitting within two years
- Active communication between agencies
- Concurrent reviews
- Development of a permitting timetable
- Commitment to the process and improvements of the process

In addition to the MOU, a Working Agreement was reached between the USACE, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, and FHWA for major infrastructure projects requiring an EIS.

In addition to concurrence points, the aforementioned agencies need to agree in writing to the Agency Coordination Plan (ACP) and the permitting timetable/schedule, per the OFD MOU and Working Agreement. While only cooperating agencies need to concur on the concurrence points above, the lead agencies request concurrence from all participating agencies to ensure that concerns are addressed during the NEPA process. Refer to Table 6.4 for concurrence tracking.

These agencies, along with state natural resource and regulatory agencies, worked together to develop a schedule to streamline the NEPA and permitting processes for this project.

Table 6.4 Agency Concurrence Tracking

Agency	Date of Concurrence
ACP and Purpose and Need	
USACE	June 7, 2019
USCG	June 4, 2019
USEPA	August 19, 2019
USFWS	June 3, 2019
NOAA Fisheries	June 7, 2019 (Request Specific Dates for Table 3-1 in ACP)
NPS	October 9, 2019
SCDAH	June 4, 2019 (No Comment of Purpose and Need)
SCDHEC	No Objection Received
SCDHEC OCRM	No Objection Received
SCDNR	June 3, 2019
SCPRT	June 6, 2019

Table 6.4 Agency Concurrence Tracking (Continued)

Agency	Date of Concurrence
Permitting Timetable and Agency Milestones	
USACE	September 13, 2019
USCG	September 5, 2019
USEPA	August 21, 2019
USFWS	August 20, 2019
NOAA Fisheries	September 3, 2019
NPS	October 9, 2019
SCDAH	August 21, 2019
SCDHEC	No Objection Received
SCDHEC OCRM	No Objection Received
SCDNR	August 22, 2019
SCPRT	June 6, 2019
Proposed Reasonable Alternatives	
USACE	March 27, 2020
USCG	March 26, 2020
USEPA	April 8, 2020
USFWS	March 16, 2020
NOAA Fisheries	March 23, 2020
NPS	April 6, 2020
SCDAH	April 2, 2020
SCDHEC	No Objection Received
SCDHEC OCRM	No Objection Received
SCDNR	March 19, 2020
SCPRT	April 6, 2020
Recommended Preferred Alternative	
USACE	June 19, 2020
USCG	June 8, 2020
USEPA	June 26, 2020
USFWS	June 8, 2020
NOAA Fisheries	June 12, 2020
NPS	June 18, 2020
SCDAH	June 5, 2020
SCDHEC	No Objection Received
SCDHEC OCRM	No Objection Received
SCDNR	June 8, 2020
SCPRT	June 24, 2020

6.2 What are the Goals and Objectives of Public Involvement?

The public involvement effort is intended to establish and maintain communication between the community, SCDOT and FHWA. These lines of communication allow participants to express any issues or concerns regarding the I-526 LCC WEST project. Specific public involvement goals are outlined in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1 Public Involvement Goals

The I-526 LCC WEST Public Involvement Plan (PIP) (Appendix U) details strategies and tools to be used so members of the public receive key information about the project and have opportunities to provide meaningful input on decisions that will affect their community. It was developed to be consistent with public involvement requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice (EJ), and other federal regulations. The PIP outlines methods to engage all segments of the public with intensive outreach focused on residents, small neighborhood businesses, special populations (e.g., low-income and minority neighborhoods), and other stakeholders in and around the proposed project area. It is a living document and is updated regularly as the project progresses.

The EJ Outreach Strategy (Appendix T), provides a detailed action plan for reaching the four potentially impacted EJ neighborhoods: Russelldale, Ferndale, Highland Terrace, and Liberty Park.

6.3 How is the Public Engaged in the Proposed Project?

NEPA encourages meaningful public involvement in decisions affecting the quality of the human and natural environments. An effective public involvement process provides an open exchange of information and ideas between the public and transportation decisionmakers.

The overall objective of a public involvement process is to be proactive, provide complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement.⁶ It also provides opportunities for the agencies to solicit public comments and ideas as well as identify circumstances and impacts which may not have been known or anticipated by public agencies.

6.3.1 What Strategies and Tools are used to Involve the Public and Communicate Information?

Due to the diverse nature of the audiences and the scale of the potential impacts, a selection of both high touch and low touch strategies are implemented to educate the public and solicit appropriate feedback on the project. The key communication tools for this include:

- Community Project office and hotline
- Community Advisory Council
- Meetings: Public, Stakeholder, Community and Pop-up meetings
- Digital: website and social media
- Newsletters
- Speakers Bureau

Figure 6.2 shows an overview of the Public Involvement strategies. For a full list of strategies and tools the project team uses, refer to the Public Involvement Plan in Appendix U.

