

September 1, 2023

Post-Public Meeting Update

SCDOT comment response from June 1, 2023 Public Information Meeting held in Santee, South Carolina

Thank you for your participation in the commenting process.

Update provided by SCDOT

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) appreciates your interest and comments regarding the I-95 bridge replacements over Lake Marion project. The proposed project involves the replacement of the northbound and southbound I-95 bridges over Lake Marion in Clarendon and Orangeburg Counties in South Carolina. A range of improvement alternatives are currently being evaluated. All comments obtained through the public involvement process are being considered in the development of the project and your comment will also be retained as part of the project file and public record.



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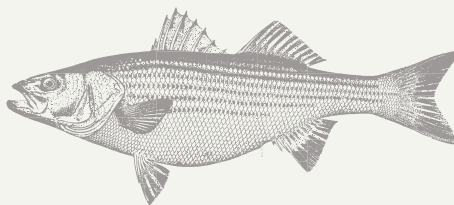
Alternatives

The purpose of the project is to maintain connectivity and a safe interstate facility for the travelling public and provide safe access for pedestrians and cyclists over Lake Marion. The three alternatives differ in their relative location to the existing bridge alignments. Alternative A would primarily be constructed between the two bridges. Alternative B would primarily be constructed just east of existing bridges, towards Lake Moultrie. Alternative C2 would primarily be constructed just west of the existing bridges. The public meeting originally presented Alternative C1 that would retain the existing I-95 southbound bridge towards Santee as the multiuse path for pedestrians and cyclists. Because funding for this project and across the state is limited and due to excessively high maintenance costs associated with keeping the old bridge structure, Alternative C1 has been eliminated. Alternative C2 would be in the same location, but would provide a new southbound bridge structure and the multiuse path would be included on this new bridge.

Comments received regarding alternatives included support for one of the three options, a request to place truck traffic only on the existing bridges, a carpool lane, tolling, four lanes for military/supply chain use, a separate lane for emergency vehicles, and a bridge for traffic to be redirected to when there is an accident. A designated travel lane on the bridge specific to six-axle vehicles (semi-trucks) is not feasible for inclusion in this project. Heavier trucks do more damage to roads and bridge decks over time, so segregating trucks to certain lanes would require more maintenance for those lanes. The process of separating truck traffic from general traffic flow traffic would need to be conducted miles in advance of the bridges. Additional barriers and merge lanes will create conflict points which could reduce motorist safety. The cost of a separate additional bridge is not included in the budgeting for this project. Truck traffic in 2022 was 22% of total vehicle traffic of 40,100 vehicles per day (average). A toll system is not proposed for the bridge project.

The proposed project allows for additional width to be added to the bridge and approach shoulders, when compared to the existing bridges. The 10-foot inside and 12-foot outside shoulders will provide space for emergency pull-overs and will provide access for first responder vehicles. The proposed shoulder widths are in compliance with design standards and provide for emergency vehicle access. The proposed design of the replacement bridges includes staged construction designed which will allow two lanes of traffic to remain open in each direction at all times. This will provide the best response times for the volume and vehicle mix use of I-95.

The project focus is to replace the deteriorating bridges and alternatives are focused on this effort. Design modifications are underway and a Preferred Alternative has not yet been selected.





US 301 Bridge

SCDOT continues to explore options for allowing the existing US 301 bridge to remain in place during construction. It is intended that once the new multiuse path is open on the new I-95 bridges, pedestrians and cyclists would be relocated to the new path. Due to structural conditions and very high repair and maintenance costs of the existing US 301 bridge over Lake Marion, there are no plans to re-open it to vehicular traffic. A final decision regarding the existing US 301 structure will be determined as options are evaluated.

Multiuse Path

SCDOT is proposing a multiuse path facility, adjacent to the main I-95 bridge structures, for cyclists and pedestrians to cross Lake Marion that is physically separated with a barrier from vehicular traffic to ensure the safety of users. For Alternatives A, B, and C2, the multiuse path and vehicle travel lanes would be separated by barriers in accordance with the state and federal requirements. The safety of the travelling public is of the utmost importance to SCDOT. To ensure public safety and maintain the efficient operation of the interstate system, regulations are in place to prohibit pedestrians from walking on interstates.

SCDOT recognizes the recreational, cultural, and economic importance of providing fishing access to Lake Marion. Additional recreation facilities are outside the scope of this project and typically, recreation facilities and amenities are provided and maintained by county or state Parks and Recreation Departments. However, SCDOT is considering options to maintain the current uses of walking, cycling, and fishing that have historically taken place on the US 301 bridges.

Noise

A traffic noise analysis is required for federal-aid highway projects that would physically alter an existing highway. Physically altering the highway is defined as a substantial change in the horizontal (side to side) and/or vertical (up and down) alignment of the road or bridge, or an increase in the number of through traffic lanes. The proposed alternatives do not substantially alter the physical alignment and through-lanes are not proposed at this time. Because the project does not meet the requirements, a detailed noise study was not prepared and noise mitigation measures are not being proposed at this time. However, if the project design changes and does meet requirements, the appropriate studies will be performed and public comment will be requested.





