Improvements to US Route 78
Phase 3

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

June 8, 2021
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

The Dorchester County Sales Tax Transportation Authority (DCTA), through an Intergovernmental Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), proposes to improve US Highway 78 (US 78) from Orangeburg Road (S-18-22) to Berlin Myers Parkway (SC Route 165) in Dorchester County, South Carolina. The project, as proposed, would result in certain modifications to the adjacent and surrounding human and natural environments. However, the Department has not identified any adverse impacts that would occur. Therefore, the project meets the criteria under 23 CFR 771.115(c) for processing as an Environmental Assessment. Specific preliminary environmental studies, conducted in the early stages of project development, and understandings of the scope of work to be performed were considered in this decision. Copies of these studies have been appended to this document and are included on the CD attached to the document. This environmental document is being prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and in accordance with Federal Highway Administration regulations (23 CFR Part 771).

Improvements to US 78 are included in the CHATS Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) FY 2017 to 2022 and have been included in the 2017-2022 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Additionally, the segment of the project from Orangeburg Road to West Richardson Avenue is one of 22 projects included in the DCTA’s referendum authorizing the County to issue bonds in the amount of $125,000,000 to be repaid from a one-cent (1%) special transportation sales and use tax.

1.2 Revisions Since Approval of the EA

Since the approval of the EA, several design modifications have been made to reflect development that has occurred since the original design plans were developed. These revisions include the following:

- A right-turn deceleration lane has been constructed for the Beazer Homes subdivision (tract 290B). Since a turn lane is planned here as part of the proposed roadway improvements, the plans will be revised to incorporate the additional existing pavement. The proposed limits of construction are not expected to change.

- Parcels 340 and 344 have been developed since the design plans were prepared. The proposed roadway design will be adjusted to accommodate the current site access driveways. The proposed limits of construction are not expected to change.

- Parcel 377 has been modified and now includes two driveway locations. The proposed roadway design will be adjusted to accommodate the second site access driveway. The proposed limits of construction are not expected to change.

These revisions are needed only to accommodate previously approved and permitted development along the project corridor.
2.0 Purpose and Need

2.1 Project Description

This project is being developed and advanced by the Dorchester County Sales Tax Transportation Authority and South Carolina Department of Transportation. Funding for the project will come jointly from the Dorchester County Transportation Sales Tax, State Transportation Infrastructure Bank, and Federal Highway Administration Funds.

As seen in Figure 2-1, Phase 3 is located along existing US Highway 78 beginning near secondary road S-18-22 (Orangeburg Road/Dawson Branch Road) and extending to SC 165 (Berlin G. Myers Parkway) in Summerville. Phases 1 and 2 of US Highway 78 Improvements were previously approved as separate projects, with a northern terminus of secondary road S-167 (Academy Road/Sugar Hill Road), continuing to a southern terminus near Orangeburg Road. Specific details of the proposed improvements include:

- Widen US highway 78 to 5 lanes from Orangeburg Road to Berlin G Myers Parkway
- Intersection improvements at Orangeburg Road / Dawson Branch Road
- Intersection improvements at Jedburg Road / Mallard Lane
- Intersection improvements at Deming Way
- Intersection improvements at West Richardson Avenue / Auburn Hills Road
- Intersection improvements at North Maple Street
- Intersection improvements at Iris Street / Bryan Street
- Intersection improvements at North Cedar Street
- Intersection improvements at US17A
- Intersection improvements at Berlin G. Myers Parkway
- Construct approximately 5.5 miles of sidewalks
- Construct approximately 2.1 miles of multi-use path from Auburn Hills Road to Branch Creek Trail

2.2 Project Purpose

The purpose of project is to increase capacity along certain segments of the road and improve the efficiency of the roadway by reducing traffic delays.

2.3 Project Need

Improvements to US Highway 78 are included in the CHATS 2005-2030 Long Range Plan and have been included in the 2017-2022 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)\(^1\). Additionally, the segment of the project from Orangeburg Road to West Richardson Avenue is one of 22 projects included in the DCTA’s referendum\(^2\) authorizing the County to issue bonds in the amount of $125,000,000 to be repaid from a one-cent (1%) special transportation sales and use tax.

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1 CHATS Financial Statement, STIP 2017-2022, page 1 of 7. $3.250M for R/W (SIB), $4.557M for R/W (STBGP), and $2.193M for R/W (DCTA).
2 Dorchester County Ordinance No. 2004-10
US Highway 78 has been included in the South Carolina Strategic Corridor System established by SCDOT in the South Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Multimodal Long-range Transportation Plan, which was approved by the SCDOT Commission on May 14, 2008, and the 2014 update to this plan entitled the South Carolina Multimodal Transportation Plan, “Charting a Course to 2040”, adopted by the SCDOT Commission in December 2014. The purpose of these plans is to identify a strategic system of corridors forming the backbone of the state’s transportation system. This Strategic Corridor System provides a connected, continuous network that serves the traveling public, facilitates the movement of freight, and provides the needed connectivity that will allow South Carolina to maintain and enhance its economic vitality. US Highway 78 is a part of the “Best Friend of Charleston Corridor” which runs from the Georgia State Line to US Highway 52 in Charleston County. The corridor begins on US Highway 1 at the state line in Aiken County before changing over to US Highway 17 in the City of Aiken. The remainder of the corridor follows along US Highway 78. This corridor provides an important route connecting the Port of Charleston to I-26, I-95, and I-20. The Port of Charleston is one of the busiest ports on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. US Highway 78 also connects to the “Mountains to the Sea Corridor,” which runs on US Highway 178 from the North Carolina State Line in Pickens County to US Highway 78. This corridor provides an alternate route to I-26 which runs parallel and north of the corridor.