STRATEGIES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Reach often neglected members of the public by providing information in English and Spanish, where necessary → Use low touch techniques (social media, email blasts, virtual meetings, homeowner’s associations’ email trees, etc.) for populations that are more digitally friendly → Use high touch techniques (flyers, door hangers, neighborhood posters, etc.) which have been found to be effective for minority and low-income areas → Provide assistance (i.e. translated materials, translation), if needed, at community meetings and corridor-wide meetings → Establish a contact matrix to ensure that the community is provided with project information and meeting notifications which will include newsletters, website postings, email blasts and mailings in a timely fashion throughout the different milestones of the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Provide information in a timely manner that is easy to read and understand → Maintain an electronic process that tracks public input in regards to the decision-making process → Use local residents, vendors, and business owners to support the outreach efforts → Ensure that local, city, and county governmental agencies within the project area are informed during every stage of the project → Conduct extensive public outreach efforts to gather input from the communities located within the outreach area of the project → Gather input from areas outside of the outreach area, from people that use the corridor, but may not live or work within the outreach area
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Figure 6.2 Public Involvement Strategies

6.3.1.1 Public Meetings

Public meetings are held to inform and involve the public on the project development process and gather feedback that is integral to the decision-making process. Public meetings held for the project are outlined in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Public Meetings

Date	Type of Meeting	Meeting Goal	Number of Attendees
October 2016	Virtual Meeting	Introduce the public to the project and provide the same information provided at the community meetings	N/A
July 2016 (North Charleston); October 2016 (West Ashley)	Community Meetings	Introduce the public to the project	134
November 2019	Community Drop-ins (4 in North Charleston, 1 in West Ashley)	Meetings in potentially impacted communities to present draft Reasonable Alternatives and potential Right-of-Way impacts	188
November 2019 (virtual through January 31, 2020)	Public Information Meeting, Virtual Public Information Meeting	Project scoping and introduce the purpose and need; provide an update on the alternatives analysis process and how the team arrives there (alternatives evaluation criteria); present the draft reasonable alternatives; explain the SCDOT noise policy, the right-of-way process and the community mitigation plan; receive feedback from the public on the above	223 in person; almost 6,000 page views online

6.3.1.2 Initial Community Meetings and Companion Virtual Public Meeting (Summer/Fall 2016) - Scoping Meetings

A series of eight community meetings were held during July 2016 in North Charleston. An additional community meeting was held in West Ashley in October 2016. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an opportunity for citizens to engage in small, table talks where they could comfortably share their thoughts and ideas regarding the potential I-526 improvements. A corresponding video was made available online as well as a downloadable PDF with basic project information such as study area, capacity, safety, and schedule. The meeting survey was also distributed using paid social media. Refer to Table 6.6 for the Community Meetings held in 2016.

Table 6.6 Community Meetings 2016

Date	Location	Municipality
July 18, 2016 5-7 pm	Radisson Hotel	North Charleston
July 19, 2016 5-7 pm	Jerry Zucker Middle School	North Charleston
July 20, 2016 5-7 pm	Jerry Zucker Middle School	North Charleston
July 21, 2016 5-7 pm	Alfred Williams Community Center	North Charleston
July 25, 2016 5-7 pm	Alfred Williams Community Center	North Charleston
July 26, 2016 5-7 pm	Danny Jones Gymnasium	North Charleston
July 27, 2016 5-7 pm	Felix C. Davis Community Center	North Charleston
July 28, 2016 5-7 pm	Felix C. Davis Community Center	North Charleston
October 25, 2016 5:30-7:30 pm	West Ashley Advanced Magnet Middle School	West Ashley

6.3.1.3 Public and Virtual Engagement (Fall 2019) - Draft Reasonable Alternatives

Community Drop-Ins (Fall 2019)

The goal of the community drop-ins was to provide a more intimate setting for those potentially impacted by the project to learn more about those potential impacts, the tools and resources available to them (especially regarding the right-of-way process), and the project schedule. Therefore, it was important to provide a high-touch opportunity to address those concerns and points of discrepancy. Interactive stations included the virtual public meeting overview video, printed maps showing potential right-of-way impacts, and a property “look up” station, among others.

A series of five community drop-in meetings and one public information meeting were held in November 2019. An accompanying virtual public meeting was active through the end of January 2020.

Meeting locations were chosen specifically because of their convenience and proximity to the EJ neighborhoods and I-526 LCC WEST study area. A total of 188 people attended the community drop-ins.

