

APPENDIX I

REEVALUATION OF 2015 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

2015 DEIS REEVALUATION

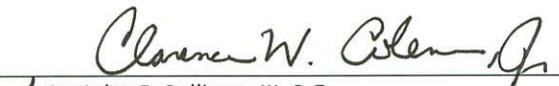
I-26 Asheville Connector
Buncombe County, North Carolina
Federal Aid Project No. NHF-26-1(53)
WBS Element 34165.1.2
STIP I-2513

**U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
and
North Carolina Department of Transportation**

1/9/2020
Date of Approval


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1/9/2020
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The documented needs for the transportation project in Buncombe County are presented in the report. The existing conditions of the study area are described and the alternatives are assessed in terms of environmental impacts, compatibility with local planning goals, relative cost-effectiveness and public opinion.

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REEVALUATION

Pursuant to 23 CFR 771.129(a) and according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Technical Advisory T 6640.8A, if an acceptable Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is not submitted to FHWA within 3 years from the date of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) circulation, then a written evaluation (Reevaluation) is required to determine whether there have been changes in the project or its surroundings or new information which would require a supplement to the DEIS. The purpose of this Reevaluation is to identify and assess changes that have occurred since publication of the DEIS in October 2015. FHWA and NCDOT's evaluation of impacts resulting from changes since publication of the DEIS have been assessed to determine whether a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) or new DEIS is required.

Overall, the effects of changes associated with the project do not result in significant impacts since publication of the DEIS. This Reevaluation summarizes the changes and resulting impacts that support this determination.

2.0 UPDATES SINCE PUBLICATION OF THE 2015 DEIS

Transportation plans approved after submittal of the 2015 DEIS are discussed in Chapter 3.2.2.1 and Chapter 4.1.2.2 of the FEIS. The 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) was approved in October 2015 by the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO). This 2040 MTP supersedes the FBRMPO's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (2010).

Following publication of the DEIS, the FBRMPO revised its travel demand model (TDM). This revised model, and associated revisions to the traffic forecast and capacity analysis, as discussed below and in more detail in Chapter 2.6.3, allowed the design team to incorporate several refinements into the project to reduce impacts of the preferred alternative.

Overall, the effect of the proposed project has not changed significantly since publication of the 2015 DEIS. The establishment of the I-26 Connector Working Group initiated a series of meetings between members of the City of Asheville City Council, the Asheville Design Center, Buncombe County, FHWA, FBRMPO, NCDOT, and other stakeholders. Additional public involvement has occurred with communities directly impacted in order to best determine how the project fits into the context of the community. Notable correspondence with neighborhoods and the I-26 Working Group is described in Section 8.2 of the FEIS.

2.1 UPDATED TRAFFIC STUDIES

Since the publication of the *Traffic Operations Technical Memorandum* (URS 2015i), which presented traffic operations information used in the DEIS, updated traffic studies have been prepared to re-evaluate traffic conditions for refinement of the preferred alternative and are based on the updated TDM provided by the FBRMPO. The following sections are based on the 2018 *Traffic Operations Technical Memorandum* (AECOM 2018g) and present traffic volumes

and operational analyses for the existing (year 2015) and the traffic volumes for the projected design year (year 2040) for the study area roadway network.

Existing Roadway Characteristics

The existing roadway network that was analyzed for the proposed project has not been altered since publication of the 2015 DEIS.

Existing 2015 Traffic Conditions

The traffic forecasts used for the traffic operations analyses were obtained from the *Traffic Forecast Report for TIP Project No. I-2513, I-26 Connector* (AECOM 2016). The traffic forecasts provided peak hour and annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes for the transportation network within the project study area for the Existing No-Build Conditions (year 2015) and the Future No-Build Scenario (year 2040).

Year 2040 No-Build Traffic Projections

The traffic forecasts used for the traffic operations analyses were obtained from the *Traffic Forecast Report for TIP Project No. I-2513, I-26 Connector* (AECOM 2016). The traffic forecasts were used to develop peak hour volumes for AM and PM peak periods for the transportation network within the project study area for the Future No-Build Scenario (year 2040). The 2040 No-Build peak hour and ADT volumes were determined through the use of the 2015 Asheville Travel Model Version 2.

