



The Town of Hilton Head Island
Special Meeting
Town Council
Tuesday, February 18, 2020, 3:00 p.m.
Benjamin M. Racusin Council Chambers
AGENDA

*As a courtesy to others please turn off / silence ALL mobile devices during the Town Council Meeting.
Thank You.*

1. **Call to Order**
2. **FOIA Compliance** - Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act and the requirements of the Town of Hilton Head Island.
3. **Consideration of a Recommendation – U.S. 278 Gateway Corridor Committee Recommendation**

Consideration of a Recommendation from the U.S. 278 Gateway Corridor Committee to the Town Council of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina regarding the U.S. 278 Corridor Project.
4. **Adjournment**



TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Community Development Department

TO: Stephen G. Riley, ICMA~CM, *Town Manager*
FROM: Charles Cousins, AICP, *Assistant to the Town Manager*
CC: Josh Gruber, *Assistant Town Manager*
DATE: February 12, 2020
SUBJECT: Recommendations from US 278 Gateway Corridor Committee

Recommendation: Staff recommends that Town Council accept the attached “US 278 Gateway Corridor Committee Interim Report to Town Council, February 2020” and forward appropriate recommendations to SCDOT with the except of the items found in the “Potential Mitigation for Property Owners, Business Owners and Operators” document. The items in this mitigation document are not recommendation for SCDOT but rather for the Town. Any discussion on mitigation will be better served once we understand the final proposed route.

Summary: The South Carolina Department of Transportation is working through the Environmental Assessment for its US 278 Corridor Project as required by the Federal Highway Commission. An end product of this work is to develop a “Preferred Alternative” that addresses SCDOT’s purposes for this project. These purposes are to address deficiencies in the existing MacKay Creek Bridge, to address congestion issues in the corridor and to improve corridor capacity. To reach this “Preferred Alternative” SCDOT has narrowed down a list of 17 preliminary alternatives to 6 “Reasonable Alternatives”. SCDOT is currently gathering data and undertaking computer modeling and simulations to analyze these 6 alternatives in anticipation of arriving at a “Preferred Alternative” in the March/April time frame. The Town’s US 278 Gateway Corridor Committee has been meeting since February 14, 2018 to study issues surrounding this project and hear public comment in order to develop recommendations to Town Council. These recommendations are found in the attached document from the committee which was adopted on February 5, 2020. The Committee’s charter requires all recommendations to SCDOT go through the Town Council. Therefore the Committee is submitting these recommendations to the Town Council in anticipation the Council will provide them to SCDOT prior to the March/April timeframe when they will be narrowing down their alternatives.

Background: The South Carolina Department of Transportation is undertaking a multi-year project to address deficiencies in the eastbound Mackay’s Creek Bridge. In addressing this deficiency, SCDOT has folded addressing this issue in a larger project to address capacity and congestion issues on US 278 between Moss Creek and Spanish Wells Road. The Town of Hilton Head Island created a US278 Gateway Corridor Committee in early 2019 to work cooperatively with SCDOT to gather information, obtain citizen input and make recommendations to Town Council regarding the US 278 Environmental Assessment (EA). As part of the EA, SCDOT is evaluating 6 “Reasonable Alternatives” which will be pared

down to a “Preferred Alternatives” and made public in the Fall of 2020. In anticipation of the Town providing input to SCDOT during their evaluation of the 6 “Reasonable Alternatives”, the committee has been discussing the pros and cons of each alternative. As a result of these discussions, the committee has developed recommendations for the Town Council to consider accepting and providing to SCDOT.

**US 278 Gateway Corridor Committee
Interim Report to Town Council**

February 2020

“The purpose of the Committee is to work cooperatively with the South Carolina Department of Transportation to gather information, obtain and provide citizen input into the environmental assessment process and make recommendations to Town Council regarding the US 278 Environmental Assessment and Design Alternatives.”

–from the Town of Hilton Head’s charter for the US 278 Gateway Corridor Committee

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and other agencies began the environmental assessment process in the fall of 2018. The process, which is now about 40% complete, is a federally mandated first step to address structural deficiencies at the existing eastbound Mackay Creek bridge, increase capacity and reduce congestion along US 278 from Moss Creek Drive to Spanish Wells Road.

This interim report summarizes the work of the US 278 Corridor Committee (the Committee) to date and recommends a strategy for Town Council to consider in its communication with the SCDOT.