Public Information Meeting and Virtual Public Information Meeting (Fall 2019)

The purpose of the public information meetings (in-person and online) was to provide the public with an opportunity to offer input on the alternative evaluation process including the full range of alternatives, the evaluation criteria and the draft reasonable alternatives. Interactive smartboards were used to display the draft reasonable alternatives and a station was dedicated to address searches/right-of way concerns.

All materials from the in-person meeting were added to the website and made available to the public during the comment period, and thereafter. Additionally, a video “tour guide,” featuring open captions, provided additional information in each section to supplement the PDF materials. These materials were made available online in both English and Spanish.

A complementary virtual public meeting was held online which had almost 6,000 views during the public comment period.

A total of 553 comments were received during the formal comment period across all comment methods (Community Drop-Ins, in-person Public Information Meeting, Virtual Public Information Meeting, Project Hotline, Email, Community Office and traditional mail) associated with these fall 2019 outreach efforts, with approximately half from an online method. More information found later in this chapter in Section 6.5.1, Comments Summary.

Table 6.7 Community and Public Information Meetings 2019

Date	Type	Location	Municipality
11/9/2019 2-5 pm	Community	Biblical House of God	North Charleston
11/13/2019 5-8 pm	Community	Ferndale Community Center	North Charleston
11/14/2019 5-8 pm	Community	Life Changers Covenant Ministries	North Charleston
11/18/2019 5-8 pm	Community	Danny Jones Community Center	North Charleston
11/19/2019 5-8 pm	Community	Citadel Mall	West Ashley
11/21/2019 11 am-7pm	Public Scoping	Charleston Area Convention Center	North Charleston

6.3.1.4 Public Hearing (Late 2020)

A public hearing will be scheduled for late 2020 where the recommended preferred alternative and the draft EJ Community Mitigation Plan will be presented for public feedback.

6.3.1.5 Meeting Notifications

Public meetings are advertised through the methods discussed in this section. Additional methods are added to incorporate feedback or removed if unnecessary. For a detailed description of all meeting summaries and advertising methods, view the accompanying meeting plans or advertisings summaries in Appendix V.

Postcards

Postcards and/or doorhangers notify surrounding neighborhoods and businesses of upcoming public or community meetings. These are distributed between one to three weeks prior to the meetings. Doorhangers are used for door-to-door distribution to notify residents and business owners located in potentially impacted EJ neighborhoods of community meetings. These neighborhoods are particularly important in regard to meeting participation.

Flyers

The I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST flyer box program began in mid-2019. The intent of this program is to keep citizens in and around the potentially affected areas up to date on project information, without relying on the use of technology, making it more accessible for those with limited computer/internet resources. From June 2019 to March 2020, over 600 flyers were distributed through this program.

Flyers were placed in real estate boxes (33) in high-pedestrian-traffic areas, such as bus stops, as well as the display stands located in community centers and businesses within the EJ neighborhoods.

Text Alerts

A text alert system was established in 2017. It was intended to be used to encourage the public to sign up for project notifications. However, it was discontinued prior to the 2019 public outreach efforts because the number of subscribers was low.

Advertising

Billboards, bus wraps, and digital display ads are used to build awareness of the project and drive website traffic. For a full review of the advertising methods, visit the Advertising Summary in Appendix V.

Traditional Media

Media events with one-on-one interview opportunities with the project manager are held prior to each public outreach phase.

Social Media

Facebook and Twitter posts (paid and organic) and event pages are used to promote the meetings. More about the additional uses of social media for the project can be found in Section 6.3.3.3.

6.3.2 Meeting Materials Used

All meetings included the following meeting materials, refer to Appendix U.

- Project Sign-In Sheet
- Display Boards
- Project Area Maps
- Project Handout
- Project Comment Form

Meeting materials were tailored for each meeting and included:

- Videos on topics such as noise analysis, the right-of-way process, project overview/status update (Fall 2019 Community, Public and Virtual Meetings; Fall 2020 Public Hearing)
- Interactive smartboard displays for alternatives and other area projects (Fall 2019 Public Information Meeting - draft Reasonable Alternatives and existing and committed projects)
- Noise handout (Fall 2019 Community, Public and Virtual Meetings)
- Interactive right-of-way impact maps (Fall 2019 Community and Public Information Meeting)

6.3.3 What Other Sources of Information are Available to the Public?

6.3.3.1 Website

A project website, www.526lowcountrycorridor.com, is used to disseminate project information, provide a schedule of events and studies, and solicit public input, refer to Figure 6.3. The site includes English and Spanish materials and includes features such as an online feedback form, a location for media information, and a repository for technical documents and reports.



Figure 6.3 Project Website - Home Page (May 20, 2019)

6.3.3.2 Hotline

A hotline, with both local and toll-free numbers, provides the status of the project and current engagement opportunities. The hotline is answered by Community Office staff during normal business hours.

