

## What is the Mark Clark Extension Project?

The South Carolina Department of Transportation, in cooperation with Charleston County, is proposing to construct a new roadway from the existing endpoint of I-526 at Savannah Highway in West Ashley (U.S. 17) to the James Island Connector at Folly Road, linking James Island, Johns Island, and West Ashley.

This proposed new roadway would require environmental reviews coordinated across several federal and state agencies in order to proceed. To streamline these reviews, provide a more comprehensive analysis, and reduce the overall time needed to complete the project, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) agreed to merge the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the USACE's Regulatory permitting process to create a joint environmental document.

The purpose of the Project is to increase the capacity of the regional transportation system, improve safety, and enhance mobility to and from the West Ashley, Johns Island, and James Island areas of Charleston, South Carolina.



## Project History

- » **1972**  
 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) completed for Charleston Inner Belt Freeway
- » **1976**  
 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) completed for James Island Connector
- » **1980s & Early 1990s**  
 Portions of the Mark Clark Expressway constructed
- » **1995**  
 Draft Supplemental EIS - refined the unconstructed corridor (this project) chosen in the 1972 FEIS
- » **2004**  
 Charleston County voters passed the Transportation "Half-Cent" sales tax
- » **2006**  
 SC Transportation Infrastructure Bank approval of Charleston County's application to fund the unconstructed portion of Mark Clark Expressway
- » **2007**  
 Intergovernmental agreement between SCDOT and Charleston County  
 Notice of Intent for this proposed project
- » **2008**  
 New EIS process begins, Public & Agency Scoping Meetings  
 Public Information Meetings
- » **2009**  
 Public Information Meetings  
 Joint Public Hearing
- » **2010**  
 Draft EIS (DEIS) signed
- » **2016**  
 Draft EIS (DEIS) Re-evaluation signed
- » **2019**  
 Supplemental Draft EIS (SEIS) process begins



## Project Definitions

### Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

A full disclosure document detailing the process through which a transportation project was developed, includes consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives, analyzes the potential impacts resulting from the alternatives, and demonstrates compliance with other applicable environmental laws and executive orders. The EIS process is completed in the following ordered steps: Notice of Intent (NOI), Draft EIS (DEIS), Final EIS (FEIS), and Record of Decision (ROD).

### Project Study Area

The project study area is the area in which field data is collected to identify all known environmental resources (human or natural). Established early in the process, this area must be large enough to house all potential project alternatives.

### No-Build Alternative

The scenario where the project is not built which is used as a benchmark to compare the impacts of the other alternatives. Short-term, minor reconstruction, such as safety upgrading and maintenance projects, can be considered. (Source: FHWA)

### New Location Alternative

An alternative that would provide a new roadway to be built in a new location.

### Transportation Systems Management

A set of strategies that focus on operational improvements that can maintain and even restore the performance of the existing transportation system before extra capacity is needed. The goal is to get the most performance out of the current, existing transportation facilities. (Source: FHWA)



## A Deep Dive: Public Involvement & the Development of Alternatives

Public involvement has been an integral part of the development of alternatives for the Mark Clark Extension project. Throughout the development of the project, the public has had opportunities to comment on the project through the following: scoping meetings, information meetings, stakeholder meetings, public hearings, the project website, and the telephone hotline.

Comments and areas of concern provided by the public at the public scoping meeting (April 2008) were considered while developing the preliminary alternatives. The 17 "Preliminary Build Alternatives" were developed, including 4 alternatives from the 1995 DEIS and 13 new alternatives. Three additional alternatives, the No-build Alternative, mass transit, and transportation systems management alternatives, were also identified for evaluation in the DEIS.

### Most frequently mentioned issues from the public scoping meetings (2008):

- Include "New Way to Work" as proposed by the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League (SCCCL) as an alternative in the DEIS
- Include bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Avoid the James Island County Park
- An urgency to complete the project

These 20 alternatives were presented to the public in a series of public information meetings in late 2008. Based on comments received from the public, resource agencies, and project stakeholders, an additional 19 new location alternatives—including a parkway concept, a grid network ("New Way to Work"), and improvements to existing roads—were developed.

In total, the range of alternatives included 39 alternatives—36 new location alternatives, mass transit, transportation systems management, and the No-build Alternative—which were then evaluated to determine if they would meet the needs of the project.



# A Deep Dive: Continued

Through a process called the Tier I Alternatives Analysis, the project team evaluated the range of 39 alternatives using a set of traffic and environmental criteria. The criteria, units of measure, and the preliminary alternatives analysis process were presented to the participating and cooperating resource agencies as well as the public in late 2008.

Based on the results of the Tier I Alternatives Analysis of the 39 alternatives, nine alternatives were carried forward for further evaluation, including six new location alternatives (Alternatives 1, 8, 10, 11, 11A, and 36), mass transit, transportation systems management, and the No-build Alternative. Upon detailed evaluation, mass transit and transportation systems management were found to not meet the purpose and need of the project and were eliminated from further study.

This resulted in the identification of the Reasonable Alternatives: the six new location alternatives (Alternatives 1, 8, 10, 11, 11A, and 36). These alternatives were presented to the resource agencies and public in Spring 2009.

