



# ASSEMBLY STREET RAILROAD SEPARATION PROJECT

## PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

DECEMBER 11, 2024

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), City of Columbia, Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) welcome you to this evening's public information meeting and appreciate your attendance.

The purpose of this public information meeting is to provide an update on the project to the community and gather comments from the public on the following:



**Project Purpose**



**Draft Reasonable Alternatives**



**Alternatives Analysis Process**



**Next Steps, Including How to Stay Involved**

# PROJECT HISTORY

The Assembly Street Railroad Separation Project dates back to the 1970s. At that time, the City of Columbia was dealing with several issues within the downtown area, primarily growth and redevelopment, community connectivity, expansion of the University of South Carolina (USC) campus, heavily-used rail corridors that crisscrossed the area and bisected communities, and a notable increase in traffic volume. The need for railroad corridor separation and consolidation had long been recognized as a need for reducing delays in automobile traffic, creating efficient operating speeds for rail traffic and eliminating barriers for redevelopment.

Part of the solution developed in the 1970s became known as the “Columbia Railroad Relocation and Roadway Grade Separation Project” and was conceived as a series of four phases, as listed below.

Many alternative solutions to this growing problem were suggested and studied in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) completed in 1981. This EIS proposed to consolidate various railroad tracks into one corridor and replace the at-grade crossings with grade separated structures by lowering the elevation of the tracks and raising the roadway elevations.

A feasibility study was completed in 2009 to determine if the proposed solution from the 1981 EIS was still feasible considering present conditions, changes in environmental laws and regulations and the City’s vision for the downtown area. From this feasibility study, five alternatives (including one supplemental alternative) were designed and evaluated. Each alternative implemented some type of grade crossing with either the rail going under the existing roadway network or the rail crossing over the roadway network.