Year 2040 No-Build Capacity Analysis

The No-Build Alternative assumes the local transportation system would evolve as currently planned, but without implementation of the proposed project. With the exception of routine maintenance, no change would take place along the existing corridors within the project study area.

The planned improvements, within the study area of the proposed project, were identified by reviewing the 2040 MTP.

The methods developed in the 2010 Highway Capacity Manual were used to determine the future LOS for the freeway segments and signalized intersections at ramp terminals for the No-Build Alternative.

Year 2040 Build Traffic Projections

The traffic forecasts used for the traffic operations analyses were obtained from the *Traffic Forecast Report for TIP Project No. I-2513, I-26 Connector* (AECOM 2016). The traffic forecasts were used to develop peak hour volumes for AM and PM peak periods for the transportation network within the project study area for the Future Build Scenario (year 2040) for the preferred alternative. The 2040 build peak hour and ADT volumes were determined through the use of the 2015 Asheville Travel Model Version 2.

Year 2040 Build Traffic Capacity Analysis

The methods developed in the 2010 Highway Capacity Manual were used to determine the future LOS for the freeway segments and signalized intersections at ramp terminals for the build alternatives. The analysis of the build alternatives assumes that the local transportation system would evolve as currently planned, including the implementation of the proposed project. Assumptions regarding how the transportation system adjacent to the project study area will be developed include analysis of the improvements presented in the 2040 MTP.

Based upon the updated traffic studies prepared to re-evaluate traffic conditions for refinement of the preferred alternative, it has been determined these updated studies have not introduced alternatives that would result in significant environmental impacts that were not evaluated in the DEIS. As discussed in subsequent sections, the updated traffic studies lessen the effects of the project noted in the 2015 DEIS.

2.2 DESIGN REFINEMENTS

Design refinements to the preferred alternative have been developed based on the updated traffic studies discussed in the previous section as well as coordination with environmental and regulatory resource agencies, local officials, and affected communities. The following sections summarize portions of the design refinements that demonstrate the most changes since the alternatives described in the 2015 DEIS.

Number of Lanes in Section A

Traffic studies used to analyze detailed study alternatives in the DEIS showed the minimum number of lanes required to accommodate the projected traffic volumes would include eight through travel lanes (four in each direction) for the section from I-40 to Patton Avenue (where it is combined with I-240) and six through travel lanes (three in each direction) from Patton Avenue to Broadway.

The results of updated traffic analyses after selection of the preferred alternative resulted in the recommendation of a six-lane typical section for basic freeway lanes on I-26/I-240, from I-40 to US 19-23-70. This resulted in a slightly less impactful design, as discussed in the FEIS.

I-26 Configuration between Amboy Road and Brevard Road

As described in Section 2.6.4 of the FEIS, the project team met with the community and local officials to evaluate various options for this interchange. It was decided to eliminate the Amboy Road extension and the connections to Fairfax and Virginia avenues, and redesign this section of the project to provide a split diamond interchange on I-26 between Amboy Road and Brevard Road. This reduced impacts to the adjacent community and they are in support of this design revision.

Amboy Road

The detailed study alternative designs showed Amboy Road extending over I-26 and intersecting with Brevard Road. When the Brevard Road/Amboy Road interchange was revised

to a split diamond configuration, the project team performed a study to determine whether Amboy Road should be positioned above or below I-26. This study determined that, with the split diamond configuration, positioning Amboy Road under I-26 would cause the least impacts to the Fairfax/Virginia Avenue Community as well as Carrier Park, a Section 4(f) resource.

I-40 Collector/Distributor Roads

The revised traffic studies used to refine the preferred alternative designs showed traffic volumes were reduced within the project limits along I-40. As a result, the project team was able to eliminate approximately 20,000 feet of C/D roads in Section C. This reduced impacts adjacent to both eastbound and westbound I-40 west of the I-26 interchange.