6.3.3.3 Social Media

Project-specific Facebook and Twitter accounts are used to provide a stream of regular project updates, including photos of the project team and current activities to promote upcoming events and engagement opportunities. This feed also includes educational campaigns about the project development process, transportation, and other topics.

6.3.3.4 Newsletters

Newsletters notify the community of upcoming project milestones, project updates, and opportunities for engagement for both the I-526 LCC WEST and EAST projects. Even though these are separate and distinct projects, stakeholders and interested parties overlap significantly. All newsletters reside on the project website, in both English and Spanish, and are emailed to stakeholders and individuals that have signed up to be included in the project database.

The newsletter is distributed to property owners within the public outreach area via mail and/or email.

6.3.3.5 Speakers Bureau

Presentations were provided to local groups such as neighborhood associations and business organizations about the project, providing answers to their specific questions and informing them of other ways to stay engaged with the project (upcoming meetings, website, social media, etcetera). Refer to Table 6.8.

Table 6.8 Speakers Bureau Presentations

Date	Organization	Venue	Attendance
8/10/2017	Charleston Chamber of Commerce North	Crowne Plaza Airport	40
9/26/2017	Charleston Chamber of Commerce Central	Doubletree by Hilton	40
10/4/2017	Mt. Pleasant Rotary Club	Harbor Breeze Restaurant	40
10/23/2017	American Subcontractors Association Meeting	Town & Country Inn - West Ashley	100
1/18/2018	Charleston Chapter Society of Military Engineers	Ashley Venue - West Ashley	50
2/7/2018	Summerville Rotary Club	Sticky Fingers - Summerville	75
5/16/2018	Highland Terrace, Liberty Hall, and Russelldale Communities (Councilwoman Dorothy William's Community Meeting)	City of North Charleston - City Hall	99
8/7/2018	Pile Driver Contractors Association of South Carolina	Town & County Inn - West Ashley	75

Table 6.8 Speakers Bureau Presentations (Continued)

Date	Organization	Venue	Attendance
10/12/2018	American Society of Civil Engineers - Citadel	Citadel Campus	40
10/26/2018	International Right-of-Way Association	Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina	100
3/18/2019	Park Circle Community Meeting (Councilman Bob King)	Felix C. Davis Community Center	60
4/16/2019	North Charleston Area Top Real Estate Producers	Oscar's Restaurant	50
7/25/2019	Joint Base Charleston Partnership Council	Joint Base Weapons Station	Unknown
7/29/2019	North Charleston Rotary Club	Hilton Garden Inn - Airport	Unknown
8/27/2019	Berkeley County Continuing Education Course	Berkeley County Building	Unknown
9/19/2019	Charleston Motor Carriers Association	Doubletree by Hilton	Unknown
1/10/2020	Ashley Harbor Neighborhood	West Ashley Middle School	79
1/27/2020	Providence Commons HOA	West Ashley High School Band Room	40
2/3/2020	Ferndale Community Meeting	Ferndale Community Center	14

6.3.3.6 Community Office

The I-526 LCC Community Office, located at 5627 Rivers Avenue in the project study area, provides the opportunity for the public to meet one-on-one with the project team and connect with resource specialists such as right-of-way relocation experts and community liaisons. The public can come to the office for information about the project and how it may impact their community, as well as ask specific questions or share concerns.

6.3.4 How Does FHWA and SCDOT Reach Out to Traditionally Under-Represented Communities?

6.3.4.1 Limited English Proficiency Communities

The primary non-English-language within the community is Spanish. As such, nearly all project materials are translated into Spanish. This includes the project website, quarterly project newsletters, Community Office flyers, and Public Information Meeting materials. Further, the Community Drop-Ins and Public Information Meetings are staffed with English/Spanish translators. At the Community Office, any visitors requiring Spanish translation are provided with an informational card to request a translator from SCDOT. Additionally, there is an option to hear the hotline message in Spanish and request a follow-up call in Spanish. Facebook allows for the user to translate text posts into Spanish.

Considerable efforts have been made to ensure meaningful engagement for limited English proficiency (LEP) communities.

6.3.4.2 Community Office

Establishing connections within the community and with resources that can best serve the community's needs are not only critical components of an effective EJ Outreach Strategy, they also support the delivery of a comprehensive Community Mitigation Plan. To foster the growth of these relationships, SCDOT opened a Community Office in Gas Lite Square, a shopping complex just north of the Liberty Park neighborhood in the fall of 2019 ahead of the public meetings. The Community Office is staffed with an office manager and subject matter experts such as right-of-way liaisons and community liaisons.

