



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

South Carolina

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Columbia, South Carolina 29201
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April 2, 2026

In Reply Refer To:
HDA-SC

Mr. Chad Long
Director Environmental Services Office
South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT)
955 Park Street, P.O. Box 191
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

Dear Mr. Long:

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed I-26 Mile Marker 172 - 187 (Federal Project Number P042567) project and finds that it adequately addresses the potential impacts of the proposal. The EA is approved and acceptable for public availability and comment. The complete document, including appendices, shall be made available for public review for a minimum of thirty (30) days before FHWA makes its final determination. The public availability shall be announced by a notice similar to a public hearing notice. Also, please provide Notice of Availability of the EA to the affected units of government, and to the State intergovernmental review contacts as specified in 23 CFR § 771.119(d). The FHWA requests that the EA and associated appendices be posted to the project website.

All project commitments documented in the EA are binding and the SCDOT will need to ensure that they are ultimately carried out. The public hearing may be scheduled fifteen (15) days after the document is made available for public review. Enclosed is a copy of the signed document. Please address any questions you may have concerning this project to Mr. Aaron Dawson at 803-253-3885 or aaron.dawson@dot.gov.

Sincerely,

Digitally signed by AARON
MICHAEL DAWSON
Date: 2026.04.02 17:23:14
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(for) Jermaine R. Hannon
Division Administrator

Enclosure

ec: Mr. William Jurgelski, SCDOT RPG 1 NEPA Coordinator
Mr. C.T. York, SCDOT RPG 1 Lowcountry Program Manager
Mr. David Kelly, SCDOT NEPA Manager

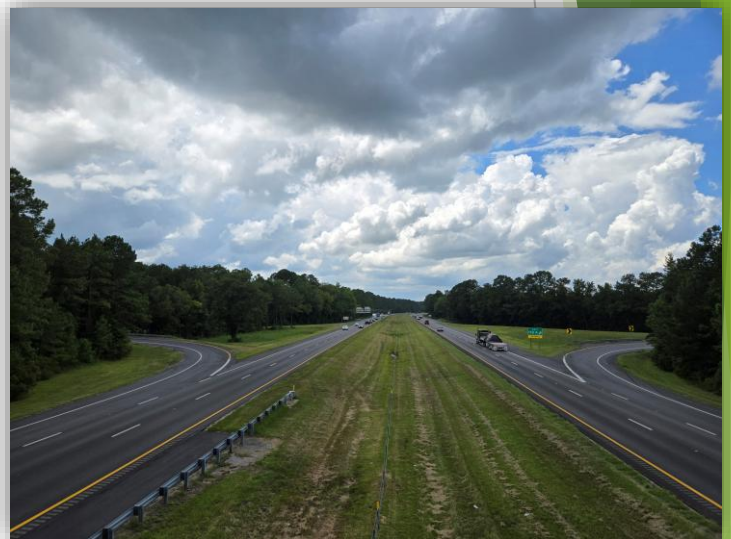
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

I-26 Corridor Improvement Project

(Mile Marker 172 to 187)

Dorchester and Berkeley Counties, SC

SCDOT PIN P042567



April 2026

U.S. Interstate 26 Corridor Improvement Project

(Mile Marker 172 to 187)

Dorchester and Berkeley Counties, South Carolina

SCDOT Project ID: P042567

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT



Submitted Pursuant to 42 U.S.C 4332 (2) (c) by the
U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
and
S.C. Department of Transportation, Environmental Services Office

4/3/2026

Date of Approval

Bill Jurgelski

Digitally signed by Bill Jurgelski
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S.C Department of Transportation

4/2/2026

Date of Approval

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron Dawson".

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MICHAEL DAWSON
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Federal Highway Administration

The following individuals may be contacted for additional information concerning the project:

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- SCDOT -
NEPA ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS FORM

Date: Project ID: County: District: Doc Type:

Project Name:

The Environmental Commitment **Contractor Responsible** measures listed below **are to be included in the contract and must be implemented**. It is the responsibility of the Program Manager to make sure the Environmental Commitment **SCDOT Responsible** measures are adhered to. If there are questions regarding the commitments listed please contact:

CONTACT NAME: C.T. York **PHONE #:** (803)737-3122

STANDARD ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

Applies	Standard Commitment	Commitment Language	Responsibility
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	USTs/Hazardous Materials	If avoidance of hazardous materials is not a viable alternative and soils that appear to be contaminated are encountered during construction, the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) will be informed. Hazardous materials will be tested and removed and/or treated in accordance with the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the SCDES requirements, if necessary.	Contractor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Migratory Bird Treaty Act	The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, 16 USC § 703-711, states that it is unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture or kill; attempt to take, capture or kill; possess, offer to or sell, barter, purchase, deliver or cause to be shipped, exported, imported, transported, carried or received any migratory bird, part, nest, egg or product, manufactured or not. The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) will comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 in regard to the avoidance of taking of individual migratory birds and the destruction of their active nests. The contractor shall notify the Resident Construction Engineer (RCE) at least four (4) weeks prior to construction/demolition/maintenance of bridges and box culverts. The RCE will coordinate with SCDOT Environmental Services Office (ESO), Compliance Division, to determine if there are any active birds using the structure. After this coordination, it will be determined when construction/demolition/maintenance can begin. If a nest is observed that was not discovered after construction/demolition/maintenance has begun, the contractor will cease work and immediately notify the RCE, who will notify the ESO Compliance Division. The ESO Compliance Division will determine the next course of action. The use of any deterrents by the contractor designed to prevent birds from nesting, shall be approved by the RCE with coordination from the ESO Compliance Division. The cost for any contractor provided deterrents will be provided at no additional cost to SCDOT.	Contractor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Cultural Resources	The contractor and subcontractors must notify their workers to watch for the presence of any prehistoric or historic remains, including but not limited to arrowheads, pottery, ceramics, flakes, bones, graves, gravestones, or brick concentrations during the construction phase of the project, if any such remains are encountered, the Resident Construction Engineer (RCE) will be immediately notified and all work in the vicinity of the discovered materials and site work shall cease until the SCDOT Archaeologist directs otherwise.	Contractor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Water Quality	The contractor will be required to minimize possible water quality impacts through implementation of BMPs, reflecting policies contained in 23 CFR 650B and the Department's Supplemental Specification on Erosion Control Measures (latest edition) and Supplemental Technical Specifications on Seeding (latest edition). Other measures including seeding, silt fences, sediment basins, etc. as appropriate will be implemented during construction to minimize impacts to water quality.	Contractor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stormwater	Stormwater control measures, both during construction and post-construction, are required for SCDOT projects with land disturbance and/or constructed in the vicinity of 303(d), TMDL, ORW, tidal, and other sensitive waters in accordance with the SCDOT's MS4 Permit. The selected contractor would be required to minimize potential stormwater impacts through implementation of construction best management practices, reflecting policies contained in 23 CFR 650 B and SCDOT's Supplemental Specifications on Seed and Erosion Control Measures (latest edition).	Contractor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Noise	SCDOT will inform local planning officials of future, generalized noise levels expected to occur in the project vicinity after FHWA has made a final decision on the Environmental document.	SCDOT

STANDARD ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS CONTINUED

Applies	Standard Commitment	Commitment Language	Responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Coast Guard Permit Exclusion	<p>a. Timely notice of any and all events that may affect navigation shall be given to the District Commander during construction of the bridge project. Contact the US Coast Guard sixty (60) days prior to the commencement of construction over the waterway.</p> <p>b. Upon completion of design and finalization of the location the Coast Guard shall be contacted regarding approval of lights and other signals that may be required under 33 CFR 118. Approval of said lighting or waiver shall be obtained prior to construction.</p> <p>c. Upon completion of construction, the bridge owner shall submit photos and "as built" drawings (8 1/2 X 11") showing clearances through the bridge and a completion report. This report is used for Coast Guard and other mariner publications.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Displacements	The SCDOT will acquire all new right-of-way and process any relocations in compliance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition policies Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S. C. 4601 et seq.). The purpose of these regulations is to ensure that owners of real property to be acquired for Federal and federally-assisted projects are treated fairly and consistently, to encourage and expedite acquisition by agreements with such owner, to minimize litigation and relieve congestion in the courts, and to promote public confidence in Federal and federally-assisted land acquisition programs.	SCDOT
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Floodplains	The Engineer of Record will send a set of final plans and request for floodplain management compliance to the local County Floodplain Administrator.	SCDOT
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lead-Based Paint	The existing structures shall be removed and disposed of by the Contractor in accordance with Subsection 202.4.2 of the Standard Specifications. The Contractor's attention is called to the fact that this project may require removal and disposal of structural components containing lead-based paints. Removal and disposal of structural components containing lead-based paints shall comply with all applicable Federal, State, and Local requirements for lead as waste, lead in air, lead in water, lead in soil, and worker health and safety.	Contractor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Essential Fish Habitat	<p>Avoidance and Minimization:</p> <p>The selected contractor will be required to minimize impacts of siltation and erosion through implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PERMIT

<input type="checkbox"/>	General Permit	Impacts to jurisdictional waters will be permitted under a Department of the Army Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Based on preliminary design, it is anticipated that the proposed project would be permitted under SCDOT's General Permit (GP) or applicable Nationwide Permit. The required mitigation for this project will be determined through consultation with the USACE and other resource agencies.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Individual Permit	Impacts to jurisdictional waters will be permitted under a Department of the Army Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Based on preliminary design, it is anticipated that the proposed project would be permitted under an Individual Army Corps of Engineers Permit (IP). SCDOT will provide the Army Corps with information regarding any proposed demolition activities during the Section 404 permitting process. The required mitigation for this project will be determined through consultation with the USACE and other resource agencies.

NON-STANDARD ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

Special Provision

NEPA Doc Ref: Page 47: Paragraph 1

Responsibility: SCDOT

Threatened & Endangered Species (Tricolored Bat)

Should the tricolored bat be officially listed as an endangered species, SCDOT will coordinate with the resource agencies and initiate a reevaluation and any commitments for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation will be included as part of the reevaluation.

Special Provision

NEPA Doc Ref: Page 47: Paragraph 2

Responsibility: SCDOT

Threatened and Endangered Species (Northern long-eared Bat)

Formal Section 7 Consultation is currently being conducted with USFWS regarding impact the northern long-eared bats. This process will be completed prior to the final federal decision, and any commitments for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation will be included prior to the subsequent federal action.

Special Provision

NEPA Doc Ref: Page 48: Paragraph 5

Responsibility: CONTRACTOR

Cultural Resource

The boundaries of the Bowers Cemetery (SHPO Site Number 1398/38DR176) shall be clearly marked on all construction plans along with a 20-foot buffer surrounding the cemetery. No ground disturbing activities may take place within the buffered boundaries of the cemetery, and project personnel and equipment will be prohibited from entering the cemetery.

NON-STANDARD ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS CONTINUED

Special Provision

NEPA Doc Ref: Page 58: Paragraph 2

Responsibility: SCDOT

Underground Storage Tanks/Hazardous Materials

Based on the site review and records review, it is recommended that a Phase II Environmental Screening Assessment be conducted prior to construction on portions of the PSA where sites are listed as RECs with ground disturbance and/or new ROW.

Special Provision

NEPA Doc Ref: Page 58: Paragraph 3

Responsibility: CONTRACTOR

Asbestos and Lead-based Paint

The existing structures shall be removed and disposed of by the Contractor in accordance with Subsection 202.4.2 of the Standard Specifications. The Contractor's attention is called to the fact that this project may require removal and disposal of structural components containing asbestos and/or lead-based paints. Removal and disposal of structural components shall comply with all applicable Federal, State, and Local requirements.

Special Provision

NEPA Doc Ref:

Responsibility:

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Definition</u>
AADT	Average Annual Daily Traffic
ACS	American Community Survey
APE	Area of Potential Effects
ARS	At-Risk Species
BA	Biological Assessment
BCDCOG	Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments
BFE	Base Flood Elevations
BMP	Best Management Practices
CAA	Clean Air Act
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CO	Carbon Monoxide
CWA	Clean Water Act
dBA	A-weighted decibels
DO	Dissolved Oxygen
EA	Environmental Assessment
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
ESA	Environmental Site Assessment
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Maps
FY	Fiscal Year
GIS	Geographic Information System
IPaC	Information for Planning and Consultation
JD	Jurisdictional Determination
Leq(h)	Average energy of a sound level over a 1-hour period
LOI	Letter of Intent
LOS	Level of Service
LUST	Leaking Underground Storage Tank
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MM	Mile Marker
MPH	Miles Per Hour
MS4	Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System
MSAT	Mobile Source Air Toxic
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NAC	Noise Abatement Criteria
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NLEB	Northern Long-eared Bat
NO2	Nitrogen Dioxide

NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOI	Notice of Intent
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPS	National Park Service
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NRTM	Natural Resource Technical Memorandum
NSA	Noise Study Area
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
O3	Ozone
Parclo	Partial cloverleaf interchange (interchange with two loops)
Pb	Lead
PEL	Planning and Environmental Linkages
PIM	Public Information Meeting
PM	Particulate Matter
PJD	Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination
PSA	Project Study Area
RCE	Resident Construction Engineer
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
REC	Recognized Environmental Conditions
ROW	Right-Of-Way
SARA	Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act
SCDAH	South Carolina Department of Archives and History
SCDEC	South Carolina Department of Environmental Control
SCDNR	South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
SCDOT	South Carolina Department of Transportation
SFHA	Special Flood Hazard Areas
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SO2	Sulfur Dioxide
STIP	Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
TCB	Tricolored Bat
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Office
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
TNM	Traffic Noise Model
UR	Urban Land
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
UST	Underground Storage Tank
V/C	Volume to Capacity Ratio
VMT	Vehicle Miles Traveled
WOTUS	Waters of The United States
WQC	Water Quality Certification

1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) propose to widen approximately 15 miles of Interstate 26 (I-26) from just west of mile marker (MM) 171 to just east of MM 186 in Dorchester and Berkeley Counties, South Carolina. The project would include adding a travel lane in each direction of I-26, grading median/outside shoulders, installing safety barrier walls and/or cable guardrail, replacing 11 bridges (including 5 overpass bridges, 4 mainline bridges, and 2 interchange overpasses), addressing 6 hydrological box culverts and 2 “access” box culverts, and making drainage improvements. The interchange overpass improvements would also include improving the ramps and associated frontage roads. Likewise, the associated frontage and side roads at the five overpass bridges at Seven Mile Road, First Bend Road, Second Bend Road, Taylors Pond Road, and Beidler Forest Road would be improved.

Due to modifications to the Interstate system (I-26) and federal-aid funds, FHWA is the lead federal agency. The project as proposed would result in certain modifications to the human and natural environment. SCDOT, as assigned by FHWA, has prepared this environmental assessment (EA), which examines the proposed project’s potential impacts on the human and natural environment. This EA has been prepared according to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, and corresponding regulations and guidelines of FHWA (Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Part 771 and 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508).

1.1 Project Study Area

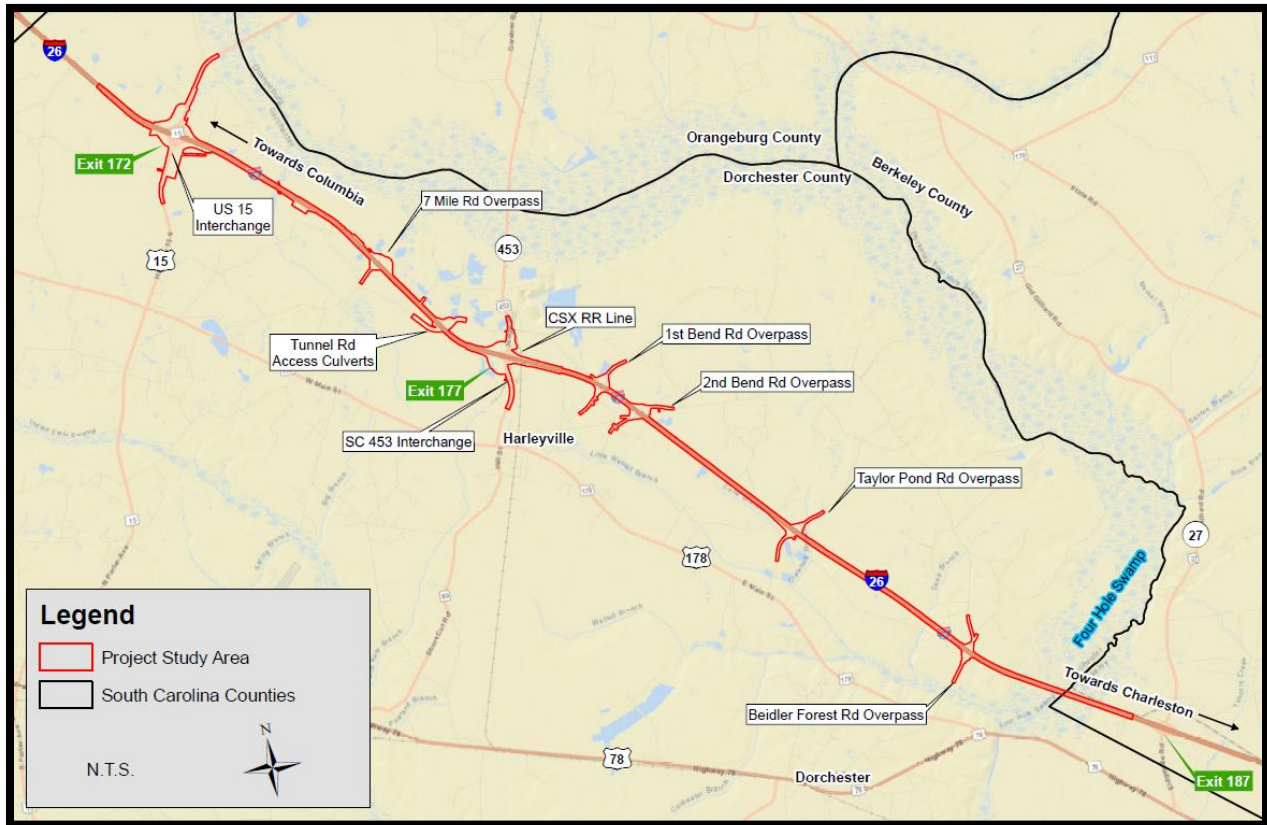
The project study area (PSA) encompasses 1,340 acres and begins just west of the existing I-26 and US Highway 15 (US 15) interchange (Exit 172 A-B) to just west of the I-26 and South Carolina 27 (SC 27) interchange (Exit 187) with additional crossing areas at interchanges and overpass bridges (**Figure 1**).

The PSA is mostly within Dorchester County with a smaller portion located within neighboring Berkeley County. The entire PSA is considered rural and is bordered by farmland, undeveloped land (including protected property belonging to the National Audubon Society), industry, and sparse residential development. Most of the industry in the area is centered around the mining of materials for the production and distribution of Portland cement. The interchange at I-26 and SC 453 (Exit 177) is critical to this industry.

Two population centers are located adjacent to the project. The Town of Harleyville is approximately 1 mile south of the interchange of I-26 and SC 453. Harleyville had a population of 666 based on the 2020 Census. The Town of Holly Hill is approximately 6 miles north of the interchange of I-26 and SC 453. Holly Hill had a population of 1,298 based on the 2020 Census.

I-26 is a major travel corridor running east-west between Tennessee and South Carolina. The I-26 corridor in this PSA serves as a major commuting route and commercial port route between Columbia, South Carolina and Charleston, South Carolina, and provides access to existing and anticipated industrial land uses. Additionally, the western end of the PSA is approximately 1.7 miles from the I-95 and I-26 interchange.

