

PUBLIC HEARING VIDEO SCRIPT – ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION

VIDEO 2: Alternatives Evaluation

The I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST project proposes improvements to the *existing* roadway along I-526 between Virginia Avenue and Paul Cantrell Boulevard. The purpose of the project is to increase capacity at the I-26/I-526 interchange and along the I-526 mainline, thereby relieving traffic congestion and improving operations at the I-26/I-526 interchange and along the I-526 mainline from Paul Cantrell Boulevard to Virginia Avenue. The need for this project was identified in several regional and state-level planning efforts.

SCDOT currently ranks the segment of I-526 between I-26 and Virginia Avenue as one of the most congested segments of interstate highway in the state. The remainder of the project, from I-26 to Paul Cantrell Boulevard, ranks among the state's top 10 most congested interstate corridors. The interchange of I-526 and I-26 is a major source of this congestion. This is because of the high number of vehicles moving between the two interstates, coupled with closely spaced interchanges that have ramps with steep grades and tight curves, as well as limited distances for vehicles to merge onto *and* off of the interstate.

The project team has performed traffic analysis, environmental studies, and preliminary design to identify and analyze the transportation solutions which meet the purpose and need on this corridor. These transportation alternatives were developed based on:

The findings of the 2013 I-526 Corridor Study,

- SCDOT's goals and priorities,
- Further evaluation of the corridor, and
- Input from the public and agencies.

SCDOT understands we cannot simply build our way out of congestion. So, in addition to analyzing more travel lanes on I-526, and other improvements at key interchanges, we also considered increased transit, rideshare programs, and working with major employers to implement work flextimes and staggered shifts to reduce traffic in peak times of the day. We also evaluated the effectiveness of managed lanes through a separate study that determined managed lanes would also need to be implemented on I-26. Our designs have considered this potential for future improvements, and we have worked to ensure our recommendations would not preclude their use later on. While most of these other options, called "Travel Demand Management," did not show enough of a traffic reduction potential to be standalone solutions, many were determined to be cost-effective and have some positive impact. So, to begin alleviating some of the growing congestion today, we have already funded and begun implementation through various partnerships on many of these solutions. Taken together, these alternatives are often called the "range of alternatives," and were general in nature and were evaluated based on their ability to satisfy the purpose and need of the project.

Those alternatives that did increase capacity, relieve congestion and improve operations at the I-26 / I-526 interchange and along the mainline, became known as the preliminary alternatives. The others were eliminated as stand-alone alternatives, however, they still may be considered as components of the recommended preferred alternative.

The preliminary alternatives were then evaluated to determine if they were both practicable and feasible. So what does that mean and how was it determined?

The preliminary alternatives were evaluated at a qualitative level based on the following criteria:

- Acceptable Level of Service – Would this alternative provide improvement in the flow of traffic?
- Compatibility with Adjacent Interchange – Would this alternative work with the interchanges nearby?
- Geometric Deficiencies Resolved – Does this alternative address the problems previously identified in the layout of the roadway?
- Flexibility with the Don Holt Bridge – Does this alternative provide flexibility for any future improvements to the Don Holt Bridge?
- Constructability – Can this be constructed, and what would this do to the current traffic?

The alternatives that met each of these criteria, along with the no-build alternative, were identified as the Proposed Reasonable Alternatives and were presented to you last Fall. So, what's happened since then?

We heard your concerns about the removal of direct access between Virginia Avenue and I-526. So, North Rhett Alternatives 5 and 6 were developed to incorporate a “u turn” type ramp traveling from Virginia Avenue and under I-526 adjacent to North Rhett Avenue to provide direct access to I-526.

We also heard your comments about the importance of avoiding or minimizing impacts to environmentally sensitive areas, such as wetlands and creeks. To evaluate an alternative that addressed your concerns, met the purpose and need of the project, and minimized impacts, we needed something new. So, an alternative that was a combination of North Rhett Alternatives 2 and 6 was developed. This is called North Rhett Alternative 2A. Therefore, a total of five alternatives at the North Rhett/ Virginia Avenue interchange were evaluated as Proposed Reasonable Alternatives. The no-build or “do nothing” alternative is also carried through each step of the process.

All the Proposed Reasonable Alternatives were evaluated once more to arrive at today's Recommended Preferred Alternative. The corridor was split into three segments for the analysis:

- Paul Cantrell Boulevard to International Boulevard
- International Boulevard to Rivers Avenue
- Rivers Avenue to Virginia Avenue

This detailed evaluation focused on their traffic performance and potential impacts to communities and the natural environment. The alternative presented today for your consideration as the Recommended Preferred Alternative includes the components that best meet the purpose of the project while minimizing impacts and includes:

- Alternative 1 at Paul Cantrell Boulevard to International;

- Alternative 2 from International Boulevard to Rivers Avenue
- Alternative 2A from Rivers Avenue to Virginia Avenue

The Recommended Preferred Alternative was identified because of the lower number of relocations, lower potential impact to traditionally under-represented populations, lower impact to wetlands and streams, improved traffic operations, and the ability to resolve a high number of existing roadway deficiencies.

Due to the nature of the proposed project study area, it's not possible to avoid all impacts. All the Proposed Reasonable Alternatives would have potential impacts to socioeconomics, residential communities, water quality, wetlands and streams, floodplains, business and home relocations, noise, and indirect and cumulative impacts. Mitigation measures are proposed that would minimize or mitigate the potential impacts from the Recommended Preferred Alternative.

For more information on the Environmental Justice Community Mitigation plan, please continue on to the Environmental Justice Community Mitigation station.

A full copy of the proposed reasonable alternatives screening matrix for each segment of the I-526 LCC WEST project can be found in the Alternatives Evaluation station.

We encourage you to continue your exploration of the public hearing materials and to provide a comment before you leave today.

NOTE – More info on the Recommended Preferred Alternative, will be found at that station where there will be some audio recording to accompany the maps.