The SCDOT Plan identified several issues along US Highway 78. Specifically, the fact that the projected traffic levels in 2030 will result in unacceptable levels of service (LOS) along portions of the road; and that this segment experiences a high volume of truck traffic due to the industrial growth north of the Town of Summerville and the proximity to I-26 and the Port of Charleston. The increased truck volume is contributing to the poor LOS on US Highway 78. It is anticipated that truck traffic volume along US Highway 78 will increase with increased capacity at the Port of Charleston, as this route provides an alternate and shorter route to congested I-26 from Charleston to Augusta.

US Highway 78 has been included in the South Carolina Statewide Strategic Freight Roadway Network. This was done at the recommendation of the South Carolina Ports Authority due to its potential role in moving goods via truck through South Carolina from the Port of Charleston.

US Highway 78 is a major part of the transportation system serving the Summerville area, providing access to the Summerville/North Charleston/Charleston areas from the northern portion of Dorchester County. The primary need for this project is reflected in the projected traffic volume (AADT) increases as shown in Table 2.1, which indicates a projected increase of 143% on the section of road west of Orangeburg Road, and a 52% increase between Deming Way and West Richardson Avenue. These volumes of traffic will impact the levels of service along the roadway as discussed below.

### Table 2.1 Traffic Data for US Highway 78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traffic Data Along Phase 3 US Highway 78</th>
<th>2017 AADT (vpd)</th>
<th>2017 AADT (vpd)</th>
<th>Percent Increase (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West of Orangeburg Road</td>
<td>8,100</td>
<td>19,700</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jedburg Road to Deming Way</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>10,300</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deming Way to West Richardson Ave.</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>21,300</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Maple Street to Iris St./ Bryan St.</td>
<td>17,200</td>
<td>22,600</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris St. / Bryan St. to Cedar St.</td>
<td>17,200</td>
<td>20,300</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of Berlin Myers Parkway</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 South Carolina Statewide Freight Plan, December 1, 2017
4 Source: Transportation Planning Study, US 78 Corridor Widening, Dorchester County, South Carolina, prepared by SRS Engineering, LLC, June 2009.
One of the factors to be considered in analyzing the need for a road project is the capacity of the existing roadway. One of the ways this is accomplished is to look at a roadway’s Level of Service (LOS). The level of service is a ratio reflecting the actual volume of traffic compared to the maximum capacity the road was built to accommodate. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) define various levels of service as follows:

**LOS A:** Free flow with individual users virtually unaffected by the presence of others in the traffic stream. Provide improved travel times and access options to the rapidly growing, high density employment centers along Palmetto Commerce Parkway and Ingleside Boulevard.

**LOS B:** Stable flow with a high degree of freedom to select speed and operating conditions but with some influence from other users.

**LOS C:** Restricted flow which remains stable but with significant interactions with others in the traffic stream. The general level of comfort and convenience declines noticeably at this level.

**LOS D:** High-density flow in which speed and freedom to maneuver are severely restricted and comfort and convenience have declined even though flow remains stable.

**LOS E:** Unstable flow at or near capacity levels with poor levels of comfort and convenience.

**LOS F:** Forced flow in which the amount of traffic approaching a point exceeds the amount that can be served, and queues form, characterized by stop-and-go waves, poor travel times, low comfort and convenience, and increased accident exposure.

An analysis was performed to determine the LOS under existing and future traffic conditions on US Highway 78 using concepts and procedures contained in the Highway Capacity Manual, as prepared by the Transportation Research Board, Washington, DC, 2000. A copy of this analysis is included in the Transportation Planning Study for this project, which is included as Appendix P to this document and found on the CD included at the end of this document. The LOS under existing conditions, future “no-build” conditions and future “build” conditions, is provided in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 LOS Data for US Highway 78**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traffic Data on US 78</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2040 No-Build</th>
<th>2040 Build</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AADT (vpd)</td>
<td>LOS</td>
<td>AADT (vpd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West of Orangeburg Road</td>
<td>8,100</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>19,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jedburg Road to Deming Way</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>10,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deming Way to West Richardson Ave.</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>21,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Maple Street to Iris St./ Bryan St.</td>
<td>17,200</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>22,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris St. / Bryan St. to Cedar St.</td>
<td>17,200</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>20,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of Berlin Myers Parkway</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>12,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Transportation Planning Study, US 78 Corridor Widening, Dorchester County, South Carolina, prepared by SRS Engineering, LLC, June 2009
2.4 Logical Termini

As noted previously, Phase 3 of the U.S. Highway 78 Improvement Project begins near secondary road S-22 (Orangeburg Road/Dawson Branch Road) and extends to SC 165 (Berlin G. Myers Parkway) in Summerville, approximately 7.1 miles. The northern terminus is at Orangeburg Road, which served as the southern terminus for the previously approved Phase 2 Improvement Project. The southern terminus of Phase 3 is SC -165 (Berlin Myers Parkway), a four-lane highway providing an alternate route around the Town of Summerville for U.S. Highway 17A, resulting in a change in traffic volume on US 78 as traffic will turn onto SC-165 to bypass downtown Summerville.

The proposed project would have independent utility since it would provide benefits to travel efficiency that would reduce traffic congestion by adding capacity in the project area.

3.0 Alternatives

Location and design alternatives were considered in the process of developing the currently proposed “build” alternative. The “no-build” alternative, which consists of making no improvements, was considered as a baseline for comparison; however, the “no-build” alternative would not improve the efficiency of the roadway. Without the improvements, the LOS along several segments of the project will increase to “E”, operating at or near the design capacity. Therefore, this alternative is not considered acceptable as it does not meet the purpose and need of the project because it does not increase the capacity of the road nor does it improve congestion.

Build alternatives included widening of the existing roadway as well as alignment shifts to accomplish the desired results. Each alternative will also include multi-use paths separated from the highway along one side of the roadway for sections in the more urban areas of the project approaching the Town of Summerville. The multi-use paths are being included for bicycle and pedestrian use. Due to ROW issues and the desire to minimize relocations, the multi-use path will switch from one side of the road to the other at one location. At this location, there will be appropriate signage to indicate the change in location, instructing users of the path to switch to the other side.