Figure 1. Project study area



1.2 Existing Facilities

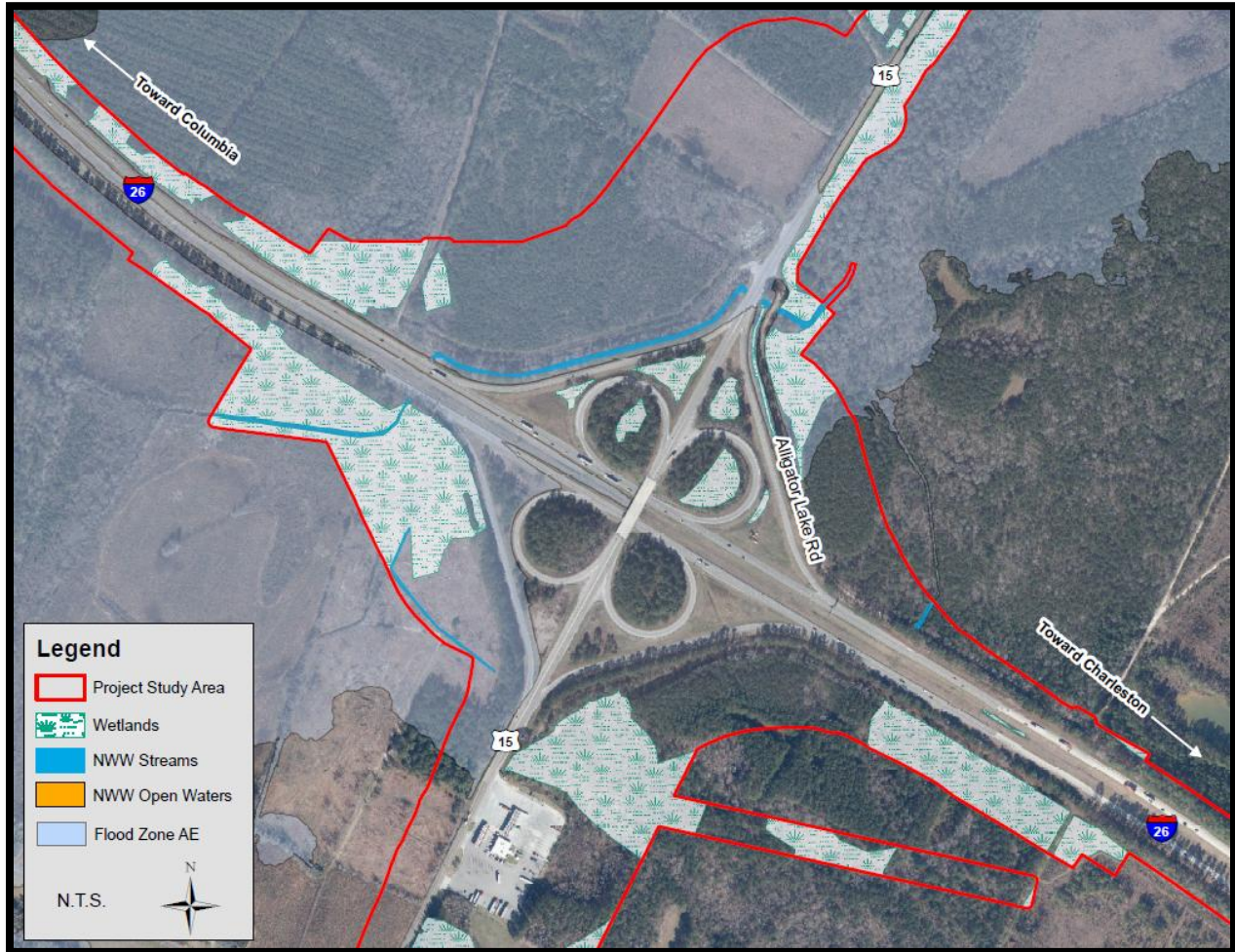
The existing I-26 project corridor contains two 12-foot-wide travel lanes in each direction for approximately 15 miles with interchanges at US 15 (Exit 172) and SC 453 (Exit 177). The project corridor also includes dual bridges over CSX railroad and Four Hole Swamp, and five overpass bridges. The bridges affected within the PSA are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Affected bridges in PSA

Bridge name	Number of travel lanes	Approximate location
US 15 over I-26 (Interchange)	Four	Between MM 171 and 172
S-50 (Seven Mile Road) over I-26	Two	Between MM 174 and 175
SC 453 over I-26 (Interchange)	Two	MM 177
I-26 over CSX Railroad	Two dual lanes (4 total)	Between MM 177 and 178
S-28 (First Bend Road over I-26)	Two	Between MM 178 and 179
S-55 (Second Bend Road over I-26)	Two	MM 179
S-139 (Taylors Pond Road over I-26)	Two	Between MM 181 and 182
S-28 (Beidler Forest Road over I-26)	Two	Between MM 185 and 186
I-26 over Four Hole Swamp	Two dual lanes (4 total)	MM 186

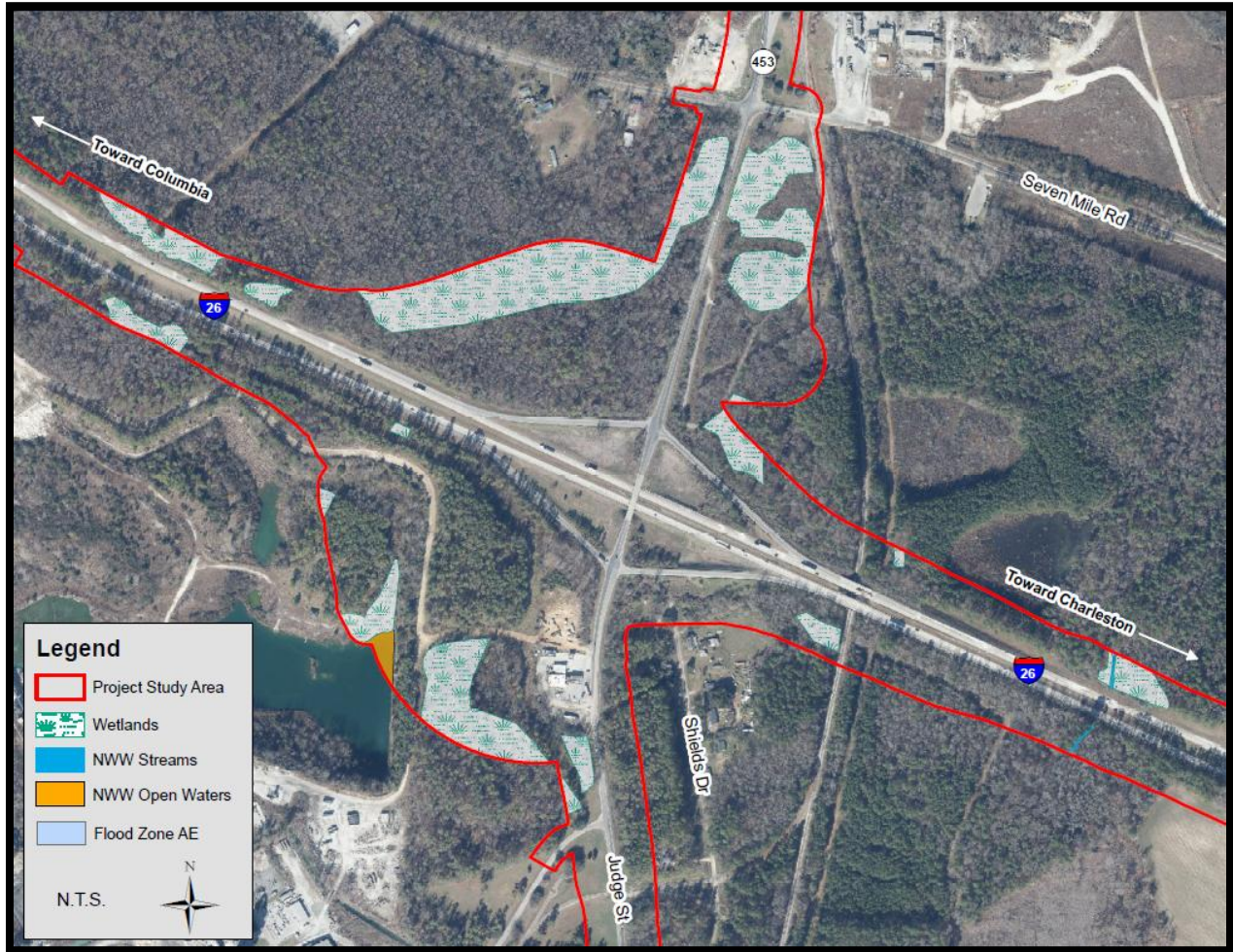
The interchange at Exit 172 is a full clover leaf design that provides northbound and southbound access on US 15 from I-26 (**Figure 2**). The bridge and approximately 1,400 feet of approach on each side are four lanes until it tapers to two lanes. This entire portion of US 15 within Dorchester County is predominantly a two-lane road that extends parallel to I-95 and provides connectivity for several small communities in the area.

Figure 2. Existing US 15 at I-26 interchange (Exit 172 A-B)



The interchange at Exit 177 is a diamond design that provides northbound and southbound access on SC 453 from I-26 (Figure 3). This portion of SC 453 is a two-lane road that connects to the Town of Holly Hill to the north and the Town of Harleyville to the south. It is also the primary route for transporting Portland cement from nearby manufacturing facilities.

Figure 3. Existing SC 453 at I-26 interchange (Exit 177)



2 PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE PROJECT

2.1 Project Purpose

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve traffic operations and existing geometry associated with roadways and bridges along I-26 between mile marker (MM) 172 and 187.

2.2 Project Need













The project is needed based on analysis of existing and projected traffic volumes and operational deficiencies along this section of I-26. Specifically, the existing and projected traffic volumes indicate that I-26 would be operating beyond capacity and would experience an increase in traffic congestion and operational deficiencies if no improvements are made.

In addition, this section of I-26 is dated and includes various design elements that do not meet current design standards in accordance with the *2021 SCDOT Roadway Design Manual* or the *2006 SCDOT Bridge Design Manual*. The ramp loops at I-26 and US 15 do not meet current geometrical design standards for ramp length. Each of the existing bridges fail to meet vertical clearance standards, appropriate shoulder width, or meet current seismic design standards per *2008 SCDOT Seismic Design Specifications*. Additionally, the twin I-26 bridges over CSX railroad do not meet the current horizontal clearance standard from CSX's *2025 Public Project Information* guidebook. Each of the design deficiencies are further explained in Section 2.2.2 Design Optimization.

2.2.1 Operational Deficiencies

Level of service (LOS) is the term used to describe traffic conditions in terms of the level of congestion and speed and travel time. LOS is represented by six letter designations ranging between LOS A and LOS F. LOS A generally represents the best, free-flow operating conditions, and LOS F represents the worst operating conditions. The scale for LOS on highways is presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Level of service for highways and streets

LOS	Flow conditions	Technical descriptions
		This LOS describes completely free-flow conditions. Desired speed and movements are virtually unaffected by the presence of other vehicles and constrained only by the geometric features of the roadway and driver preferences.
		Traffic flow is stable. The presence of other vehicles only slightly restricts freedom to maneuver.
		Traffic flow is stable, but the number of bumper-to-bumper groups of vehicles increases due to slow moving vehicles and turning.
		Unstable traffic flow conditions are approached under LOS D. The desire to pass becomes very high, but safe passing opportunities decrease significantly.
		Passing is virtually impossible. The slowest moving vehicle controls the travel speed.
		Passing is impossible. The slowest moving vehicle controls the travel speed. Very unstable traffic flow conditions exist.

This metric is important because poor levels of service would indicate that traffic along the corridor and interchange ramps would be high, contributing to tighter spacing among vehicles and increased weaving and merging at the ramps.

In 2024, the existing four-lane mainline corridor of I-26 was determined to operate at LOS C or better with an average annual daily traffic (AADT) count of 47,000 while the interchanges of I-26 at US 15 and I-26 at SC 453 operated at LOS B or better.

A capacity analysis was conducted for future conditions along the I-26 corridor between MM 172 and MM 187. This analysis was conducted utilizing the forecasted traffic volumes developed by applying an annual growth rate of 3 percent to the 2024 traffic data, combined with the trips generated by the planned developments in the vicinity of the interchanges.

The results indicate that the I-26 mainline would operate at LOS D or better in 2035 and LOS F in 2055 under the No-Build scenario while AADT is expected to increase to 133,500 AADT by the year 2055.

The results also indicated that the interchanges of I-26 at US 15 and I-26 at SC 453 would continue to operate at LOS B or better in 2035 but by 2055 they would experience LOS F under the No-Build scenario.

The range of LOS conditions for the existing I-26 project corridor is shown in **Table 3** below. Additional details can be found in the *Traffic Operations Analysis Report* in **Appendix A**.

Table 3. LOS under existing and No-Build conditions

Segment	2024 (Existing)	2035 (No-Build)	2055 (No-Build)
I-26 mainline	C or better	D or better	F
I-26 and US 15 interchange	B or better	B or better	F
I-26 and SC 453 interchange	B or better	B or better	F

2.2.2 Design Optimization

Improvements are necessary to address existing geometry and design elements throughout the PSA that either reduce capacity and impede the flow of traffic along the mainline and at points of ingress and egress or address design elements that require improvements to comply with current design standards. The improved geometry is one of the steps needed to improve traffic capacity. There is no eminent risk present, only the need to upgrade design because the standards were modified since the roadway and bridges within the PSA were originally constructed. Correcting these deficiencies will optimize interchange and mainline performance throughout the PSA. These deficiencies include:

- The ramp loops at I-26 and US 15 need to meet current geometrical design standards for acceleration and deceleration ramp lengths. Current ramps are designed for 25 miles per hour (mph) with approximately 200-foot deceleration length. New ramps will be designed for 35 mph and a 500-foot deceleration length.
- The bridges over I-26 need to provide a minimal vertical clearance of 17 feet from the I-26 road surface to the bottom of the overhead bridge structure. They currently range from 15 feet 10 inches to 16 feet 11 inches.
- The bridges over I-26 need to meet current shoulder width requirements based on road classification and design speed:
 - Overpasses: 6-foot-wide shoulders proposed (currently range from 1-foot to 3-foot-wide shoulders)
 - US 15: 10-foot-wide shoulders proposed (currently 3-foot-wide shoulder)
 - SC 453: 8-foot-wide shoulders proposed (currently 3-foot-wide shoulder)
 - I-26 mainline: 12-foot-wide shoulders proposed (currently 10-foot-wide shoulder)
- The twin I-26 bridges over CSX railroad need to meet the current minimum horizontal clearance standards of 25 feet from track to bridge substructure and the minimum vertical clearance standard of 23 feet from the tracks to the bottom of the I-26 bridge structure. Currently the horizontal clearance is 23.1 feet, and the vertical clearance is 22.7 feet.
- The bridges (mainline and overpass) need to meet current seismic design standards.

2.2.3 Logical Termini and Independent Utility

This section of I-26 is part of a series of completed, ongoing, and planned improvements between Charleston and Columbia.

Logical termini are defined as the rational end points for transportation improvements, and rational end points for a review of environmental impacts. FHWA regulations outline three general principles in 23 CFR § 771.111(f) that are to be used for highway projects:

- Connect logical termini and be of sufficient length to address environmental matters on a broad scope
- Have independent utility or independent significance, i.e., be usable and be a reasonable expenditure even if no additional transportation improvements in the area are made; and,
- Not restrict consideration of alternatives for other reasonably foreseeable transportation improvements.

The termini of this proposed widening of I-26 between MM 172 and 187 align with the I-26 Corridor Improvements Project (MM 187 to MM 194) in Berkeley County to the east (SCDOT Project ID P029263) and the proposed I-26 Widening (MM 154 and MM 172) in Dorchester and Orangeburg Counties to the west (SCDOT Project ID P042454). However, the proposed project is not dependent upon, nor would it prevent the evaluation of alternatives associated with the adjacent projects.

The proposed project is determined to have independent utility because it provides additional capacity and operational improvements within the congested project corridor, even if no other existing or future projects are completed. In addition, the project would not create a need for improvements on other roadways or require additional improvements to be effective for addressing the stated purpose and need. The project would improve the LOS of the proposed project segment and would not worsen the adjacent facilities or require additional improvements to adjacent facilities to achieve the improved LOS.

2.2.4 Reasonable Availability of Funding

The current project cost estimate is \$875.7 million. SCDOT will work with the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments and the Charleston Area Transportation Study to revise and update the Long-Range Transportation Plan and local Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to reflect upcoming cost estimate changes. These changes will be reflected in a TIP amendment and will be addressed prior to the final NEPA decision.

3 ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

The analysis of project corridor alternatives included a tiered screening process to evaluate and ultimately identify a recommended preferred alternative to meet the project's purpose and need. Preliminary alternatives considered for the I-26 mainline included widening to either inside or outside of existing lanes while each overpass bridge, including the I-26 and US 15 interchange bridge and the I-26 and SC 453 interchange bridge, were evaluated for replacement on existing alignment, east of existing alignment, or west of existing alignment.

Based on the results of the preliminary screening (Tier 1), one alternative for the I-26 mainline widening, one alternative for each overpass bridge, three alternatives for the I-26 at US-15 interchange bridge, and three alternatives for the I-26 at SC 453 interchange bridge were identified as reasonable build alternatives and developed for further consideration. These alternatives were presented at the public information meeting (PIM) on January 16, 2025.

As part of the reasonable build alternatives analysis (Tier 2), the alternative designs were further refined based on design criteria and engineering judgement. The Tier 2 analysis also included modifications based on traffic operations, project cost, right-of-way (ROW), and impacts to wetlands, streams, and floodplains. This analysis also led to the development of a modified preferred alternative at each of the interchanges.

While the recommended preferred alternative for the project represents the best build alternative for meeting travel demands in the area while minimizing impacts, input received during the public outreach process and environmental document availability period will be carefully evaluated in future project development, and modifications will be made where appropriate.

3.1 No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative considers both existing conditions and reasonably expected future conditions if the proposed project is not constructed. Future conditions account for existing infrastructure as well as committed transportation projects expected to be implemented by the design year 2055. A No-Build Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project but was retained as a baseline for impacts analysis; however, the No-Build Alternative would not improve the capacity deficiencies due to predicted future AADT or rectify the geometric roadway designs to meet current SCDOT design standards. The *Traffic Operations Analysis Report (Appendix A)* provides more information on the No-Build Alternative.

3.2 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

Preliminary alternatives were eliminated from further consideration if they resulted in less desirable traffic operations and/or extensive environmental, utility, or ROW impacts.

3.2.1 I-26 Mainline Widening

Preliminary alternatives considered for the I-26 mainline included widening to either the inside (i.e. median) or outside (i.e. shoulder) of the existing I-26 travel lanes. Widening to the outside was eliminated from further consideration because it would result in greater impacts to waters of the United States (WOTUS), ROW, and adjacent facilities. During preliminary investigations it was determined that the entire project corridor median contained sufficient space (40 feet to 90 feet) to allow for an additional lane in each direction. This would result in minimal clearing, no new ROW, and minimal impact to wetlands. Additionally, conflicts at each of the project’s termini would be avoided since the I-26 Corridor Improvements Project (MM 187 to MM 194) in Berkeley County to the east (SCDOT Project ID P029263) and the proposed I-26 Widening (MM 154 and MM 172) in Dorchester and Orangeburg Counties to the west (SCDOT Project ID P042454) are both widening to the median.

3.2.2 Overpass Bridge Alignments

Each of the overpass bridges is required to be replaced to accommodate the purpose and need for the proposed project. The vertical clearance of each of the bridges needs to be increased to meet current standards and the horizontal bridge openings need to accommodate additional travel lanes while complying with current design standards. The preliminary alternatives considered replacement along existing alignment, new alignment to the west, and new alignment to the east. During preliminary investigations each of the overpass bridges were evaluated to determine the most reasonable design at each location. The alignments were designed such that they minimized impacts to the natural and human environment, complied with design requirements, and connected with existing side and frontage roads.

Based on these criteria, various alignment replacements were eliminated from future consideration. A summary of the preliminary alternatives that were eliminated from further consideration are found in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Overpass alternatives eliminated

Overpass road	Alternatives eliminated and reason
Seven Mile Road	On alignment, due to AADT level and no suitable detour. New alignment to the east, due to wetlands and overhead utilities.
First Bend Road	New alignment to the west and east, due to AADT level and availability of suitable detour; wetlands on the west side and a pond on the east side.
Second Bend Road	New alignment to the west and east, due to AADT level and availability of a suitable detour.
Taylor Pond Road	On alignment, due to AADT level and no suitable detour. New alignment to the east, due to ROW impact.
Beidler Forest Road	On alignment, due to AADT level and no suitable detour. New alignment to the east, due to utilities impacts.

3.2.3 US 15 Over I-26 Interchange Bridge Alignments

Preliminary alternatives associated with the US 15 interchange bridge over I-26 considered replacement along existing, replacement on new alignment to the west, and replacement on new alignment to the east. The replacement of the US 15 bridge and interchange at I-26 on existing alignment was eliminated from consideration due to the need to maintain traffic at the interchange. Replacement to the east of existing alignment was also eliminated from further consideration because this alignment would result in the displacement of the Enmark Service Station and ROW impacts to the National Audubon Society property. Three reasonable interchange build alternatives utilizing a new bridge to the west of existing were advanced for further consideration.

3.2.4 SC 453 over I-26 Interchange Bridge Alignments

Preliminary alternatives associated with the SC 453 interchange bridge over I-26 considered replacement along existing, replacement on new alignment to the west, and replacement on new alignment to the east. The replacement of the SC 453 bridge and interchange at I-26 on existing alignment was eliminated from consideration due to the need to maintain traffic at the interchange. Replacement to the east of existing alignment was also eliminated from further consideration because this alignment would result in utility impacts and design constraints due to the proximity of the CSX railroad. Three reasonable interchange build alternatives utilizing a new bridge to the west of existing were advanced for further consideration.

3.3 Reasonable Build Alternatives

As documented above, after eliminating several preliminary alternatives from consideration, one mainline I-26 widening, one alternative for each of the five overpass bridges, three alternatives for the US 15 at I-26 interchange, and three alternatives for the SC 453 at I-26 interchange were identified as reasonable build alternatives and advanced for further analysis and consideration, including the advancement of design and additional environmental analysis.

As a result of further alternative analysis and coordination, an additional reasonable build alternative was added for both interchanges and evaluated in the development of the preferred alternative.

Each of the alternatives carried forward as reasonable build alternatives were evaluated based on the anticipated level of improvement to traffic conditions, ROW impacts (business and residential impacts), and anticipated project cost. Areas of new ROW were determined based on preliminary design. Other environmental impacts evaluated, including wetland and floodplain impacts, hazardous materials, and cultural resources, were calculated based on the anticipated preliminary roadway footprint. Traffic analysis and modeling was performed for each alternative carried forward, including analysis of the interchanges (refer to the *Traffic Operations Analysis Report* in **Appendix A**).

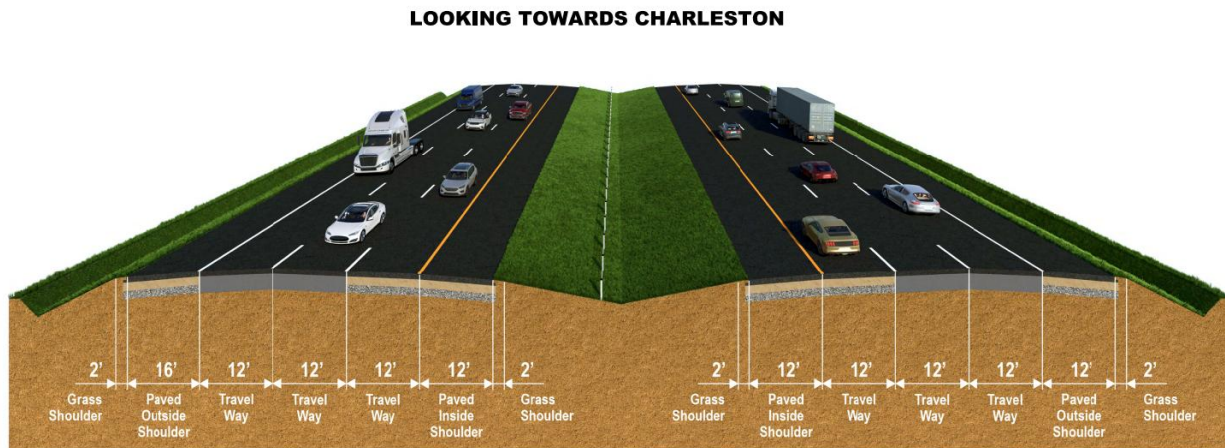
3.3.1 Mainline I-26 Widening

The reasonable build alternative resulting from the Tier 1 analysis is to widen the mainline towards the median. This will allow for the staged construction of the I-26 dual bridges over Four Hole Swamp and the I-26 dual bridges over CSX railroad. Additionally, the single-lane access culverts at Tunnel Road under I-26 will be closed and filled due to size restrictions and low average daily traffic (350 vehicles per day).