Work to date. The Committee first met in February 2019 and has met 32 times since then. We represent a wide variety of interests on Hilton Head Island. Members of the Committee have made 13-15 presentations to citizen groups and have had many conversations within our communities and with policy makers. We have taken questions from the public at each of our meetings. Between committee meetings, public meetings and stakeholder meetings we have met with the SCDOT 10 times. We gave the SCDOT input from communities and individuals before the SCDOT presented six Reasonable Alternatives in the fall of 2019, and we gave the SCDOT feedback from the community after the Alternatives were announced.

Timing. The SCDOT will begin to narrow the six Reasonable Alternatives in March or April of this year, with the goal of announcing a single preferred Alternative in the fall. In order to meaningfully influence the SCDOT's decision-making process, Town Council needs to formally make clear to the SCDOT what it sees as the critical issues for this project as soon as possible.

Recommended Strategy. Given the scope of and the timeline for the Environmental Assessment, it should not come as a surprise that the SCDOT is still analyzing many aspects of this project, including traffic patterns, intersection design, exact right-of-ways, property impacts and costs. Because these issues are not yet finalized, the Committee decided not to recommend or reject any one of the six Reasonable Alternatives at this time. Instead, the Committee has laid out the elements we consider to be essential for any solution to be effective. These touch on specific areas along the corridor as well as considerations for the corridor as a whole.

We emphasize that this is a work in progress. This is a project with far reaching consequences for the future of the island. In the months ahead, there will continue to be much communication between residents, communities, our committee, Town Council and the SCDOT. At the end of the day, we want a solution that satisfies the Guiding Principles that were approved both by our Town Council and Beaufort County Council. But there are many steps and much work to be done before we know exactly what that solution will be.

Respectfully submitted by David C. Johnson on behalf of the Committee

1/ Essential Elements of Success for the 278 Corridor Project

2/ Framework for Aesthetics

3/ Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Recommendations

4/ Potential Mitigation for Property Owners, Business Owners & Operators

5/ The US 278 Gateway Corridor Project Guiding Principles

1/ Essential Elements of Success for the 278 Corridor Project

Causeways

Engineer the three causeways within the corridor to reduce the potential of damage that could result in limited or loss of vehicular access to Hilton Head Island, Jenkins Island and Hog Island.

Due the nature of construction and elevation of these causeways the potential exists that significant storm events could result in damage or breaches of these structures.

Bridges

Ensure that all bridges have a similar useful life post project.

Pinckney Island

Eliminate all left turns on Pinckney Island. Maintain the water-oriented access and preservation of the environment, minimizing impact to the wildlife and any historical landmarks throughout.

Jenkins Island

Improve safety on Jenkins Island by eliminating all left turn movements and maintaining adequate access to all adjacent businesses, neighborhoods and cultural landmarks.

Stoney

Mitigate impacts of route choice to property owners and businesses by considering frontage roads for improved access and opportunities for relocation of homes and businesses if the owner chooses. The use of Town owned property should be considered to accomplish this.

Provide for efficient traffic flow on and off the Cross Island Expressway.

Consider access improvements that will enhance the opportunity for the economic development in Stoney.

Corridor-wide

- ✓ Design and program signals and intersections according to best practices so that they do not create backups on US 278 while also providing adequate opportunities for traffic on the side streets to enter and exit US 278.
- ✓ Incorporate intelligent transportation system technology throughout the corridor.

- ✓ Minimize impacts to the environment and meet any mitigation requirements locally.
- ✓ Cooperate with the Town and County to address aesthetics that reinforce the character of the community. Recognize that this includes the transitional experience from the mainland to the islands, including but not limited to bridge design, gateway improvements and corridor landscaping.
- ✓ Minimize the impacts to residences, businesses and traffic during the construction phase. Scheduling and phasing of construction should consider seasonal needs.
- ✓ Create roadway redundancy to address emergencies.
- ✓ Enhance the roadway's ability to meet community's needs resulting from natural disasters
- ✓ Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the corridor as well as provide for safe crossings at strategic locations. Provide connections to existing bike/ped facilities on each end of the corridor.
- ✓ Work with the Town and other governments in the region to plan for alternative transportation options – existing and future multi-modal needs, park and ride, etc.
- ✓ Mitigate noise impacts.
- ✓ Minimize the visual impact of any expansion of lanes in the entire corridor.
- ✓ Mitigate hydrology impacts throughout the corridor.
- ✓ Improve the level of service at all intersections throughout the corridor.