Major shifts in the alignment were determined to be unacceptable due to the potential for the requirement of numerous relocations and increased environmental impacts. Much of the land to either side of the existing road is already developed, and any major shift in alignment that does not utilize the existing roadway will result in an increase in relocations. Therefore, the project is proposed to be widened using the existing roadway as a portion of the project. Options included widening to the north of the existing alignment, to the south of the existing alignment, and symmetrically around the centerline of the existing alignment. This will require the use of existing and newly acquired ROW. As described earlier, the roadway would be widened from two lanes to five lanes. Additional turn lanes will be installed at major intersections. Also, shoulders will be widened for the entire length of the project. These improvements will result in increased capacity of the roadway and will relieve existing and projected future congestion.

Anticipated impacts from these three build alternatives are outline in Table 3.1
Table 3.1 shows that the symmetrical alignment has the least number of relocations, the smallest wetland impact, and the lowest total construction cost. The south alignment has the lowest acres of floodplains impacted (approximately 0.3 acres less than the symmetrical alignment). However, the south alignment has the highest estimated total construction cost of $85,300,000, approximately $11,000,000 greater than the symmetrical alignment. Based on the overall minimal impacts to floodplains for any of the three alternatives, the lower number of relocations and wetland impacts for the symmetrical alignment, as well as savings of $11,000,000 in construction costs, outweigh the relatively low increase in floodplain impacts (0.3 acres). It should be noted that the symmetrical alignment does impact the highest number of hazardous material sites; however, it is believed that most of these sites will have no overall impact on the construction or cost of the project. For these reasons, the alignment symmetrically around centerline of the existing roadway is the preferred alignment.

While the proposed alignment for the project represents the best “build” alternative for meeting the project’s purpose and need, input received during the public hearing process and environmental document availability period will be carefully evaluated in project’s ongoing development process. Modifications will be made where appropriate.
4.0 Probable Impacts of the Project on the Environment

This section includes a discussion on the probable, beneficial, and adverse social, economic, and environmental effects of the alternatives under consideration and describes the measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impacts. The project, as proposed, would result in certain modifications to the human and natural environment. The Department has not identified impacts that would require the preparation of an EIS. Therefore, the project meets the criteria under 23 CFR 771.115 (c) for processing as an Environmental Assessment. Specific environmental studies conducted in the early stages of the project development and understandings of the scope of work to be performed were considered in making this decision. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the environmental findings. Detailed information can be found in the environmental studies for the project which are appended to this document. Copies of the studies can be found on the CD included in the back of this document.

4.1 Land Use

Most of the land along US Highway 78 from the northwestern terminus of the project (approximately 3,600’ northwest of the intersection with Orangeburg Road/Dawson Branch Road) down to Jedburg Road is primarily undeveloped land, with a few residential properties. From Jedburg Road to the southeastern terminus of the project (approximately 545 feet southeast of the intersection with SC-165, Berlin Myers Parkway) the land is highly developed, with residential and commercial properties lining both sides of the roadway.

Dorchester County adopted a Comprehensive Plan in November 2008. This plan sets forth a vision for Dorchester County through the year 2030. The seven foundations of this plan are future land use, infrastructure concurrency, transportation, economic development, workforce housing, priority investment areas, and community design. The future land use plan for the area along US Highway 78 calls for employment growth in the vicinity of Ridgeville, with managed growth along the remaining segments of US Highway 78. The future land use plan includes the improvements to US Highway 78 as a part of the plan. Therefore, this project should have little impact on current land use plans but will provide for better traffic flow to meet the intent of these plans.

The project design will comply with the requirements of the Dorchester County Tree Ordinance.

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7 Dorchester County Zoning and Land Development Ordinance 04-13, Section 12.4 Tree and Canopy Protection Standards.
4.2 Threatened or Endangered Species

Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, a field survey of the proposed new right-of-way was conducted. The following lists of endangered and threatened species for Dorchester County were obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR):

| Animals (Federal) | | Animals (State) | | Plants (Federal) |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Bald eagle | Haliaeetus leucocephalus BGEPA* | Spotted turtle | Clemmys guttata | State Threatened |
| Red-cockaded woodpecker | Picoides borealis | Ranae rusinus | State Endangered |
| American wood stork | Mergus americana | Swallow-tailed kite | Elanus leucurus | State Endangered |
| Atlantic sturgeon | Acipenser oxyrinchus | Least tern | Sterna antillarum | State Threatened |
| Shortnose sturgeon | Acipenser brevirostrum | Gopher tortoise | Gopherus Polyphemus | State Endangered |
| Northern long-eared bat | Myotis septentrionalis | Gopher frog | Rano capito | State Endangered |

*Federally protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA)

A review of the project corridor by the DCTA’s biologist (May-June 2015 and September 2017) did not identify the presence of any species from the list provided by the USFWS, with the exception of a Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) population in Brosnan Forest. This particular area is located along Phase 1 of the project and was dealt with under the permitting for that phase. The RCW has not been detected along either Phase 2 or Phase 3. Based on the lack of suitable habitat and no observations of the listed species during field surveys, results of the biological assessment indicate that the proposed action will not adversely affect resources under the jurisdiction of the USFWS that are currently protected by the Act. Therefore, no further action is required under Section 7(a)(2) of the Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with this determination and a copy of their concurrence letter is included in Appendix D. The threatened and endangered species technical reports for this project have been appended to this assessment as Appendices K and L and can be found on the CD included in the back of this document.