Bridge and Roadway Design Elements

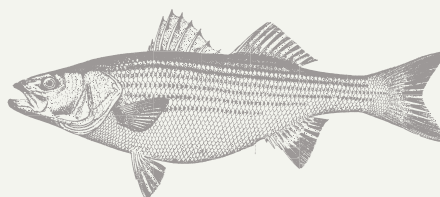
Several comments related to the bridge and road design were submitted. The proposed alternatives do not substantially alter the physical alignment of the current bridge structures. The vertical clearance of the highest point of the bridge to the navigable portion of Lake Marion is approximately 100 feet tall. The span width between the bridge columns at the navigable, or deepest, portion of Lake Marion will be 50 feet wide.

While space for a future third lane will be incorporated into the bridge replacements, in the short term, the additional 12-foot inside lane will act as road shoulder and be marked and signed as such. If a future widening of I-95 were proposed, this lane would be restriped to serve as a travel lane. This would alleviate the need to widen a newly-constructed bridge if a widening of the interstate is proposed. A widening of I-95 in this area is not currently proposed.

The bridge deck will be replaced as part of this project. The roadway approaches to the bridges will be resurfaced to tie in with the new bridges. The replacement bridge will be constructed with concrete and steel to enhance the life of the bridge. Bridge design specifications include elongated bridge deck sections to reduce the frequency of bridge joints. SCDOT will incorporate innovative materials and include the use of a built in quarter-inch sacrificial wearing surface to prolong the bridge deck surface.

SCDOT will work with Clarendon and Orangeburg Counties to ensure emergency resources related to fire and emergency response are provided. Traffic control measures will be employed during construction to assure safe conditions for drivers and workers. The permanent closure of Bass Drive is not proposed and is not expected to be closed.

Best Management Practices will be followed during both design and construction phases to ensure a reduced-risk of sedimentation, minimizing impacts to drainage. A stormwater management plan will be developed and adhered to by both SCDOT and the selected contractor team to ensure compliance. Permitting will be approved through the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control.





Signage and Lighting

Safety measures, such as lighting, signage, and fencing will be considered as the project progresses. Bridge lighting and signalization (visible by boaters) will be included in the final design of the project. US Coast Guard requirements for a multiple-span fixed bridge include the use of 360-degree green, red, and white lights. Three white lights arranged in a vertical line and placed on the outermost girder will be used to mark the main channel. Red lights will be used on either side of navigable channels as well as the bridge pilings. Green lights affixed to the outermost girder will demarcate navigable passage under the bridge.

Changeable message signs and/or electronic message boards are used by SCDOT throughout the state to convey information to motorists. Temporary signs during construction will be used for lane shifts and/or lane closures. While commenters asked if warning signage could be used throughout the year if traffic is congested on the bridges, there are no plans to include permanent changeable message signs. Potential detours around this area are very lengthy and notification signs would not be visible to motorists until they were well past a possible detour route.

Construction

A construction timeline for this project has yet to be finalized. The construction phase is being estimated to last approximately 36 months. It is proposed to begin in 2025, with substantial work in starting in 2026.

Traffic control measures will be employed during construction to assure safe conditions for drivers and workers. The selected contractor will be required to adhere to the conditions set forth in the latest version (March 1, 2021) of the SCDOT Rule on Work Safety and Mobility. The use of law enforcement officers is one of many traffic control measures that can be implemented by the selected contractor. In certain instances (like night time lane closures) law enforcement may be present on site. SCDOT and the contractor team will work closely with state and local law enforcement to ensure motorist adherence to work zone safety conditions. A construction detour of I-95 has not been proposed and is not expected. Existing travel lanes on I-95 will remain open during construction. There will be no substantial impacts to the rest areas near Santee and they will remain open during construction.

Constructing new bridges ahead of demolishing existing structures is expected to occur. This will allow travel lanes to remain open during construction which is a requirement of the project. The construction project will be awarded to a contractor team using the design-build delivery process. While preliminary plans are approved by SCDOT, the final design plans are completed by the contractor after the contract has been awarded. Final plans are approved by SCDOT, allowing for an expedited and streamlined process. Due to the nature of the design-build construction process, the methods, phasing, and staging will be at the discretion of the contractor team.



Funding

While some funds are currently allocated to this project, SCDOT is also seeking federal grants to fully fund the bridge replacements. If no federal grants are approved for the I-95 over Lake Marion Bridge Replacements project, the project will remain in the standard bridge replacement process. The project will be in the 2021-2027 STIP and as funds become available, they will be committed to the project over time. This may result in schedule changes, such as a later start date than early 2025.

Next Steps

The next steps of the project will be to conduct a final analysis on the current alternatives. Following the refinement of the current alternatives the final environmental document, a Non-Programmatic Categorical Exclusion, will be sent to Federal Highway Administration for approval. After approval, the project will be awarded to a contractor in which the final design and environmental permitting will be completed. Finally, project construction will commence.

Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback. We value your local knowledge and experience. Please feel free to contact me at ReynoldsBS@scdot.org or 803-737-1440 if you have any additional concerns or visit our website for project updates: <http://scdotgis.online/i95bridgesoverlakemarion>

Progress updates for this project can also be found here: <https://www.scdot.org/business/design-build.aspx>

