

### PART I: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

#### 1. How did the project team develop the range of alternatives?

The I-526 @ Long Point Road Interchange Improvements project was identified as a priority through the I-526 Lowcountry Corridor (LCC) EAST Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. The purpose of the proposed project is to improve the operations of the I-526/Long Point Road interchange and I-526 mainline and reduce operational conflicts between port-related and local traffic.

This interchange was identified as needing improvements, and four initial high-level concepts for the interchange were shown at the fall 2021 public information meeting for the I-526 LCC EAST PEL Study. Based on public input, the project team conducted engineering analyses to identify six total options, known as the range of alternatives. Preliminary traffic analysis indicated that Alternative 4: Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI) and Alternative 5: Flyover would not improve the traffic operations performance significantly enough to meet the purpose and need of the project, so the range of alternatives was narrowed as follows:

- Alternative 1: Improved Existing Ramps
- Alternative 2: New Port Access Ramps with Improved Existing Ramps
- Alternative 3: Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI)
- Alternative 6: New Port Access Ramps with Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI)

#### 2. How will the range of alternatives be narrowed to a “recommended preferred alternative” moving forward?

The alternatives will be evaluated through a two-step process of engineering and environmental studies to identify the recommended preferred alternative:

- Step 1: traffic performance (does this alternative meet the purpose and need?)
- Step 2: traffic performance (purpose and need), engineering, natural resources, community and built environment, project goals

With each step, the alternatives analyses will become more detailed, and the alternatives that are the lowest performing will be eliminated. This screening process will help SCDOT arrive at the recommended preferred alternative. The recommended preferred alternative will be presented to the public for feedback at the public hearing planned for spring 2023.

#### 3. When will the right-of-way acquisition process begin? When will construction begin? What if equivalently priced housing is not available?

The right-of-way acquisition process is expected to begin by early 2024, after the environmental approvals have been secured through the NEPA process. Construction is expected to start in the summer of 2024 and last approximately three years.

The official right-of-way acquisition process does not typically start until the NEPA process is completed and a NEPA decision has been issued by the Federal Highway Administration, who oversees the project.

For this project, the right-of-way process is projected to begin in early 2024. Once right-of-way design plans are finalized, acquisition activities would begin.

SCDOT follows the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended. On highway projects in South Carolina that require relocations, SCDOT makes a survey of the residential households to be relocated and the available housing in the area. The right-of-way agent informs you in writing of the specific comparable replacement housing, the sales prices or rent used as the basis for establishing the upper limit of the replacement housing payment, and the basis for that determination.

If the comparable replacement housing available on the market is priced higher (property appraised value or rent), the homeowner may be eligible for supplemental benefits for a period of time to cover this price differential, including increased mortgage interest costs and eligible incidental expenses (such as closing costs). For more information on the right-of-way process, visit the SCDOT website: <https://www.scdot.org/business/pdf/rightofway/Relocation.pdf>

#### **4. Will environmental impacts be considered as part of the project study process?**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies, like the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), to consider the impacts of their decisions on the natural environment and to include the public in the decision-making process. An Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared for the I-526 @ Long Point Road Interchange Improvements project. The EA will outline the development process of the proposed project, identify reasonable alternatives, analyze the potential environmental impacts resulting from the reasonable alternatives, and demonstrate compliance with other applicable environmental laws and executive orders. The results of all engineering and environmental studies, including all environmental impacts, will be published within the EA. The draft EA will be available to the public for review during the public hearing and corresponding comment period.

