

Chapter 4

Public and Agency Coordination

This chapter describes the agency coordination and public involvement that has taken place as part of the I-95 Environmental Assessment (EA). This outreach has included agency meetings, local official roundtable meetings, public workshops, as well as the development of brochures, project hotline, website, and social media applications.

4.1 AGENCY COORDINATION

The I-95 EA is being conducted in accordance with the Statewide Transportation and Metropolitan Planning and Programming Regulations under 23 CFR 450. The provisions linking planning and NEPA presented in Section .318 and Appendix A of 23 CFR 450 are being followed. As part of this approach, the project team identified key project stakeholders who have continued to provide various degrees of oversight and input into the development of the project. These stakeholders were assembled into an “Agency Steering Committee” that participated in the planning process, especially with regard to the development of the statement of purpose and need, range of reasonable alternatives, analytical methodologies, and the level of detail for the analysis of reasonable alternatives. Members of the Agency Steering Committee included representatives of the following agencies:

- Federal Highway Administration
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Division of Water Quality
- NC Wildlife Resource Commission
- NC State Historic Preservation Office
- NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Division of Marine Fisheries
- NCDOT

Brief summaries of the Agency Steering Committee meetings are listed below. Committee input was gathered during the first two meetings to inform the technical work. Minutes for these meetings are included in **Appendix A**. The third and fourth meetings were limited to presentations detailing progress on the study and obtaining written concurrence on the previously accepted project approach.

- **Meeting #1 – August 17, 2010** – A brief overview of the I-95 project was presented to the Agency Steering Committee and discussions related to project purpose and need and preliminary alternative options were initiated.
- **Meeting #2 – November 9, 2010** – The Agency Steering Committee was briefed on the current I-95 project status and progress to date, including the screening of alternatives, the results of the environmental screening, the project purpose and need, and the project schedule. The Agency

Steering Committee members gave verbal concurrence on the purpose and need and the alternatives recommended for further analysis.

- **Meeting #3 – May 19, 2011** – The Agency Steering Committee was briefed on the current status of the I-95 project and signed the a concurrence agreement for the project’s purpose and need, as well as the preferred design concept and scope. The concurrence form is included in **Appendix A**.
- **Meeting #4 – December 15, 2011** – The Agency Steering Committee was briefed on the current status of the I-95 project and informed of the conversion of the original Alternatives Analysis Report to a federal EA document. During the meeting, the agencies were briefed on the progress of the EA; specifically on the completion of the Draft EA (scheduled for November), and that the Final EA would be finalized and distributed for public and agency comment at the end of 2011.

4.2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A community engagement and public involvement coordination plan was developed for the I-95 project using five steps to systematically set up and implement a public involvement program. The five steps include:

1. Set goals and objectives
2. Identify the audience to be reached
3. Develop a general approach or set of general strategies that are keyed to the goals and objectives of the plan and the characteristics of the target audiences
4. Refine the approach with specific techniques
5. Assure that proposed strategies and techniques aid decision making, continually evaluating and making mid-course corrections, if needed.

Building on NCDOT’s previous work within the I-95 corridor, the project area was surveyed to determine the demographic composition of the local communities involved or potentially affected and to identify stakeholders and other key participants to include in the process. Targeted populations included those people who use I-95, those who use I-95 and may suffer the results of direct and/or indirect impacts, and those that do not use I-95 but suffer the results of direct and indirect impacts. Information from the U.S. Census (including data from the 2000 and 2010 US Census, 2009 American Community Survey, and 2009 Local Employment Dynamics) was used to determine the presence of Environmental Justice communities within the study area, language requirements of potential participants, and overall travel patterns of commuters.

One of the goals of the public involvement process is to ensure that people who have been traditionally underserved by transportation, members of minority, ethnic, low-income, or limited English proficiency (LEP) communities, or the disabled have full access to information and meaningful opportunities to participate in the decision making process. For this project, bilingual Spanish translation services were used to translate outreach materials and other accessible materials for identified Spanish LEP communities.