Widening the mainline in this manner would limit conflicts with parallel frontage roads, lessen the need for additional ROW, and allow for design consistency with adjacent SCDOT widening projects along I-26 to the east and west of the project's termini. A typical lane configuration at the completion of widening is shown on **Figure 4**.

Figure 4. I-26 Typical lane configuration



3.3.2 Overpass Bridge Replacements

The reasonable build alternatives for the overpass bridges resulting from the Tier 1 analysis would replace the First Bend Road and Second Bend Road overpasses on alignment with detours. The other three overpasses (Seven Mile Road, Taylor Pond Road, and Beidler Forest Road) would be constructed on new alignment to the west without the need for detours. This would allow for optimal traffic flow while minimizing impacts and reducing the construction duration. **Table 5** provides a summary of the alignment location, detour option, and bridge dimensions for each overpass. Specific deciding factors for each overpass bridge are addressed in subsequent chapters.

Table 5. Overpass bridge summary for reasonable build alternatives

Overpass road	Proposed alignment	Detour (length of days)	Total detour distance	Proposed bridge dimension	
				Length (ft)	Width (ft)
Seven Mile Road	New, replacement to west	No	n/a	223'	36-3"
First Bend Road	On existing	Yes (365) ^a	9 miles ^b	224'	36-3"
Second Bend Road	On existing	Yes (365) ^a	9 miles ^b	238'	36-3"
Taylor Pond Road	New, replacement to west	No	n/a	232'	36-3"
Beidler Forest Road	New, replacement to west	No	n/a	225-6"	36-3"

^aNumber of days is approximate, and detours will not occur at the same time.

^bDetour distance represents the maximum distance utilizing state-maintained roads. Local traffic may use alternate county-maintained roads.

3.3.2.1 Seven Mile Road Overpass

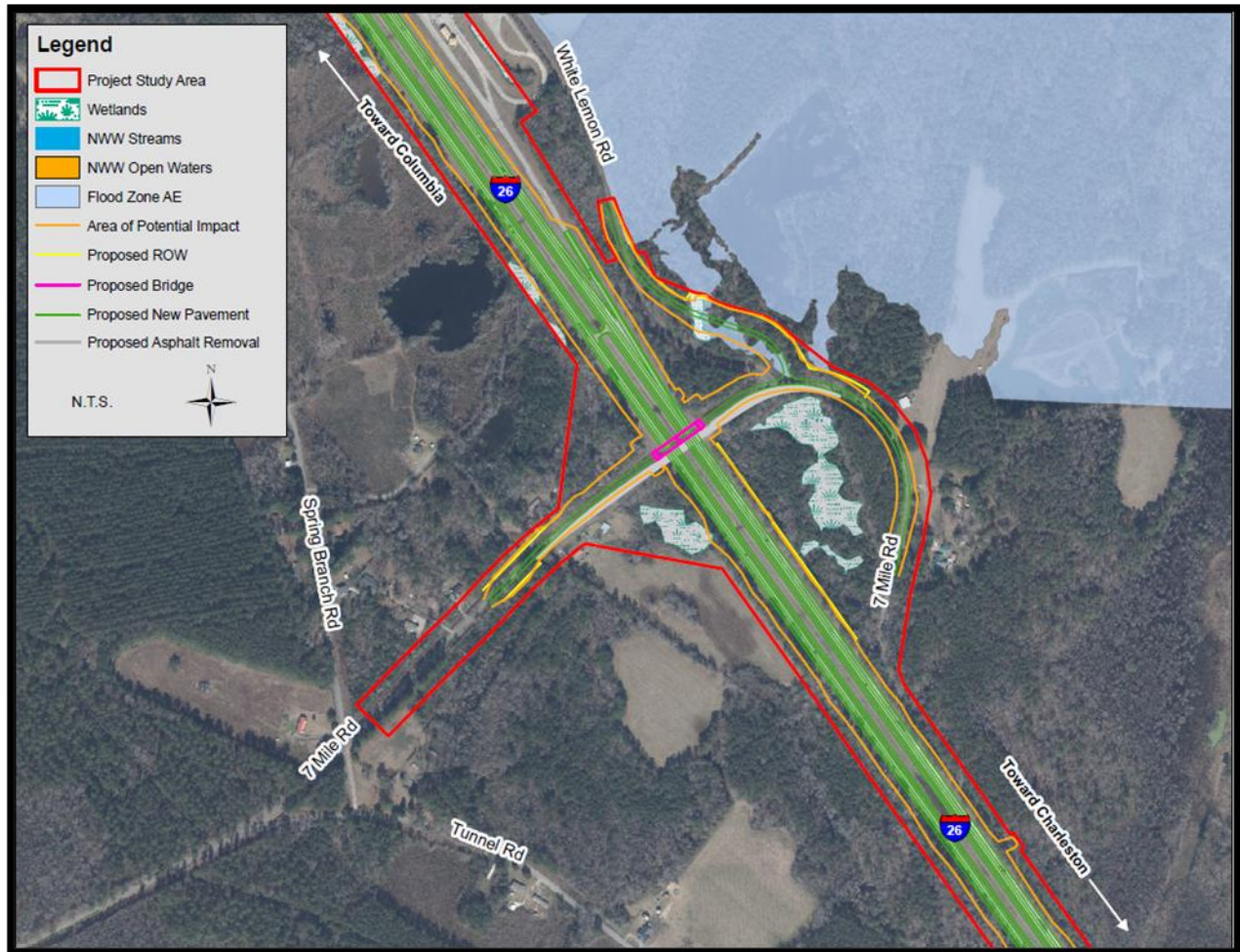
The reasonable build alternative resulting from the Tier 1 analysis would replace the Seven Mile Road overpass on new alignment to the west of the existing bridge.

The Seven Mile Road overpass is surrounded by forested wetlands and uplands, planted pine, residential homes, maintained lawns and ROW, and existing road and utility infrastructure. Wetlands were identified approximately 200 feet to the north and south of the bridge on the eastern side of Seven Mile Road.

Geometrically, Seven Mile Road is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing bridge, with a curved alignment approaching from the east. The intersection with White Lemon Road is approximately 330 feet from the north end of the existing bridge and does not affect the geometry of the proposed bridge replacement. Since the site is a grade separation, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Due to the lack of available detour routes, and nearby residences, a new alignment replacement is proposed. Replacement to the west of the existing bridge was identified as the preferred alternative due to the existing roadway geometry and potential impact to adjacent wetlands if replacement was conducted to the east (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Seven Mile Road overpass



3.3.2.2 First Bend Road Overpass

The reasonable build alternative resulting from the Tier 1 analysis would replace the First Bend Road overpass on existing alignment.

The First Bend Road overpass is surrounded by forested upland and wetlands, ponds, agricultural fields, residential lots, and existing utility and transportation infrastructure. Wetlands were identified approximately 500 feet south of the bridge on the western side of First Bend Road, and at the end of the PSA between Greenhill Road and the edge of the PSA at the start of the tree line. In addition, a large pond was identified along the east side of First Bend Road and Greenhill Road. Existing utilities near the bridge site consist of telecommunications and overhead power lines. Both utilities are over 500 feet south of the existing bridge and should not conflict with this proposed bridge replacement.

Geometrically, First Bend Road is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing and proposed bridges. The intersection with Seven Mile Road/Greenhill Road to the east is over 500

feet beyond the end of the existing bridge which does not affect the geometry of the proposed bridge replacement. Since the site is a grade separation, not a water crossing, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Due to the relatively low average daily traffic volume (384 vehicles) and a feasible detour route, the new bridge is proposed to be constructed on essentially the same alignment by closing the existing bridge and detouring traffic during construction. This avoids any impact to existing utilities, the pond, and adjacent wetlands (**Figure 6**).

The new detour is a maximum of 9 miles, and it is anticipated that the detour would last approximately 12 months (**Figure 7**). The bridge closure and detour at this location will not occur during the same time as the Second Bend Road overpass closure and detour.

Figure 6. First Bend Road overpass

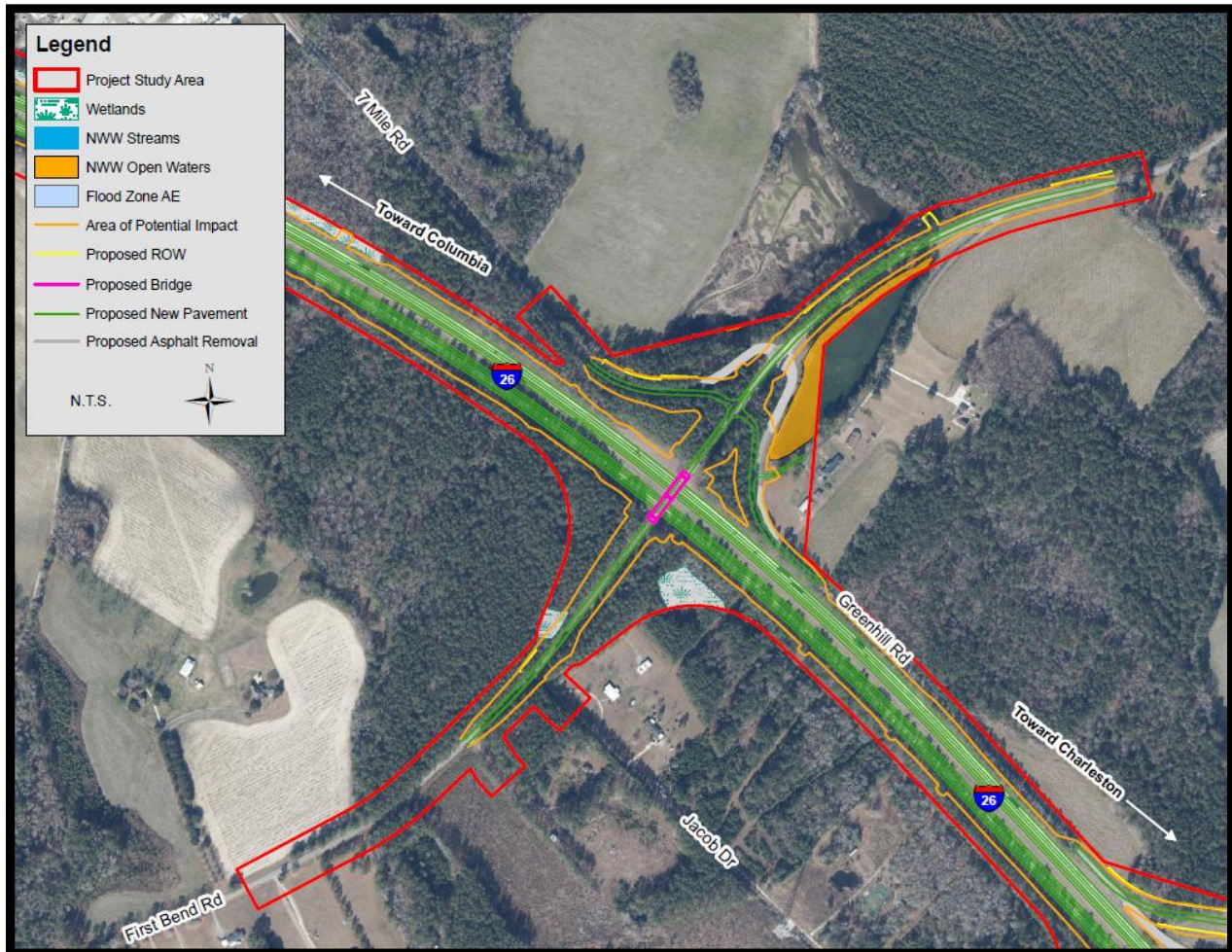
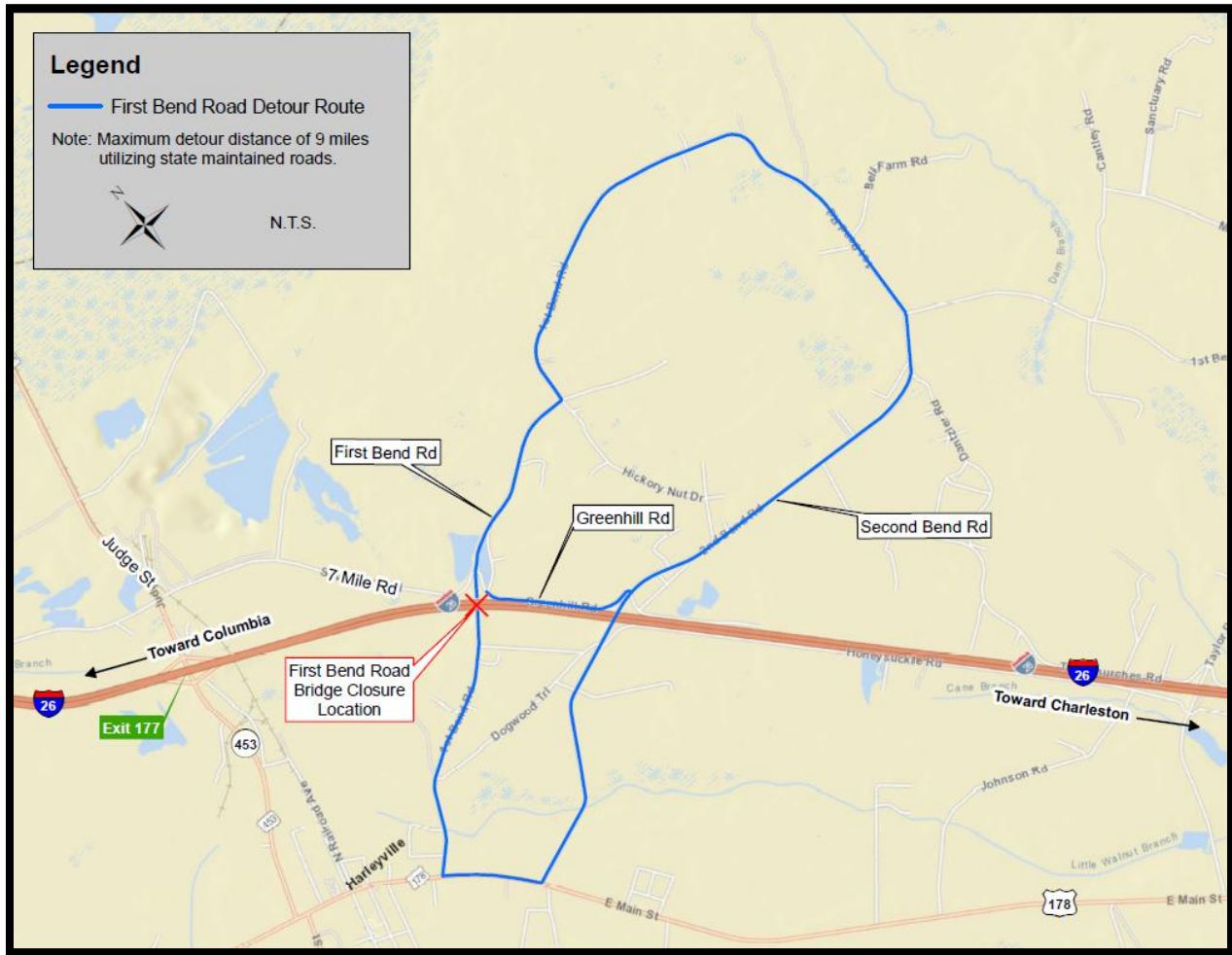


Figure 7. First Bend Road overpass detour



3.3.2.3 Second Bend Road Overpass

The reasonable build alternative resulting from the Tier 1 analysis would replace the Second Bend Road overpass on existing alignment.

The Second Bend Road overpass is surrounded by forested upland, agricultural fields, residential lots, and existing utility and transportation infrastructure. No wetlands were identified within the immediate vicinity of the crossing. Existing utilities consist of telecommunications lines on both sides of Second Bend Road and an overhead power line. The telecommunications lines extend under I-26 and are not attached to the existing bridge. The power line should not be affected by the project.

Geometrically, Second Bend Road is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing and proposed bridge. The road curves to the right east of the bridge, but the curve does not affect stopping sight distance at the bridge. Intersections with Honeysuckle Road/Dogwood Trail to the west and Dantzler Pond Road/Greenhill Road to the east are over 500 feet beyond the ends of

the existing bridge and should not affect the geometry of the proposed bridge replacement. Since the site is a grade separation, not a water crossing, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Due to the relatively low average daily traffic volume (680 vehicles) and a feasible detour route, the new bridge is proposed to be constructed on essentially the same alignment by closing the existing bridge and detouring traffic during construction. This avoids any impact to existing utilities (**Figure 8**).

The new detour is a maximum of 9 miles, and it is anticipated that the detour would last approximately 12 months (**Figure 9**). The bridge closure and detour at this location will not occur during the same time as the First Bend Road overpass closure and detour.

Figure 8. Second Bend Road overpass

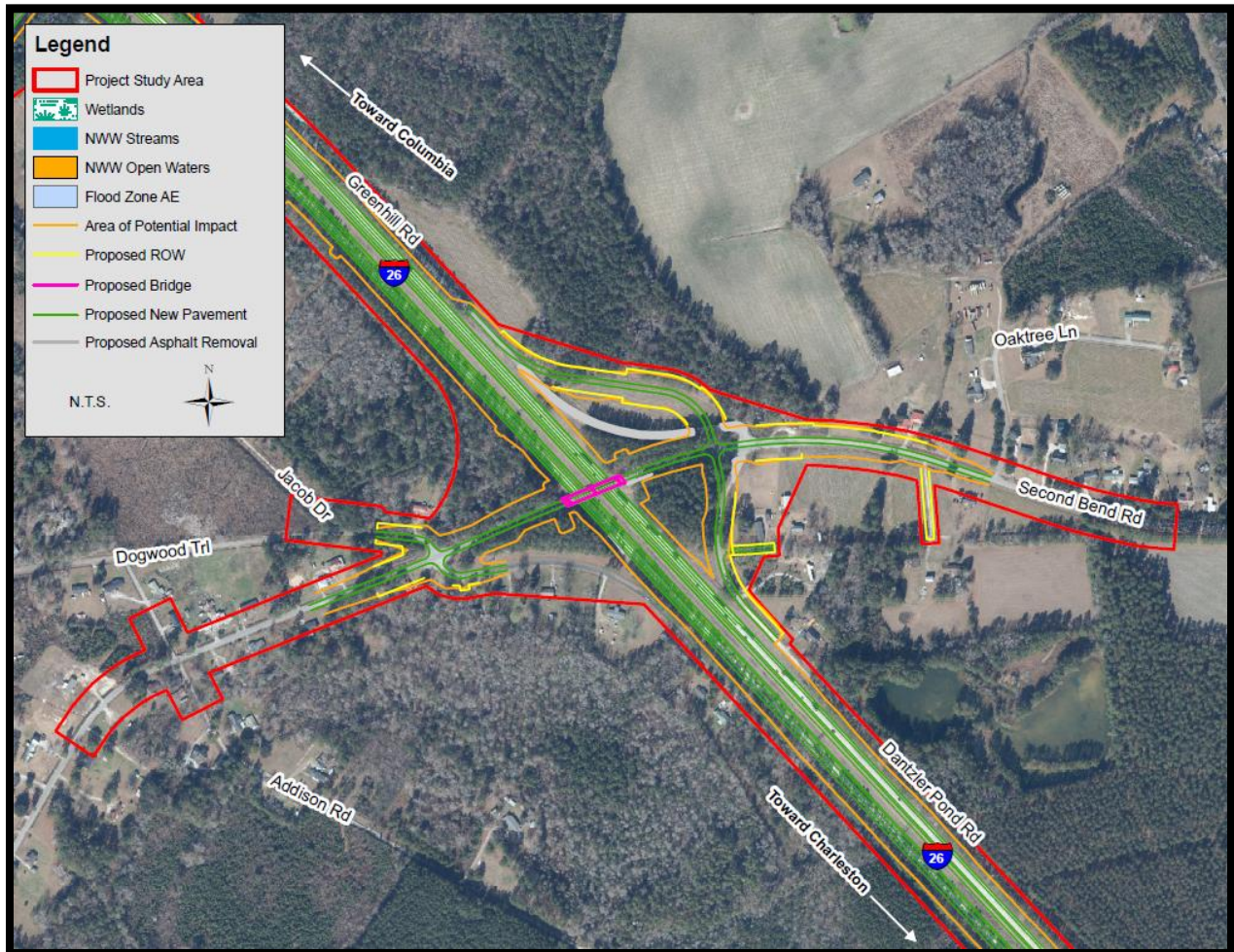
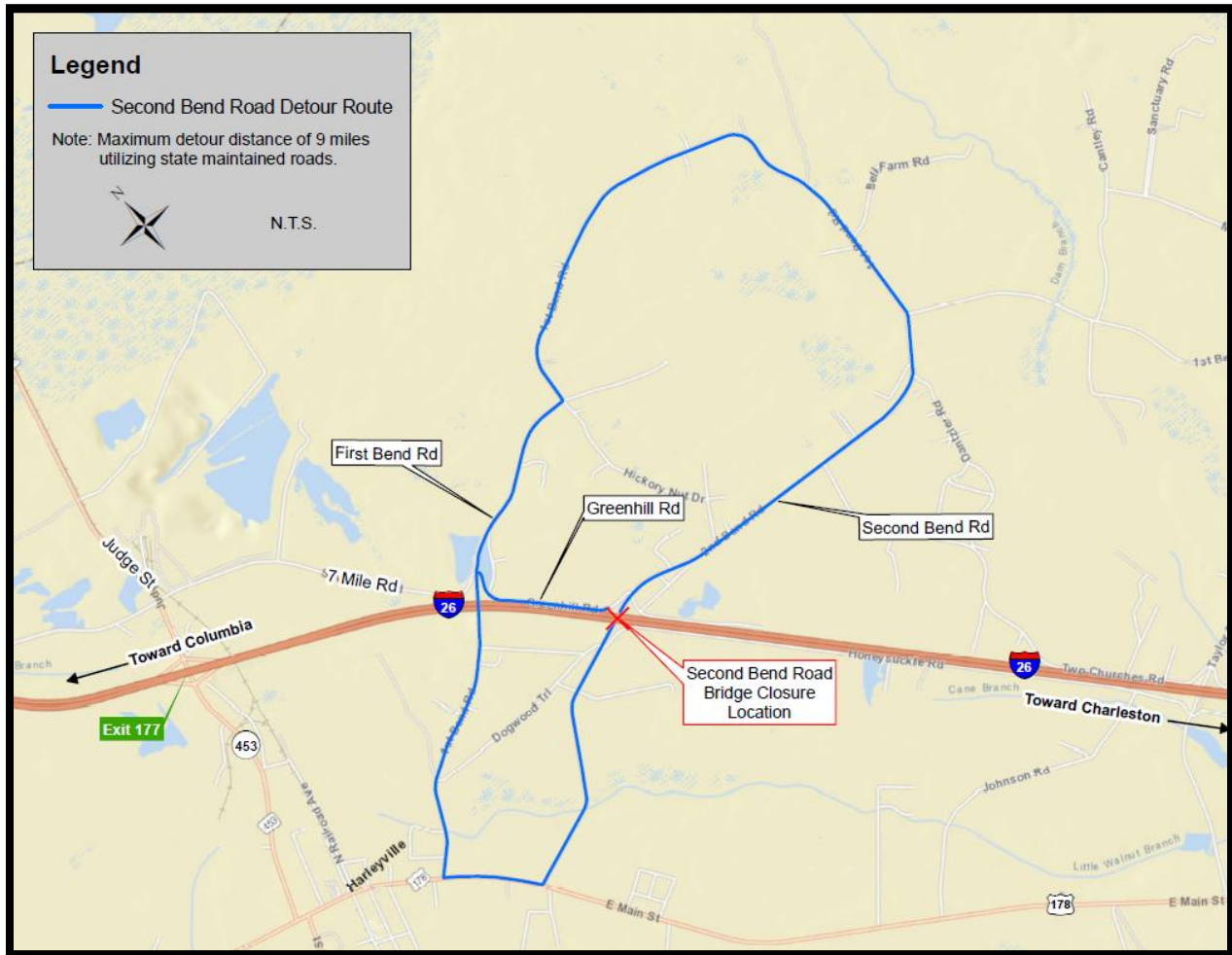