2/ Framework for Aesthetics

A primary aesthetic focus of the corridor should be creation of a sequence of experiences moving from the Mainland to the Islands. The visual and transitional experiences should create a Gateway; and the Island's "Blend with Nature" design standards should apply to all physical improvements constructed by SCDOT.

As a point of reference, the Town's Design Guide should be applied in determining appropriate bridge/roadway design; landscaping and tree protection; community character; materials and colors; lighting; signage; introduction of new bike and pedestrian paths, etc. Other characteristics that are not part of the specific road and road right-of-way design should acknowledge and celebrate the Communities' identity (i.e. Pinckney Island as a natural preserve area; Hog Island and Jenkins Island as distinct but connected components of the island hop from the mainland; and cultural/historical recognition of the Stoney Neighborhood).

As SCDOT provides options we suggest that the Corridor should be viewed as a canvas to be painted upon. All options should be reviewed for compatibility with this design philosophy.

Bridge/Roadway Design:

- ✓ Understated
- ✓ Nature Blending
- ✓ Allows vista views from vehicles
- ✓ Utilizes "do no harm" approach to storm drainage
- ✓ Utilizes native materials & colors

Community Design:

- ✓ Recognizes significance of Native Islander community
- ✓ Provides safe movement of pedestrians & cyclists within the corridor
- ✓ Provides a natural approach to noise abatement

Landscaping:

- ✓ Retains existing vegetation, whenever possible
- ✓ Includes replacement canopy trees
- ✓ Favors indigenous/native materials

Lighting:

- ✓ Utilizes low impact light sources (i.e. foot candles/color temp)
- ✓ Utilizes low profile fixtures (height)
- ✓ Limited to intersections and on pedestrian/bicycle pathways

Signage:

- ✓ Limited signage in the corridor
- ✓ Utilizes a unified package to minimize visual clutter & distractions

3/ Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Recommendations

Introduction

The US 278 Corridor serves a vital role for Hilton Head as it is the only vehicular access between Hilton Head Island, Jenkins Island, Hog Island, Pinckney Island and the mainland. While this important link for motorized vehicles has been established since 1956, little consideration has been given to providing a similar link for both pedestrians and bicycles. The Town of Hilton Head Island began constructing a pathway network in the early 1990s with its initial emphasis being along the on-island route of US 278. Since then, bicycling has become an important island transportation element and amenity with significant growth anticipated on the mainland. This bicycle/pedestrian network on US 278 currently ends at the US 278/Gumtree Road intersection. A narrow sidewalk immediately adjacent to the highway extends from that point towards the bridges but ends at the western edge of the Stoney Community. On the mainland, a series of pathways and bicycle lanes have been created by the Town of Bluffton and Beaufort County to link many areas in Southern Beaufort County. However there is a gap in the two networks from the Buckingham Landing Rd./ Bluffton Parkway intersection to US 278 on the mainland to the US 278/Gumtree intersection on Hilton Head Island. The current planning process by SCDOT to address deficiencies in the US 278 Corridor between these two points offers a tremendous opportunity to eliminate this gap and take a much needed step in the creation of a safe, integrated roadway and pathway system connecting all potential corridor users throughout the jurisdiction of Southern Beaufort County. While SCDOT has stated that the replacement of the bridges over MacKay and Skull Creek will include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, the following recommendations should be included by SCDOT when addressing the existing network gap.

Recommendations

- ✓ All efforts should be made to insure that SCDOT's planned pedestrian and bicycle improvements link the two existing networks at the terminus of the Bluffton Parkway pathways at Buckingham Landing Rd. to US 278/Moss Creek and US 278/Gumtree with a pathway system that is physically separated from the vehicular travel lanes. Further these improvements should provide a safe connection to all properties along the corridor.
- ✓ The pathway facilities should provide all users with a good experience by:
 - All improvements should be attractive and blend in with the architecture of the bridge and any other aesthetic considerations included in the corridor.
 - Physical barriers should be included on the bridge to separate vehicles from the pathway.
 - A trail head for bridge users with parking should be included on both Jenkins and Pinkney Islands.

