

The Purpose of the Project Update Meeting

In 2018, NCDOT held a public meeting to share plans for the I-26 Connector project and gather community feedback. Since then, the project has been updated based on input from the public, coordination with agencies, local officials and nearby communities. The northern section of the project from the Haywood Road/I-240 Interchange to the north end is now moving forward to construction. Today's Project Update Meeting highlights these updates, which include a smaller highway footprint, fewer residential relocations, reduced impacts on communities, improved bike and pedestrian features and better overall safety.

The updated design also includes adjustments to project sections to support phased construction (see page 4).

Section B includes building a new portion of interstate from the Haywood Road interchange, crossing the French Broad River, and connecting to U.S. 19/23/70 north of Broadway.

Section D includes roadway improvements along Riverside Drive from Hill Street to Broadway Street.

NCDOT continues to review the design, construction schedule, and traffic management plans to find ways to reduce time and costs. Some impacts shown at today's meeting may be refined further as drainage and utility work is finalized.

Project Funding

Activity	Estimated Costs*
Property Acquisition	\$175,600,000
Utility Relocation	\$27,400,000
Construction	\$1,010,000,000
Total Cost	\$1,213,000,000

**Costs shown are estimates and are subject to change. Based on currently adopted NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program.*

Project Description

The I-26 Connector Project is an interstate freeway project to connect I-26 in southwest Asheville to U.S. 19/23/70 in northwest Asheville. This project will upgrade and widen I-240 from I-40 to Patton Avenue, and then proceed northward from Patton Avenue on new location across the French Broad River and connect to U.S. 19-23-70 to Broadway Street. Upon completion, this project will be part of the I-26 Interstate that extends from Charleston, South Carolina to Kingsport, Tennessee.

The proposed I-26 Connector in Asheville is approximately 7 miles long from the I-40 interchange to Broadway Street and is now divided into four sections: A, B, C and D.

Hurricane Helene Impacts

After Hurricane Helene, local NCDOT staff had to shift their focus to recovery efforts, which delayed some coordination activities for this project. While storm recovery remains a top priority, the long-term transportation needs addressed by the I-26 Connector are still important for Asheville and Western North Carolina. Central NCDOT staff are continuing to work with the Design-Build Team to keep the project on schedule thanks to strong coordination and communication with local stakeholders.

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Project Purpose and Need

Why is the I-26 Connector needed?

The project is needed to address traffic capacity problems along the existing I-240 corridor (future I-26), across the Captain Jeff Bowen Bridges to U.S. 19/23/70. Presently, numerous areas do not meet interstate design standards and cannot be designated I-26 without being improved. The project would improve traffic flow, address the substandard roadway features, and provide an interstate roadway through West Asheville for the I-26 Corridor.

Why are we meeting today?

The project design presented in the 2018 Public Meeting has been refined to reduce the project costs, impacts and duration. We are here today to present the outcome of those efforts and offer you the opportunity to have one-on-one discussions with project team members. You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback. Comments can be submitted in person using the comment form attached to the back of the handout, or mailed, emailed, submitted online or by phone using either the project hotline or the PI.com site phone number. This information is available on page 10 of this handout.

Design-Build Process

The I-26 Connector Project is being constructed as a design-build project. The design-build process allows NCDOT to hire a team of designers and contractors that are responsible for the design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of the project. In May 2024, as part of the design-build process, the project was awarded to the Archer-Wright Joint Venture for Sections B and D of the project. The team plans to begin construction on the northern portion of the project, Sections B and D, while the design and right-of-way acquisition for the remaining sections of the I-26 Connector are underway. This typically results in faster completion of the project.

Optimization & Refinement

Optimization & Refinement (O&R) is an NCDOT strategy aimed to reduce costs and move the project forward. Through the O&R process NCDOT collaborated with the design-build team and local stakeholders to review concepts, provide feedback and determine priorities. This collaboration yielded approximately \$125 million in savings while maintaining:

- All commitments from the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision
- Separation of I-26 and Patton Avenue traffic
- Pedestrian and Cyclist connections

Following this meeting, FHWA and NCDOT will produce a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Re-Evaluation to document findings and update environmental impacts.

The Department will then proceed with permitting this fall and construction to begin in March 2026. With these savings, the Department is moving forward on the original construction schedule with the completion expected in 2031.

What's Next after the Project Update Meeting?