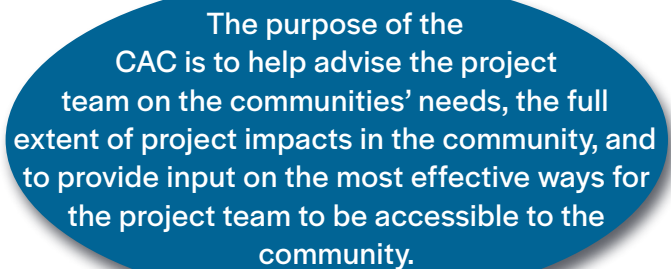
While any member of the public is welcomed and encouraged to visit the Community Office, the EJ neighborhoods nearby of Ferndale, Highland Terrace, and the surrounding potentially impacted areas are the target audiences for these services. Additionally, the office is equipped with the project materials from the fall 2019 public engagement (boards, handouts, etc.), as well as additional project collateral developed for the public (including some from adjacent projects such as the Mark Clark Extension).

These residents are encouraged to visit the community office to ask questions about relocation; construction; renters, homeowners, and business rights; and potential impacts. Additionally, the Community Office is used regularly for community events, such as open houses and workshops, as well as meetings for the Community Advisory Council, media, agencies, and project team.

The public may visit the office during normal operating hours or by scheduling an appointment. Right-of-way specialists and other resources are available to answer project-related questions by appointment.

6.3.4.3 Community Advisory Council

The Community Advisory Council (CAC) was formed to provide input and help guide the I-526 LCC WEST project team. CAC members provide input on actions to minimize and mitigate impacts and help distribute project updates and meeting notifications. The project team queried community leaders, neighborhood associations, organizations active in the community, and local churches to assist with identifying community residents that might be interested in becoming involved in the CAC. The goal was to identify multiple (three to five) community members from each of the potentially impacted EJ neighborhoods of Russelldale, Ferndale, Liberty Park and Highland Terrace to serve on the CAC.



The purpose of the CAC is to help advise the project team on the communities' needs, the full extent of project impacts in the community, and to provide input on the most effective ways for the project team to be accessible to the community.

This advisory group is assisting in the formulation of community mitigation options that will ultimately be presented to the EJ neighborhood residents for consideration. The CAC will transition to a Project Oversight Committee (POC) during implementation of the Community Mitigation Plan to ensure the commitments outlined are implemented in accordance with intent of the plan. CAC meeting presentations and summaries are included in Appendix U.

CAC Meeting Dates:

1. September 20, 2019
2. November 1, 2019
3. December 7, 2019

4. January 4, 2020
5. February 8, 2020
6. March 7, 2020
7. April 18, 2020
8. May 2, 2020
9. June 6, 2020
10. July 11, 2020
11. August 29, 2020

6.3.4.4 Pop-Up Meetings

As part of the EJ outreach efforts, a series of pop-up meetings were held. A pop-up meeting is a mobile booth set up in various locations to engage residents who frequent the area. They can be held at any time of the day thereby allowing hosts to target busy periods, such as evenings or weekends, to increase local participation and overall facetime in the community. For a full list of the pop-up events, see Appendix W or Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.2.

Door-to-door canvassing was done to alert the potentially impacted EJ communities with information about upcoming ways to participate such as Community Drop-Ins or the Community Office Open House.

6.3.4.5 Additional Outreach Tools

Many of the previously mentioned tools, throughout this Chapter, identified for communicating with the public at large are also leveraged to better engage with the identified EJ communities. For instance, the Project Hotline was created specifically to make project information available verbally at any hour of the day, specifically to provide an opportunity for those in the EJ communities a more convenient, high-touch method to connect with the project team. Another example was the use of geographically targeted Facebook ads to promote participation by the potentially impacted neighborhoods at the Community Drop-Ins. In addition to these ads, an additional set of postcards specific to these communities was sent ahead of the Fall 2019 Community Drop-Ins. The Flyer Box program was initiated to provide project materials in a non-internet-reliant method within the EJ communities. For all outreach to EJ communities, view the EJ Outreach Strategy in Appendix X.

6.4 Who are the Project Stakeholders?

6.4.1 Who was Invited to Become a Project Stakeholder?

The stakeholder group is comprised of representatives from local public agencies (county staffs, municipal staffs, planning organizations, first responders, etc.); local colleges and universities; non-profits; major employers (Boeing, Joint Base Charleston, etc.); owners/operators of local small businesses; owners of substantial numbers of residential rental units in the project area; and some neighborhood representatives, refer to Appendix Y.

The purpose of this group was to provide a forum where the unique concerns and potential impacts to these businesses could be voiced during the project development process.

The stakeholder's role is to provide information and concerns to the project team and to share project information with their constituencies and neighbors. Stakeholders were invited to participate in the stakeholder group through an official letter.