#### **5. Why is increased truck traffic projected on Long Point Road?**

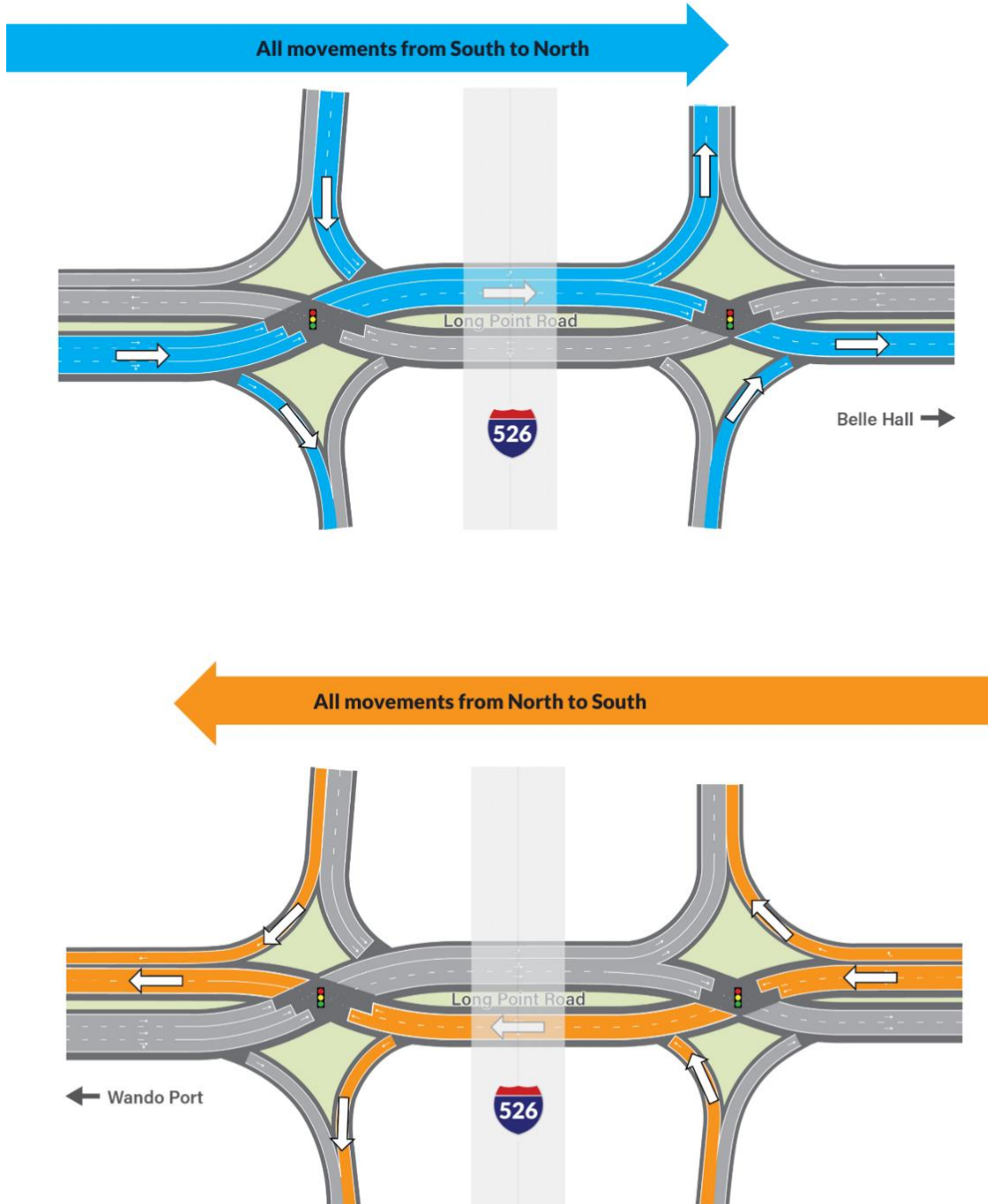
The average daily number of vehicles, including cars and commercial vehicles, driving through the I-526/Long Point Road interchange is expected to grow 66% by 2050. 13,000 more truck trips per day are anticipated on I-526 west of the Long Point Road interchange by 2050. A portion of the increased truck traffic on Long Point Road is associated with growth at the Wando Welch Terminal traffic. Other increased truck trips in the area may be attributed to population growth and increases in home deliveries and ecommerce.