Figure 9. Second Bend Road overpass detour



3.3.2.4 Taylor Pond Road Overpass

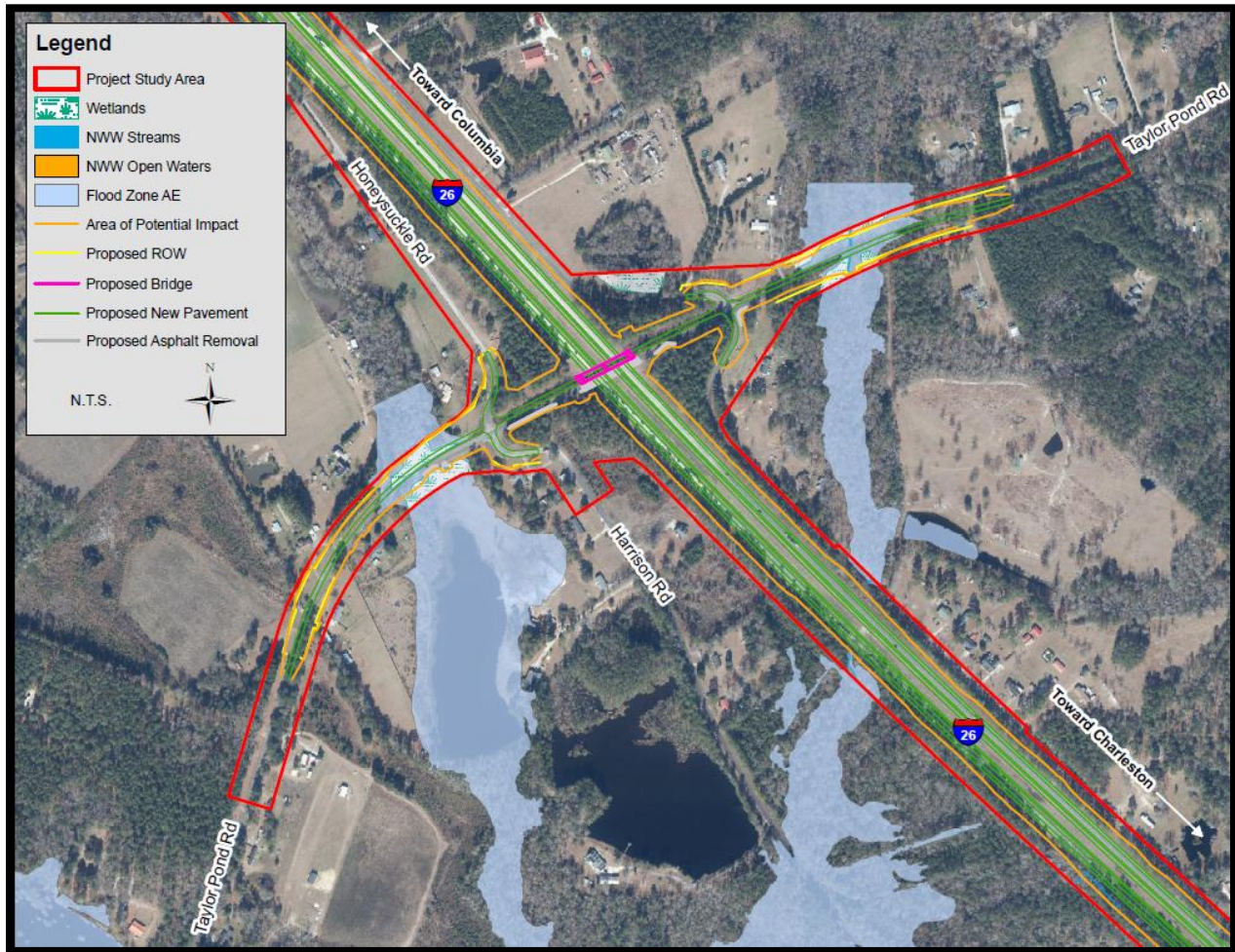
The reasonable build alternative resulting from the Tier 1 analysis would replace the Taylor Pond Road overpass on new alignment to the west of the existing bridge.

The Taylor Pond Road overpass is surrounded by forested upland and wetlands, ponds, agricultural fields, residential lots, and existing utility and transportation infrastructure. A wetland was identified southwest of Taylor Pond Road's intersection with Harrison Road and Honeysuckle Road. This wetland was forested on the western side of Taylor Pond Road, and predominantly emergent to the east. An additional wetland was observed northwest of Taylor Pond Road's intersection with Two Churches Road. Another wetland was identified and associated with a stream approximately 450 feet east of the intersection of Taylor Pond Road with Two Churches Road and Sweatman Road and was densely forested. Existing utilities near the bridge site consist of telecommunications and overhead power lines. Both utilities are north of the existing bridge.

Geometrically, Taylor Pond Road is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing and proposed bridge. Intersections with Honeysuckle Road/Harrison Road to the west and Two Churches Road/Sweatman Road to the east are over 500 feet beyond the ends of the existing bridge and should not affect the geometry of the proposed bridge replacement. Since the site is a grade separation, not a water crossing, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Due to the lack of available detour routes, and nearby residences, a new alignment replacement is proposed. Replacement to the west of the existing bridge was identified as the preferred alternative due to the existing roadway geometry (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10. Taylor Pond Road overpass



3.3.2.5 Beidler Forest Road Overpass

The reasonable build alternative resulting from the Tier 1 analysis would replace the Beidler Forest Road overpass on new alignment to the west of the existing bridge.

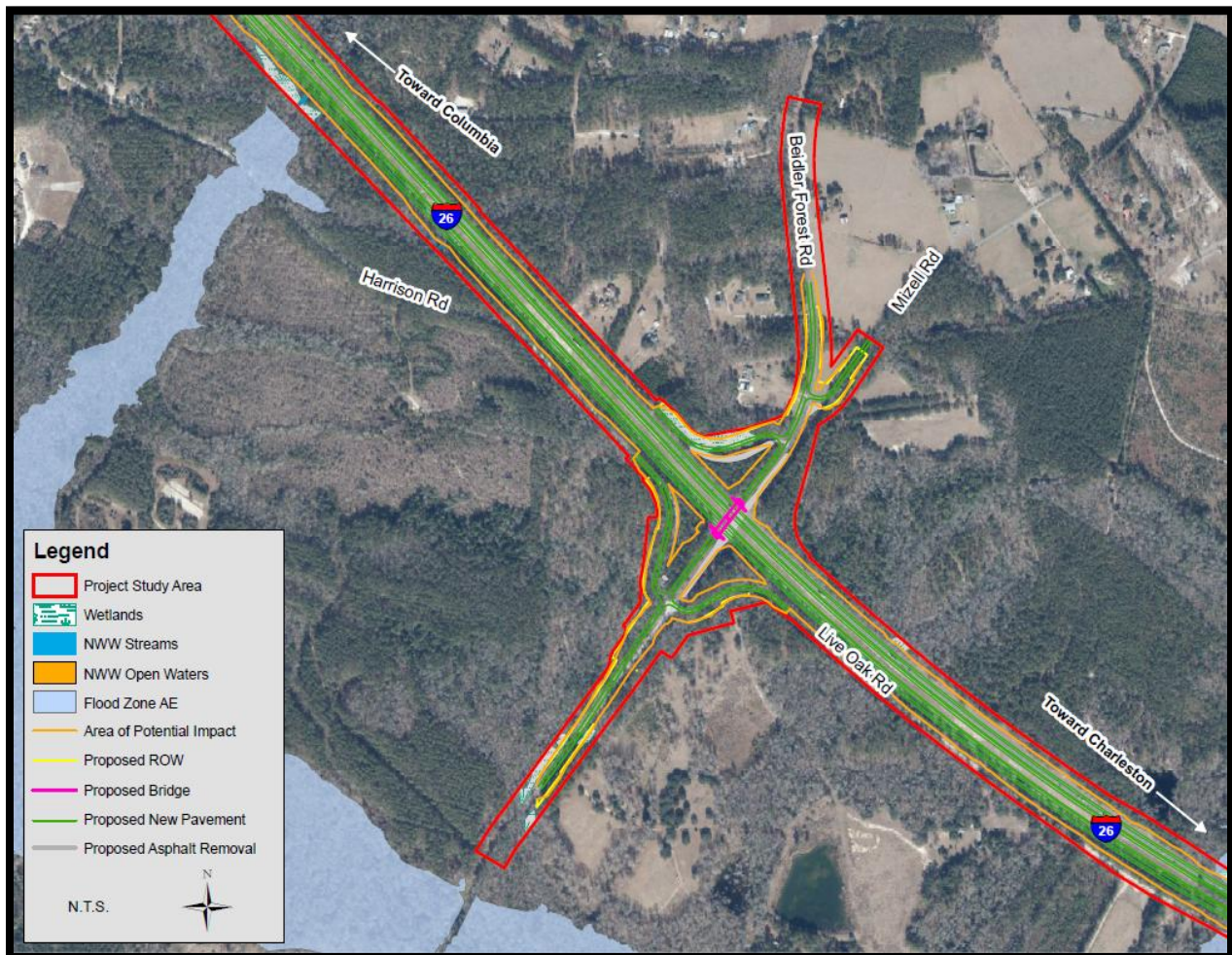
The Beidler Forest Road overpass is surrounded by forested uplands and wetlands, agricultural fields and pastures, residential lots, and utility and transportation infrastructure. Multiple

wetlands were identified during the field review, including 1,000 feet south of the bridge on both sides of Beidler Forest Road, and northwest of the bridge adjacent to Sweatman Road. Existing utilities near the bridge site consist of telecommunications and overhead power lines. Both utilities are east of the existing bridge.

Geometrically, Beidler Forest Road is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing and proposed bridges. Intersections with Harrison Road/Live Oak Road to the south and Sweatman Road to the north are over 500 feet beyond the ends of the existing bridge and should not affect the geometry of the proposed bridge replacement. Since the site is a grade separation, not a water crossing, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Due to the lack of available detour routes, a new alignment bridge replacement is proposed. Replacement to the west of the existing bridge was identified as the preferred alternative to avoid utility impacts at this site (**Figure 11**).

Figure 11. Beidler Forest Road overpass



3.3.3 US 15 over I-26 Interchange Alternatives

Four reasonable build alternatives were considered at the US 15 over I-26 interchange (Exit 172 A-B) to accommodate the widening of the I-26 mainline and to address the operational deficiencies of the existing interchange ramp system. This includes the three preliminary alternatives and the addition of Alternative 1B, which was developed to remove the I-26 eastbound exit loop ramp to reduce cost and alleviate ingress/egress concerns at the Enmark Service Station for the US 15 at I-26 interchange. Each of the reasonable build alternatives would be built on new alignment to the west of the existing structure allowing traffic operations to continue during construction. The approximately 147-acre area around the I-26 at US 15 interchange consists of forested uplands and wetlands, emergent wetlands, streams, agricultural fields, a gas station, and utility and transportation infrastructure. Numerous wetlands were identified during field reviews and from prior delineations; however, their locations do not affect the interchange alternatives.

Geometrically, US 15 is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing and proposed bridges. Traffic analysis and roadway design was completed to determine the recommended preferred interchange concept which dictated the alignment of the proposed bridge. Since the site is a grade separation, not a water crossing, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Existing utilities near the US 15 bridge site consist of telecommunications and overhead electric lines. Telecommunication lines extend along the east side of the existing bridge. A replacement structure west of the existing bridge would avoid utility impacts at this site. Two potential hazardous waste sites are located near the interchange. They are: Enmark fueling station (2722 Highway 15 North) and former I-26 One Stop fueling station (2877 Highway 15 North). A comparison of preliminary impacts from each of the alternatives is shown in **Table 6** below.

Table 6. I-26 and US 15 interchange alternatives preliminary impacts

Impact category	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 1B (preferred)
LOS in design year (2055)	D	D	F	C
New potential ROW (acres)	42	51	36	42
Stream impacts (linear feet)	1,665	1,828	1,623	2,230
Wetland impacts (acres)	11.2	15.8	10.7	13.5
Possible relocations	0	0	0	0
Hazardous materials sites	2	2	2	2

3.3.3.1 US 15 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 1)

This interchange alternative consists of a partial clover leaf off-ramp configuration.

I-26 westbound to US 15 northbound would consist of a direct off-ramp, similar to the existing condition. The US 15 northbound to I-26 westbound loop ramp would be removed, and the movement would access the I-26 westbound direct on-ramp via an unsignalized left turn. This direct on-ramp will also provide US 15 southbound free flow yield access onto I-26 westbound.

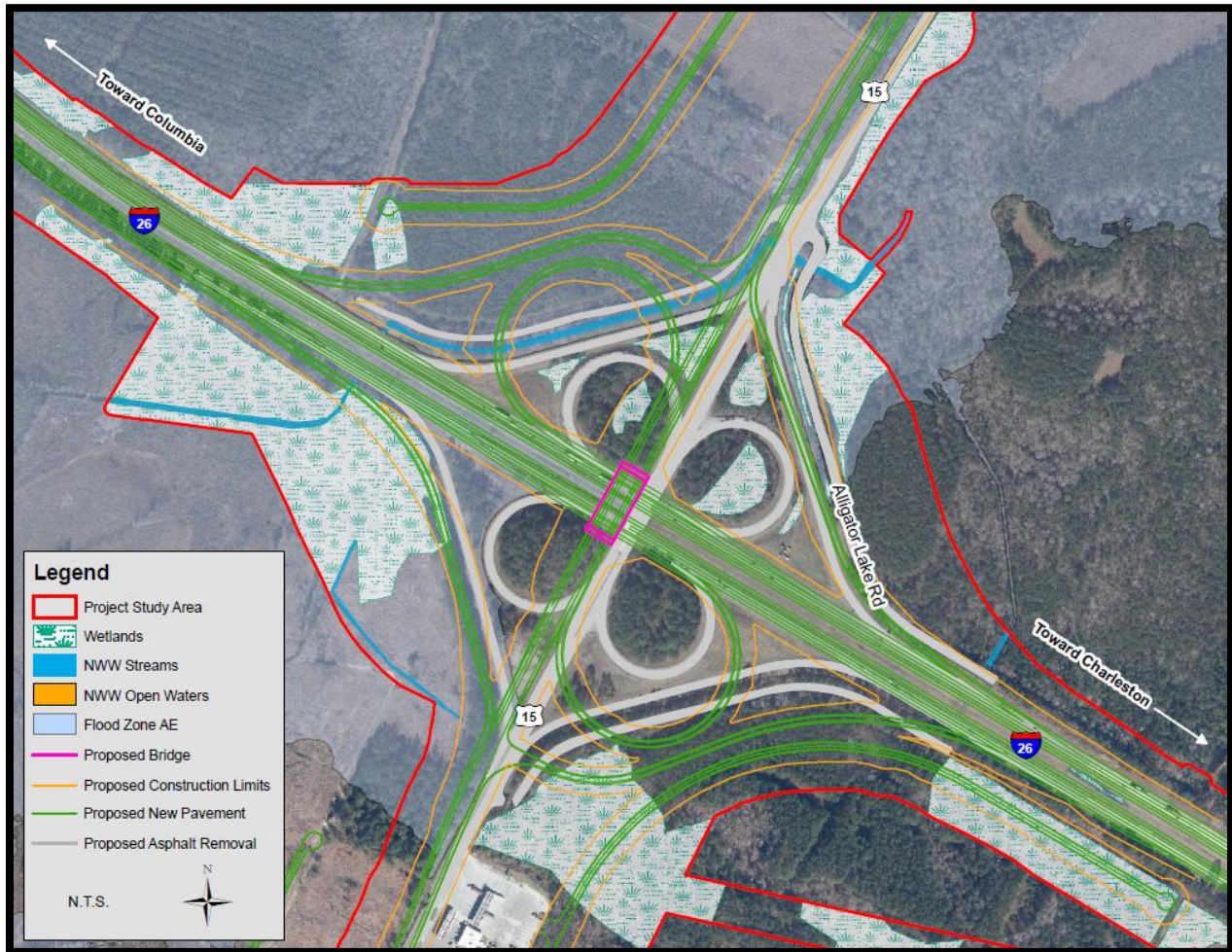
I-26 westbound to US 15 southbound would consist of a larger, redesigned loop ramp to improve capacity and operation.

I-26 eastbound to US 15 southbound would consist of a direct off-ramp, similar to the existing condition. The US 15 southbound to I-26 eastbound loop ramp would be removed, and the movement would access the I-26 eastbound direct on-ramp via an unsignalized left turn. This direct on-ramp would also provide US 15 northbound free flow yield access onto I-26 eastbound.

I-26 eastbound to US 15 northbound would consist of a larger, redesigned loop ramp to improve capacity and operation.

The reconstruction of the interchange would require the realignment of adjacent frontage/access roads. Access to property on Alligator Lakes Road from US 15 would be relocated farther north. Three Ravens Road from US 15 would be relocated farther north. Buzzards Roost Road from US 15 would be relocated farther south and would also allow additional access to Enmark convenience store and fueling station. Once completed, Alternative 1 would provide LOS D in the 2055 design year with no other modifications. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 12**.

Figure 12. US 15 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 1)



3.3.3.2 US 15 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 2)

This interchange alternative consists of a partial clover leaf on-ramp configuration with signalization.

I-26 westbound to US 15 would consist of a direct off-ramp with signalized movement onto US 15 southbound and US 15 northbound. The US 15 northbound to I-26 westbound loop ramp would consist of a larger, redesigned loop ramp to improve capacity and operation.

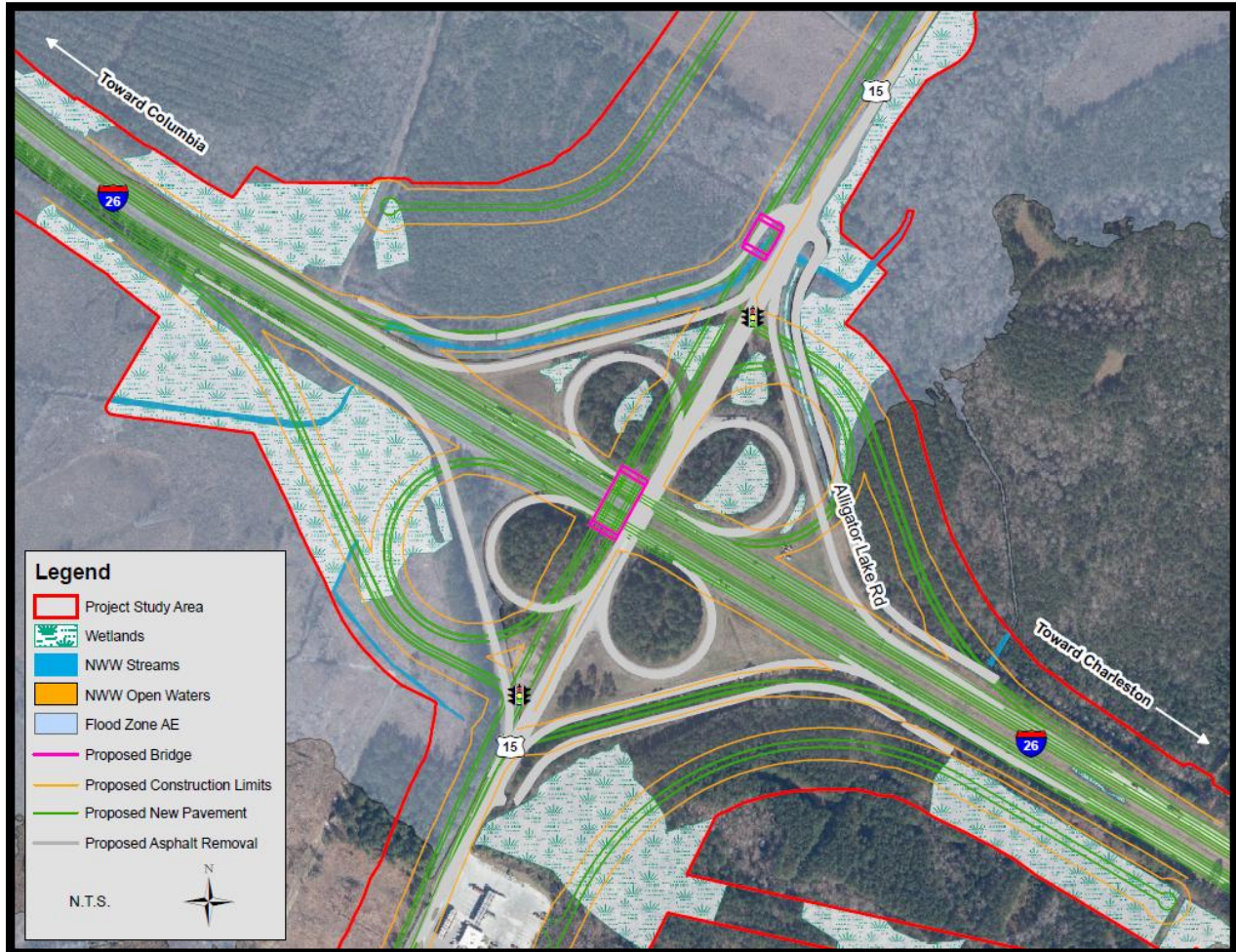
The existing I-26 westbound to US 15 southbound loop ramp would be removed. A direct on-ramp would provide US 15 southbound free flow yield access onto I-26 westbound.