Activity	Anticipated Date
NEPA Re-Evaluation	Summer 2025
Permitting	Fall 2025
Right-of-Way Acquisition	Fall 2025
Construction	March 2026
Completion of Project	2031



Key Differences Since 2018

The focus in this section of the project remains separation of I-240 traffic from Patton Avenue traffic. The current designs have key differences compared to the preliminary designs presented at the 2018 public meeting to further reduce costs and impacts associated with the project. Below are the key differences described in detail.

Hillcrest Apartments and Hill Street Community

The 2018 Public Meeting maps designed the widening of I-240 as it follows Hill Street with greater right-of-way impacts. As a result of the O&R process, the design of I-240 through this corridor was consolidated and residential impacts were reduced along Hill Street.

Additional changes to the Hillcrest Apartments neighborhood include incorporation of a multi-use path providing connectivity from the southern portion of the complex to Patton Avenue / I-240. To the northeast corner of the Hillcrest Apartments complex, a roundabout design was incorporated east of I-240, and additional lanes were designed on I-240 without increasing the impacts to Hill Street or the Hillcrest Apartments.

Footprint Reduction of the I-26 Connector across the French Broad River

The current footprint of the bridges across the French Broad River reduces right-of-way impacts and impacts across the river compared to the 2018 Public Meeting design. The 2018 design had a larger footprint extending north of the current design. The new design reduces the footprint of the bridge where it connects at the new Patton Avenue/ I-26 configuration.

Modification of the I-26 / Patton Avenue Interchange Configuration

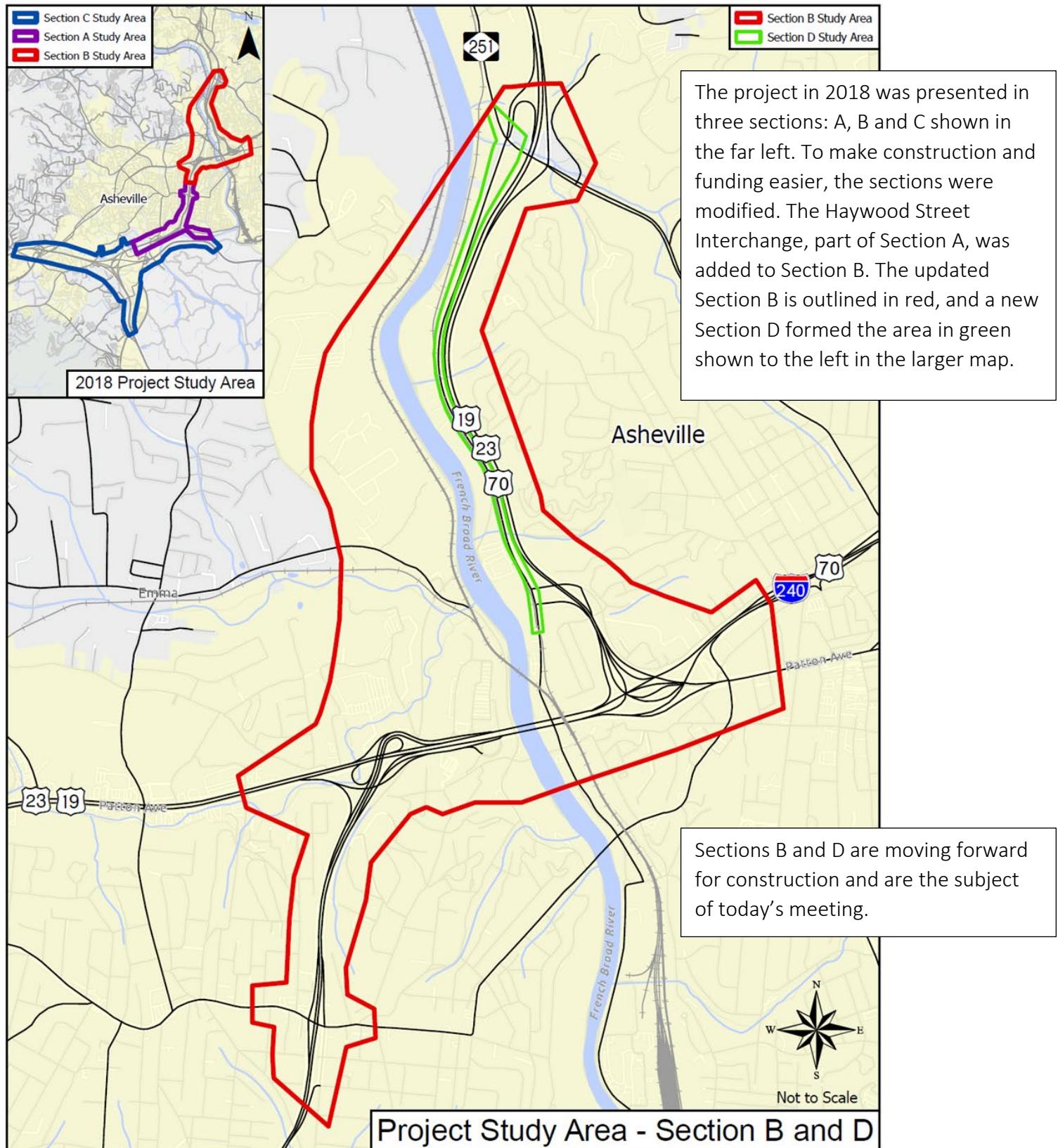
In previous designs, Patton Avenue crossed over I-26 on a bridge—a concept that was preferred by a portion of the community. However, this approach would have required the relocation of multiple existing utilities along Patton Avenue that would have resulted in significant costs and an extended construction timeline.