The SC Ports freight forecasts consider the opening of other facilities in the region (including the new Leatherman facilities) and the types of cargo served by each facility (rail, truck containers, bulk materials, etc). Considering all these factors, the 30-year growth at the Wando Welch Terminal assumes continued growth to approximately 2027, a shift of some truck traffic to the Leatherman facility in 2028, and then continued growth at Wando Welch through approximately 2039. From 2039 to 2050, the Port's planned capacity is reached, and truck operations continue at a constant level through 2050. This growth, coupled with shifts in delivery patterns, are included in the truck forecasts used in this project for the 2050 design year. The existing interchange cannot handle this volume or mix of vehicles.

SC Ports continues to monitor and optimize operational performance of the Wando Welch Terminal and modifies operations to accommodate the demand for freight movements. With the introduction of barge service and near-dock rail service in North Charleston, some diversion of cargo ships will occur, reducing the growth of port-related truck traffic in this project area.

## 6. What is a Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI) and how does it work?

Alternatives 3 and 6 propose constructing a diverging diamond interchange (DDI). A DDI allows free-flowing turns when entering and exiting an interstate, eliminating the left turn against oncoming traffic, and limiting the number of traffic signal phases so vehicles do not have to wait as long. The graphics below demonstrate how vehicle movements would work for those traveling from south to north and north to south. A typical DDI has the two signals as shown. However, due to the traffic volumes and high number of turn movements being processed at Long Point Road, these proposed DDI improvements would actually be composed of five signals. Three of them work together at the left (southern signal) and two at the right (northern signal).



## PART II: POTENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACTS

### 1. Why is the left turn from Long Point Road to Belle Hall Parkway removed in all alternatives? Have you considered how this would impact traffic on Belle Point Drive, Paul Foster Road, and surrounding neighborhood roads?

The existing left turn at Belle Hall Parkway, and its proximity to the I-526 interstate ramps, does not meet current SCDOT or FHWA access standards. These standards are in place to prevent access to local roads from being too close to the interchange, potentially causing a backup of vehicles and other delays that impact flow at the interchange and onto the interstate. For this reason, we showed removing the left turn as the worst-case scenario at the public information meeting. SCDOT heard the public's concerns and will continue to work on potential ways to mitigate those concerns as the designs are refined. In addition to operational impacts to the interstate, SCDOT must also consider whether allowing the left turn to remain would result in unsafe conditions for the users of the roadway. As traffic continues to grow on Long Point Road, there will be fewer gaps that would allow this left-turning operation to be made safely.

### 2. Why do the proposed new port access ramps come so close to the Tidal Walk neighborhood? Could trucks enter at another point or use the left lane instead?

The designs presented at the public information meeting were conceptual and still subject to change as the designs are refined. The new access ramps are being designed to accommodate the planned widening of I-526 and must conform to the design standards set by FHWA and SCDOT for interstate facilities. Based on comments and feedback received during the public comment period, the design of the proposed port ramps is being refined, where feasible, to avoid or minimize potential residential relocations and community impacts.

The designs presented do not have trucks entering at another point or using the left lane to enter. Doing so would require high volumes of trucks to shift across multiple lanes of traffic to reach the truck climbing lane across the Wando River bridge. This would create multiple lane changes for the trucks, and would also result in having the trucks, the slower vehicles, in the far-left lane. This would also require more land for future widening. In the future widening of I-526, trucks will be restricted from using the inside left lane as is traditional practice on Interstate freeways where there are three or more lanes in each direction. Aligning the new access ramps on the Interstate in the inside left lane would degrade the future operational strategies for I-526 and would not be compatible with Interstate system truck restrictions.

### 3. Which homes would be impacted by the new port access ramps? Would the Tidal Walk neighborhood amenities, like the pool and playground, be impacted?

The designs presented at the public information meeting are conceptual and still subject to change as the designs are refined. The concepts shown at the public information meeting would potentially result in relocations for the first two homes in the Tidal Creek neighborhood but would not impact the neighborhood pool or playground. Based on comments and feedback received during the public comment period, the design of the proposed new access ramps is being refined, where feasible, to avoid or minimize the potential residential relocations and community impacts.

#### **4. Is SCDOT evaluating the potential effects from increased debris, exhaust pollution, and light pollution?**

SCDOT heard concerns about the potential for debris from large trucks to create a safety hazard in adjacent communities and along Seacoast Parkway. We also heard your concerns about the potential for increased exhaust and light pollution from trucks. During the alternatives analysis, the project team compares each improvement concept, weighing the potential benefits and impacts of each to arrive at the recommended option, the recommended preferred alternative.