I-26 eastbound to US 15 would consist of a direct off-ramp with signalized movement onto US 15 northbound and US 15 southbound. The US 15 southbound to I-26 eastbound loop ramp would consist of a larger, redesigned loop ramp to improve capacity and operation.

The existing I-26 eastbound to US 15 northbound loop ramp would be removed. A direct on-ramp would provide US 15 northbound free flow yield access onto I-26 eastbound.

The reconstruction of the interchange would require the realignment of adjacent frontage/access roads. Access to property on Alligator Lakes Road from US 15 would be relocated farther north. Three Ravens Road from US 15 would be relocated farther north. Buzzards Roost Road from US 15 would be relocated farther south and would also allow additional access to Enmark fueling station. Once completed, Alternative 2 would provide LOS D in the 2055 design year with no other modifications. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 13**.

Figure 13. US 15 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 2)



3.3.3.3 US 15 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 3)

This interchange alternative would remove all four existing loop ramps and replace them with a full diamond interchange with signalization.

I-26 westbound to US 15 would consist of a direct off-ramp with dual left turn lanes via signalized movement onto US 15 southbound and free flow merge access onto US 15 northbound.

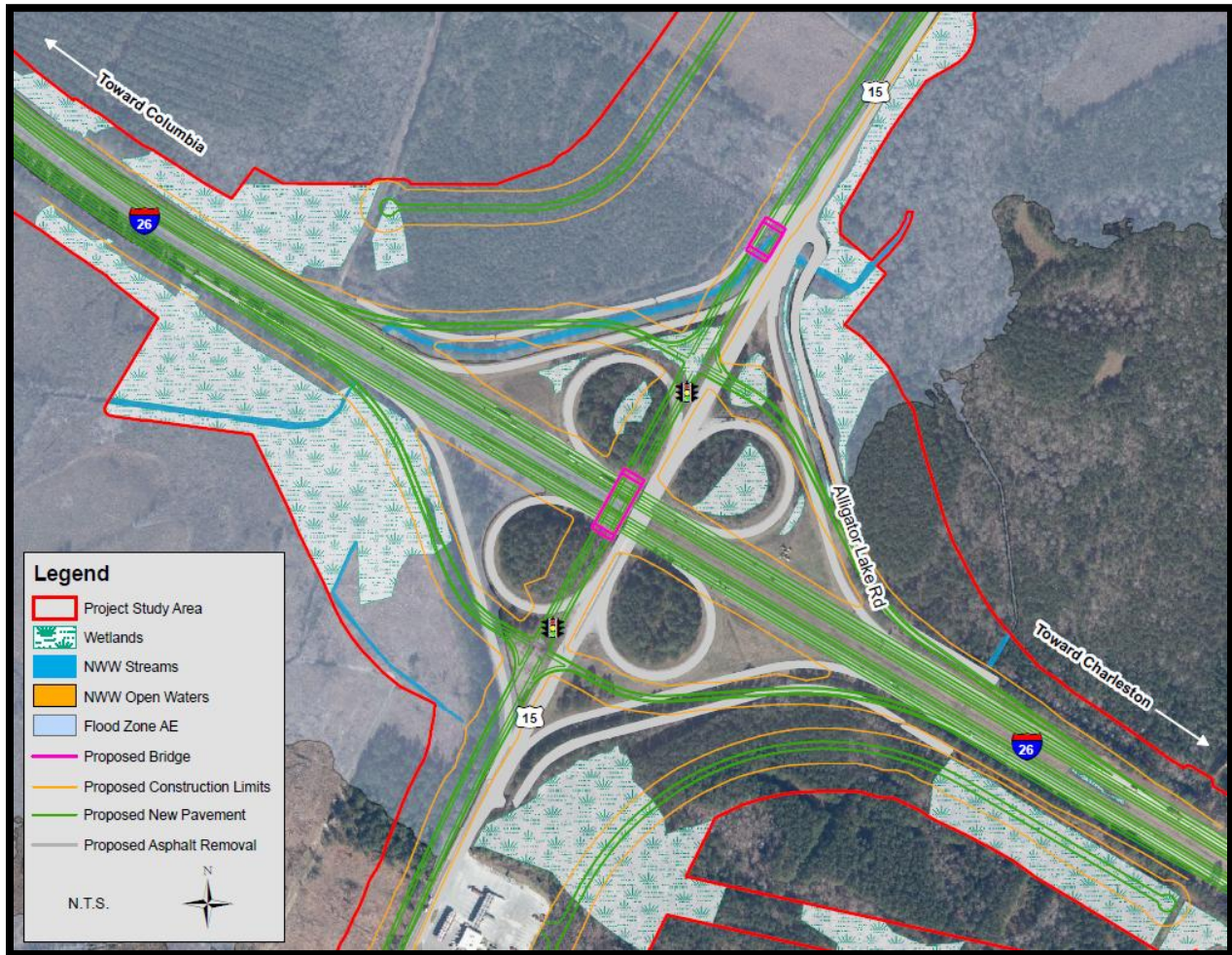
A direct on-ramp will provide US 15 southbound free flow yield access onto I-26 westbound and a signalized left turn movement will allow US 15 northbound access onto I-26 westbound via the same ramp.

I-26 eastbound to US 15 would consist of a direct off-ramp with dual left turn lanes via signalized movement onto US 15 northbound and free flow merge access onto US 15 southbound.

A direct on-ramp would provide US 15 northbound free flow yield access onto I-26 eastbound and a signalized left turn movement would allow US 15 southbound access onto I-26 eastbound via the same ramp.

The reconstruction of the interchange would require the realignment of adjacent frontage/access roads. Access to property on Alligator Lakes Road from US 15 would be relocated farther north. Three Ravens Road from US 15 would be relocated farther north. Buzzards Roost Road from US 15 would be relocated farther south and would also allow additional access to Enmark convenience store and fueling station. Once completed, Alternative 3 would provide LOS F in the 2055 design year with no other modifications. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 14**.

Figure 14. US 15 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 3)



3.3.3.4 US 15 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 1B)

This is a modification of Reasonable Build Alternative 1 that was developed after further design considerations that improved LOS.

I-26 westbound to US 15 northbound would consist of a direct off-ramp, similar to the existing condition. The US 15 northbound to I-26 westbound loop ramp would be removed, and the movement would access I-26 westbound direct on-ramp via an unsignalized left turn. This direct on-ramp would also provide US 15 southbound free flow yield access onto I-26 westbound.

I-26 westbound to US 15 southbound would consist of a larger, redesigned loop ramp to improve capacity and operation.

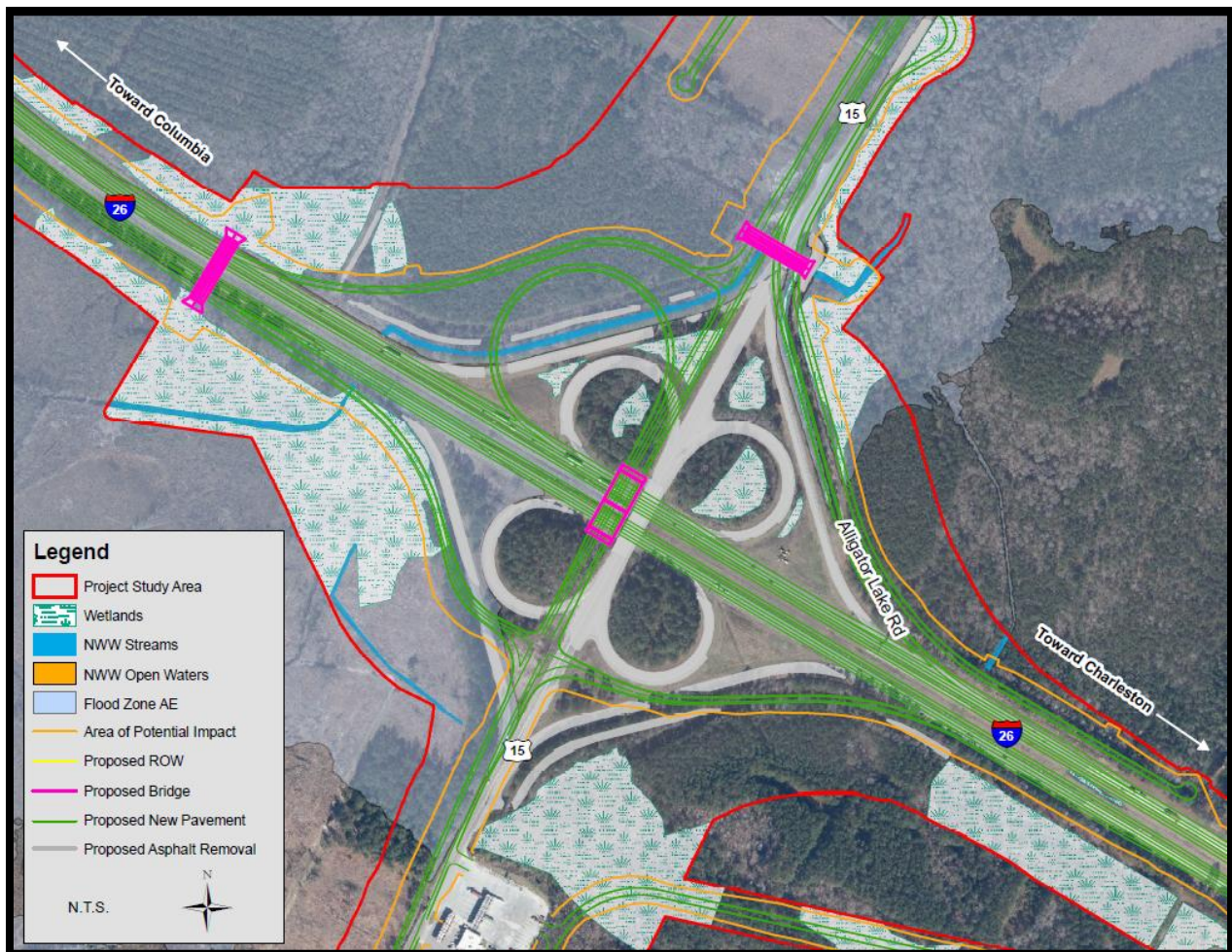
I-26 eastbound to US 15 would consist of a direct off-ramp with an unsignalized left turn movement onto US 15 northbound and free flow merge access onto US 15 southbound.

A direct on-ramp would provide US 15 northbound free flow yield access onto I-26 eastbound and an unsignalized left turn movement in a dedicated lane would allow US 15 southbound access onto I-26 eastbound via the same ramp.

This configuration results in similar operational conditions as Alternative 1, with a LOS range of B (2035) to LOS D (2055) and comparable impacts, while reducing construction costs and ROW. Specifically, the modifications resulted in the elimination of a potential relocation of a commercial property (Enmark convenience store and fueling station). In addition, the recommended preferred alternative modified the alignment in the northeast quadrant to avoid property owned by the National Audubon Society.

Based on this design's ability to meet the purpose and need of the project while minimizing impacts to the environment, Alternative 1B will be carried forward as the recommended preferred alternative for the US 15 at I-26 interchange. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 15**.

Figure 15. US 15 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 1B)



3.3.4 SC 453 over I-26 Interchange Alternatives

Four reasonable build alternatives were considered at the SC 453 over I-26 interchange (Exit 177) to accommodate the widening of the I-26 mainline and to address the operational deficiencies of the existing interchange ramp system. This includes the three preliminary alternatives and the addition of Alternative 2B, which was developed to remove the I-26 eastbound entrance loop ramp to avoid environmental impacts to ARGOS Cement property for the SC 453 at I-26 interstate interchange. Each of the reasonable build alternatives would be built on new alignment to the west of the existing structure allowing traffic operations to continue during construction. Additionally, each new interchange overpass would be widened from two travel lanes to four travel lanes that will taper back to two lanes near Seven Mile Road to the north and Shields Drive to the south on SC 453. The approximately 94-acre area around the I-26 at SC 453 interchange consists of forested uplands and wetlands, ponds, agricultural fields, a gas station, and utility and transportation infrastructure. Numerous wetlands were identified during field reviews and from prior delineations; however, their locations do not affect the interchange alternatives.

Geometrically, SC 453 is in a tangent alignment within the limits of the existing and proposed bridges. Traffic analysis and roadway design was completed to determine the recommended preferred interchange concept which dictated the alignment of the proposed bridge. Since the site is a grade separation, not a water crossing, there are no bridge hydraulic constraints to consider.

Existing utilities near the SC 453 bridge site consist of telecommunications and overhead power lines. Telecommunication lines extend along the east side of the existing bridge. A replacement structure west of the existing bridge would avoid utility impacts at this site. Five potential hazardous waste sites are located near the interchange. They are Giant Cement (654 Judge Street), Ronnie’s fueling station (495 Judge Street), D&R Waste Tire Processing (adjacent to Ronnie’s), ARGOS Cement (463 Judge Street), and Orangeburg Redi-Mix (corner of Judge Street and Seven Mile Road). Additionally, Ronnie’s fueling station is anticipated to be acquired for ROW. A comparison of preliminary impacts from each of the alternatives is shown on **Table 7** below.

Table 7. I-26 and SC 453 interchange alternatives preliminary impacts

Impact category	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 2B (preferred)
LOS in design year (2055)	E	D	E	C
New potential ROW (acres)	10	38	37	28
Stream impacts (linear feet)	132	132	133	120
Wetland impacts (acres)	3.8	5.6	4.1	8.0
Possible relocations (commercial)	1	1	1	2
Hazardous materials sites	5	5	5	5

3.3.4.1 SC 453 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 1)

This interchange alternative would replace the existing full diamond interchange with a similar full diamond signalized interchange.

I-26 westbound to SC 453 would consist of a direct off-ramp with dual left turn lanes via signalized movement onto SC 453 southbound and free flow merge access onto SC 453 northbound.

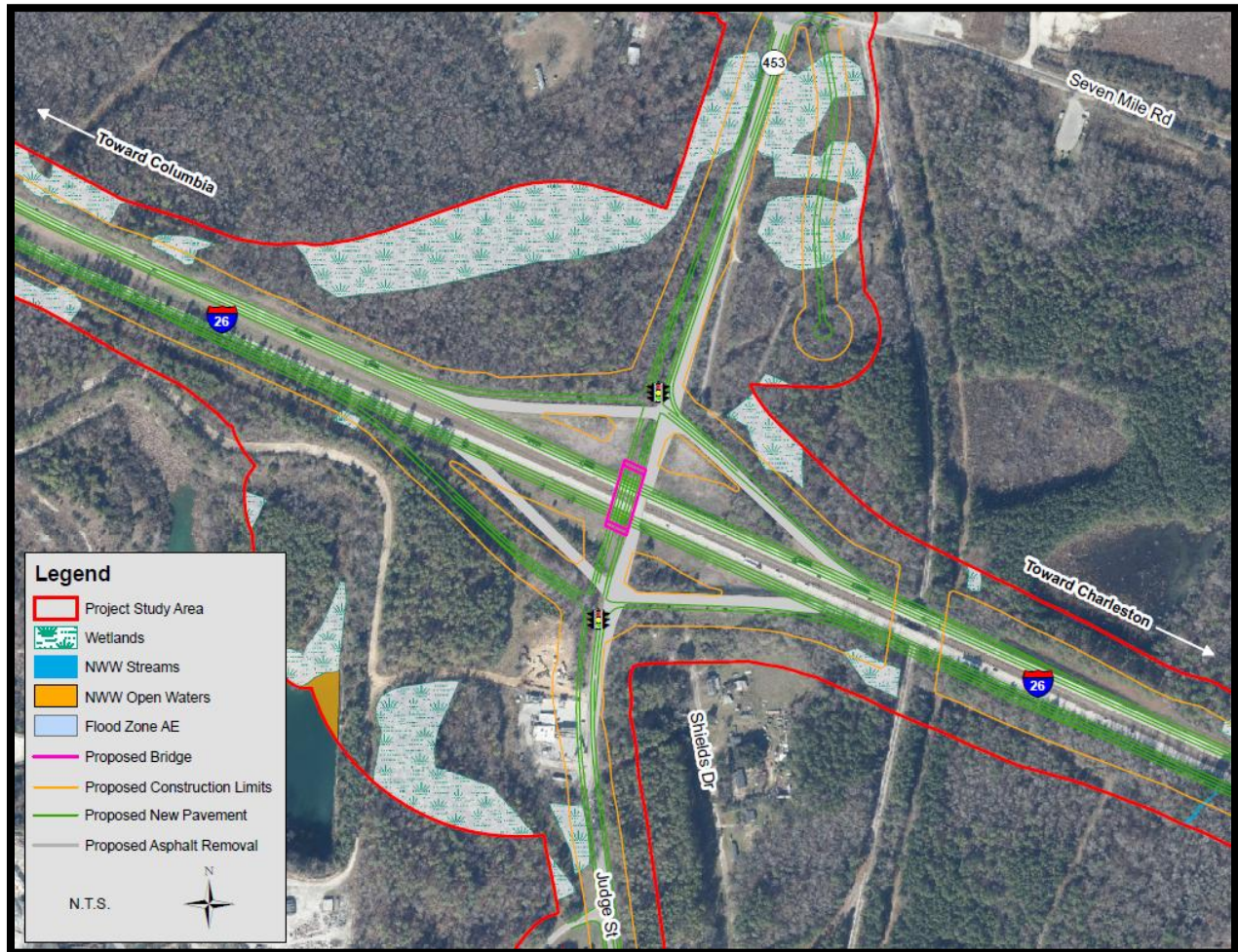
A direct on-ramp would provide SC 453 southbound stop yield access onto I-26 westbound and a signalized left turn movement would allow SC 453 northbound access onto I-26 westbound via the same ramp.

I-26 eastbound to SC 453 would consist of a direct off-ramp with dual left turn lanes via signalized movement onto SC 453 northbound and stop yield access onto SC 453 southbound.

A direct on-ramp would provide SC 453 northbound stop yield access onto I-26 eastbound and a signalized left turn movement would allow SC 453 southbound access onto I-26 eastbound via the same ramp.

The reconstruction of the interchange would require Mockingbird Drive to be relocated from its connection with SC 453 to Seven Mile Road. Once completed, Alternative 1 would provide LOS E in the 2055 design year with no other modifications. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 16**.

Figure 16. SC 453 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 1)



3.3.4.2 SC 453 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 2)

This interchange alternative would replace the existing full diamond interchange with a partial clover leaf interchange.

I-26 westbound would consist of a direct off-ramp with free flow merge access onto SC 453 northbound.

I-26 westbound to SC 453 southbound would consist of a loop ramp to improve capacity and operation. SC 453 to I-26 westbound would consist of a direct on-ramp with unsignalized left turn movement from SC 453 northbound and free flow merge access from SC 453 southbound.

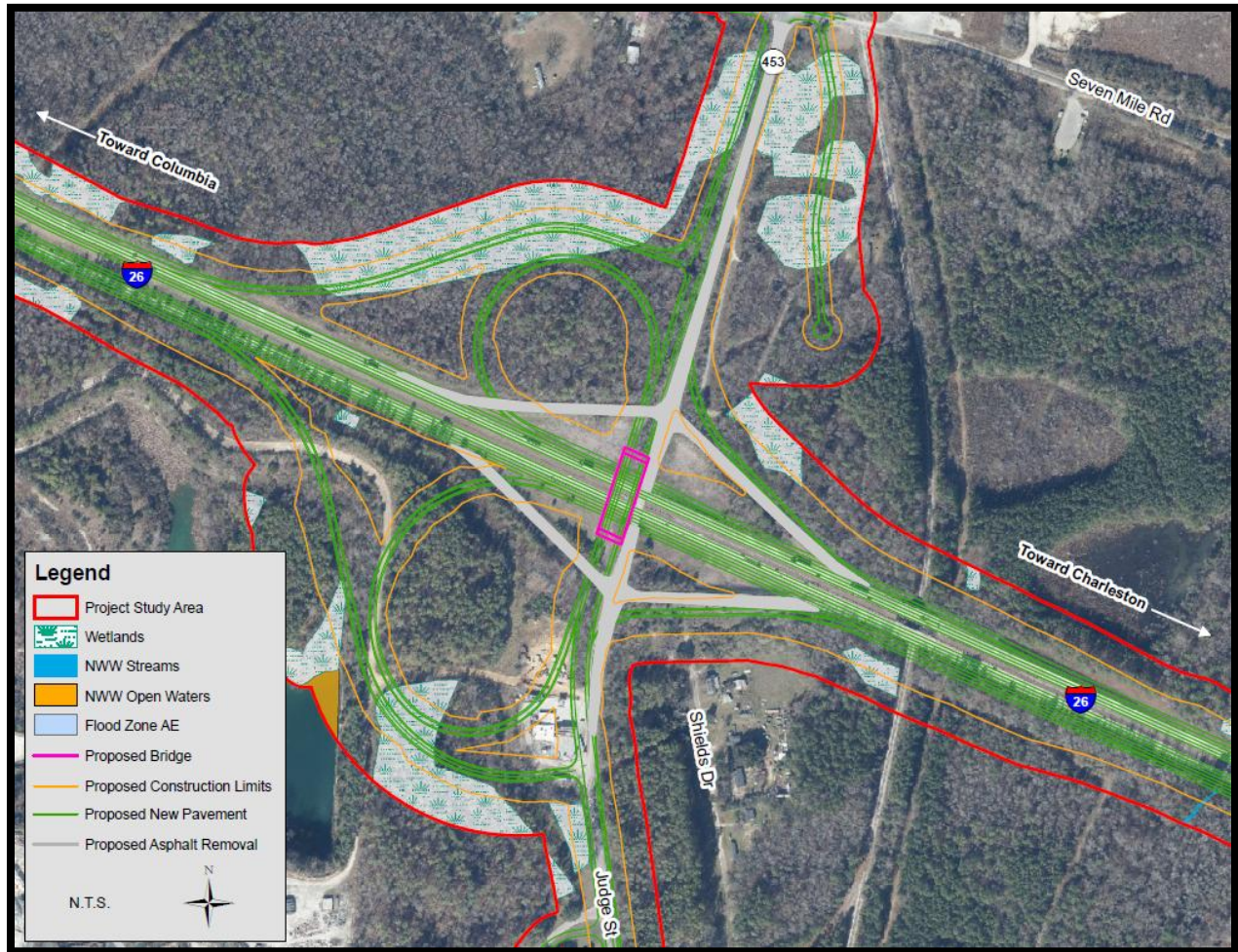
I-26 eastbound to SC 453 would consist of a direct off-ramp with unsignalized movement onto SC 453 northbound and SC 453 southbound.