- Safety features should be included such as:
 - barriers on the water side of the bridge pathway
 - directional signage
 - pavement markings on the pathway bridge to separate pedestrians from bicycles
- The pathway on the bridge will offer excellent views. Provisions should be made so pathway users can stop and enjoy the views without blocking the pathway.
- Educational signage should be included along the route.
- Lighting meeting the International Dark-Sky Association standards should be considered.
- ✓ The existing sidewalk in the corridor should be eliminated and any sections of US 278 with raised curbing should be replaced with a 5 foot paved shoulder where practical, taking into account and balancing the needs of property owners, business owners and operators in the needed additional right of way. The addition of this shoulder is to accommodate on road active cyclists and e-bikes.

4/ Potential Mitigation for Property Owners, Business Owners & Operators

Background

In the event SCDOT's "Preferred Alternative" for the Gateway Corridor Project involves expansion from four to six lanes of the current roadway between the causeway onto Hilton Head Island to the Spanish Wells Road intersection or incorporates routes in Reasonable Alternatives 5 and 6, this would result in significant impact to the properties along the selected corridor. The Gateway Corridor Committee encourages the Town of Hilton Head Island to explore the use of unrestricted Town-owned land on the Island to create land swap, relocation or other mitigation opportunities for the impacted property owners, business owners and operators as possible alternatives to SCDOT taking of right-of-way through condemnation proceedings.

Objective

Dealing with the impact of the proposed US 278 Gateway Corridor Project is a community responsibility. The SCDOT is scheduled to begin meeting in February with property owners, business owners and operators who are potentially impacted by the current set of Reasonable Alternatives. With SCDOT's announcement of the Preferred Alternative currently scheduled for the fall of 2020, it is in the best interests of the impacted property owners, business owners and operators and the Town to start now and use the intervening months to work out reasonable solutions for improving conditions in the corridor for the property owners and the community at large. The ultimate goal would be to create a proactive versus reactive environment for dealing with the impact of a no-build decision or if SCDOT's Preferred Alternative incorporates the current corridor.

Recommendations to Achieve Objective

1. The Gateway Corridor Committee recommends the Town organize, advertise, coordinate and conduct a single meeting with affected property owners, business owners and operators along the current corridor from the causeway to Spanish Wells Road and the corridor for Reasonable Alternatives 5 and 6.
 - a. The effort should be initiated as soon as possible.
 - b. The Town should designate a Staff member to act as point person for the effort.
 - c. The Town's effort should be undertaken in addition to any initiatives by SCDOT.

2. The Town should identify individual parcels impacted and the respective property owners, business owners and operators, then send meeting invitations to each affected party.
3. The agenda for the meeting with affected property owners, business owners and operators should include:
 - a. An explanation of the role of the Gateway Corridor Committee and discussion of the Committee's Guiding Principles as adopted by the Town and Beaufort County.
 - b. A presentation by SCDOT to:
 - i. Bring all parties up to date on the Project's status and timetable.
 - ii. Review each SCDOT "Reasonable Alternative" and explain how it will impact the current corridor.
 - c. A presentation by the Town to:
 - i. Explain the advantages of working with the Town now versus waiting for the final Preferred Alternative.
 - ii. State that the Town is committed to working with interested property owners, business owners and operators to explore mitigation options, including the use of Town-owned land where appropriate.
 - iii. Offer to meet one-on-one with any interested party.
4. The Town should follow up individually with any affected property owner, business owner and operator who did not attend the meeting to convey its willingness to explore mitigation options.
5. The Town should meet one-on-one with any interested property owner, business owner and operator and explore mitigation options for the affected property. Any transfers of Town-owned land to affected property owners, business owners and operators may require rezoning.
6. Funding for negotiated mitigation should be absorbed in the costs of the project to the extent possible.

5/ The US 278 Gateway Corridor Project Guiding Principles

1. Fix the transportation issues in the corridor in a way that improves the safety and quality of life for all residents, workers and visitors to Hilton Head Island

- Address transportation needs for natural disasters and resiliency of island access
- Consider future transportation alternatives

2. Improve the safety and quality of life for the residents of the neighborhoods and businesses directly impacted by the US 278 corridor

- Stoney
- Neighborhoods on Jenkins and Hog Islands (including but not limited to Windmill Harbor)

3. Have a gateway to and from Hilton Head Island that the region will be proud of

- Aesthetically pleasing and reflecting the Hilton Head Island/Low Country values
- Safe and functional pathways for pedestrians and cyclists
- Minimizes environmental impacts and enhances the national asset of Pinckney Island