As part of the Design-Build process, the selected team's proposal included the concept of bridging I-26 over Patton Avenue. This concept was chosen because it was the most economical and feasible to construct. In evaluating the alternative concept, the team discovered that redesigning Patton Avenue to run under I-26 would minimize the impact of utility relocations that increased the overall construction duration by approximately 15 months. This type of design refinement is a common part of the Design-Build process.

Importantly, the revised design does not introduce any additional impacts and still meets the purpose and need of the project. As a result, the revision complies with all National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidelines. Without this change the project would not have advanced through the Optimization & Refinement (O&R) phase and could have faced indefinite delays.



Section Changes



Measures to Minimize Harm

Following the 2018 Public Meeting, measures to minimize harm were incorporated into the project and documented in the FEIS. Those refinements included:

Riverside Cemetery – In review of the previous design and impacts to historic resources seen in 2018 at the public meeting, only the impact to the Riverside Cemetery was an adverse effect. This current design studied minimizing impacts to the cemetery. Shifting away was not feasible because of the railroad and right-of-way impacts but the grade of the road has been lowered and no longer requires a retaining wall. Coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is ongoing to ensure that design changes do not violate the determinations and stipulations in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between FHWA, NCDOT, and SHPO.

Burton Street Neighborhood Plan – The Burton Street Neighborhood Plan was developed through coordination with members of the Burton Street Community Association to address and mitigate the anticipated impacts to the Burton Street neighborhood due to the proposed project. The plan lists mitigation strategies to be implemented by NCDOT, including improving sidewalks and pedestrian connections, installing bus shelters and other improvements at transit stops, incorporating a Burton Street history mural on a sound wall if built, constructing a new park and community gathering space at Smith Mill Creek, and additional mitigation strategies outlined in the Plan.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities – Multi-use paths and greenways continue to be incorporated and can be seen on the project maps at today's meeting along Patton Avenue, Riverside Drive, and the Hillcrest Connector. Additional improvements are also noted in the Burton Street Neighborhood Plan.

Aesthetics Committee – The City of Asheville established an Aesthetics Advisory Committee to develop guidelines that address aesthetic treatments that may be incorporated in the project. NCDOT will continue to coordinate with the City of Asheville throughout the project on the implementation of the aesthetic guidelines. Proposed aesthetics to be incorporated into the project can be seen in the renderings presented at today's meeting.

River User Safety – Construction of the bridge over the French Broad River is a concern because of regular use of the river by kayakers. NCDOT as part of their River User Safety plan will place signage along the river warning of construction activities. NCDOT is working with the Buncombe County Parks and Recreation and will alert boaters of the construction at their boat launch locations. In addition, safe passage through the bridge construction area will be provided for the duration of construction.

Project Impacts Summary

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and guidance, impacts to protected environmental features were identified and evaluated for the 2018 Public Meeting design and the current design. Those environmental features and their impacts are described below.