In October 2016, more than 190 small business owners within the study area were invited to participate in a Small Business Stakeholder Group for the project. In an effort to expand participation by these small business owners, a door-to-door outreach initiative was performed at the following six interchanges within the project study area: Rivers Avenue, International Boulevard, Montague Avenue, Dorchester Road, Leeds Avenue, and Paul Cantrell Boulevard/Glenn McConnell Parkway. Based on the small number of participants (of the 23 who indicated interest, only four participants from three businesses attended), the Small Business Stakeholder Group was combined with the regular project stakeholder group.

6.4.1.1 How are Stakeholder Meetings Held?

The stakeholder group meets two to three times per year over the life of the project. Participants are provided a project update and asked to share information and concerns relevant to the project. A moderator captures the comments of the group and presents the findings to the rest of the project team for inclusion in the decision-making process. Stakeholder presentations are posted to the website for the public at large. A full list of the stakeholder meetings held is available in Appendix Y.

6.4.2 How are Governments and Leadership Involved?

Local, state, and federal elected officials are kept up to date regarding projects occurring in their district. Their participation in the information-sharing process is important to the success of the project. Specific briefings are held, and/or notices issued, prior to public meetings to highlight what is to be presented to their constituents. The frequency of the meetings and the amount of time prior to the meeting they are briefed is dependent on their level of potential impacts by the project. As the project progresses through the mitigation development, an increased briefing schedule will be developed, especially for the local governments impacted. For the fall 2019 public outreach efforts, specific briefings were held with each Mayor at least a month ahead of the public information meeting. An elected officials day in which all Charleston regional elected officials (local, state, federal) was scheduled approximately two weeks ahead of the public information meeting. They are also invited to have representatives in the stakeholder meetings and receive the communications sent to the stakeholder group. For a list of meetings with local, state and federal elected officials, refer to Appendix Y.

6.5 How are Public and Agency Comments Incorporated into the Project?

Public and agency comments are an integral part of the project development process. Comments are accepted throughout the EIS process in a variety of ways shown in Figure 6.4. These comments are stored in a comment tracking database. Comments received through social media are not considered part of the formal comment process.

Upon entry into the public comment database, comments are categorized based on topic. Online and emailed comments were automatically sent to key members of the project team upon receipt. The project manager responds to most emails within forty-eight hours of receipt. As a rule, all comments received during a public comment period receive a formal response. All comments and responses are documented in the comment tracking database which is available in Appendix Z.