SC 453 southbound to I-26 eastbound would consist of a loop ramp to improve capacity and operation.

SC 453 northbound to I-26 eastbound would consist of a direct on-ramp.

The reconstruction of the interchange would require Mockingbird Drive to be relocated from its connection with SC 453 to Seven Mile Road. Once completed, Alternative 2 would provide LOS D in the 2055 design year with no other modifications. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 17**.

Figure 17. SC 453 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 2)



3.3.4.3 SC 453 at I-26 Interchange (Alternative 3)

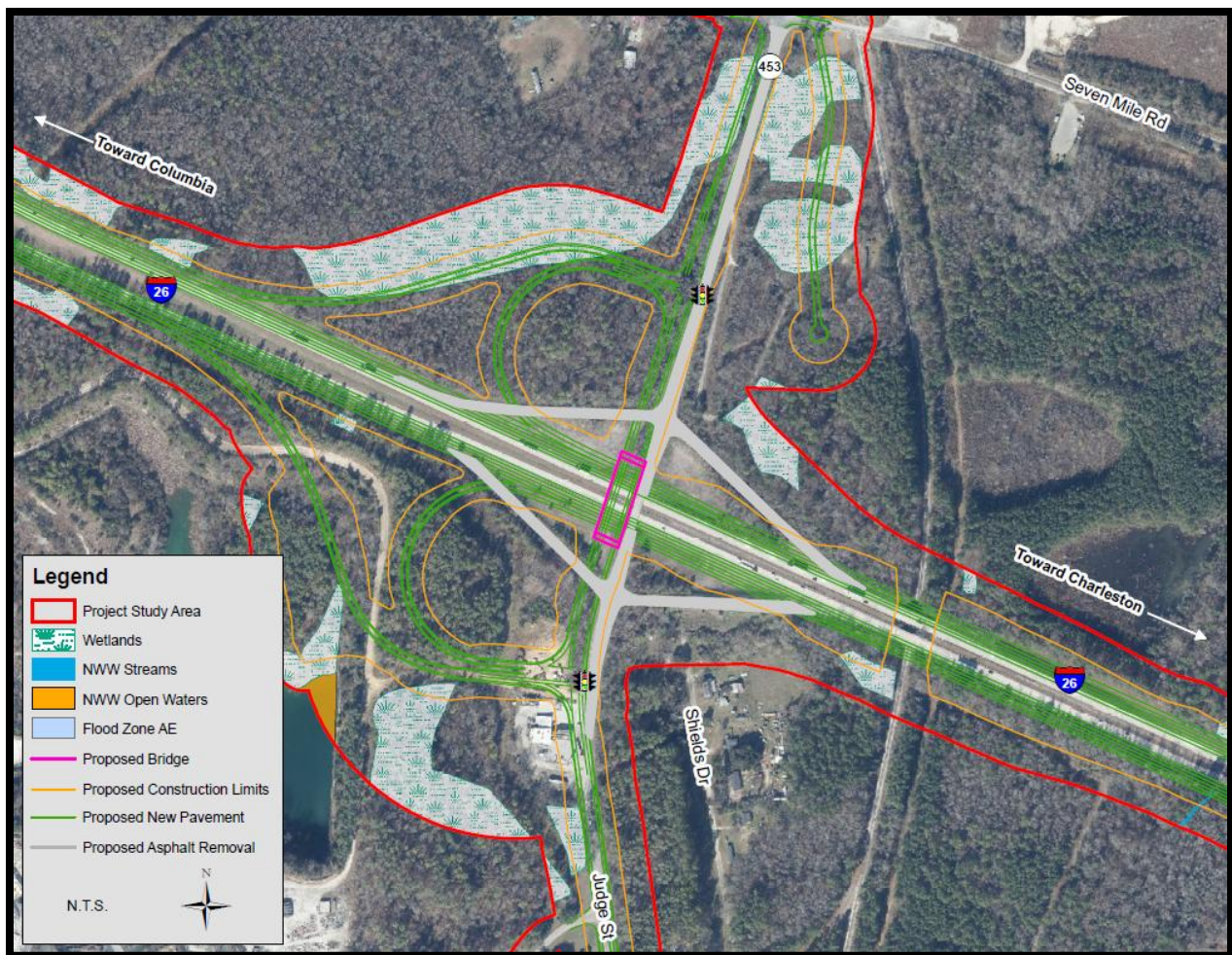
This interchange alternative would replace the existing full diamond interchange with a signalized partial clover leaf interchange while eliminating all ramps east of the interchange.

The I-26 westbound to SC 453 northbound/southbound direct off-ramp would be replaced with a loop ramp that provides signalized left turns onto SC 453 northbound and free flow merge onto SC 453 southbound for improved capacity and operation. SC 453 southbound to I-26 westbound would consist of a direct on-ramp. SC 453 northbound to I-26 westbound would utilize the same ramp via a signalized left-turn movement.

The I-26 eastbound to SC 453 northbound/southbound direct off-ramp would allow signalized left turns onto SC 453 northbound and free flow yield onto SC 453 southbound. The I-26 eastbound from SC 453 northbound/southbound direct on-ramp would be replaced with a loop ramp that provides signalized left turns from SC 453 northbound and free flow yield from SC 453 southbound for improved capacity and operation.

The reconstruction of the interchange would require Mockingbird Drive to be relocated from its connection with SC 453 to Seven Mile Road. Once completed, Alternative 3 would provide LOS E in the 2055 design year with no other modifications. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 18**.

Figure 18. SC 453 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 3)



3.3.4.4 SC 453 at I-26 Interstate Interchange (Alternative 2B)

This is a modification of preliminary Alternative 2 that was developed after further design considerations that allowed for better LOS.

I-26 westbound to SC 453 northbound would consist of a direct off-ramp, similar to the existing condition.

I-26 westbound to SC 453 southbound would consist of a loop ramp to improve capacity and operation. SC 453 to I-26 westbound would consist of a direct on-ramp with an unsignalized left turn movement from SC 453 northbound and free flow yield access from SC 453 southbound.

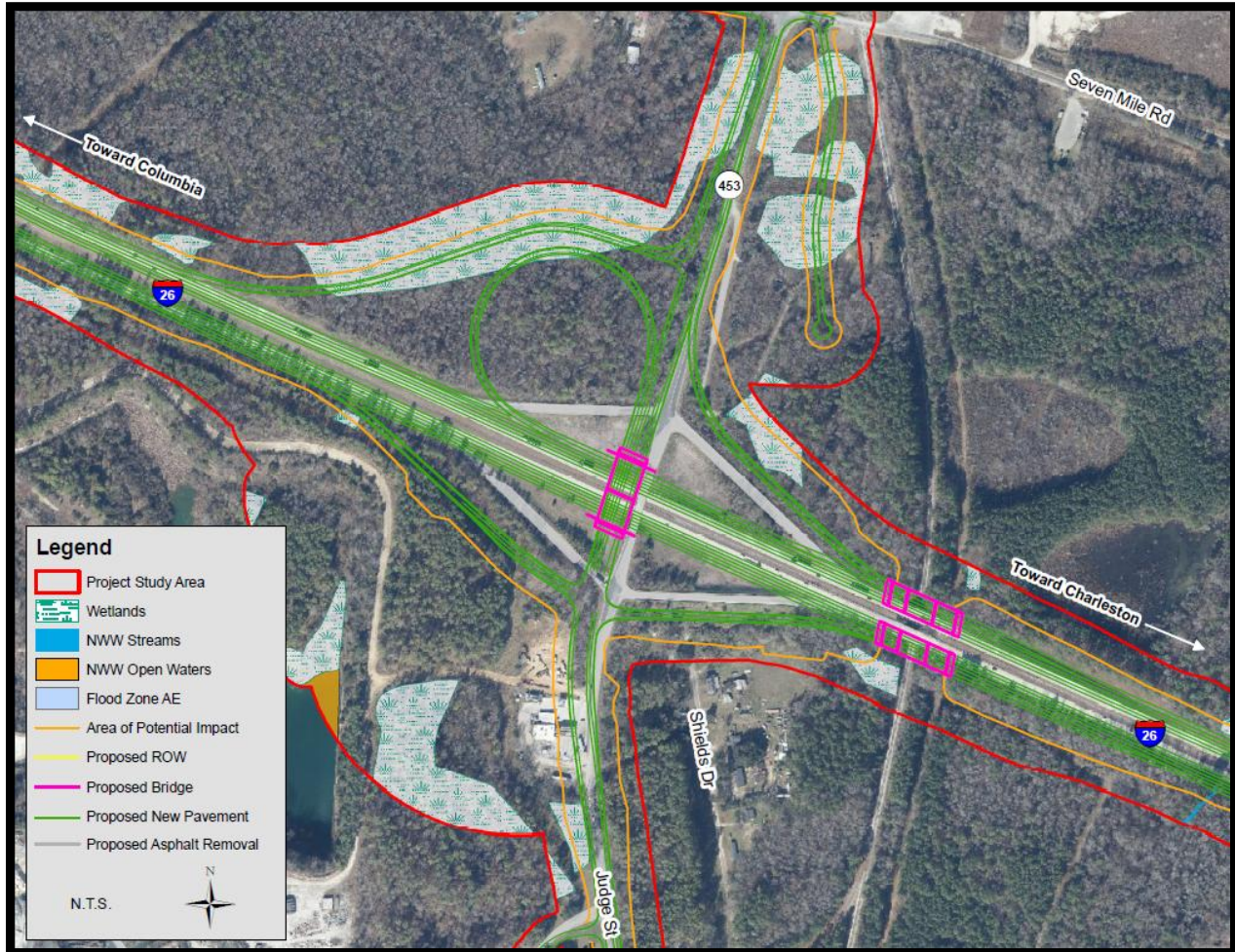
I-26 eastbound to SC 453 would consist of a direct off-ramp with unsignalized movement onto US 15 northbound and SC 453 southbound, similar to existing condition.

A direct on-ramp would provide SC 453 northbound free flow yield access onto I-26 eastbound and an unsignalized left turn movement in two dedicated lanes would allow US 15 southbound access onto I-26 eastbound via the same ramp.

This configuration results in similar operational conditions as Alternative 2, with a LOS range of A (2035) to LOS C (2055) and comparable impacts, while reducing construction costs and ROW. Specifically, the modifications resulted in the elimination of ROW that would have affected sediment ponds on ARGOS Cement property.

Based on this design's ability to meet the purpose and need of the project while minimizing impact to the environment, Alternative 2B will be carried forward as the recommended preferred alternative for the SC 453 at I-26 interchange. The proposed interchange concept is presented in **Figure 19**.

Figure 19. SC 453 at I-26 interchange (Alternative 2B)



3.4 Recommended Preferred Alternative

The recommended preferred alternative would begin just west of Exit 172 and continue eastward for 15 miles to just west of Exit 187. The mainline of I-26 would be improved from two travel lanes in each direction to three travel lanes in each direction, with paved inside and outside shoulders. The widening would be conducted within the existing median and include installation of new barrier walls and/or cable guardrail at completion. During mainline construction, the travel way would be shifted to allow two lanes of traffic in each direction while work is conducted toward the median.

The widening of I-26 would also require the replacement of dual bridges over CSX railroad near MM 177 and dual bridges over Four Hole Swamp near MM 187. These bridge replacements would utilize staged construction to maintain I-26 traffic movement in both directions during construction. Additionally, the access culverts under I-26 on Tunnel Road would be closed and permanently filled.

Each of the five overpass bridges would be replaced to accommodate the interstate widening as described in the reasonable build alternatives, with First Bend Road and Second Bend Road overpass bridges requiring a “close and detour” during their construction.

The interchange at US 15 and I-26 would utilize Alternative 1B and the interchange at SC 453 and I-26 would utilize Alternative 2B as the recommended preferred alternative at those locations. **Table 8** provides a summary of the recommended preferred alternative actions for each segment.

Table 8. Summary of Recommended Preferred Alternative actions

Segment	Recommended Preferred Alternative
Mainline I-26	Widen towards the median
Seven Mile Road overpass	Replace on new alignment to the west
First Bend Road overpass	Replace on alignment with a close and detour
Second Bend Road overpass	Replace on alignment with a close and detour
Taylor Pond Road overpass	Replace on new alignment to the west
Beidler Forest Road overpass	Replace on new alignment to the west
I-26 and US 15 interchange	Alternative 1B – Replace bridge on new alignment to the west
I-26 and SC 453 interchange	Alternative 2B – Replace bridge on new alignment to the west

These improvements would result in the I-26 mainline achieving a LOS of D or better with both interchanges achieving LOS C or better in 2055 (**Table 9**).

Table 9. LOS under No-Build and Recommended Preferred Alternative

Segment	2055 (No-Build)	2055 (Build)
I-26 mainline	F	D or better
I-26 and US 15 interchange	F	C or better
I-26 and SC 453 interchange	F	C or better

The loop ramps at I-26 and US 15, the vertical clearances, shoulder widths, and seismic design standards would be upgraded to current standards. Additionally, the twin I-26 bridges over CSX railroad would be improved to meet current horizontal clearance standards.

The project is anticipated to begin construction in spring 2027 and continue for approximately 4 years. **Table 10** provides the anticipated impacts associated with the proposed action, based on further design and development of the recommended preferred alternative.

Table 10. Proposed impacts for the I-26 corridor improvements

Impact category	US 15 interchange	SC 453 interchange	Mainline and overpasses	Total impacts
New potential ROW (acres)	42	28	18	88
Stream impacts (linear feet)	2,230	120	950	3,300
Wetland impacts (acres)	13.5	8.0	7.5	29.0
Pond (acres)	0	0.10	0	0.10
Possible relocations	0	2	1	3
Hazardous materials sites	2	5	1	8
Floodplain impacts (acres)	53.5	0	25.5	79.0

Project overview figures for the recommended preferred alternative can be found in **Appendix B**.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

This chapter describes the existing conditions of applicable environmental resources within the PSA and identifies the environmental impacts that would occur from construction of the recommended preferred alternative. If the project was not constructed then environmental impacts would be negligible or non-existent.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 14148 (*Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions*), and EO 14154 (*Unleashing American Energy*). The EOs revoked EO 13990 (*Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis*, January 20, 2021), and EO 14008 (*Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, January 27, 2021). Subsequently, on January 29, 2025, Secretary Duffy signed a Memorandum for Secretarial Offices and Heads of Operating Administrations, Implementation of Executive Orders Addressing Energy, Climate Change, Diversity, and Gender. On February 25, 2025, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) published an Interim Final Rule removing CEQ's NEPA implementing regulations, effective April 11, 2025 (90 Fed. Reg. 10610). As a result of these actions, FHWA will not include greenhouse gas emissions and climate change analyses in the federal environmental review process. Any purported greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impacts will not be considered in the federal decision. Accordingly, no greenhouse gas emissions or climate change analyses are included in this EA.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed EO 14148 (*Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions*), and EO 14154 (*Unleashing American Energy*). The EOs revoked EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All* (April 21, 2023). Subsequently, on January 21, 2025, President Trump signed EO 14173, *Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity*. This EO revoked EO 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations* (February 11, 1994). On February 25, 2025, CEQ published an Interim Final Rule removing the CEQ's NEPA implementing regulations, effective April 11, 2025 (90 Fed. Reg. 10610). As a result of these actions, all federal environmental justice requirements are revoked and no longer apply to the federal environmental review process. FHWA, Federal Transit Administration, and Federal Railroad Administration's Joint NEPA regulations (23 CFR Part 771) and the agencies' Interim Final Guidance on "Section 139 Environmental Review Process: Efficient Environmental Reviews for Project Decision making and One Federal Decision" (December 17, 2024) do not require an environmental justice analysis. Accordingly, no analysis of environmental justice is included in this EA. Any purported environmental justice impacts will not be considered in the federal decision. Social, economic, and community impacts will continue to be disclosed, where applicable, in accordance with 23 CFR Part 771.

Table 11 references the section for each resource evaluated as part of this EA and summarizes the findings of resources with minimal to no impact from the recommended preferred alternative. Resources with minimal to no impact from the recommended preferred alternative are not discussed further in this EA. Technical memoranda are provided as appendices to this EA.

Table 11. Resources considered in this EA

Resource	Summary or section reference
Waters of the U.S.	Section 4.1 and Appendix C
Water Quality	Section 4.2 and Appendix C
Floodplains	Section 4.3 and Appendix C
Federally Protected Species	Section 4.4 and Appendix C
Cultural Resources	Section 4.5 and Appendix D
Section 4(f)/6(f)	Section 4(f) is a provision of federal transportation law at 49 U.S.C. 303 that affords certain protections to public parks, recreation areas, historic sites, and wildlife refuges. No Section 4(f) resources are present within the PSA. Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Act requires coordination with the National Park Service when properties funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) are proposed to be converted to a different use by a proposed government action. No Section 6(f) resources are present within the PSA.
Noise	Section 4.6 and Appendix E
Air Quality	Section 4.7 and Appendix F
Community Impacts	Section 4.8
Relocations/Displacements	Section 4.9 and Appendix G
Farmlands	Section 4.10 and Appendix H
Land Use	The 1,340-acre PSA consists primarily of disturbed uplands including transportation/utility ROW and infrastructure, mixed upland forest, forested wetlands, agricultural lands, residential properties, industrial and commercial development, emergent wetlands, open water, and riverine areas. The proposed project would result in minimal changes to existing land uses by converting existing commercial, undeveloped, and residential land uses to transportation ROW. The proposed project is not expected to change the timing or density of development within the area. The proposed project is not in conflict with any land use plan, existing land use, or zoning regulation.
Hazardous Materials	Section 4.11 and Appendix I
Essential Fish Habitat	Essential Fish Habitat is defined as those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity (16 USC 1802, 50 CFR § 600.10). Based on field observations and online mapping tools, it was determined that no Essential Fish Habitat is present within the PSA. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on Essential Fish Habitat.
Navigable Waters	Four Hole Swamp is not included on the US Coast Guard's (USCG) map of navigable waters. The swamp is a small blackwater tributary without defined channels, developed access points or the ability to handle craft in excess of 21 feet. The USCG Jurisdiction Checklist is included in Appendix L.

4.1 Waters of the United States

WOTUS, as it applies to the jurisdictional limits of the authority of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), are defined in 33 CFR Part 328, and include wetlands, rivers, and streams. WOTUS are protected by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

The 1,340-acre PSA was evaluated to determine the potential presence of any WOTUS in accordance with USACE *Wetlands Delineation Manual* (1987) and subsequent regional supplements for the South Atlantic Region. This evaluation included a review of available mapping and various site visits. The review of initial mapping identified Four Hole Swamp, potential wetlands, and other WOTUS within the PSA. Various site visits have been conducted throughout project development, with the most recent visit conducted in June 2025 to further evaluate and document the potential WOTUS. The field evaluations confirmed waters associated with Four Hole Swamp, and various wetlands and tributaries within the PSA. These areas have been field-delineated and surveyed. It was determined that the PSA includes approximately 8,536 linear feet (LF) of linear non-wetland waters (NWW), approximately 3.36 acres of NWW-open water (ponds), and approximately 133 acres of individual wetlands areas. A total of 17 linear NWWs (streams), 5 ponds, and 99 wetlands, including forested and emergent wetlands, were identified within the PSA. A preliminary jurisdictional determination was submitted to USACE on July 21, 2025, and is pending verification. The Natural Resource Technical Memorandum (NRTM) in **Appendix C** provides additional details on WOTUS and other features in the PSA.



4.1.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

Based on preliminary design, the recommended preferred alternative would impact WOTUS due to the widening of I-26, modification of the I-26 interchanges at US 15 (Exit 172) and SC 453 (Exit 177), reconstruction of the five overpass bridges, and new drainage structures. As such, the project would require appropriate state and federal permitting for unavoidable impacts to WOTUS. Approximately 29 acres of wetlands and 3,300 linear feet of streams would be affected. The impacts to wetlands would include placement of fill material and mechanized clearing to accommodate the proposed improvements. The 29 acres of wetlands to be affected comprise 22 percent of the total delineated wetlands within the PSA. In addition, the wetlands anticipated to be affected would be immediately adjacent to existing infrastructure facilities and are considered to be impaired or partially impaired due to prior conversion. The 3,300 linear feet of stream impacts are mainly associated with the extension and improvement of various culverts/cross line

pipes, including rip-rap armoring for protection. Approximately 1,958 linear feet of stream will be relocated to accommodate the reconstruction of the I-26 and US 15 interchange. However, this system is partially impaired and was previously altered/realigned from the initial construction of this interchange. Additionally, there will be 0.10 acre of impact to ponds in the PSA. Various strategies have been implemented to further avoid/minimize impacts to WOTUS, including but not limited to widening to the existing median, minimal footprint/design, alternative analysis and selection of the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative, and maintenance of surface hydrologic connections. In addition, compensatory mitigation for these impacts would be provided to ensure no net functional loss.