Exit 44 Ramp over Railroad

The project team determined that due to the elimination of the westbound C/D road along I-40 in Section C, it was acceptable geometrically to add a new ramp connecting westbound I-40 to northbound Smoky Park Highway at Exit 44 and revise the existing loop to serve only westbound I-40 to southbound Smoky Park Highway traffic. This revision reduced impacts resulting from this interchange.

Left-over on Patton Avenue in Section B

The designs used to analyze the detailed study alternatives in the DEIS included a left-over turn lane for eastbound Patton Avenue traffic to access the Westgate Shopping Center. Since eastbound traffic can use Hazel Mill Road and Westgate Parkway to access the shopping center, it was determined acceptable to eliminate this redundant access for eastbound traffic for the preferred alternative.

I-26/I-240/Patton Avenue Interchange

The designs for this interchange used to analyze the detailed study alternatives in the DEIS included a modified partial cloverleaf interchange. The modification, an extra loop in the northwest quadrant, was added to accommodate the large volume of outbound Patton Avenue traffic accessing I-26/I-240 eastbound. In April 2018, NCDOT began coordinating with the City of Asheville's consultant Sam Schwartz on various design recommendations from the City of Asheville. One of these recommendations included revising this interchange to an urban diamond type configuration. Alternative 4-B was revised to include a diamond interchange at the I-26/I-240/Patton Avenue, which required the addition of approximately 8.5 acres of right of way; however, no additional residential relocations were necessary, and one business relocation was eliminated. The full analysis of Alternative 4-B by the City of Asheville and their design recommendations for Section B was finalized in September 2018 and is included in Appendix B.

West Asheville Greenway

The detailed study alternative designs showed the West Asheville Greenway following or using Hazel Mill Road in the southeast quadrant of the I-26/Patton Avenue interchange. As a result of coordination with the City of Asheville and the I-26 Connector Working Group, the refined

designs for the preferred alternative realign the greenway to follow the proposed ramp in the southeast quadrant. This design change will eliminate right-of-way impacts, eliminate conflicts between vehicular and greenway traffic, and provide better connectivity of the proposed West Asheville Greenway to Patton Avenue.

Riverside Drive Widening

Since publication of the 2015 DEIS, the Riverside Drive Widening project, formerly STIP U-5868 has been included in Section B. The improvements along Riverside Drive include the addition of a center turning lane and a 10-foot multi-use path to the west of the roadway, from Hill Street to Broadway.

2.3 HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Since publication of the 2015 DEIS, studies updated with regard to the human environment have not introduced significant changes to the conditions in the study area and have lessened the effects of the project as noted in the following sections.

Socioeconomic Conditions

The socioeconomic conditions in the project study area have not changed substantially since publication of the 2015 DEIS. In the 2015 DEIS, community-based demographic data were gathered from the 2010 US Census as well as the 2007-2011 American Community Survey (ACS). Using the same direct community impact area and demographic study area (DSA boundary, updates were obtained using the demographic information from the 2010 US Census and the 2011-2015 ACS. Updated socioeconomic data are included in Section 3.1 of the FEIS.

Land Use

A comparison of existing development in the region revealed very few changes to development or land use in the vicinity of the project as reported in the 2015 DEIS. Once the preferred alternative was selected, land use impacts were calculated for the refined designs. A summary of the land use impacts for the preferred alternative is included in Table 4-3 in Chapter 4.1.3.1 of the FEIS.

Parks and Recreational Facilities

The 2015 DEIS reported that the preferred alternative was expected to require the reconstruction of a portion of the French Broad River Greenway at the western end of the Carrier Park property to allow the reconnection of Old Amboy Road and provide access to several properties west of Carrier Park along the banks of the French Broad River. Since publication of the DEIS and design refinement of the preferred alternative, the configuration at Amboy Road was realigned and avoided any required reconstruction of the greenway.

The preferred alternative design also lessens impact to the Amboy Road frontage of Carrier Park for additional right-of-way and construction easements since what was reported in the DEIS.

The preferred alternative in Section B would require placement of bridge bents in the French Broad River, which is designated by the state as a paddle trail, during construction of bridges over the French Broad River.