The project team also worked with public officials and localities in the study area to identify community organizations and other major stakeholders that needed to have a voice in the overall process. Through the various outreach methods listed below, interested parties and the public at large have played a role in shaping the I-95 project.

4.2.1 Local Officials Roundtable Meetings

The project team conducted two rounds of seven (7) local officials “Roundtable” meetings. The first round occurred in January 2010 and the second in January 2011. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the elected officials to the I-95 project and invite them to participate in the identification of the deficiencies along I-95, as well as to recommend needs that the I-95 project should address. Meetings were held in each county along the corridor, except at the northern portion where a combined meeting was held for Halifax and Northampton Counties. Meetings included the project team as well staff from the relevant NCDOT Division offices. A third set of meetings will be held in January 2012 to present the project team’s study recommendations prior to the public hearings. A list of the previously held roundtable meetings follows below:

January 2010

- Robeson County – January 11, 2010. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Lumberton, Town of St. Pauls, and local chamber of commerce.
- Cumberland County – January 11, 2010. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Fayetteville, Town of Spring Lake, Town of Hope Mills, local chamber of commerce, and local metropolitan and rural planning organizations.
- Harnett County – January 13, 2010. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Dunn, rural planning organization, and economic development commission.
- Johnston County – January 13, 2010. Meeting included representatives from the County, Town of Benson, Town of Selma, and Adventure Development Corporation.
- Halifax/Northampton Counties – January 20, 2010. Meeting included representatives from Halifax and Northampton Counties, City of Roanoke Rapids, Town of Enfield, economic development commission, state legislators, an area newspaper, and representatives of New Dixie Oil.
- Wilson County – January 25, 2010. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Wilson, chamber of commerce, county commissioner, and economic development commission.
- Nash County – January 25, 2010. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Rocky Mount, Town of Nashville, chamber of commerce, county commissioners, and Carolinas Gateway.

January 2011

- Wilson County – January 10, 2011. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Wilson, chamber of commerce, and economic development commission.
- Cumberland County – January 12, 2011. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Fayetteville, and the local rural planning organization.

- Halifax/Northampton Counties – January 19, 2011. Meeting included representatives from Halifax and Northampton Counties, City of Roanoke Rapids, and the local rural planning organization.
- Nash County – January 20, 2011. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Rocky Mount, and chamber of commerce.
- Harnett County – January 24, 2011. Meeting included representatives from the County, City of Dunn, and economic development commission.
- Johnston County – January 24, 2011, Meeting included representatives from the County, Town of Benson, Town of Selma, and local chamber of commerce.
- Robeson County – February 10, 2011. Meeting included representatives from the County and City of Lumberton.

4.2.2 Public Workshops

A series of seven informal public workshops were held along the project corridor to provide information on the proposed study and to obtain public input. The meetings were held at community colleges (CCs), other public facilities, and in one case a hotel, in the vicinity of I-95 as shown in **Table 4-1**. Each workshop was held between the hours of 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Advertisements for the workshops were placed in the local newspapers and public service announcements were made by several radio stations along the corridor. In addition, the project team met with representatives of daily newspapers along the I-95 corridor to encourage attendance and participation in the public involvement process. These include:

- Dunn Daily Record
- Fayetteville Observer
- Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald
- The Robesonian
- Rocky Mount Telegram
- Wilson Times.

Although specific targeting of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations along the corridor was not part of the advertising of the workshops, materials in Spanish were available at each of the seven workshops, as was a Spanish interpreter.