A USACE Section 404 permit would be required for placement of fill material into WOTUS. The South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) administers the Water Quality Certification program pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA. Section 401 requires that the state issue certification for any activity which requires a USACE Section 404 permit. The Section 401 certification with SCDES is applied concurrently with the Section 404 permit application. Permits will be applied for after FHWA approval of this EA. Mitigation for potential impacts to WOTUS will be provided in accordance with the USACE Charleston District to compensate for the loss of WOTUS associated with the proposed action. It is assumed wetland and stream credits will be purchased from approved banks within the project's service area. The required mitigation for the project will be determined during final design and coordination with USACE.

4.2 Water Quality

The 1972 Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) establishes the basic structure for regulating the discharges of pollutants into WOTUS, and for regulating quality standards for surface waters. Pursuant to Section 303(d) of the CWA and 40 CFR § 130.7 SCDES evaluates and develops a priority list of waterbodies that do not currently meet state water quality standards. It is commonly referred to as the 303(d) List of Impaired Waters. Once a waterbody has been added to the 303(d) List, it will remain on the List until the water quality standard set by SCDES has been attained, or a total maximum daily load (TMDL) has been developed and approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to attain the standard.

Section 402 (b) of the CWA and 40 CFR Part 123 established the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). In South Carolina, SCDES administers the NPDES. NPDES permits “allow businesses to discharge a range of waste pollutants into rivers, streams, and lakes in ways that minimize the potential for harm to fish and other aquatic life and to humans who use the water for drinking, fishing, recreation and other purposes.”¹

¹ SCDES, <https://des.sc.gov/programs/bureau-water/national-pollutant-discharge-elimination-system-npdes/fact-sheet-getting-national-pollutant-discharge-elimination-system-npdes-permit>

The PSA is within the Lower Four Hole Swamp (Hydrologic Unit Code [HUC] 0305020503) and the Indian Field Swamp (HUC 0305020602) Watersheds, which flow to the Edisto River and ultimately to the Atlantic Ocean. There are 17 streams within the PSA including the following named streams: Spring Branch, Mill Branch, Cane Branch, Crawford Branch, Deep Branch, and Four Hole Swamp. Spring Branch and Mill Branch flow to the north of the PSA, draining directly into Four Hole Swamp. Both Cane Branch and Crawford Branch flow into Little Walnut Branch to the south of the PSA, which in turn flows into Walnut Branch and then Four Hole Swamp. Deep Branch drains directly into Walnut Branch and then to Four Hole Swamp. SCDES maintains an ambient surface water quality monitoring station (RS-20523) along Walnut Branch on Beidler Forest Road to the south of the PSA towards US 178, downstream of the confluence of Cane, Crawford, and Deep Branches with Walnut Branch. At this location, Walnut Branch is listed as non-supporting for dissolved oxygen (DO) as documented in the *SCDES Water Quality Information Report (Appendix C)*. Additionally, the SCDES “Watershed Atlas” online map shows two watershed monitoring sites within the Four Hole Swamp Watershed: E-112 north of the PSA at SC 453, and E-100, located along Four Hole Swamp south of the PSA at US 78. A third site was identified at Big Branch along Saint Paul Road (RS-10373) within the Indian Field Swamp Watershed. This mapping concluded that the project is not found within a MS4-designated area, but that the Lower Four Hole Swamp and Indian Field Swamp Watersheds are Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Watersheds based on findings at the above sites. E-100 and RS-10373 meet TMDL parameters for *E. coli*/fecal coliform. This is reported in TMDL Report No. 008-07. The 2024 South Carolina Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters was searched for waterbodies within the PSA. Based on the findings from this report, none of the tributaries to Four Hole Swamp are impaired within the PSA, however downstream locations are impaired. While none of the tributaries to Four Hole Swamp within the PSA are impaired, the E-100 monitoring site at Four Hole Swamp is impaired for *E. coli*, and the E-112 monitoring site (upstream of the PSA) is listed as impaired for dissolved oxygen (DO) and mercury. The entire project is within a TMDL watershed to improve the water quality standards within the watershed. References to the documentation of this data are found in the natural resource technical memorandum (NRTM) (**Appendix C**).

4.2.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

The proposed action is not expected to have long-term impacts on water quality in the watershed. Stormwater control measures, both during construction and postconstruction, are required for SCDOT projects with land disturbance and/or construction near Section 303(d) (impaired), TMDL, and other sensitive waters in accordance with the SCDOT Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer System (MS4) Permit. **The contractor would also be required to minimize potential stormwater impacts through the implementation of construction best management practices (BMPs), in accordance with CWA Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, policies contained in 23 CFR §650B, SCDOT’s most current *Supplemental Technical Specifications* and/or *Supplemental Specifications for Erosion Control*, seeding specifications, and applicable guidance documents.**

4.3 Floodplains

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regulates floodplains that are subject to inundation by the “100-year flood” (1 percent annual chance of flooding). These 100-year floodplains are identified as special flood hazard areas (SFHA) and have different designations (zones) depending on the flood hazard posed.

EO 11988 of May 24, 1977 (*Floodplain Management*) requires federal agencies to avoid making modifications to and supporting development in floodplains, to the greatest extent possible. In January 2015, EO 13690 amended EO 11988, establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (Standard) that will increase resilience against flooding. This Standard will ensure that agencies expand management to a higher vertical elevation and corresponding horizontal floodplain to address current and future flood risk. To comply with EO 11988 and EO 13690, all floodplain crossings must be analyzed to determine if the encroachments will cause changes within the 100-year floodplain (Zone AE). SCDOT considers “No Impact” projects to be those that result in an increase of 1.0 foot or less (of backwater) above the unrestricted or natural 100-year flood condition. Any changes greater than those noted will require the development of a conditional letter of map revision (CLOMR) and eventually a letter of map revision (LOMR) documenting the changes.



FEMA has developed a mapping system to designate areas that could be prone to inundation based on a 100-year flood. These maps, known as Flood Insurance Rate Maps or FIRMs, are the official source for flood hazard information.

A review of the FIRMs—45035C0045E, 45035C0065E, 45035C0185E, 45035C0195E, and 45035C0215E (effective July 18, 2017)—identified that the PSA includes portions of the regulated 100-year floodplain and floodway zone associated with Four Hole Swamp and its tributaries. These areas are classified as special flood hazard areas, Zone AE, which have been determined to be subject to inundation by the 1 percent annual chance flood, in which base flood elevations have also been determined. In addition, FIRMs 45035C0180E and 45035C0213E (effective date July 18, 2017) overlap the PSA, but had no flood hazard areas intersecting the PSA.

4.3.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

The proposed action is anticipated to impact approximately 79 acres of Zone AE floodplains. Nine floodplain crossings would be affected by the proposed action. Three of these locations are associated with the stream labeled “Four Hole Swamp Tributary 10” on FIRM panel

45035C0045E. This tributary crosses I-26 just west of Exit 172 and crosses US 15 and Alligator Lake Road to the north of the I-26/US 15 interchange. One crossing is associated with an unnamed tributary approximately 1,700 feet to the north of the intersection of Alligator Lake Road and US 15. A fifth crossing is located at I-26 over Spring Branch (Four Hole Swamp Tributary 8 on FIRM panel 45035C0065E). Cane Branch crosses Taylor Pond Road south of I-26, and Crawford Branch crosses Taylor Pond Road north of I-26 (FIRM panel 45035C0185E). The same crossings of Cane Branch and Crawford Branch are also shown on FIRM panel 45035C0195E, along with a crossing of I-26 by Crawford Branch to the east of the Taylor Pond Road overpass. The ninth crossing is located at the I-26 bridges over Four Hole Swamp, as shown on FIRM panel 45035C0215E. The FIRMs and figures showing FEMA flood zones in the PSA can be found in **Appendix C** within the NRTM appendix.

A preliminary hydraulic analysis was conducted in accordance with *SCDOT Requirements for Hydraulic Design Studies* (May 26, 2009). In addition, the SCDOT Bridge Replacement Scoping Trip Risk Assessment Forms and the Floodplains Checklist were completed for the appropriate structures and are attached to **Appendix C** within the NRTM appendix. Based on this analysis, the proposed project is anticipated to have a “no impact” on the base flood elevation associated with the regulated floodplains.

A final detailed hydraulic analysis would be conducted during final design development in accordance with *SCDOT Requirements for Hydraulic Design Studies*. The final analysis and findings will be coordinated with appropriate agencies, including Dorchester and Berkeley Counties.

4.4 Federally Protected Species

Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (Title 16 United States Code [U.S.C.], Section 1531, et seq. (see also 50 CFR Part 402), and the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 (Title 16 U.S.C., Sections 703-711), the PSA was evaluated for the potential presence of federally protected species and associated critical habitat currently listed for Dorchester and Berkeley Counties. Because of the federal nexus of the proposed project, consultation with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is required under Section 7 of the ESA (16 USC 1531–1534) for actions that “may affect” federally endangered and threatened species. A biological assessment (BA) was submitted to USFWS in November 2025 and is included as an appendix to the NRTM in **Appendix C**.

A list of federally protected species and their critical habitat for Dorchester and Berkeley Counties was obtained from the USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) report, updated on October 28, 2025.² In addition, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), S.C. Rare, Threatened & Endangered Species Inventory was reviewed for potential occurrences of state-

² USFWS IPaC Report, <https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/>, accessed October 28, 2025

protected species.³ Field surveys of the PSA were conducted in every month between April 2024 and January 2025, and additional site visits were conducted in March, May, and June 2025.

The IPaC report identified seven federally protected species known to occur or to have formerly occurred in Dorchester and Berkeley Counties. The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is no longer protected under the ESA but is afforded federal protection through the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) of 1940 and the MBTA of 1918. **Table 12** lists these species, their associated protection status, and effects determination. The IPaC report did not list any designated critical habitat for the seven federally protected species.

Table 12. Threatened, endangered, and proposed species

Common name	Scientific name	Protection status	Effects determination
<i>Birds</i>			
Red-cockaded woodpecker	<i>Dryobates borealis</i>	Threatened	No Effect
<i>Mammals</i>			
Northern long-eared bat	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Endangered	May Affect – Likely to Adversely Affect
Tricolored bat	<i>Perimyotis subflavus</i>	Proposed Endangered	N/A ^b
<i>Reptiles</i>			
Southern hognose snake	<i>Heterodon simus</i>	Proposed Threatened	N/A ^b
<i>Insects</i>			
Monarch butterfly	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	Proposed Threatened	N/A ^b
<i>Plants</i>			
Canby’s dropwort	<i>Oxypolis canbyi</i>	Endangered	No Effect
Pondberry	<i>Lindera melissifolia</i>	Endangered	No Effect

^a Federally protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

^b Currently listed as proposed, so no effects determination was made

³ SCDNR, <https://natural-heritage-program-scdnr.hub.arcgis.com/pages/environmental-professionals>, accessed January 2, 2025.

4.4.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

Based on field reviews of the federally listed species in Dorchester and Berkeley Counties, five species (*Danaus plexippus* [monarch butterfly], *Lindera melissifolia* [pondberry], *Oxypolis canbyi* [Canby's dropwort], tricolored bat [TCB, *Perimyotis subflavus*], and Northern long-eared bat [NLEB, *Myotis septentrionalis*]) were determined to have potential suitable habitat within the PSA.

No suitable habitat is present for the *Dryobates borealis* (red-cockaded woodpecker [RCW]) within the PSA. No individuals of these species were observed during site visits, and of the species listed only the RCW has a known occurrence within 1 mile of the PSA. The project is assumed to have “**No Effect**” on the RCW.



Example of bat habitat in the PSA.

On December 12, 2024, USFWS proposed to list the monarch butterfly as a threatened species under the ESA. The proposed listing was in a 90-day comment period for input on the proposal that ended on March 12, 2025. A second comment period was opened from March 19 to May 19, 2025. Should the species be listed, a proposed 4(d) rule would be followed according to USFWS procedures. The larval stage of the species feeds on milkweed species that may be available in the non-forested uplands associated with transportation and utility ROW, as well as residential yards in and adjacent to the PSA. The proposed listing and associated guidance would be followed, as it is likely that the monarch butterfly will be present within portions of the PSA.

A review of the SCDNR Species Reviewer Report concludes that there are no known occurrences of Canby's dropwort or pondberry in the PSA or within a 1-mile buffer of the PSA. While the PSA does provide some areas of suitable habitat for both species, no individuals were observed within the PSA during the survey windows across multiple site visits. Additionally, impacts would occur within existing maintained ROW to the greatest extent possible. Due to the limited suitable habitat for Canby's dropwort and pondberry, no known nearby occurrences, and no individuals observed over numerous site visits, the proposed action is anticipated to have “**No Effect**” on Canby's dropwort and pondberry.

The review for federally protected species also determined that there is suitable habitat available for both the TCB and NLEB. An initial structural survey was performed to identify the presence of bat species, and the results were uploaded to IPaC and USFWS. The survey identified two TCBs in box culverts along the I-26 mainline. The completed acoustic survey determined that both the TCB and the NLEB are found throughout the PSA. Of the 56 acoustic monitoring locations, 36 were positive for TCB, and 18 were positive for NLEB.

The proposed action has the potential to affect both the TCB and NLEB by impacting suitable foraging and roosting habitat, including impacts from tree clearing and culvert/bridge construction. A formal determination for TCB would be finalized upon official listing of the species. **Should the TCB be officially listed as an endangered species, any commitments for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation will be included prior to the subsequent federal action.**

Regarding the NLEB, the I-26 Corridor Improvement Project (MM 172-187) was initially scoped for completion as a non-programmatic categorical exclusion (NPCE) under NEPA. In September 2025, SCDOT provided USFWS with a biological evaluation (BE) with effects determinations for species subject to Section 7 of the ESA. Upon USFWS' review, it was determined that the project **"May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect"** the NLEB due to the extensive tree clearing proposed, and formal consultation would be required to further evaluate potential effects. To initiate formal consultation, a BA was completed in December 2025. **Formal Section 7 Consultation is currently being conducted with USFWS regarding impacts to NLEB. This process will be completed prior to the final federal decision, and any commitments for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation will be included prior to the subsequent federal action.**

The MBTA prohibits the take of protected migratory bird species for species that occur within the United States or U.S. territories as the result of natural biological or ecological processes. Species protected under the MBTA may be potentially impacted through the construction of the proposed project. However, SCDOT will comply with the provisions of the MBTA to avoid and minimize impact.

Additional details and species analyses can be found in the NRTM in **Appendix C**.

4.5 Cultural Resources

A study was conducted to identify historic properties in the project's area of potential effect (APE) to assist SCDOT in meeting its obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended (36 CFR Part 800). The NHPA defines historic properties as: "any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included on, or eligible for inclusion on, the National Register, including artifacts, records, and material remains relating to the district, site, building, structure, or object."⁴ To be eligible for listing in the National Register, resources must typically be at least 50 years of age, possess historic integrity, and embody at least one of four criteria, according to 36 CFR Part 60.

4.5.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

In accordance with 36 CFR §800.4, background research and intensive archaeological and architectural surveys were conducted between July 2024 and September 2025, to determine if

⁴ NHPA, <https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/nhpa.pdf>, Accessed on March 5, 2026.

previous cultural resources investigations and previously identified or unrecorded archaeological sites/above-ground (architectural) resources were present in the project's APE. For the purposes of the archaeological resource investigation, shovel testing and pedestrian inspection of all undisturbed uplands within the 1,361.8-acre archaeological APE were conducted. An additional 300-foot buffer beyond the archaeological APE was surveyed for architectural resources.

Archaeologists conducted an intensive archaeological survey of the APE in six sessions between July 2024 and September 2025. The archaeological survey entailed shovel testing and pedestrian inspection of all undisturbed uplands within the 551.1-hectare (1,361.8-acre) archaeological APE. During these investigations, a total of 1,959 shovel tests were excavated at 7.5-, 15-, and 30-meter intervals. As a result, archaeologists revisited one previously recorded archaeological site (38DR17) and identified five new archaeological sites (38DR541, 38DR542, 38DR543, 38DR551, and 38DR579) and four isolated finds (Isolates 1–4) in the archaeological APE. Site 38DR551 extends outside the archaeological APE and should be considered unevaluated for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) outside the archaeological APE. The remaining nine archaeological resources are recommended not eligible for the NRHP. These archaeological resources require no additional management in the archaeological APE.

Historians conducted the architectural survey of the architectural APE in six sessions between July 2024 and August 2025, following the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH) (2018) standards for architectural surveys. As a result, three previously recorded aboveground historic resources (State Historic Preservation Office [SHPO] Site Numbers [Nos.] 1132, 1339, and 1609) and one cemetery (SHPO Site No. 1398/38DR176), and 39 new aboveground historic resources (SHPO Site Nos. 1385–1410, 1445, 1445.01, 1507, 1509–1511, and 1595) and one new cemetery (SHPO Site No. 1510.01/38DR563) were identified in the architectural APE. All 43 of the aboveground historic resources are either not eligible or recommended not eligible for the NRHP. However, cemeteries are protected from disturbance and desecration under South Carolina state law (South Carolina Code of Laws 16-17-600) and should be avoided.

As currently designed, the proposed project will not affect Bowyer's Cemetery (SHPO Site No. 1398/38DR176) or the Mount (Mt.) Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Cemetery (SHPO Site No. 1510.01/38DR563). The remaining 41 above-ground historic resources require no additional management.

The boundaries of the Bowers Cemetery (SHPO Site Number 1398/38DR176) shall be clearly marked on all construction plans along with a 20-foot buffer surrounding the cemetery. No ground disturbing activities may take place within the buffered boundaries of the cemetery, and project personnel and equipment will be prohibited from entering the cemetery.

During construction, the contractor and subcontractors must notify their workers to watch for the presence of any prehistoric or historic remains, including but not limited to arrowheads, pottery, ceramics, flakes, bones, graves, gravestones, or brick concentrations during the

construction phase of the project, if any such remains are encountered, the Resident Construction Engineer (RCE) will be immediately notified and all work in the vicinity of the discovered materials and site work shall cease until the SCDOT Archaeologist directs otherwise.

The Cultural Resources Assessment Survey was submitted to the SHPO and the following Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO): Catawba Indian Nation, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and the Cherokee Nation. Responses were received from the SHPO and Catawba Indian Nation, both of whom concurred with the report findings and recommendations. The Cultural Resources Assessment Survey and concurrence letters are provided in **Appendix D**.

4.6 Noise Analysis

In accordance with FHWA 23 CFR Part 772, a traffic noise analysis is required for proposed federal-aid highway projects that would construct a highway on new location or physically alter an existing highway or roadway, which would substantially change either the horizontal or vertical alignment of the road or increase the number of through-traffic lanes. This Detailed Noise Analysis (DNA) documents the methodologies, results, and recommendations in compliance with FHWA 23 CFR Part 772 *Procedures for Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise* and the SCDOT *Traffic Noise Abatement Policy* (2023).

In accordance with FHWA 23 CFR §772.5(2) and the *SCDOT Traffic Noise Abatement Policy*, the proposed action is a “Type I” project because it includes the addition of through-traffic lanes as well as horizontal alteration throughout the I-26 project corridor.

This DNA utilized computer models created with the FHWA Traffic Noise Model[®] (FHWA TNM 2.5), validated to field-collected traffic noise measurement data, to determine existing and predict future worst noise hour equivalent noise levels and to identify impacted receptors resulting from the proposed action. A-weighted decibels (dBA) are the units of measurement used in the study.

According to 23 CFR §772.5(g) traffic noise impacts occur when the predicted traffic noise levels either: [a] approach or exceed the FHWA noise abatement criteria (NAC) for the applicable land use category (with “approach” meaning within 1 dBA of the NAC L_{eq} values listed in **Table 13**), or [b] substantially exceed (defined as a 15-dBA increase or greater) the existing noise levels. Therefore, traffic noise impacts occur when a receptor is within 1 dBA of the NAC sound level or when the predicted noise levels are 15 dBA or more above the existing noise levels.

Table 13. NAC for land use categories

Activity category	Activity criteria $L_{eq}(h)^a$	Description of activity category
A	57 (Exterior)	Lands on which serenity and quiet are of extraordinary significance and serve an important public need and where the preservation of those qualities is essential if the area is to continue to serve its intended purpose.
B	67	Residential
C	67 (Exterior)	Active sports areas, amphitheaters, auditoriums, campgrounds, cemeteries, daycare centers, hospitals, libraries, medical facilities, parks, picnic areas, places of worship, playgrounds, public meeting rooms, public or nonprofit institutional structures, radio studios, recording studios, recreational areas, Section 4(f) sites, schools, television studios, trails, and trail crossings.
D	52 (Interior)	Auditoriums, daycare centers, hospitals, libraries, medical facilities, places of worship, public meeting rooms, public or nonprofit institutional structures, radio studios, recording studios, schools, and television studios.
E	72 (Exterior)	Hotels, motels, offices, restaurant/bars, and other developed lands, properties, or activities not included in A-D or F.
F	-	Agriculture, airports, bus yards, emergency services, industrial, logging, maintenance facilities, manufacturing, mining, rail yards, retail facilities, shipyards, utilities (water resources, water treatment, electrical) and warehousing.
G	-	Undeveloped lands that are not permitted.

Source: 23 CFR Part 772

a The $L_{eq}(h)$ activity criteria values are for impact determination only and are not design standards for noise abatement measures.

4.6.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

For the design year 2055, traffic noise from the recommended preferred alternative, which proposes widening I-26 into a multilane facility from just west of the US 15 interchange at Exit 172 and ending just west of the SC 27 interchange at Exit 187, is predicted to impact 67 residential noise sensitive receptors (NAC B) near the project area.