Environmental Feature	2018 Design	2025 Design
Parks and Recreational Facilities	French Broad River paddle trail – No adverse effect.	No change
Churches	6 churches – No effect except a small parking impact to Community Baptist Church	The impact to Community Baptist Church parking has been reduced.
Relocatees	56 residential, 29 business relocatees	Reduced to 40 residential, 28 business relocatees
Land Use and Transportation Planning	The project is consistent with existing and future land use and transportation plans.	No change
Noise	A Traffic Noise Report was completed prior to the previous public meeting. It identified areas of concern based on preliminary information.	A Design Noise Report is underway for the current design and will make final recommendations for noise barriers. Soon after the Design Noise Report is complete, a balloting process will begin where the property owners and tenants benefited by a recommended noise wall will vote on whether they would like a noise wall or not.
Historic Architecture	13 eligible properties – No effect or no adverse effect except for Riverside Cemetery	Reduction of roadway height along Riverside Cemetery, eliminating the need for a retaining wall and minimizes the visual impact to the cemetery
Archaeology	0 sites within Sections B and D	No change
Air Quality	No adverse effect	No change
Farmlands	Not applicable	No change
Indirect Effects	Low to moderate	No change
Hazardous Materials	1 site – high severity	No change
Floodplains	100-year Floodplain - 3.91 acres Floodway - 0.38 acres	100-year Floodplain - 2.75 acres Floodway - 0.12 acres
Protected Species	USFWS issued a Biological Opinion (BO) in 2020 addressing the gray bat (<i>Myotis grisescens</i>), northern long-eared bat (<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>), and Appalachian elktoe (<i>Alasmidonta raveneliana</i>). This resulted in measures to protect and/or mitigate for impacts to the identified species in the project study area.	



Underserved Populations

A February 5, 2025, Executive Order (E.O.) rescinded the consideration of Environmental Justice (EJ) as it relates to “overburdened and underserved populations and low-income communities, and communities of color and Tribal and Indigenous communities,” as well as cumulative effects analysis as it pertains to land use and human and natural environmental effects. However, as potential EJ impacts were addressed in prior studies, impacts analysis was undertaken to ensure consistency. Future environmental analysis will not consider EJ per the E.O.

Based upon the design in the 2018 Public Meeting maps and the associated Community Impact Assessment (NCDOT, 2018), it was determined that without additional avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures, there would be disproportionately high and adverse impacts to the Burton Street neighborhood, a historically low income and minority neighborhood adjacent to the corridor. The design was then revised to minimize impacts documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and ROD. NCDOT has continued coordination with the City of Asheville, neighborhood representatives, historic property owners, and the Burton Street Community, to obtain input on how the project design could be refined to further minimize the impacts.

Section 4(f)

Based upon the final evaluation, four historic properties and one recreation area (paddle trail) that qualify for protection under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 will require some permanent incorporation of Section 4(f) protected land into the project; however, FHWA previously determined they will be *de minimis* impacts. The properties are as follows:

- West Asheville/Aycock School Historic District
- William Worley House
- Haywood Street United Methodist Church
- Great Smoky Mountain Park Bridge (Buncombe County Bridge No. 323)
- French Broad River paddle trail

As part of the ongoing coordination with SHPO referenced on page 5 of the handout, FHWA will determine if *de minimis* is still applicable to the historic properties, and separately verify *de minimis* for the French Broad River paddle trail.



Right-of-Way and Relocations

Right-of-Way Procedures

After decisions are made regarding the final design, the proposed right-of-way limits will be staked in the ground. If you are an affected property owner, a Right-of-Way Agent will contact you and arrange a meeting. The agent will explain the plans and advise you as to how the project will affect you. The agent will inform you of your rights as a property owner. If permanent right-of-way is required, professionals who are familiar with real estate values will evaluate or appraise your property. The evaluations or appraisals will be reviewed for completeness and accuracy, and then the Right-of-Way Agent will make a written offer to you. The current market value of the property at its highest and best use, when appraised, will be offered as compensation. The Department of Transportation must:

- Treat all owners and tenants equally
- Fully explain the owner's rights
- Pay just compensation in exchange for property rights
- Furnish relocation advisory assistance

Relocation Assistance

If you are a relocatee, that is, if your residence or business is to be acquired as part of the project, additional assistance in the form of advice and compensation is available. You will also be provided with assistance regarding locations of comparable housing and/or commercial establishments, moving procedures, and moving aid. Moving expenses may be paid for you. Additional monetary compensation is available to help homeowners cope with mortgage increases, increased value of comparable homes, closing costs, etc. A similar program is available to assist business owners. The Right-of-Way Agent can explain this assistance in greater detail.



