

**GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY  
POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
Friday July 28, 2023, 10:30 AM Hybrid Meeting  
Waccamaw Library**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Hon. Bob Hellyer, Surfside Beach  
Mr. Louis Morant [Mr. Bob Anderson]  
Mr. Tony Cox, SCDOT Commissioner  
Mr. Gary Loftus, Horry County  
Rep. Lee Hewitt (Chairman)  
Mr. Johnny Gardner [Mr. Tyler Servant]  
Hon. Carol Jayroe, Georgetown  
Mr. Randall Thompson, Brunswick County  
Hon. Walt Eccard, Shallotte  
Hon. Debbie Smith, Ocean Isle Beach  
Hon. Dave Bounviri, Briarcliffe Acres

**STUDY TEAM/TAC MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr. Stacey Johnson, SCDOT  
Mr. Mark Hoeweler  
Ms. Marla Watson, SCDOT  
Mr. Andy Markunas  
Ms. Caitlin Melvin, NCDOT  
Mr. Lyle Lee, SCDOT  
Mr. Chad Kimes, NCDOT  
Mr. Kevin Blayton  
Ms. Michelle Howes, NCDOT  
Mr. Jason Werner  
Ms. Elizabeth Tucker  
Mr. Brandon Harrelson  
Mr. David Gray

**EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT**

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Mr. Charles Swenson  
~~Mr. Brett McCutchan~~  
Mr. Al Jordan  
Ms. Erin Porter, SCDOT  
Mr. Tom Martin

## **Adoption of the Agenda**

Chairman Lee Hewitt called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM. It was noted that a quorum was present.

Chairman Hewitt called for a vote to adopt the meeting agenda. **All members present voted in favor.**

## **Adoption of Minutes from March 31, 2023**

The minutes from the March 31, 2023, GSATS Policy Committee meeting were presented for approval. Chairman Hewitt called for a vote to approve the minutes. **Mr. Tyler Servant moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Bob Anderson seconded. All members present voted in favor.**

## **Public Comment**

Chairman Hewitt asked if there were any members of the public who signed up to address the committee during the public comment portion of the meeting. Mr. Tom Martin introduced himself. He recounted that he moved to the Waccamaw Neck in 2020 after retiring from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation. After arriving, he became enthralled in the natural beauty of the area and volunteered to clean up litter along the Pawleys Island causeways and the US 17 bridges to Georgetown. He then lamented how long it takes for local transportation improvements to be completed. Mr. Martin concluded by suggesting that the entrances to ~~Huntington Beach State Park be relocated to their original location because they create traffic~~ congestion during events and it is dangerous for vehicles to be making a left turn at that intersection, especially if the vehicle turning is pulling a camper. Chairman Hewitt thanked Mr. Martin for speaking and agreed that making a left turn into Huntington Beach State Park can be hazardous. He added that it is admirable that Mr. Martin volunteers to pick up litter along US 17.

## **Adoption of PM 2 and PM 3**

Chairman Hewitt invited Ms. Erin Porter, Chief Asset Performance Manager at SCDOT Office of Planning, to present PM2 and PM3. Ms. Porter stated that Performance Measure (PM) 2 and PM 3 are SCDOT performance measures that are part of the Asset Management Plan and focus on pavement, bridge quality, reliability, and freight movement. Mr. Hoeweler noted that the Study Team has reviewed the measures and approved them. **Mr. Servant moved to adopt PM 2 and PM 3. Mr. Anderson seconded. All members present voted in favor.**

## **Projects Update (SCDOT)**

Mr. Stacey Johnson, Assistant Program Manager with SCDOT, provided an update on the status of current and upcoming projects in the region. Of particular note are the following:

- The **US 501 SB** widening project is currently under construction and will likely be complete in the fall of 2023.
  - Construction of the **S-57 and S-111** intersection improvement is complete and only punch-list items remain.
  - The **US 17 widening from Shetland to Backgate** interchange project was let in November of 2022, but was rejected due to high cost. The staging for the construction will be revised to potentially lower the cost and it will be re-let either at the end of 2023 or in early 2024.
  - The **Tournament Boulevard and McDowell Shortcut** intersection project was re-let in April of 2023. Construction has not started yet. It is scheduled to be completed on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.
  - Right-of-way acquisition for the **Riverwood Drive and Old Kings Highway** intersection project is underway. It is scheduled to be let to construction in December of 2023.
  - Right-of-way plans for the **US 17 and 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue South** intersection improvement in North Myrtle Beach are underway.
  - The **Murrells Inlet I2I** multipurpose path is scheduled to be let to construction in November of 2023.
  - Right-of-way acquisition for the **US 501 corridor improvements** is underway. It is scheduled to be let to construction in the next few months.
  - The **SC 9 widening east of Loris** project was let to construction in February of 2023. Construction is expected to start next week.
  - Construction of the **US 701 North of Loris** widening project is underway.
  - Construction plans for the **US 701 North of Conway** widening project are being finalized. It is scheduled to be let to construction in a few months.
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- Right-of-way acquisition for the **Forestbrook Road widening** project is underway. It is scheduled to be let to construction in late summer of 2024.
  - Construction of the **Fred Nash Boulevard widening and extension** project is underway.
  - Right-of-way acquisition for the **US 501 Realignment in Myrtle Beach** project is underway. It is scheduled to be let to construction in January of 2024.
  - Right-of-way acquisition for the **Conway Perimeter Phase II** project is underway. It is scheduled to be let to construction in spring of 2024.
  - Right-of-way acquisition for the **US 17 Business Intersections in Garden City** project is underway. It is scheduled to be let to construction in the fall of 2024.
  - The draft EIS for the **Carolina Bays Parkway extension** is currently under review. An in-depth discussion of the project with NCDOT officials will occur at the next policy committee meeting on September 22.