In accordance with the *SCDOT Noise Abatement Policy*, consideration for noise abatement measures was given to all impacted receptors. SCDOT policy requires identification of whether it is “likely” or “unlikely” that noise barriers will be installed for each noise sensitive area identified. “Likely” does not mean a firm commitment. A total of nine noise barriers were assessed in this preliminary traffic noise analysis; all nine meet the SCDOT policy feasibility criteria but not the reasonableness criteria. Therefore, all noise abatement measures are considered to be “unlikely” as part of this project. Unless changes to the project occur that would result in either additional predicted traffic noise impacts or different feasibility and reasonableness conclusions for the evaluated traffic noise abatement measures, additional traffic noise analysis during final design

is not recommended, and no noise abatement measures are proposed for incorporation into the project.

The complete DNA report is in **Appendix E. SCDOT will inform local planning officials of expected future, generalized noise levels after approval of this environmental document.**

4.7 Air Quality

National Ambient Air Quality Standards

The National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) were established by EPA under the Clean Air Act (CAA), as amended, to protect public health, the environment, and the quality of life from the detrimental effects of air pollution. The NAAQS have been set for the following criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide (CO), lead (Pb), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), ozone (O₃), particulate matter (PM), and sulfur dioxide (SO₂). Mobile sources from on-road vehicles contribute to four of the six criteria pollutants: CO, NO₂, O₃, and PM. Temporary air quality impacts could occur during construction and would be in the form of emissions from construction equipment, dust from construction embankment, and clearing of areas prior to paving or revegetation. During construction, slowed traffic through construction areas may produce additional emissions. Emissions from construction equipment are anticipated to have a minimal impact on air quality due to the amount of time it would take to construct the proposed roadway improvements.

In accordance with the CAA, all portions of South Carolina are designated as in attainment, nonattainment, or unclassifiable for meeting NAAQS standards. An area with air quality that is better than NAAQS standards is considered to be in attainment, while an area with air quality that is worse than NAAQS standards is considered to be in nonattainment. If there is a lack of information for determining an attainment status, the area is designated as unclassifiable. Each state determines which areas within its boundaries are designated to be in attainment or nonattainment and must develop a State Implementation Plan to ensure that areas achieve and/or maintain attainment status for NAAQS standards. A review of current air quality data determined that the EPA has designated both Dorchester and Berkeley Counties 'in attainment' for the criteria pollutants, and in compliance with the NAAQS.

Mobile Source Air Toxics

EPA also regulates air toxics. Most air toxics originate from human-made sources, including on-road mobile sources, nonroad mobile sources (i.e., airplanes), area sources (i.e., dry cleaners) and stationary sources (i.e., factories or refineries). A qualitative analysis provides a basis for identifying and comparing the potential differences among mobile source air toxic (MSAT) emissions, if any, from the various alternatives.

Controlling air toxic emissions became a national priority with the passage of the CAA amendments in 1990, whereby Congress mandated that the EPA regulate 188 air toxics, also known as hazardous air pollutants. EPA has assessed this expansive list in their latest rule on the *Control of Hazardous Air Pollutants from Mobile Sources* and identified a group of 93 compounds

emitted from mobile sources that are listed in their Integrated Risk Information System. EPA refers to these compounds as MSATs. In addition, EPA has identified nine compounds with significant contributions from mobile sources that are among the national and regional-scale cancer risk drivers. While FHWA considers these the priority MSATs, the list is subject to change and may be adjusted in consideration of future EPA rules. The 2007 EPA rule for MSATs requires controls that will dramatically decrease MSAT emissions through cleaner fuels and cleaner engines. FHWA has developed updated interim guidance on addressing MSAT in the NEPA context.⁵ While a discussion of potential MSAT emission impacts from the proposed project has been included in this analysis, appropriate technical tools are not available at this time to determine project-specific health impacts from MSAT associated with the project alternatives. Due to the lack of technical resources, a qualitative impact evaluation is provided, consistent with FHWA guidance.

4.7.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

This project has been determined to generate minimal air quality impacts for CAA criteria pollutants and has not been linked with any special MSAT concerns. As such, this project would not result in changes in traffic volumes, vehicle mix, basic project location, or any other factor that would cause a meaningful increase in MSAT impacts to the project from that of the No-Build Alternative.

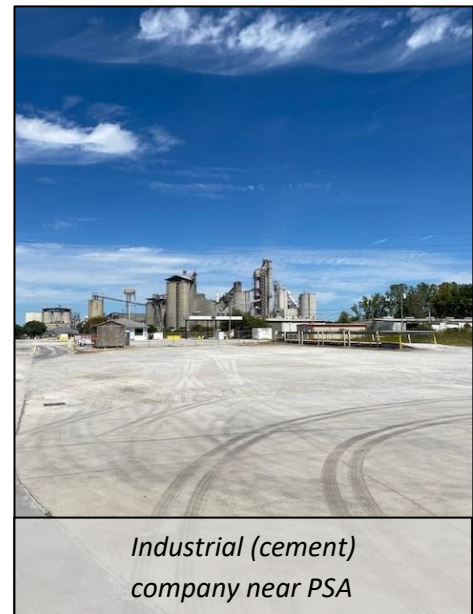
The quantities of MSAT emitted during operation of the recommended preferred alternative would be proportional to the VMT forecasted for that alternative, assuming that other variables remain the same. The fleet mix between the recommended preferred alternative and No-Build Alternative would not be expected to differ much. While peak hour vehicle speeds would differ between the recommended preferred alternative and No-Build Alternative, differences in average vehicle speeds and annual VMT levels would be expected to be relatively minor. Therefore, it is not expected that emissions of MSAT in the project area would differ. Moreover, the total VMT of the roadway network affected by the project would be anticipated to change negligibly due to the minor differences in total roadway miles between the different interchange design options. Regardless of the alternative chosen, emissions would be expected to be substantially lower than present levels in the design year because of EPA's national control programs, which are projected to reduce annual priority MSAT emissions by 76 percent between 2020 and 2060. Local conditions may differ from the national projections in terms of fleet mix and turnover, VMT growth rates, and local control measures. However, the magnitude of the EPA-projected reductions is so great (even after accounting for VMT growth in the project area) that MSAT emissions in the project area would be expected to be lower in virtually all locations. Although implementation of the recommended preferred alternative may negligibly increase

⁵ FHWA, *Updated Interim Guidance on Mobile Source Air Toxic Analysis in NEPA Documents*, January 18, 2023, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/Environment/air_quality/air_toxics/policy_and_guidance/msat/fhwa_nepa_msat_memo_randum_2023.pdf.

overall VMT, it is expected that MSAT emissions along the I-26 project corridor would be reduced relative to existing conditions due to increased travel speeds and reduced idle associated with the addition of a travel lane to the existing median in both directions, and due to EPA's MSAT reduction programs. There may be localized areas where ambient concentrations of MSAT could be higher than the No-Build Alternative. These increases could be offset due to increases in average speeds and reductions in congestion along the project corridor. However, the magnitude and the duration of these potential increases compared to the No-Build Alternative cannot be reliably quantified due to incomplete or unavailable information in forecasting project-specific MSAT health impacts. Moreover, on a regional basis, EPA's vehicle and fuel regulations, coupled with fleet turnover, will cause substantial reductions over time that, in almost all cases, will cause region wide MSAT levels to be significantly lower than today. Guidance regarding MSATs can be found in **Appendix F**.

4.8 Community Impacts

The proposed action was evaluated for potential impacts to surrounding communities, businesses, and commuters. The project corridor is bordered by farmland, undeveloped land (including property belonging to the National Audubon Society), industry, and sparse residential development. Several residential dwellings are located throughout the PSA with some single-family homes along the frontage roads adjacent to I-26 and others on side roads that cross over the interstate. Two population centers are located adjacent to the project. The Town of Harleyville is approximately 1 mile south of the interchange of I-26 and SC 453. Harleyville had a population of 666 based on the 2020 Census. The Town of Holly Hill is approximately 6 miles north of the interchange of I-26 and SC 453. Holly Hill had a population of 1,298 based on the 2020 Census. The project will have no negative impact on either town due to their distance and maintained traffic during construction activities nor will it prevent access to any services or amenities in the region.



4.8.1 Impacts from Recommended Preferred Alternative

The proposed action would require 88 acres of new ROW. The project will not create any change in the local population or employment patterns for the area. ROW acquisition amounts from individual properties will be minimal; therefore, there will be no change in existing land uses. In addition, the acquisitions would not fragment, disrupt, or impact the future known planned land uses. The ROW acquisition process would be conducted in compliance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4601 et seq.). The project is not expected to change neighborhood or community cohesion,

school districts, police and fire protection, emergency medical services, highway traffic and safety, minority or other social groups, or permanently affect existing travel patterns and accessibility.

Temporary, adverse impacts may occur during the construction period, including intermittent interruptions in the flow of traffic, noise and dust generated by construction equipment, and travel delays. Traffic services would be maintained throughout project construction with no anticipated adverse effects on emergency services in the area. The contractor would be responsible for maintaining traffic during construction. If the roadway must be reduced to one-lane traffic for a short period, appropriate traffic control measures would be implemented, and notice would be given to the public through variable message signs, media news releases, and/or other outlets.

Temporary detours will be implemented for the replacement of two overpass bridges: First Bend Road and Second Bend Road. Only one bridge will be detoured at a time. Each detour will last approximately 12 months. After the proposed action's completion, improved traffic service for both public and private use would be realized.

The proposed action was evaluated for potential impacts to the surrounding communities. The impacts considered include the anticipated impacts to local businesses, employment, tax base, and property values. As a result, it is anticipated that the proposed action would have a positive impact long term due to the transportation benefits it will provide. The cost of the proposed action is estimated at \$875.7 million, which would result in added travel lanes in each direction along I-26, reconstructed overpass bridges, new interstate interchange improvements to increase traffic flow through the PSA, as well as improved drainage along the PSA corridor.

4.9 Relocations/Displacements

Relocations/displacements occur when the acquisition of land directly impacts a home or business, requiring the person, family, or business owner to relocate. A relocation study was conducted to determine where such impacts might occur. While the study indicated several potential impacts to personal outbuildings and billboards, it is anticipated that only three sites would result in a displacement due to final design alignments.

- Commercial displacement/relocation is anticipated at 495 Judge Street in Harleyville, South Carolina. The location contains a single structure utilized by Ronnie's Gas Station and Convenience Store as well as Harleyville Liquor Store.
- Commercial displacement/relocation is anticipated at 504 Seven Mile Road in Harleyville, South Carolina. The location contains a small, single structure utilized by the non-profit For a Greater Cause.
- Residential displacement/relocation is anticipated at 402 Second Bend Road in Harleyville, South Carolina. The location contains a single-family residential structure.

All acquisitions and relocations will be conducted in compliance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4601 et seq.), and all relocation resources will be made available without discrimination. The project would benefit the area with improved traffic operations. The relocation study can be found in **Appendix G**.

4.10 Farmlands

The Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981 (FPPA) was enacted by Congress to minimize the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland soils to nonagricultural uses, and to assure, to the extent practicable, that federal, state, and local policies are used to protect farmland soils. Farmland soils can be prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland soils of statewide or local importance. Prime farmland soils are defined as soils that consistently produce the greatest yields with minimal inputs of energy and economic resources, and farming these soils involves the least environmental impact.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey and GIS data layers were evaluated to identify prime farmland soils within the PSA. Of the 1,340 acres of land within the PSA, approximately 704 acres of prime farmland, prime farmland if drained, and farmland of statewide importance was identified, which included areas within the existing roadway footprint.

The project is largely rural and located beyond the immediate limits of a municipality and is not considered an urban place or committed for urban land uses. Therefore, a NRCS Farmland Conversion Impact Rating for Corridor Type Projects (NRCS-CPA-106) was completed for the project and is included in **Appendix H**. The PSA includes approximately 1,340 acres of total area and 80 acres would be directly converted to transportation uses. The Corridor Assessment Criteria analysis resulted in a score of 40, and the relative value of farmland is 100 for a total score of 140 for the project. This score is less than the threshold score of 160; and therefore, farmland in the corridor is not considered a priority for protection nor are alternative sites or additional studies required under the FPPA.

4.11 Hazardous Materials

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was completed in compliance with the procedures found in ASTM Practice E 1527-13 and included a site reconnaissance and records review of the PSA to identify recognized environmental conditions (RECs) (**Appendix I**). A total of 11 REC sites were identified within the search radius, which included findings of current and former underground storage tanks (USTs) and aboveground storage tanks (ASTs), as indicated in **Table 14**.

Table 14. Recognized environmental condition sites

Site location	Potential for adverse impact	Potential contaminant(s) and media	Phase I ESA comments	Impact type (new ROW or ground disturbance)
Ronnie’s Station (495 Judge St.)	Moderate to High	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Active retail fuel station, ASTs. Known groundwater contamination above regulatory limits based on a 2021 assessment report. Ongoing monitoring.	New ROW and ground disturbance
Enmark Station (2722 Highway 15 North)	Moderate to High	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Active retail fuel station, USTs. Known groundwater contamination above regulatory limits based on a 2023 assessment report. Ongoing monitoring.	New ROW and ground disturbance
I-26 One Stop (site) (2877 Highway 15 North)	Moderate to High	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Former retail fuel station. USTs were removed in 1998. Known groundwater contamination above regulatory limits based on 2021 assessment report. Ongoing monitoring.	New ROW and ground disturbance
Argos Cement (463 Judge St.)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Large Industrial cement production plant; eight abandoned USTs.	New ROW and ground disturbance
D & R Waste Tire Processing (located on lot adjacent to Ronnie’s Station)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Former site for waste tire collection for Argos Cement.	New ROW and ground disturbance

Site location	Potential for adverse impact	Potential contaminant(s) and media	Phase I ESA comments	Impact type (new ROW or ground disturbance)
Giant Cement/Giant Resource Recovery (654 Judge St.)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products, hazardous waste storage; soil and/or groundwater	Large industrial cement production plant; abandoned USTs.	New ROW and ground disturbance
Santee Carriers Division at current Oakridge Construction Company site (261 Seven Mile Rd.)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products, hazardous waste storage; soil and/or groundwater	Former trucking logistics company/current construction company; former UST/AST site; potential hazardous waste storage.	None anticipated
Dorchester Biomass (609 Seven Mile Rd.)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Electricity producing facility utilizing waste wood as biomass fuel to produce steam to power generating turbines; has 1,000-gallon AST.	None anticipated
Orangeburg Redi-Mix Concrete (northwest corner of Judge St. and Seven Mile Rd.)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Small concrete batch plant.	New ROW and ground disturbance
Port City Concrete (273 Seven Mile Rd.)	Low to Moderate	Petroleum products; soil and/or groundwater	Large concrete batch plant.	None anticipated
Small garage style building (493 Second Bend Rd.)	Low to Moderate	Unknown	Potentially former auto repair shop.	New ROW and ground disturbance

Of the 11 RECs identified, 8 are within the potential impact limits of the proposed action and may require further evaluation. They are:

- Ronnie’s Station
- Enmark Station

- I-26 One Stop (site)
- Argos Cement
- D & R Waste Tire Processing
- Giant Cement/Giant Resource Recovery
- Orangeburg Redi-Mix Concrete
- Small garage style building

Any properties partially or wholly acquired for this project where ground disturbance would occur may require further inspection and assessment or be further evaluated through a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment.

Based on the site review and records review, it is recommended that subsurface investigations are conducted prior to construction on portions of the PSA where sites are listed as RECs with ground disturbance and/or new ROW. If avoidance of hazardous materials is not possible, and contaminated soils are encountered, SCDES will be notified, as necessary.

The existing structures shall be removed and disposed of by the Contractor in accordance with Subsection 202.4.2 of the Standard Specifications. The Contractor's attention is called to the fact that this project may require removal and disposal of structural components containing asbestos and/or lead-based paints. Removal and disposal of structural components shall comply with all applicable Federal, State, and Local requirements.

4.12 Impacts Associated with Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

Other past, ongoing, or future actions may impact resources or collectively contribute to impacts when considered in combination with the recommended preferred alternative. This section summarizes the impacts that could occur from the recommended preferred alternative when considered in combination with the following other actions:

- I-26 Widening between MM 187 and 194
- I-26 Widening between MM 145 and 172
- I-95 and I-26 Interchange Improvement

Resources with no foreseeable impacts are not discussed.

Land Use: Changes in land use can occur as a result of development. Dorchester and Berkeley Counties continue to develop comprehensive planning documents with regulatory boundaries such as zoning. Impacts on land use would be moderated by local, state, and federal regulations. Conversion of land use would occur through local planning and zoning.

Water Quality and Wetlands: Impacts on water quality and wetlands could result from the future conversion of undeveloped and vegetated land. Conversion could include increases in impervious surfaces, which may increase stormwater runoff and associated pollutant loading in nearby waterbodies.

Noise: Noise mitigation has been determined to not be reasonable or feasible within the PSA. The traffic analysis to determine the noise impacts discussed in Section 4.6 considered growth rates. Because this is directly linked to the number of vehicles that would be anticipated for the design year 2055, no additional reasonably foreseeable impacts have been identified.

Protected Species: Impacts on protected species could result from the future conversion of undeveloped and vegetated land. Conversion could include removing vegetation that serves as habitat for protected species or could impact water quality in aquatic habitats as described above.

5 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY COORDINATION

5.1 Public Involvement

Community input is critical to the success of any project, and SCDOT is committed to providing meaningful public involvement opportunities throughout the project development process. For this purpose, a Public Information Plan (PIP) was created to document the framework for such interaction to take place. This PIP outlines the activities to be employed to share and receive project information, anticipated deliverables, and project team contacts. The PIP is a living document and will be updated and adapted to incorporate new information and document outreach activities and is included in **Appendix J**. Public involvement efforts will follow the *SCDOT Public Involvement Policy* (January 1, 2025).

5.1.1 Public Information Meeting

An eminent domain notice was published in *The Dorchester Eagle-Record* on October 5, 2023, notifying the public about engineering and environmental surveys taking place in the local area. Public and stakeholder involvement efforts were conducted throughout the development of the project including project advertising (signs, postcards, and press releases), website maintenance and development, stakeholder meetings, and a PIM. Coordination with various local, state, and federal agencies, local stakeholders, and the public to identify concerns during development of the project began in December 2024. Stakeholder letters and postcards (approximately 3,658) were mailed on December 23, 2024. A project webpage (www.i26improvements.com/mm172-187) was made available to the public on December 31, 2024, to provide project resources, public meeting materials, schedules, and an avenue to receive public input. Individual stakeholder meetings were held on January 9, 2025, to discuss the projects' potential impact with the key stakeholders.



A PIM was held on January 16, 2025, from 5 to 7 p.m. at Woodland High School located at 4128 Highway 78, Dorchester, SC 29437. The PIM presented the purpose and need, preliminary and build alternatives, schedule, and provided an opportunity for the public to provide comments on the project. A total of 89 people attended the meeting, including members of the media, and County council members. A total of 31 comments were received during the 30-day comment period that ended on January 31, 2025. Responses to comments were completed and mailed in July 2025.

All meeting materials were available on the website, with opportunities to receive hard copies of materials as requested. The project team also met with several residents and business owners during the PIM comment period to discuss the project.

Based on comments received, some design changes were implemented. Affected parties were notified of the changes and updated displays were placed on the project’s webpage.

The posted materials, comments received, and responses can be found in **Appendix J** of this document.

5.1.2 Public Hearing

SCDOT will conduct a public hearing to present the findings of this EA, including the identification of the recommended preferred alternative. The public hearing will consist of an in-person open-house meeting followed by a formal presentation and verbal comment session. Comments will be accepted online, in-person, by email, and by mail. After the end of the public comment period, each person who provided a substantive written comment will receive a response. Public notices will be prepared for newspapers to advertise the hearing, and postcards will be distributed throughout the PSA. Newspaper advertisements and postcards will include the meeting date, time, location, and purpose. Public hearing materials will include a meeting handout and displays showing the potential impacts of the project and the recommended preferred alternative.

The posted materials, comments received, and responses can be found in **Appendix J** of this document.

5.2 Agency Coordination

SCDOT sent a Letter of Intent (LOI) to inform agencies and stakeholders that an EA was being prepared. The LOI was sent to the agencies listed in **Table 15** on October 9, 2025, and is available in **Appendix K**.

Table 15. LOI recipients

Agency
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Agency
U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)
Catawba Indian Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office
Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office
Cherokee Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office
South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES)
South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff (Energy Office)
South Carolina Human Affairs Commission (SCHAC)
South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDOA)
South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH)
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR)
South Carolina Department of Public Safety (SCDPS)
South Carolina Secretary of Commerce
South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC)
South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (SCPRT)
South Carolina Department of Administration
South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA)

Four agencies provided written comment letters as a response to the LOI as well as one South Carolina State Representative. **Table 16** provides a summary of the comment letters received. The full comment letters are available in **Appendix K**.

Table 16. Summary of LOI agency response letters

Agency	Summary/Response
SCDAH	SCDAH will address any concerns regarding cultural resources within the project study area in our comments on the cultural resources assessment survey submitted to us for review.
SCDNR	SCDNR indicated that specific comments could not be provided since the project is still in the planning phase but provided general comments on wetlands and BMPs to consider during the development of the EA. In addition, SCDNR provided additional information about protected species with the potential to occur in the PSA.
SCDPS	SCDPS provided comments regarding their weigh stations located within the PSA. They have specific concerns about on-site resources (septic tanks, wells, drainage, septic fields, and pavement) being impacted. They also mention future projects (lighting and weigh-in-motion) that may be impacted.
SCDES	SCDES provided general comments regarding permit requirements through their Bureau of Coastal Management and Bureau of Water. They also provided comments regarding known RCRA and LUST sites.
Legislative	Representative Robert Robbins sent a comment in support of the project.

An Agency Coordination Effort (ACE) meeting was also held during the development of the project. **Table 17** presents the ACE meeting held and agencies in attendance. The ACE meeting summary is in **Appendix K**.

Table 17. Agency coordination meeting

Meeting date	Topic	Agency attendees
February 20, 2025	Project Introduction	FHWA, USACE, SCDOT, SCDAH, USFWS, National Park Service (NPS), SCDES