Your Participation

You may write your comments or questions on the comment sheet (page 11) and leave it with one of the representatives at today's meeting. You may also mail them by May 25, 2025, to the following address:

Mr. Jamille Robbins
NCDOT - Environmental Analysis Unit
1598 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-1598

Comments submitted by email, submitted online or by phone using either the project hotline or the PI.com site phone number must be submitted by May 25, 2025.

Where to Submit by Email

i26connector@publicinput.com

Where To Submit Comments Online

Comments can be submitted at the public input website at

<https://publicinput.com/i26connector>

Public Input Site Phone Number: 1-855-925-2801, Project Code 11368

Where To Review Project Information

People can view the materials at the project website at

<http://www.ncdot.gov/projects/i26connector/>

Project Hotline/Línea Gratuita del Proyecto: 1-800-233-6315

500 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$1,839.95, or \$3.6799 per copy. (04/25)



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I-2513 B&D COMMENT SHEET

How can we reach you?

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

How did you hear about us today?

□ Newsletter

Newspaper

Friend/Family

Other _____

Tell us your views

Your opinions about this project are important to us. Please use the space below to include your comments or questions. If you need additional space, please take additional sheets or you may include your own letter.

fold here

Place
Stamp
Here

Mr. Jamille Robbins
NCDOT - EAU
1598 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1598

fold here

seal with tape

TITLE VI PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FORM

Completing this form is **completely** voluntary. You are not required to provide the information requested in order to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related authorities, the N.C. Department of Transportation assures that no person(s) shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any of the Department's programs, policies, or activities, based on their race, color, national origin, disability, age, income, or gender.

Completing this form helps meet our data collection and public involvement obligations under Title VI and NEPA, and will improve how we serve the public. Please place the completed form in the designated box on the sign-in table, hand it to an NCDOT official or mail it to the Environmental Analysis Unit, 1598 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1598.

All forms will remain on file at the NCDOT as part of the public record.

Zip Code: _____	Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer
Street Name: (i.e. Main Street) _____	Age: <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 45-64 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-29 <input type="checkbox"/> 65 and older <input type="checkbox"/> 30-44
Total Household Income: <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$12,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$47,000 – \$69,999 <input type="checkbox"/> \$12,000 – \$19,999 <input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 – \$93,999 <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 – \$30,999 <input type="checkbox"/> \$94,000 – \$117,999 <input type="checkbox"/> \$31,000 – \$46,999 <input type="checkbox"/> \$118,000 or greater	Have a Disability: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Race/Ethnicity: Select all that apply and enter additional details in the spaces below.

American Indian or Alaska Native – Enter, for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, Maya, etc.

Asian – Provide details below.

Chinese Asian Indian Filipino Vietnamese Korean Japanese

Enter, for example, Pakistani, Hmong, Afghan, etc. _____

Black or African American – Provide details below.

African American Jamaican Haitian Nigerian Ethiopian Somali

Enter, for example, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, Ghanaian, Congolese, etc. _____

Hispanic or Latino – Provide details below.

Mexican Puerto Rican Salvadoran Cuban Dominican Guatemalan

Enter, for example, Colombian, Honduran, Spaniard, etc. _____

Middle Eastern or North African – Provide details below.

Lebanese Iranian Egyptian Syrian Iraqi Israeli

Enter, for example, Moroccan, Yemeni, Kurdish, etc. _____

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander – Provide details below.

Native Hawaiian Samoan Chamorro Tongan Fijian Marshallese

Enter, for example, Chuukese, Palauan, Tahitian, etc. _____

White – Provide details below.

English German Irish Italian Polish Scottish

Enter, for example, French, Swedish, Norwegian, etc. _____

How did you hear about this meeting? (newspaper advertisement, flyer, and/or mailing) _____

For more information regarding Title VI or this request, please contact the NCDOT Title VI Nondiscrimination Program at (984) 236-1200, or by email at titlevi@ncdot.gov. Thank you for your participation!



NCDOT - Environmental Analysis Unit
Attn:
1598 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1598

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Meeting Type:	Date:
Location:	
TIP No:	
Project Description:	