Mr. Anderson asked for an update on the SELL project. Mr. Johnson stated that SCDOT has analyzed several corridor alternatives and is now working with the Army Corps of Engineers to determine what permits would be needed. Mr. Anderson inquired what the deadlines were for project milestones. Mr. Johnson replied that the EIS could possibly be signed at the end of 2026. Mr. Anderson asked when it might be completed. Mr. Johnson responded that the earliest possible completion year is 2030, but issues with funding and litigation can cause delays. Mr. Anderson

commented that with the population growth of the coastal areas, the need for another evacuation route is paramount and a completion date of 2030 is simply unacceptable. Mr. Hewitt asked what the cost estimate of the I2I project was. Mr. Johnson responded that GSATS is providing \$639,000 of TAP funds and SCDOT is paying for its match. The original proposal was for the path to run from the marina to the Wachesaw Road roundabout to US 17 to US 17 Business which was estimated to cost \$1.1 million in 2021. Since then, prices have escalated, and the project was forced to be further phased. Phase 2A, the portion from the park to the roundabout, and Phase 2B, the portion from the roundabout to the marina, will be built. The start date of Phase 2C has not yet been determined. Ms. Carol Jayroe expressed concern about the Black River Road widening since the front yards of houses along the road will be taken and several old live oak trees would be removed. She then asked if there was enough traffic on the road to even warrant the project. Mr. Hoeweler replied that the project is not an SCDOT project and was proposed several years ago by the City of Georgetown on behalf of Tideland Hospital to accommodate their new entrances. Mr. Anderson asked if the right-of-way for the project had already been bought. Mr. Johnson responded that part of only two parcels remain: the church and the business. It is possible to redesign the project again to minimize the impacts, but another public hearing would be needed. Ms. Jayroe noted that the City of Georgetown would have to help pay for the relocation of utilities for the project and they do not have funds to do so.

### **Projects Update (NCDOT)**

Chairman Hewitt invited Ms. Michelle Howes to present an update of NCDOT projects. Ms. Howes, the Corridor Development Engineer at NCDOT's Division 3 office, introduced herself and indicated that she is anticipating the draft EIS for the Carolina Bays Parkway extension to be signed by FHWA by late 2023 or early 2024. The public hearing will then be held at some point in early 2024. The next step is to select the least environmentally damaging practical alternative. Alternatives 4 and 4A have been determined as having the least environmental impact. Ms. Howes concluded by noting that a new contractor has resumed construction of the Hickman Road and US 17 intersection improvement project and it is expected to be completed in October of 2023.

Mr. Tony Cox noted that he receives questions about the Carolina Bays Parkway extension almost daily and asked if NCDOT has secured funding for the project yet. Ms. Howes replied that she did not have any information about that and will send him information later. She then noted that an extensive update on the project will occur at the September 22<sup>nd</sup> Policy Committee meeting. Mr. Walt Eccard lamented that NCDOT has not been very transparent about funding which is embarrassing. Ms. Catlin Melvin assured the committee that the Carolina Bays Parkways extension is NCDOT Division 3's top priority and creative efforts are underway to ensure that it will be funded as soon as possible.

Below is a summary submitted by Mr. Johnson of all other projects within the GSATS Study Area.

### **GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY**

MARCH 31, 2023

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

PROJECT STATUS REPORT

GSATS PROJECTS

**US 501 Southbound Widening**

Descr: Widening US 501 southbound from two to three lanes from Carolina Bays Parkway to Gardner Lacy Rd., a distance of approximately 2.0 miles.

Status: Project is under construction.

**US 17 Widening (Shetland to Backgate Interchange)**

Descr: Widening US 17 from four to six lanes from Shetland Lane to Backgate Interchange, a distance of approximately 1.5 miles.