**PHASE 1-A**  
Assembly Street

**PHASE 1-B**  
Elmwood Loop  
Completed in  
the 1980’s

**PHASE 1-C**  
The “Ditch”  
Completed  
in 1987

**PHASE 2**  
The Fairwold  
Connection



# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

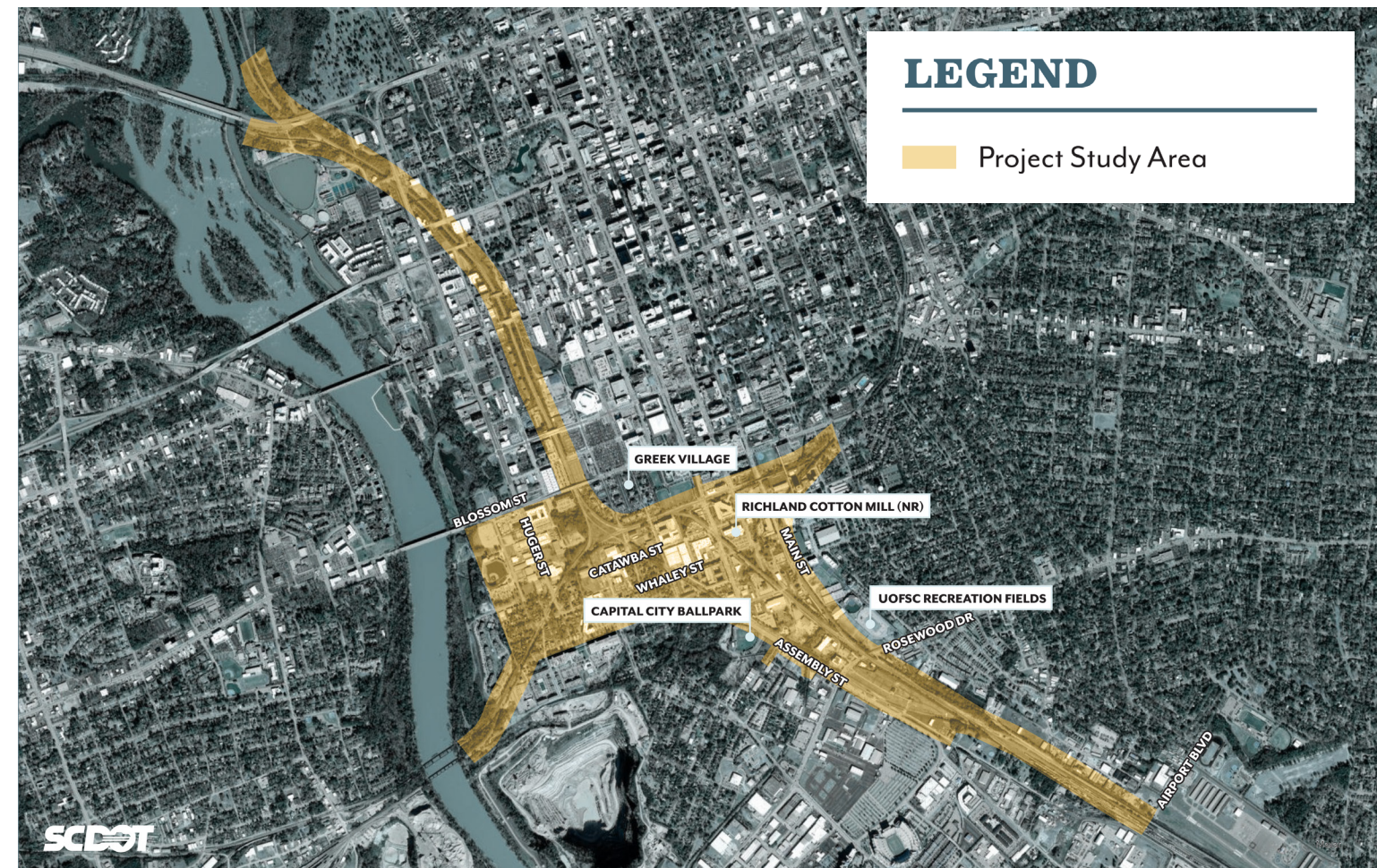
The SCDOT along with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), as the lead federal agency, and in partnership with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) propose to improve rail operation and vehicular connectivity while alleviating vehicle congestion associated with frequent freight rail movements along Assembly Street and surrounding areas located south of downtown Columbia, South Carolina.

The project, as proposed, would result in certain modifications to the human and natural environment; the project team is completing an Environmental Assessment (EA), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

## STUDY AREA

The project study area consists of approximately 1 square mile south of downtown Columbia and is generally bound by:

- Blossom Street to the north,
- Pickens Street and Norfolk Southern’s R-line to the east,
- Norfolk Southern (NS) rail line approximately 1.1 miles southeast of Rosewood Drive toward Andrews Yard and S. Beltline Boulevard, and
- Catawba Circle/Heyward Street/Dreyfuss Road/Assembly Street to the west.



## PURPOSE & NEED

The need for railroad corridor improvements in the project area has long been recognized as a need for reducing delays in vehicle traffic, creating efficient operating speeds for railroad traffic and eliminating barriers to redevelopment.

The need for this project can be summarized as a result of the following factors:



**Decreased mobility and increased vehicle congestion** during frequent NS and CSX freight rail movements.



**Growth in population and increasing development;** population is expected to increase between 33 and 189 percent within the project area between 2020 and 2050 (Central Midlands Council of Governments), with most of the growth focused in the downtown areas. Population growth, coupled with increases in development will increase travel demand and, in turn, increase the potential for vehicle delays due to trains stopping at road crossings.



**Increased motorist delay and lost productivity;** traffic waiting for trains to clear an intersection result in a loss of productive time and increased energy costs.



**Safety concerns:** with the projected increase in freight rail traffic, population and development, there is a need to focus on safety within the project area and reduce the risk of collisions and accidents between all users. There are concerns over the risks of pedestrian safety with regards to people crossing over the rail tracks while a train is present. While vehicle and train collisions are infrequent, there is an increased risk for vehicle and train collisions as population and development increases.