4.3 Farmlands

The Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981 requires evaluation of farmland conversions to nonagricultural uses. Farmland can be prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide or local importance. Prime farmland soils are those that have characteristics favorable for economic production of sustained high yields of crops. These soils may or may not be presently used as cropland. Conversely, land that is presently used as cropland may or may not be prime farmland. Most of the prime agricultural land in the study area is currently used for residential purposes.
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Through the use of county farmland listings provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), it has been determined that the project area would involve lands protected under the Act. A Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form SCS-CPA-160 has been completed for the project corridor and is included as Appendix A. The form provides a site assessment scoring system with criteria for evaluating adverse effects of projects on the protection of farmland. Sites receiving highest scores up to a maximum of 260 are considered most suitable for protection while those with lowest scores are considered least suitable. Sites receiving scores less than 160 are to be given minimal consideration for protection. The score computed for this proposed action was 112. As the total points are less than 160, neither consideration of alternative sites nor additional studies for the study area are required under the Act.

4.4 Water Quality

This Project is located within the upper reaches of the Ashley River Watershed. The Ashley River flows out of the Cypress Swamp, just north of the Project, and accepts drainage from Dorchester Creek (Sawmill Branch, Rose Creek) and Eagle Creek (Spencer Branch, Federwitz Branch, Chandler Bridge Creek). Sawmill Branch is classified FW (classifications defined below), Dorchester Creek is SA, and Eagle Creek is SB. Old Dorchester State Park lies between Dorchester and Eagle Creeks. The river then receives drainage from Coosaw Creek (SA), Olive Branch (SA), Sawpit Creek (SA), and Popperdam Creek (SA). MacBeth Creek (SA) enters the river next followed by Keivling Creek (SA), Church Creek, Bulls Creek, Brickyard Creek, Sawmill Branch (SA), Dorchester Creek (SA), and Eagle Creek (SB). The river then enters the Cooper River in Charleston Harbor. The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway (AIWW) follows Wappoo Creek from the Stono River to the Ashley River and into the harbor. This portion of the AIWW is classified SA. The Ashley River is classified FW from its origin to Bacon Bridge and SA from Bacon Bridge to Church Creek, where it changes to SA (DO not less than 4 mg/l) to the entrance of Orangegrove Creek. Downstream of Orangegrove Creek, the Ashley River returns to its classification of SA. In addition to the Old Dorchester State Park, other natural resources in the watershed include many historic gardens and plantations, and Charles Towne Landing State Park. There are a total of 113.4 stream miles, 421.3 acres of lake waters, and 3,862.5 acres of estuarine areas in this watershed.

Within the limits of the Project are two smaller water bodies, Green Bay and Rumph’s Hill Creek, both of which flow into the Ashley River. Sawmill Branch is located at the extreme southern end of the Project.

According to SCDHEC Regulation 61-68, Freshwaters (FW) are suitable for activities such as swimming (primary contact recreation) and boating (secondary contact recreation) and as a source for drinking water after accepted treatment practices. Freshwaters will support the existing and surrounding terrestrial and aquatic plant and animal communities. These waters are acceptable to be used for fishing, agricultural irrigation, and industrial uses. Class SA are tidal salt waters suitable for primary and secondary contact recreation, crabbing, and fishing, except harvesting of clams, mussels, or oysters for market purposes or human consumption and uses listed in Class SB. Also suitable for the survival and propagation of a balanced indigenous aquatic community of marine fauna and flora. Class SB are tidal salt waters suitable for primary and secondary contact recreation, crabbing, and fishing, except harvesting of clams, mussels, or oysters for market purposes, or human consumption. Also suitable for the survival and propagation of a balanced indigenous aquatic community of marine fauna and flora.

In addition to determining water quality classifications and standards, SCDHEC develops a priority list of water bodies that do not currently meet state water quality standards pursuant to Section 303(d) of the CWA and 40 CFR 130.7. This list is developed by SCDHEC on a biannual basis and reviewed and approved by the EPA. It is commonly referred to as the 303(d) List of Impaired Waters.

To monitor the area’s water quality, SCDHEC has established numerous ambient water quality monitoring stations located throughout the state. The following is a general discussion of water monitoring stations potentially impacted by the Project.

**Ashley River** – There are five monitoring stations along the Ashley River. At the furthest upstream site, CSTL-102, aquatic life uses are fully supported for both fresh and saltwater classifications; however, there is a significant increasing trend in total phosphorus concentration for both classifications. Although dissolved oxygen excursions occurred, they were typical of values seen in such systems and were considered natural, not standard violations. There is a significant increasing trend in pH. A significant decreasing trend in total nitrogen concentration suggests improving conditions for this parameter. Recreational uses are partially supported due to fecal coliform bacteria excursions for both classifications. CSTL-102 has been included on the most recent 303(d) List of Impaired Waters due to bacterial contamination (Enterococci and E coli). Moving downstream to MD-049, aquatic life uses are not supported due to turbidity and dissolved oxygen excursions. Significant decreasing trends in turbidity, total nitrogen concentration, and fecal coliform bacteria concentration suggest improving conditions for these parameters. Recreational uses are partially supported due to fecal coliform bacteria excursions at this site. MD-049 has been included on the most recent 303(d) List of Impaired Waters for pH, Turbidity, and Enterococci violations. Further downstream (MD-135), both aquatic life and recreational uses are fully supported. Significant increasing trends in dissolved oxygen concentration and decreasing trends in total phosphorus concentration suggest improving conditions for these parameters. Continuing downstream to MD-052, aquatic life uses are not supported due to occurrences of copper in excess of the aquatic life criterion and dissolved oxygen excursions. In addition, there is a significant increasing trend in five-day biological oxygen demand. There is a significant decreasing trend in pH. Significant increasing trends in dissolved oxygen concentration and decreasing trends in turbidity, total nitrogen concentration, and fecal coliform bacteria suggest improving conditions for these parameters. Recreational uses are fully supported at this site. At the furthest downstream site (MD-034), aquatic life and recreational uses are fully supported. Significant decreasing trends in five-day biological oxygen demand, total phosphorus and total nitrogen concentration, and fecal coliform bacteria suggest improving conditions for these parameters.