Table 4-1: Citizens Informational Workshop Dates, Locations, and Numbers of Attendees

Date	Location	# Attendees
August 16, 2010	Halifax CC, the Centre (Gallery), 200 College Dr., Weldon, NC (Halifax/Northampton Counties)	46
August 17, 2010	Imperial Centre (Studio Theater), 270 Gay St., Rocky Mount, NC (Nash County)	44
August 18, 2010	Johnston CC (Tart Building) 245 College Dr., Smithfield, NC (Johnston County)	79
August 23, 2010	Bill Ellis Convention Center, 2904 Forest Hills Rd., Wilson, NC (Wilson County)	20
August 26, 2010	Dunn Recreation Dept., Community Building, 205 Jackson Rd, Dunn, NC (Harnett County)	33
August 30, 2010	Robeson CC, Workforce Dev. Center, 5160 N. Fayetteville Rd., Lumberton, NC (Robeson County)	17
August 31, 2010	Holiday Inn, I-95, 1944 Cedar Creek Road, Fayetteville, NC (Cumberland County)	21

The seven workshops followed an informal, drop-in format with no presentations. Attendees arrived at a sign-in table that contained handouts with project information before arriving at project-specific display boards that described the purpose of and need for the project, summarized capacity and safety concerns for the facility, and described funding options of the improvements, including tolling. Stations for Spanish speaking attendees were available, which included translated work materials and Spanish language translators; however no self-identified Spanish-speaking people asked for assistance during the meetings. After viewing the informational boards, attendees were able to view maps showing existing conditions on I-95, and environmental screening information. One of the project boards asked attendees to review NCDOT’s goals and objectives, examine identified needs along I-95, and to provide comments, noting that this information would be used to check the identified project needs, develop alternatives, and evaluate options. Attendees were asked to place stickers on areas of concern along the corridor. Staff was available to discuss the boards and maps and to answer questions. A brief PowerPoint summary that described the Internet and social media outreach programs was available for viewing. Attendees were encouraged to return the comment forms enclosed in the project handouts. Workshop summaries are included in **Appendix E**.

Comments were primarily focused on road conditions on I-95, the impact a potential toll would have on the area economy, and safety. Opinion on the potential use of tolls was divided, with some in favor of tolling, particularly if only out-of-state vehicles were tolled, while others were in favor of discounted tolls for those frequently using I-95. A large portion of those discussing project funding at the various workshops were opposed to placing tolls on I-95.

4.2.3 Brochures

Full-color project brochures were developed to support and update the public information campaign, and to educate stakeholder that traveled the I-95 corridor and are show in **Appendix F**. They included an introduction to the project and provided information on how to learn more about the project. Brochures were produced in a bilingual (English/Spanish) format and distributed along the project corridor. They

were placed along I-95 throughout North Carolina and at North Carolina Welcome Centers located at the Virginia and South Carolina state borders. The brochures included a tear-off survey, which can be mailed back by members of the participating community. Through September 2011, 375 survey responses were returned to NCDOT. Provided below are the responses received for a sampling of the survey questions included in the brochure:

What is your greatest concern for Interstate 95 through North Carolina?

- Traffic - 163 responses
- Safety – 73 responses
- Road Conditions – 51 responses
- Tolls – 10 responses (specific concerns, e.g., cost, delays, not discussed in responses)

What is your primary use of I-95?

- Interstate/Vacation – 242 responses
- Local Travel – 37 responses
- Business/Commuting – 35 responses
- Local/Vacation Travel – 22 responses

How often do you use I-95?

- Annually – 145 responses
- 6-11 times/year – 82 responses
- Less than annually – 55 responses
- Monthly – 37 responses
- Weekly – 29 responses
- Daily – 17 responses

4.2.4 Project Hotline

The toll-free project hotline (1-877-I95-VIEW) supplements the project website as an option for those without internet access or for those who prefer audio information. The project hotline includes a Spanish language option. All calls to the hotline have been responded to, as appropriate, and documented for use in evaluating project alternatives. As of October 2011, 12 calls have been made to the project hotline. As of October 2011, twelve calls have been received by the hotline. The most common statements made on the hotline were opposition to tolls on I-95 and requests for additional information on the project (four calls each).