Impacts to Carrier Park and the French Broad River Trail qualify for Section 4(f) protection, and have been determined a *de minimis* impact, as described further in Chapter 5 of the FEIS.

Historic Resources

The 2015 DEIS reported permanent incorporation of right-of-way to five historic resources. Based on the refined designs of the preferred alternative, the project would require permanent incorporation of right-of-way from only three of these resources. The preferred alternative no longer requires the underground easement at the Montford Hill Historic District as noted in the 2015 DEIS and right-of-way impacts to the Montford Hills Historic District were eliminated. Right-of-way impacts to the Asheville School, West Asheville/Aycock School Historic District, and the William Worley House properties were reduced by the preferred alternative revised designs as described in Section 4.1.5 of the FEIS and shown in the table below.

Property	Section C		Section A		Section B	
	DEIS	FEIS	DEIS	FEIS	DEIS	FEIS
Asheville School	2.79/0.58	0.51/1.48	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
West Asheville/Aycock School Historic District and Boundary Increase	N/A	N/A	0.35/0.25	0.12/0.42	N/A	N/A
William Worley House	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.1/0.22	0.05/0.26
Montford Hills Historic District	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0/0.03	0/0

2.4 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Since publication of the 2015 DEIS, studies updated with regard to the natural environment have not introduced significant changes to the conditions in the study area and have lessened the effects of the project as noted in the following sections.

Stream and Wetland Impacts

Since publication of the 2015 DEIS, the refined designs of the preferred alternative have reduced the overall impacts to terrestrial communities, streams, and wetlands. These impact reductions are further described in Section 4.1.6 of the FEIS and summarized in the table below.

	Section C		Section A		Section B	
	DEIS	FEIS	DEIS	FEIS	DEIS	FEIS
Stream Impacts (linear feet)	1,984	1,376	798	597	2,128	1,810
Wetland Impacts (acres)	1.86	1.29	0.01	0.01	0.1	0.04

Biological Assessments

Since publication of the 2015 DEIS, the rusty patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*), was listed as an endangered species for Buncombe County under the ESA of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), but does not require a Section 7 survey or biological conclusion due its "historic" record status.

The 2015 DEIS presented the biological conclusion of "may affect-not likely to adversely affect" for the Tan riffleshell (*Epioblasma florentina walkeri*). Based on survey results (January 2018), the updated biological conclusion of the tan riffleshell is "no effect."

Since publication of the 2015 DEIS, biological conclusions for two species, the gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) and Appalachian elktoe (*Alasmidonta raveneliana*), have been changed due to the result of updated species surveys. The gray bat biological conclusion has been changed from "unresolved" to "may affect – likely to adversely affect" due to the presence of gray bats within the study area. The biological conclusion of "may affect-not likely to adversely affect" for the Appalachian elktoe has been revised to "may affect – likely to adversely affect" due to results of updated surveys of the French Broad River and surrounding tributaries. The results of the surveys are further described in Section 4.1.6.5 of the FEIS.

While two species biological conclusions have changed to "may affect – likely to adversely affect", this does not necessitate supplementation of the 2015 DEIS, as NCDOT is currently coordinating with the USFWS regarding avoidance and minimization for both species per Section 7 of the ESA of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). Section 7 compliance will be sought and secured prior to signing the ROD.

3.0 CONCLUSION

None of the changes noted in this reevaluation of the 2015 DEIS would cause a need for a supplement to the DEIS or a need for a new DEIS.

A review of the existing conditions compared with those documented in 2015 DEIS indicates there has been little change in the human, physical, and natural environments in the project area. Though some changes have occurred, they do not result in any new significant impacts not previously identified, nor do they alter the need for and purpose of the project. Based on updated technical analyses, and coordination with the public, the I-26 Connector Working Group, and environmental and regulatory resource agencies, the preferred alternative designs have lessened the human and natural environmental effects; therefore, it has been determined the 2015 DEIS would not require supplementation.

A summary of project impacts by section is listed in Table 4-19 in the FEIS.