**Sawmill Branch** - There are two monitoring stations along Sawmill Branch. At the upstream site, CSTL-043, aquatic life uses are partially supported due to dissolved oxygen excursions. In addition, there is a significant increasing trend in turbidity. There is also a significant increasing trend in pH. Significant decreasing trends in five-day biological oxygen demand and fecal coliform bacteria concentration suggest improving conditions for these parameters. CSTL-043 is included on the current 303(d) List of Impaired Waters due to dissolved oxygen excursions. It is also listed within the report as being within an Approved TMDL for fecal coliform. At the downstream site (RS-05563), aquatic life uses are fully supported, but recreational uses are not supported due to fecal coliform excursions. This site is listed within the Impaired Waters report as being within an Approved TMDL for fecal coliform. Dorchester Creek (CSTL-013) - Aquatic life uses are partially supported due to dissolved oxygen excursions. There is a significant increasing trend in pH. Significant decreasing trends in turbidity and total nitrogen concentration suggest improving conditions for these parameters. Recreational uses are partially supported due to fecal coliform bacteria excursions; however, a significant decreasing trend in fecal coliform bacteria concentration suggests improving conditions for this parameter. CSTL-013 is included on the current 303(d) List of Impaired Waters due to dissolved oxygen excursions. It is also listed within the report as being within an Approved TMDL for fecal coliform.

Stormwater control measures, both during construction and post-construction, are required for SCDOT projects constructed in the vicinity of 303(d), TMDL, ORW, tidal, and shellfish beds in accordance with the SCDOT’s MS4 Permit. Design for the Project will comply with the requirements of SCDOT Stormwater Quality Design Manual, December 2014. SCDOT stormwater BMPs would be utilized as necessary to minimize any water quality impacts to adjacent waterbodies. Where possible, grassed swales, detention areas, and/or engineered treatment systems would be implemented to address water quality concerns. To deal with the fecal coliform bacteria issues, a stormwater management program will be instituted that will incorporate best management practices (BMPs) to remove pollutants that are causing these violations. All stormwater from the project will sheet flow off the road through existing and new grass-lined swales to filter the water prior to discharge in adjacent wetlands and streams. SCDOT will adhere to the Fecal Coliform TMDL Compliance Plan as outlined in their Storm Water Management Program. To address dissolved oxygen problems at CSTL-043, dissolved oxygen enhancement structures such as enhanced riprap structures and aeration pads which provide aeration of stormwater runoff as it flows through and across the structure, causing an increase to DO levels will be utilized on the project as appropriate.

During construction activities, temporary siltation may occur, and erosion could be of a greater degree than presently occurring on existing terrain. The contractor will be required to minimize this impact through implementation of construction best management practices, reflecting policies contained in 23 CFR 650 B and SCDOT’s Supplemental Specifications on Seeding and Erosion Control Measures. In addition, the contractor will be required to develop and implement a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures (SPCC) Plan to manage the storage of petroleum products and to control any accidental releases of fuel or hydraulic fluids from machinery.

Because erosion control methods would be required to curtail runoff during construction and due to the limited scope of work around these watercourses, it has been determined that there should be no substantial impact on water quality in the area as a result of this project.

4.5 Wild and Scenic Rivers

There are no wild and scenic rivers as defined by the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, October 2, 1968, present in the project study area. Additionally, there are no designated South Carolina State Scenic Rivers in the project study area.
4.6 Noise Impact Analysis

4.6.1 Study

A noise analysis has been conducted to evaluate future noise levels, their associated impacts, and the feasibility of noise mitigation measures associated with the preferred alternative. The FHWA Traffic Noise Model (TNM version 2.5, released April 2004) was used in the analysis to compare existing and future projected noise levels. The analysis was performed in accordance with the procedures outlined in Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 772, U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, Procedures for Noise Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise and the SCDOT Traffic Noise Abatement Policy.11

4.6.2 Impact Results

In analyzing noise impacts for this project, DCTA will adhere to the SCDOT Noise Abatement Policy. For the proposed improvements, future noise was estimated using the TNM. A traffic noise impact occurs when predicted traffic noise levels:

(a) Approach or exceed their respective NAC listed in 23 CFR 772 (SCDOT defines “approach” as within 1 dBA of the FHWA noise abatement criteria for the applicable land use category, or

(b) Indicate a “substantial increase” over existing levels (SCDOT has defined a “substantially increase” as an increase in noise levels of 15 dBA or more in the design year over the existing noise level, or

(c) When both conditions (a) and (b) occur.

Therefore, a receptor that meets any of the above criteria would be classified as an “impacted receptor” for purposes of this evaluation. This does not imply that receptors that do not meet the above criteria will not experience an increase in noise levels. These criteria are simply used to guide FHWA in determining when noise abatement measures must be evaluated.

Using the forecasted 2040 build traffic data for the US 78 improvements, the TNM model determined that there are 19 receivers which met the definitions of noise impacts listed above. For the 2040 “no-build” scenario Phase 3 had 13 receivers which met the definitions of noise impacts listed above. All the impacted receivers were residential locations and had noise levels that approach or exceed the NAC. No receivers were found to have a “substantial increase” in noise levels from the proposed road widening, meaning that none of the receivers will experience an increase of 15 dBA or greater over existing noise levels. The church receivers modeled did not have noise levels that approach or exceed the NAC. The NAC level for interior spaces inside the churches was 52 dBA. The exterior noise levels at the churches ranged from 49.8 to 57.1 dBA. It is anticipated that interior noise level of the churches would be at least 5 dBA below the exterior noise level.

4.6.3 Conclusion

The noise evaluation for the Phase 3 US 78 improvements looked at potential receivers located in the adjacent Drakesborough residential neighborhoods in the western section of the Phase 3 improvements area as well as potential receivers along the remaining portions of the Phase 3 area. 67 receivers in the Phase 3 area were modeled in the TNM program using the 2040 forecasted traffic volumes provided.