The primary purpose of the proposed Assembly Street Rail Separation project is to implement a transportation solution that would improve vehicular operations in order to alleviate vehicle congestion associated with frequent freight rail movements through the project area.

Secondary purposes of the proposed Assembly Street Rail Separation project include:



Improve safety by reducing conflict points for all modes of transportation (including pedestrian and bicycle / vehicle; pedestrian and bicycle / train; vehicle / train) and implementing crossing improvements.



Improve mobility for freight by eliminating hard rail crossings, upgrading special track work and rail infrastructure.

## THE NEPA PROCESS

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 also known as NEPA, is a federal law that ensures that federal agencies thoroughly evaluate alternatives and the negative and beneficial impacts for a project as well as gather input from the public and federal and state agencies on the project. The NEPA process allows the project team to learn as much as possible about the local area and communities in order to reach a decision that best meets the needs of the community and minimizes or avoids impacts to the environment and communities.

## ALTERNATIVES SCREENING

After a range of alternatives was developed (which included over 20 options), the project team incorporated feedback from the community and, considering known constraints and challenges, the project team narrowed alternatives down to nine called the “preliminary alternatives.” These alternatives met the purpose and need and design criteria.

The preliminary alternatives, as well as the no-build option, then went through a screening process, evaluating feasibility and impacts to the human and natural environment including impacts to property and communities, wetlands and streams, noise, historic and cultural resources and cost and constructability. These criteria filtered the preliminary alternatives down to the three reasonable alternatives, which are being presented today.

**STEP 1**  
Identify Stakeholders

**STEP 2**  
Data Collection

**STEP 3**  
Develop Purpose & Need

**STEP 4**  
Identify & Evaluate Range of Alternatives

**STEP 5**  
Identify Preliminary Alternative

**STEP 6 - WE ARE HERE**  
Identify Reasonable Alternatives

**STEP 7**  
Identify Preferred Alternative

**STEP 8**  
Environmental Assessment (EA)

**STEP 9**  
Finding of No Significant Impact

## THE ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

### Public Meeting MAY 2018

#### Preliminary Range of Alternatives

Over 20 alternatives evaluated (including the no-build) including alternatives from previous studies.

#### Evaluation of Alternatives

- Purpose & Need
- Design Criteria
- Consistency with Local Plans
- Fatal Flaws

**Alternatives Eliminated**

### Online/Virtual Public Meeting JUNE 2020

#### Range of Alternatives

Nine alternatives evaluated including a no-build option.

#### Evaluation of Alternatives

- Purpose & Need
- Design Criteria
- Consistency with Local Plans
- Fatal Flaws

**Alternatives Eliminated**

### Public Meeting DECEMBER 2024

#### Proposed Reasonable Alternatives

Three alternatives evaluated including a no-build option.

#### Evaluation of Alternatives

- Purpose & Need
- Traffic Performance (Level of Service & Intersection Operations)
- Delineated Wetlands
- Structures
- Environmental Justice
- Threatened & Endangered Species
- Historic & Cultural Resources
- Noise Impacts
- Hazardous Materials
- Utility Impacts
- Project Costs

**Alternatives Eliminated**

### Public Hearing SPRING 2025

#### Proposed Preferred Alternative

Single recommended alternative proposed.

## REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

### REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE A RAIL OVER ASSEMBLY



**1** Alternative A involves consolidating a portion of the CSX AKA-Line into the western NS SC-Line. The CSX line through the CCMD would be abandoned between the NS R-Line and Assembly Street.

**2** Alternative A proposes rail bridges over Assembly Street between Catawba and Whaley Streets. The existing rail bridges over Whaley Street and over Rosewood Drive would be modified to include additional track.