As a result of input from the resource agencies, stakeholders, and the public, various adjustments to the alignments of the Reasonable Alternatives were suggested. Many of the public comments also expressed support for the parkway concept but voiced concerns about the location of Alternative 36 (the only parkway concept). As a result, the project team evaluated the possibility of alternate routes for

a parkway facility on James Island. This resulted in the merging of features of Alternative 11 and Alternative 36 to create a hybrid alternative, Alternative G, a new and the seventh Reasonable Alternative.

After the public information meetings, the study team refined the level of detail for each of the seven Reasonable Alternatives. For simplicity, the new location alternatives were also renamed for the DEIS studies:

- Alternative 1 ▶ Alternative A
- Alternative 8 ▶ Alternative B
- Alternative 10 ▶ Alternative C
- Alternative 11 ▶ Alternative D
- Alternative 11A ▶ Alternative E
- Alternative 36 ▶ Alternative F
- Alternative G ▶ Alternative G (hybrid of Alternatives 11 and 36)

These seven new location alternatives were studied for the potential impacts and benefits to the human and natural environment.

Taking into consideration the benefits and impacts of each alternative, SCDOT identified Alternative G as SCDOT's Recommended Preferred Alternative in the 2010 DEIS.



# Moving Forward

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was signed in July 2010. The project was then put on hold and Re-evaluation on the DEIS was completed in 2016. This re-evaluation addressed the amount of time that had elapsed since the DEIS was signed, incorporated comments received from the resource agencies and the public after the public hearings, and used the updated 2015 BCDCOG CHATS Travel Demand Traffic Model to reevaluate traffic impacts. Modifications made to the Preferred Alternative (as a result of agency and public input) were also applied to each of the Reasonable Alternatives, where applicable. These design changes were incorporated so the Reasonable Alternatives from the DEIS could be analyzed and compared based on the updated data. The re-evaluation documented that Alternative G remained SCDOT's Recommended Preferred Alternative. The project was then put on hold and revived again in late 2018.

Those living in the region since 2010 can tell you that several changes have occurred in the study area since

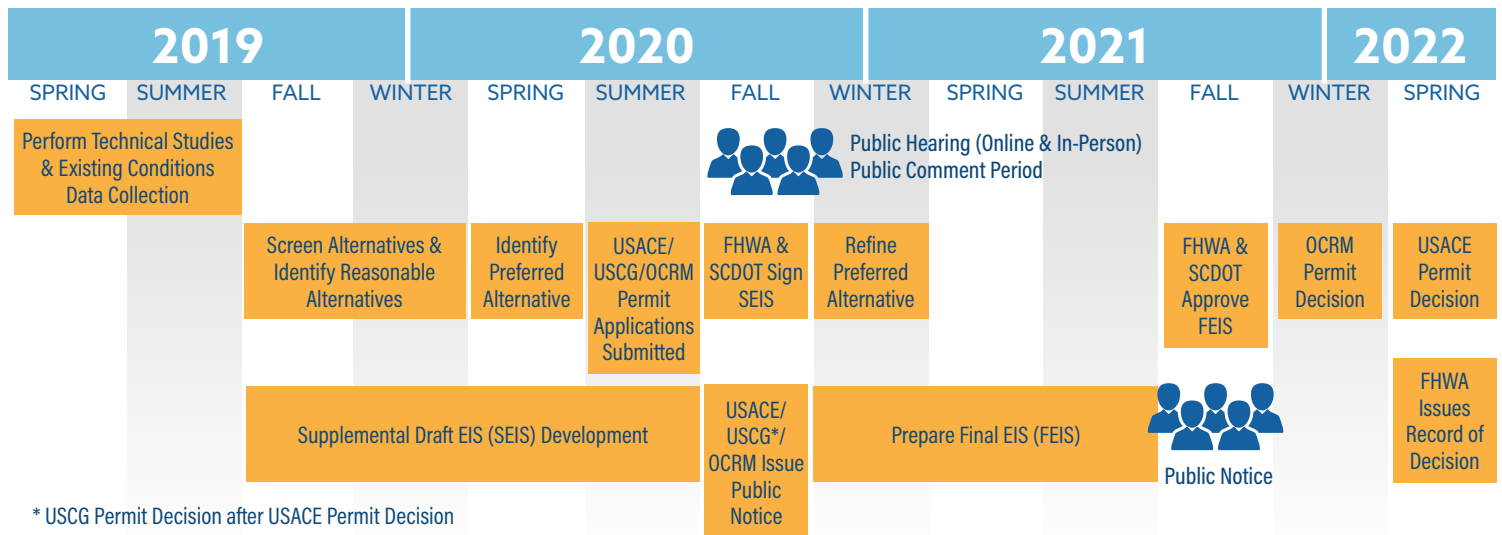
then. These include changes to land use, such as new developments; increases in population; changes in traffic patterns; as well as shifts in demographics. For this reason, SCDOT and FHWA determined a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) was necessary to evaluate the changes in the study area and the impact they may have on the project.

In the SEIS, all 39 alternatives evaluated in the 2010 DEIS will be re-evaluated. The SEIS will build on the past studies, engineering analyses, and public and resource agency comments to determine those alternatives that would best meet the project goals.

To do so, all technical studies will be reviewed and updated to reflect current conditions and will address all updated regulatory requirements. New traffic analyses and field studies for all resources, including an evaluation of wetlands and streams, among other resources, will be completed for the SEIS.

To date, the project team has begun limited field work and traffic studies.

## Current Project Schedule



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