Based on SCDOT policy criterion, the TNM program determined that there were 19 receivers approaching or exceeding the NAC in Phase 3 under the 2040 Build forecasted traffic volumes.

11 “South Carolina Department of Transportation Traffic Noise Abatement Policy”, September 1, 2014
All but four of the receivers approaching or exceeding the NAC had openings or driveways onto the highway which would make noise barriers ineffective. There were four receivers located in the Drakesborough subdivision in the western section of the Phase 3 improvements area. Noise abatement was considered for these four receivers and barrier walls were evaluated. The noise barrier evaluations conclude that none of the barrier walls met all SCDOT criterion of acoustic feasibility, reasonableness, and cost effectiveness. Therefore, no noise abatement measures are recommended.

The noise impact technical report has been appended to this document as Appendix O and can be found on the CD included in the back of this document. In accordance with 23 CFR 772.15, to prevent future traffic noise impacts on currently undeveloped lands, DCTA will provide the Dorchester Planning Commission with a copy of the noise impact analysis report. This report will provide the local officials with:

(a) The best estimation of future noise levels (for various distances from the proposed project for both developed and undeveloped lands, and properties in the immediate vicinity of the project.

(b) Information that may be useful to the local community to protect future land development from becoming incompatible with anticipated highway noise levels, and

(c) Eligibility for Federal-aid participation for Type II projects as described in 23 CFR 772.13(b).

4.7 Air Quality

For each alternative in this EA the amount of mobile source air toxics (MSAT) emitted would be proportional to the vehicle miles traveled, or VMT, assuming that other variables such as fleet mix are the same for each alternative. The VMT estimated for each of the Build Alternatives is slightly higher than that for the No Build Alternative because the additional capacity increases the efficiency of the roadway and attracts rerouted trips from elsewhere in the transportation network. Refer to Table 4.2. This increase in VMT would lead to higher MSAT emissions for the preferred action alternative along the highway corridor, along with a corresponding decrease in MSAT emissions along the parallel routes. The emissions increase is offset somewhat by lower MSAT emission rates due to increased speeds; according to the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) MOVES2014 model, emissions of all of the priority MSAT decrease as speed increases. Because the estimated VMT under each of the Alternatives are the same, it is expected there would be no difference in overall MSAT emissions among the various alternatives. Also, regardless of the alternative chosen, emissions will likely be lower than present levels in the design year as a result of EPA’s national control programs that are projected to reduce annual MSAT emissions by over 90 percent between 2010 and 2050 (Updated Interim Guidance on Mobile Source Air Toxic Analysis in NEPA Documents, Federal Highway Administration, October 12, 2016). Local conditions may differ from these 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) that MSAT emissions in the study area are likely to be lower in the future in nearly all cases.

4.8 Hazardous Materials

Hazardous waste/material sites are regulated by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)25, as amended, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA)26, as amended, and the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA). An Initial Site Assessment (ISA) was conducted by the SCDOT Right-of-Way Office to identify possible sites involving the presence and/or past use of underground storage tanks (USTs), above ground storage tanks (ASTs), and/or other hazardous materials within the project corridor. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) CERCLA site inventory was reviewed for the presence of hazardous material sites. The SCDOT Initial Site Assessment (ISA) of the project corridor identified seven sites which had UST’s located adjacent to the project corridor and one site with aboveground tanks.
It is the SCDOT’s policy to avoid the acquisition of underground storage tanks and other hazardous materials, if possible. If avoidance is not a viable alternative, tanks and other hazardous materials will be tested and removed and/or treated in accordance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and SCDHEC requirements. Cost of necessary remedial actions would be considered during the right-of-way appraisal and acquisition process.

4.9 Floodplains

Based on a study of the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM)15, published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the proposed project would involve construction within the 100-year flood limits of Green Bay Branch and Rumphs Hill Creek. Cross line culverts at these locations along the project, located within the floodplain will need to be replaced as a part of this project. The existing crossings: a 32’ long, 12’x4’ culvert at Green Bay Branch and a 37’ long, 6’x6’ culvert at Rumphs Hill Creek will be replaced with box culverts as a typical hydraulic structure. The box culverts will provide an efficient hydraulic section. The box culvert designs: 123’ long double 8’ wide x 6’ tall box culvert at Green Bay Branch, and a 113’ long, double 7’ wide x 7’ tall box culvert at Rumphs Hill Creek, will decrease water surface elevations upstream of the crossings and keep US Highway 78 from being overtopped through a 1% annual chance (100-year) flood event. Under existing conditions, the current openings do not have enough capacity to pass the 100-year event without overtopping.

 Hydraulic studies have been completed for these culvert locations and it has been determined that in all cases there will be no impact to the base flood elevations, floodway elevations, and the floodway widths. It has been determined that for each of these culvert locations, the replacement structures will have no impact on the base flood elevations and the Dorchester County Public Works Stormwater Division has issued a “no-impact certification” for each.

4.10 Jurisdictional Waters of the United States (Wetlands, Open Waters & Streams)

National Wetland Inventory (NWI) Maps12 were consulted and were used as a basis for field studies to identify wetlands along the project corridor. The NWI maps identified wetlands in the vicinity of Cypress Swamp. This information was confirmed in field studies conducted during March 2014 and September 2017. The wetlands technical reports for this Project are appended to this assessment as Appendices M and N and can be found on the CD included in the back of this document. A combination of vegetation analysis, hydrological observations, and soil sampling was utilized to determine the locations of wetlands within the proposed project area. Total wetland impacts will be approximately 4.085 acres, although a final determination of impacts to jurisdictional wetlands will be made by SCDOT and DCTA during final design and permitting stages. Based on this quantity of impacts, the proposed project will require an individual Corps of Engineers Section 404 permit.