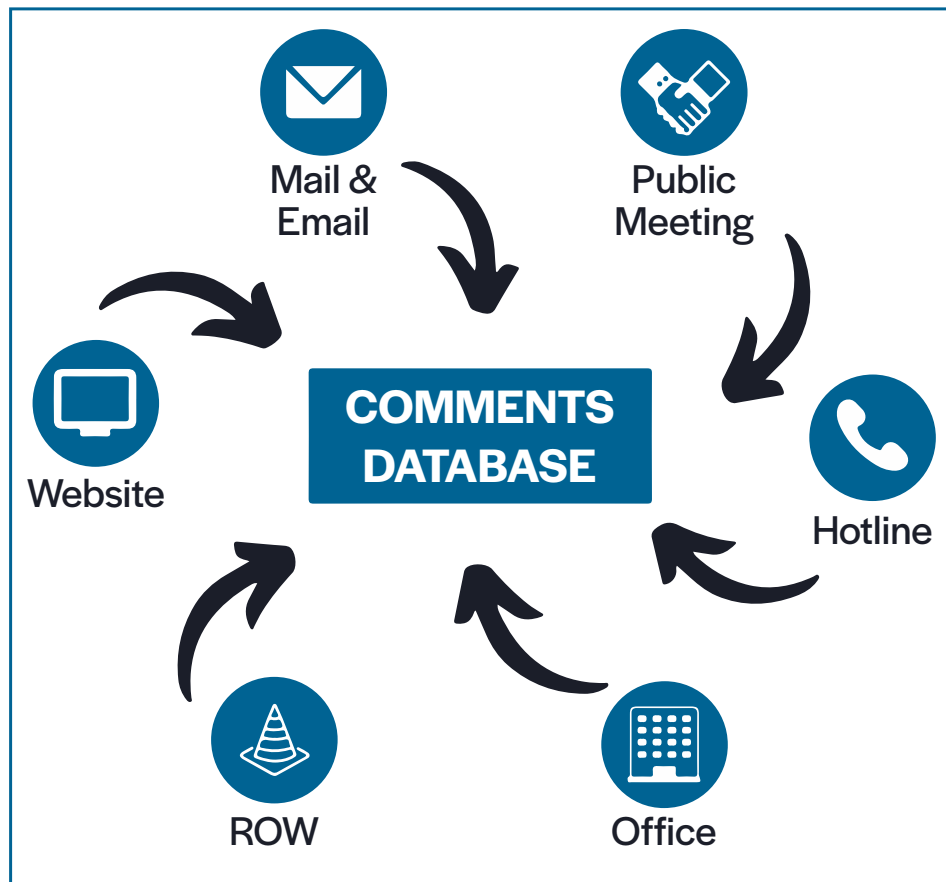


Figure 6.4 Public Comment Methods

6.5.1 Comments Summary

Comments from the 2016 community meetings and surveys include concerns about congestion, safety, dangerous movements/weavings, the distance between interchanges, environmental impacts, loss of property, and transit. Other concerns included the cost of the project, the time it would take to complete, and the real benefit once completed. Comments are representative of 1,549 individual commenters, most of which are survey respondents (1,425).

During the formal comment period for the first in-person public meeting and associated community meetings (November 2019 - January 2020), 553 comments were received and responded to. A summary of the most common topics can be found in Figure 6.5 with the full comments response database (comments and responses) in Appendix Z. The geographic breakdown of those comments can be found in Figure 6.6.

Outreach and public input was also received outside the formal public comment period. While conducting outreach in the EJ communities through pop-up meetings, community meetings, and the Community Office, the comments received from residents, their family members, and property owners focused on concern for the recurring impacts to minority neighborhoods that were previously impacted by construction of and improvements to I-26 and I-526. Most residents were interested in knowing when construction would begin, if they would lose their home, and when they have to relocate.

While comments were shared about the environmental impacts to vegetation along the project corridor, as well as the benefits of natural buffers for noise abatement, there is not an appreciable indication of concern regarding visual impacts from the project.

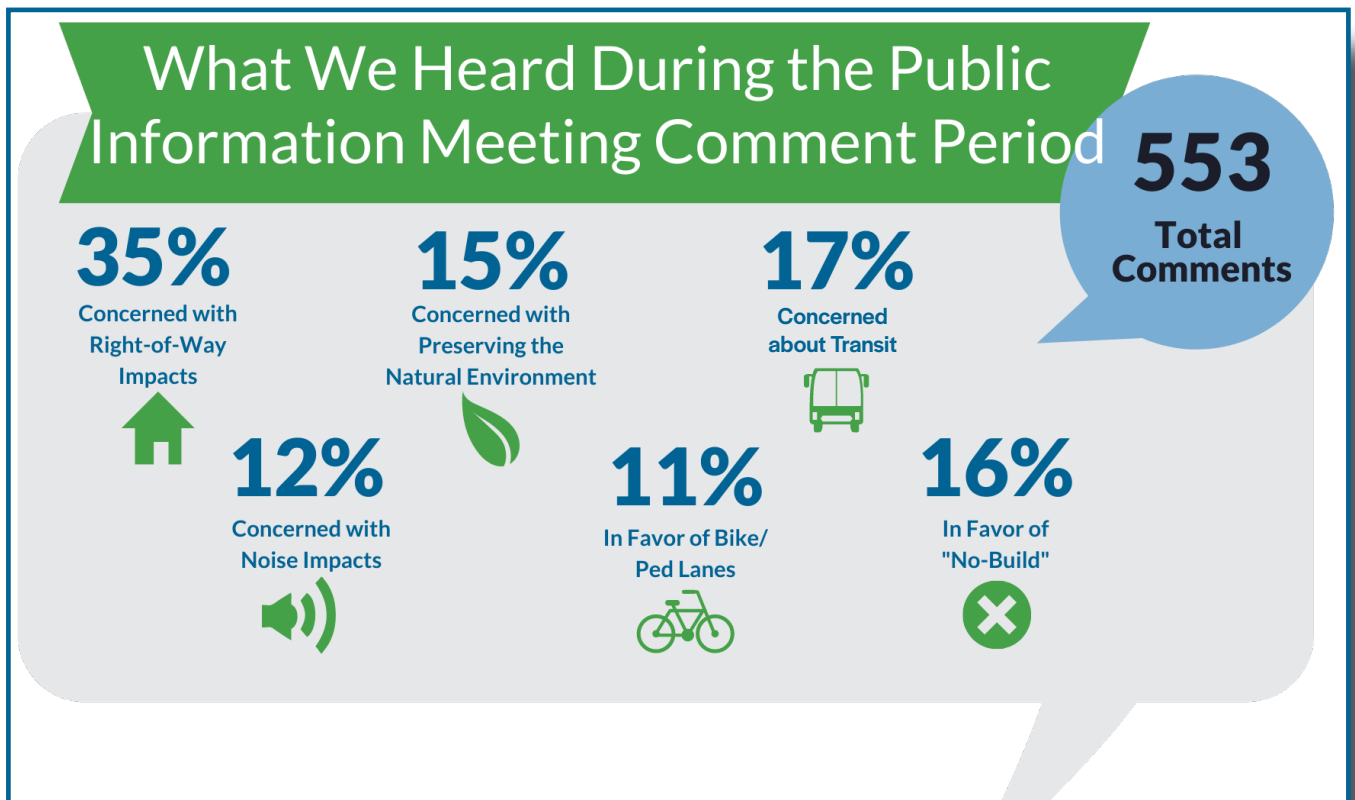


Figure 6.5 Public Comment Summary (11/7/2019 - 1/31/2020)