4.2.5 Website and Social Media Applications

4.2.5.1 Website (www.Driving95.com)

With close to 314,000 hits since its April 2010 launch (as of September 2011), the **Driving 95: What's Your View** website is a one-stop source for all online project community outreach. The website is updated with recent project information, upcoming meetings, project findings, and ongoing opportunities for outreach and communication directly through the website and through social media applications accessible via the home page. A Spanish language translation option is provided.

4.2.5.2 Twitter (www.twitter.com/driving95)

With close to 140 followers (as of September 2011), the Driving95 Twitter feed has become a real-time resource for project updates. Linked to Facebook and YouTube, project updates are distributed to all followers, including detailed public meeting information, diverse public comments from project stakeholders (including those for and against the project), and ongoing dialogues with followers.

4.2.5.3 Facebook (www.facebook.com/driving95)

With close to 100 fans (as of September 2011), the Driving95 Facebook page not only provides the real-time updates available via Twitter, but also provides detailed follow-up information and public meeting findings, including links to videos (see YouTube below), automatic re-postings of Facebook updates to the Driving 95 Twitter feed, public meeting photos, maps, and driving95.com links to specific findings.

4.2.5.4 YouTube (www.youtube.com/driving95)

YouTube is an important medium to distribute informational videos and related visual information about the Driving 95 public outreach effort, and all updates to the YouTube page are linked automatically to the Driving 95 Twitter feed. The YouTube video features Transportation Secretary Gene Conti asking for participation in the I-95 project and directing viewers to the project website. As of October 25, 2011, the channel had 792 views and the total upload views were 246.

4.2.5.5 Media Coverage

The project team has conducted interviews with media outlets and the I-95 corridor has received extensive media coverage. Articles covering the I-95 project include the following:

- Fayetteville Observer – 4/1/10 – DOT to consider improvements to I-95
- Fayetteville Observer – 7/24/10 – Behind the wheel: states taking heavy tolls on roads
- Fayetteville Observer – 9/1/10 – DOT seeks input on I-95
- Johnstonian News – 8/27/10 – Tolls may be coming to I-95
- Land Line Magazine – 3/30/10 – North Carolina discusses I-95 as a toll road
- Land Line Magazine – 8/19/10 – North Carolina I-95 proposal includes tolling
- News 14 Carolina – 8/19/10 – I-95 becoming a toll road becomes a closer reality
- Raleigh News and Observer – 6/13/10 – Talk of I-95 tolls revives

- Raleigh News and Observer – 6/15/10 – Toll talk
- Project Finance International – 4/1/10 – PPPs are possible for NC interstate
- Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald – 1/21/10 – I-95: Commerce lifeblood under microscope
- Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald – 3/28/10 – What makes you crazy about driving on, living near the interstate? NCDOT seeks public input for I-95 improvement study
- Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald – 6/20/10 – Potential impact is high for Valley businesses – tolling takes focus
- Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald – 8/17/10 – Focusing on the I-95 corridor study – Citizens share ideas, opinions on repairs, funding
- Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald – 8/17/10 – Valley leaders move to fight tolling
- Roanoke Rapids Spin – 8/18/10 – KapStone says no to tolling
- Rocky Mount Telegram – 4/1/10 – I-95 study seeks input from residents
- Rocky Mount Telegram – 8/17/10 – Rehab in store for Interstate 95
- Rocky Mount Telegram – 8/21/10 – Eastern North Carolina should say no to toll roads
- Smithfield Herald – 8/18/10 – State wants input on I-95 – To pay for improvements, highway could become toll road
- Smithfield Herald – 8/25/10 – Toll road has few fans
- The Robesonian – 4/2/10 – Advice sought on I-95 repairs
- The Robesonian – 8/30/10 – DOT holds meetings for Interstate 95 input
- Toll Roads News – 3/30/10 – North Carolina tolling I-95 being studied
- Wilson Times – 4/3/10 – Upgrading I-95: Study could lead to big changes for interstate
- Wilson Times – 4/3/10 – State on right course so far with I-95 changes
- WRAL – 8/18/10 – Meeting held in Rocky Mount on future of I-95.