A total of 31 wetland areas were identified within the project corridor, 16 of which will be impacted to some degree by the project. These wetlands are considered freshwater systems which occur generally in the vicinity of adjacent water bodies. Wetlands were given special consideration during development and evaluation of the project with a subsequent determination that the present design would pose the least disruption to wetlands other than the "no-build" alternative. The project will utilize 2:1 fill slopes along all curb and gutter sections to minimize the taking of wetland throughout the project. Along all shoulder sections, the fill slopes have been maintained at 4:1 in all areas to maintain the clear zone. The use of 4:1 slopes eliminates the need for long runs of guardrail which requires long end treatments that must extend past the 2:1 areas they are protecting. This guardrail extends so that it is adjacent to highland areas and can interfere with driveway access and cause site distance problems. The guardrail and associated 2:1 slopes requires increased maintenance to the guardrail and the slopes behind it. The limited access behind the guardrail and steeper 2:1 slopes makes this area more prone to erosion which will deposit silt into the adjacent wetlands. The 4:1 slopes more easily establish vegetation and act as a buffer between the roadway and wetlands. In some cases where the use of guardrail is unavoidable, such as at box culverts, SCDOT Standard Drawing 805-215-00 for “Additional Length Post at Compressed Shoulder” will be used to reduce wetland impacts. Implementing erosion control measures, which include seeding of slopes, sediment tubes, silt fences, and sediment basins as appropriate, will also minimize impact on adjacent wetlands. Other best management practices will be required of the contractor to ensure compliance with policies reflected in 23 CFR 650B. Reclamation of wetland areas temporarily lost through

construction activities will involve returning disturbed areas to their original elevations to the extent possible, allowing for adjacent vegetation to naturally reclaim the area. The SCDOT and DCTA will comply with Executive Order 1199014 regarding protection of wetland.

Based on the above considerations, it appears that there is no practicable alternative to the proposed new construction in these wetland areas. The proposed action will include all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands that may result from construction. The total wetlands impact of this project will be approximately 4.085 acres (3.641 acres under permanent fill or cut or permanent clearing for clear zone requirements and 0.444 acres of temporary clearing beyond the fill construction line). Mitigation will be implemented to offset these impacts. Mitigation for the unavoidable impacts will be through the purchase of credits from a USACE-approved commercial mitigation bank. A specific bank or combination of banks would be identified further into the permitting process.

5.0 Social and Economic

It is not anticipated that the proposed action and associated relocations would result in any appreciable change in local population and employment patterns in the area. Right-of-way acquisitions from residential properties are not expected to cause a change in existing land uses. Right-of-way taking would be minor in most cases. Slope permission may be necessary in some locations. Property owners would be compensated for the right-of-way taking and any damages to remaining property, in accordance with SCDOT policy and the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act, as amended. There are five residential relocations on this project dispersed through the length of the project. There should be minimal disruption to community activities since the relocations are dispersed. As indicated in the relocation study, there is sufficient similar replacement housing available in the area.

Traffic services would be maintained throughout project construction with no anticipated adverse effects on emergency services in the area. After the proposed project’s completion, improved traffic service for both public and private uses would be realized.

The project would not adversely affect local government finances. The minor additional right-of-way required would not result in a significant reduction of property tax assessments. Economic benefits to Dorchester County should result from the project because of improved access and more efficient movement of local motorists and goods in the area. Efforts have been made to ensure that the proposed project will not change the general character of the area.

5.1 Residential and Business Relocations

A relocation study was conducted throughout the project corridor and indicated that the proposed project could potentially cause the relocation of four single-family residences and one mobile home. A preliminary review of the project as currently proposed and with respect to residents affected will likely include a mixture of owner and tenant use of property. Minority, ethnic, elderly, handicapped and large family groups will likely be a part of these relocations and will require special relocation consideration. There is a likelihood that Last Resort Housing will be necessary due to potential income limitations.

This project lies in an area with a variety of home styles, ages, sizes, and uses including mobile homes, modular homes, custom built homes, and tract homes. Typical mobile homes and single-family homes in the area range from 1,000-1,900 square feet with 2-4 bedrooms and 1-3 baths. Estimated prices for residential purchases similar to those affected by the project vary but include:

- Single family residence purchase: $139,000 - $218,000
- Duplex purchase: $130,000 - $159,000
- Vacant land for mobile home: $29,000 - $50,000
Estimated prices for residential rentals similar to those affected by the project vary but include:

- Single-Family Residence Rental: $1,000 - $1,850
- Duplex Rental: $995 - $1,225

DSS housing is available within reasonable distance with similar costs, styles, and amenities as those existing within the project area.

Eight businesses will require relocation consideration. Tenancy has not been defined but is expected to be evenly split between owner occupied and tenant occupied. As is true for residential relocation availability, commercial availability is present with a variety of spaces in the general area with similar style, size, and rate. However, special consideration will need to be given to the liquor store and the gas stations due to zoning requirements for these types of businesses. There appears to be one non-profit, the mobile home owned by the First Baptist Church of Jedburg. It is being treated as a residential relocation. Estimated prices for commercial land similar to those affected by the project vary but range from $86,000 to $495,000.

The relocation program will be conducted in accordance with the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (Public Law 91-646, as amended by 100-17; 49 CFR Part 24). The program is designed to provide assistance to displaced persons in finding replacement property in which to live or to do business. Relocation of displaced persons will be offered in areas at least as desirable in regard to public utilities and commercial facilities. Rent and sale prices of replacement housing offered will be within the financial means of the families and individuals displaced and will be reasonably accessible to their places of employment.

### 6.0 Indirect and Cumulative Effects

#### 6.1 Indirect Effects

Indirect effects, as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) in 40 CFR §1508.8(b), are caused by the proposed action and are later in time or farther removed in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect effects may include growth-inducing effects and other effects related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate, and related effects on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems.