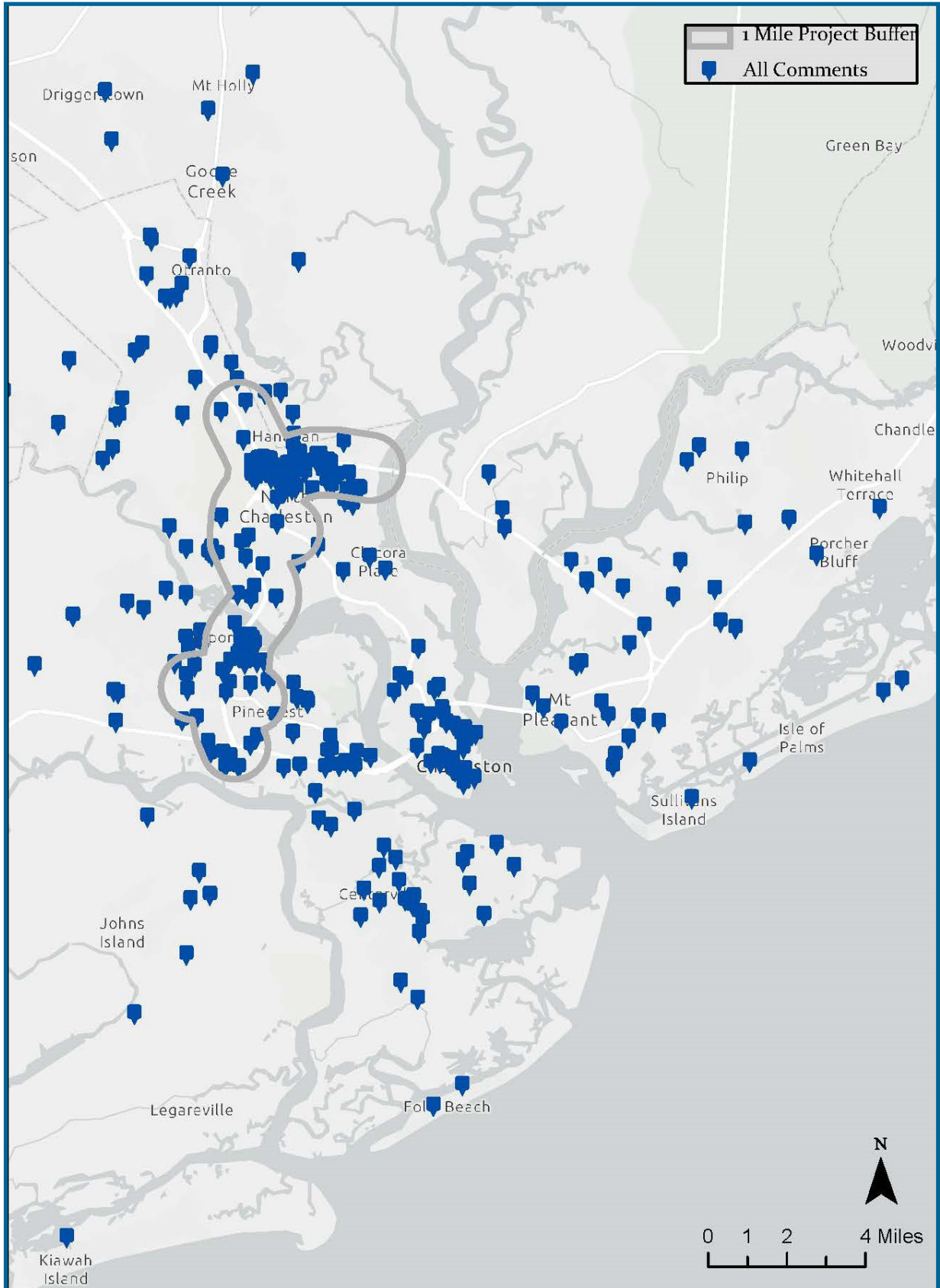


Figure 6.6 Public Comments by Geography (11/7/2-19 - 1/31/2020)