**3** Assembly Street would be lowered approximately 18 feet to allow for the rail bridge.

**4** Pedestrian access is maintained and enhanced.

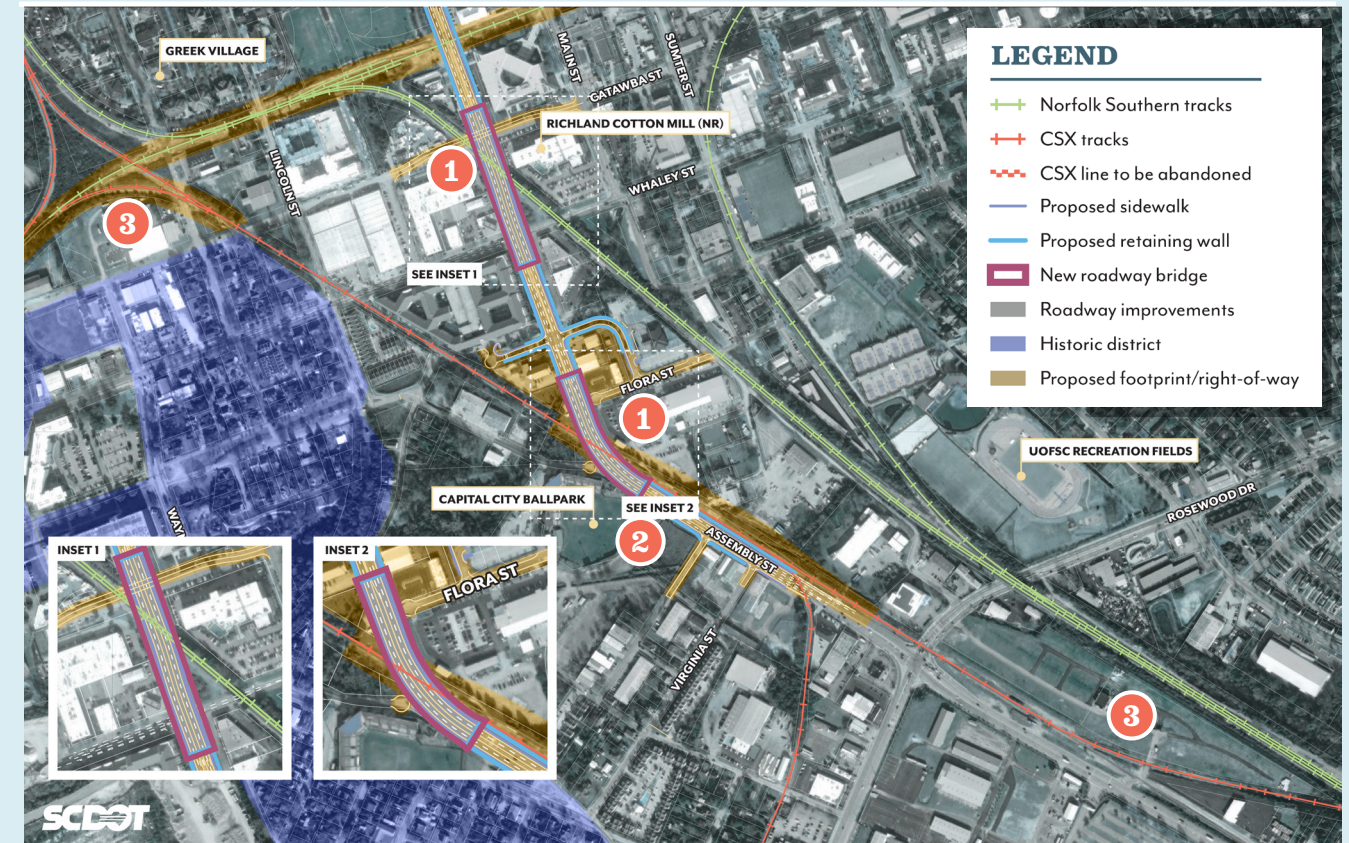
**5** A portion of the existing CSX-AKA line paralleling Assembly Street would be maintained to provide rail access to the industry track, located between Virginia Street and Rosewood Drive.

## REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE A-1 RAIL OVER ASSEMBLY WITH DIRECT CONNECTION TO INDUSTRY TRACK



- 1** Alternative A-1 involves consolidating a portion of the CSX AKA-Line into the western NS SC-Line. The CSX line through the CCMD would be abandoned between the NS R-Line to Andrews Yard.
- 2** Alternative A-1 proposes rail bridges over Assembly Street between Catawba and Whaley Streets. The existing rail bridges over Whaley Street and over Rosewood Drive would be modified to include additional track.
- 3** Assembly Street would be lowered approximately 18 feet to allow for the rail bridge.
- 4** The industry track, located between Virginia Street and Rosewood Drive, would be directly serviced by extending a CSX spur track from the consolidated CSX and NS tracks between Flora Street and Rosewood Drive.
- 5** Pedestrian access is maintained and enhanced.

## REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE B ASSEMBLY OVER RAIL



- 1** The Assembly Street roadway bridges would provide grade separations over existing NS SC-Line near Catawba Street and over CSX AKA-Line near Dreyfuss Road.
- 2** Pedestrian access is maintained and enhanced.
- 3** Alternative B involves little to no change to existing rail lines.

# ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS MATRIX

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS	MEASURE	NO-BUILD	ALTERNATIVE A	ALTERNATIVE A-1	ALTERNATIVE B
<b>Purpose &amp; Need</b>					
<b>Meets Purpose and Need</b>	Does the project meet the purpose and need?	N	Y	Y	Y
	Reduction of Delay in Network	No Reduction	Highest Reduction	Highest Reduction	Medium Reduction
<b>Safety</b>					
<b>Safety Improvements</b>	Number of at grade crossings eliminated (reduction of conflict points for all modes of transportation)	0	11	15	4
<b>Traffic</b>					
<b>Delay Improvement</b>	Does Alternative improve delay during train movements?	N	Y	Y	Y
<b>Roadway Network: Roadways Closed</b>	Number of Roadways Closed	0	4	4	4
<b>Right of Way</b>					
<b>Right of Way</b>	Number of Parcels Impacted	-	38	33	31
	Acreages of Right-of-Way Needed	-	11.5	10.4	8.2
	Anticipated Residential Relocations	0	5*	5*	1*
	Anticipated Business/Institution Relocations	0	15*	17*	15*
<b>Community Resources</b>					
<b>Section 4(f)</b>	Acreage of Section 4(f) impacted	-	0.05	0.05	0.00
	Resource	-	Richland Cotton Mill	Richland Cotton Mill	Richland Cotton Mill
<b>Historic Resources</b>	Acreage of Historic Resource Impact	0	0.05	0.05	0
	Historic Resources in Footprint	-	Olympia Mill Village Historic District, Richland Cotton Mill	Olympia Mill Village Historic District, Richland Cotton Mill	Richland Cotton Mill
<b>Natural Resources</b>					
<b>Wetlands</b>	Acreage of wetlands in footprint	-	0.85	0.99	0.00
<b>Streams</b>	Linear feet of stream in footprint	-	2,845	3,230	950
<b>Costs</b>					
<b>Total Cost</b>	(High, Medium High, Medium, Medium Low, Low)	-	\$\$\$ - Medium/High	\$\$\$\$ - High	\$\$\$\$ - High
<b>Other</b>					
<b>Constructability</b>	Qualitative issues/impacts (Major, Moderate, Minor)	-	Major	Major	Major

\* Anticipated relocations are based on conceptual design and are subject to change as the project design progresses



## SUBMIT A COMMENT

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The NEPA process relies on public input and community participation. Public comments will be taken from December 12, 2024 to January 11, 2025. Submit your comment in writing to the address below.



**Assembly Street Railroad Separation Project**  
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Columbia, SC 29202

## CONTACT US

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