As jobs, population, and ecommerce deliveries grow in the region, more vehicles are expected to use this interchange. As traffic congestion increases, so does the likelihood that you may spend more time sitting in traffic, with your vehicle idling. Vehicle idling releases several air pollutants that can be harmful to our air quality. The proposed improvements to the I-526/Long Point Road interchange are designed to keep vehicles moving safely, reducing the anticipated amount of time sitting in traffic. The project team will also take into consideration the increases to engine emission standards included in the EPA's national control programs that are projected to reduce vehicle emissions dramatically by 2050.

SCDOT will evaluate how the proposed improvements could result in changes to the current views and how new street lighting, sign lighting, headlights, and other potential light sources may differ from what it is today. SCDOT will continue to work to minimize the potential impacts to the environment and communities as the design is refined. The results of all environmental studies will be published in the draft EA and available to the public for review during the public hearing and associated comment period.

#### **5. Will runoff from the new ramps impact community retention ponds? What are the plans for wetland and flooding mitigation in the area?**

SCDOT is responsible for stormwater runoff on state-maintained roads and bridges. The new ramps would be designed to collect stormwater in accordance with SCDOT's Stormwater Quality Design Manual. During the alternatives analysis, SCDOT will compare each reasonable alternative to weigh the benefits and impacts to identify the recommended preferred alternative. The designs presented at the public information meeting were conceptual and will likely change as they are further refined. SCDOT works to minimize impacts to the environment and communities as the designs are refined. While SCDOT will first work to avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands, any anticipated, unavoidable impacts would require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in addition to mitigation to offset those unavoidable negative impacts. The results of all environmental studies, including environmental impacts, will be published within the EA. The draft EA will be available to the public for review during the public hearing and corresponding comment period.

#### **6. What are the plans for noise mitigation in the corridor?**

A noise analysis is currently underway, and the results will be ready at the public hearing planned for spring 2023. If noise mitigation, such as noise barriers, is determined to be reasonable and feasible, potential beneficiaries would receive additional information. As part of the detailed noise analysis, SCDOT considers the following questions:

- **What are the current conditions?** The project team will collect data and establish a baseline for existing conditions currently experienced in the corridor. All project alternatives will be compared with the amount of noise currently experienced.
- **What are the projected future conditions?** Noise abatement is based upon projected traffic volumes in a future year, typically 20-30 years after construction is anticipated to begin. This is done to ensure that additional traffic volume, which could generate additional noise impacts, will be considered.

- **Will a noise wall reduce the noise enough to justify its construction?** Sometimes, a noise wall will not reduce the noise enough to be considered reasonable and/or feasible.
- **Is a noise wall technically feasible?** Every road is different, many factors are considered such as topography, safety, drainage, utilities, maintenance of the wall, and whether driveways and side road access will be impacted.
- **How many people will hear a difference in noise?** Is that number high enough to justify the cost?
- **Do property owners and tenants who would hear a reduction in highway noise if a noise wall were constructed want the wall?** Public preference for or against a wall is obtained through a balloting process after a noise wall is determined to be technically feasible.

**7. What are the plans for incorporating the Complete Streets Policy to facilitate bike, pedestrian and transit in this project?**

The complete streets policy requires SCDOT to work with the local transportation planning partners and transit providers to identify and include walking, bicycling, and transit needs as part of their regional visioning plans. Once SCDOT identifies the recommended preferred alternative for this project, the design can be better refined to incorporate upgraded or new bike, pedestrian, and transit accommodations that align with local plans. Where logical connections to existing facilities such as sidewalks or bike lanes exist, SCDOT will construct the planned improvements within the project area. If there are no existing connections or a logical location to safely end the bicycle, pedestrian, or transit facilities within the project area, then SCDOT will ensure drainage, shoulder, and roadway design could accommodate these additional features in the future. This strategy would allow future complete streets projects to easily make this connection on the existing roadway footprint without major modifications.