Indirect impacts for the proposed project were analyzed using the National Cooperative Highway Research Program’s Desk Reference for Estimating the Indirect Effects of Proposed Transportation projects. The indirect effects analysis identified three focus areas: land use, wetlands, and water quality.

The proposed action could result in indirect impact on land use by providing improved transportation along the corridor which could facilitate additional development in this area. However, plans for additional development are already under consideration and are expected to occur with or without the proposed improvements to US Highway 78. A substantial portion of the land within the northern portion of the study area is designated as prime farmland. However, the majority of this land is not currently being farmed, but rather is maintained as forested land. This is not anticipated to change. As noted earlier in this document, a significant portion of the land adjacent to the proposed improvements is already heavily developed. Therefore, the overall changes in land use patterns are expected to be minor. These impacts would be moderated by local, state, and federal regulations. Control of the conversion of land to other uses resides with Dorchester County through local planning and zoning.

As noted previously, there are significant areas of wetlands located within the project area, with Cypress Swamp being located within the project boundaries. The proposed action should not result in any indirect impacts to the wetlands located within these swamps as these areas are not suitable for development. There are other wetland areas located beyond the confines of the swamp that could experience indirect impacts as a result of the improvements to US Highway 78. As noted earlier, there are plans for development along the corridor already under consideration and in fact, permit applications for these developments have already been filed with the USACE. These proposed developments would
occur independently of the proposed improvements to US Highway 78 and all activities within waters of the US would be subject to USACE Section 404 permit approval and mitigation. It is anticipated that analysis for the permitting process would require avoidance and minimization of impacts to wetlands and streams and mitigation of unavoidable impacts.

The project area does have undeveloped parcels and development adjacent to the project corridor is likely. This development may result in potential water quality impacts. This development would occur independently of the proposed project. Projects will be required to file a Notice of Intent to be under the SCDHEC General Permit for Stormwater Discharges from Construction Activities. It is anticipated that analysis for coverage under this permit would provide protection of water quality as a result of any such construction.

The proposed project will support development plans for the future of Dorchester County by increasing capacity along this segment of US Highway 78. Impacts from these developments would be moderated by local, state, and federal regulations. Control of the conversion of land to other uses resides with Dorchester County through local planning and zoning.

Mitigation of impacts to wetlands caused from future development would be required. This development would occur independently of the proposed project and all activities within waters of the US would be subject to USACE Section 404 permit approval and mitigation requirements. It is anticipated that analysis for the permitting process would require avoidance and minimization of impacts to wetlands and streams and mitigation of unavoidable impacts.

### 6.2 Cumulative Effects

Cumulative impacts are the summation of direct and indirect impacts to the human or natural environment because of the proposed action, and “other” impacts which consist of actions on these resources that are not a result of the proposed action. These cumulative impacts are defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such actions” (40 CFR 1508.7). The assessment of cumulative impacts is required by the CEQ Regulations. These regulations ensure that the US Highway 78 Improvement Project and other federal, state, and private actions will be evaluated regarding cumulative impacts. For the proposed improvements to US Highway 78, one resource, wetlands, has been identified as needing an analysis of cumulative impacts.

Impacts of this project will be “no net loss” of wetlands as the result of mitigation that will be implemented. approximately 4.085 acres (3.641 acres under permanent fill or cut or permanent clearing for clear zone requirements and 0.444 acres of temporary clearing beyond the fill construction line). Mitigation will be implemented to offset these impacts. Mitigation for the unavoidable impacts will be through the purchase of credits from a USACE-approved commercial mitigation bank. A specific bank or combination of banks would be identified further into the permitting process. Again, this project will result in no “net loss” of wetlands.

While the Build Alternative and cumulative development within the study area would reduce the amount of wetlands within the watershed that encompasses the proposed improvements, these impacts make up less than 0.02% of the 23,617 acres of wetlands in this watershed. Therefore, the wetland impacts resulting from the Build Alternative would be minimal when viewed in this context. The losses generally will not have an adverse effect on the function of the wetland system.

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7.0 Public Involvement Overview

7.1 Public Information Meeting

A Public Information Meeting was held at Alston Middle School Cafeteria, 500 Bryan Street, Summerville, S.C. on December 15, 2016 to afford residents the opportunity to comment on the proposed project. The meeting addressed all three phases of the proposed US 78 Improvement project. Approximately 43 individuals attended the meeting. A total of 12 written or emailed comments were received during the comment period.

7.2 Design Public Hearing

A Design Public Hearing was held on Tuesday, December 1, 2020 between 3:00 PM and 7:00 PM at the Dorchester County Council Chambers (500 N. Main Street, Summerville, SC as provided by 23 CFR 771.111(h). In addition, due to ongoing concerns about public health, project related maps, exhibits, and other pertinent data were provided on the project website (www.us78phase3.com) and on-line comments were received from November 15, 2020 – December 18, 2020. Thirty-seven (37) people registered on the project website and twenty-four (24) people attended the in-person meeting. Thirteen (13) written comments were received. No verbal/oral comments were provided at the in-person meeting.

The public hearing was advertised in a variety of ways to ensure effective public participation from all areas potentially impacted by the proposed action which include the following:

- SCDOT website
- Dorchester County’s website, Facebook, and Twitter accounts
- Post & Courier newspaper
- Roadway signs along the project corridor
- Live 5 News article
- Postcard mailings to residents and businesses along the project corridor

7.3 Project Website

A project webpage (www.us78phase3.com) was created in 2020 in preparation for the Design Public Hearing. The web page provided general project information and presentation materials along with an opportunity for interested individuals to provide e- comments. The website serves as the primary source for project information and updates. All information presented in meetings and handouts are posted on the site.

8.0 Basis of Finding of No Significant Impact

The FHWA has determined that this project will have no significant impact on human and natural environment. This FONSI is based on the EA and other supporting information, which have been independently evaluated by the FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. The EA provided sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope and the content of the EA and other environmental documentation for this project.