Status: Project was rejected from the November 2022 Letting. With slight design modifications, project will re-Let Early 2024.

**Black River Road Widening**

Descr: Widening Black River Rd. to three lanes from Willow Bank Road to Landgrave Street, a distance of less than 0.5 mile.

Status: The right-of-way phase of work is underway.

**Tournament Boulevard and McDowell Shortcut (Round 3 Intersection Improvement)**

Descr: Intersection Improvement at Tournament Blvd. and McDowell Shortcut in Horry County.

Status: Project was awarded April 2023. Waiting on Contractor to mobilize and begin work.

**Riverwood Dr. & Old Kings Hwy (Round 3 Intersection Improvement)**

Descr: Intersection Improvement at Riverwood Dr. and Old Kings Hwy. in Georgetown County.

Status: Final plans are being prepared.

**US 17 & 27<sup>th</sup> Ave (Round 3 Intersection Improvement)**

Descr: Intersection Improvement at US 17 BUS (North Kings Hwy.) and 27<sup>th</sup> Ave. North in Horry County

Status: Right-of-Way plans are being developed.

### **Enhancements**

Descr: Enhancements at various locations in the GSATS study area.

Status: Specific information is presented below for all projects currently under development:

River Oaks Multiuse Path

Project is waiting to be let to construction.

Little River Neck Road Shared-use Path

Project is under construction.

Murrells Inlet I2I Multi-purpose Path

Final construction plans being developed.

### **NON-GUIDESHARE PROJECTS**

#### **Carolina Bays Parkway (SC-31) Extension to NC State Line (RIDE III)**

Descr: Extension of the Carolina Bays Parkway from its current terminus at SC Route 9 across the North Carolina state line to US 17. The proposed project is a new location, multilane freeway facility.

Status: Various environmental and engineering studies are underway which will be utilized to narrow down the reasonable alternatives to a preferred alignment. The public hearing is scheduled for early 2024.

#### **US 501 Corridor Improvements (RIDE III)**

Descr: Widen US 501 from Gardner Lacy to SC 544 Interchange. Widening the existing 4-lane section to 6 lanes and improve signalized intersections with additional turn lanes and storage lengths.

Status: Final Plans are being developed.

#### **SC Highway 9 Widening (East of Loris) (RIDE III)**

Descr: Widen SC 9 for approximately 1.25 miles beginning east of Loris where the current 4-lane section terminates and extends to SC-66 (SC Highway 66); traffic analyses will determine the typical section for capacity and safety improvements along the corridor.

Status: Project Let to Construction February 14, 2023.

### **US 701 Widening (North of Conway) (RIDE III)**

Descr: Widen existing US Highway 701 North of Conway in Horry County from the intersection of SC 319 to the intersection of SC 22. The length of the project is approximately 4.3 miles. The proposed design includes widening US 701 North to a five (5) lane section and including bike/pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks and wider travel lanes where feasible.

Status: Final plans are being developed.

### **Forestbrook Road Widening (RIDE III)**

Descr: Widen Forestbrook Road (S-137) to a five lane section from US 501 to Dick Pond Road (S-616) with associated improvements to Dick Pond Road.

Status: The right-of-way phase is underway.

### **Fred Nash Boulevard Widening and Extension (RIDE III)**

Descr: Widen Fred Nash Boulevard to a three lane section and extend the roadway from its current termini to a proposed intersection with Harrelson Boulevard. Improvements will include bicycle facilities.

Status: ~~Project is under construction.~~

### **US 17 BUS Intersections in Garden City (RIDE III)**

Descr: Intersection Improvements to the following four (4) intersections along US 17 Business in Garden City:

1. US 17 Business and Inlet Square Boulevard and Mt. Gilead Road
2. US 17 Business and Atlantic Avenue
3. US 17 Business and Garden City Connector
4. US 17 Business and Tadlock Drive

Status: The right-of-way phase of work is underway.

### **US 701 Widening (North of Loris) (RIDE III)**

Descr: Widen US 701 for approximately 1.75 miles from Holly Street to SC Highway 9. A traffic analysis will determine the typical section for capacity and safety improvements along the corridor.

Status: Project is under construction.

### **US 501 Realignment (Myrtle Beach) (RIDE III)**

Descr: Realign US Highway 501 from Broadway Street (local) to 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue North (local) in the City of Myrtle Beach.

Status: The right-of-way phase of work is underway and final plans are being developed.

### **Conway Perimeter Road Phase II (RIDE III)**

Descr: New Location 4-lane divided roadway west of Conway connecting US 378 at El Bethel Road to US 701.

Status: The right-of-way phase of work is underway.

### **Southern Evacuation Lifeline (SELL) (RIDE III)**

Descr: New Location freeway from US 501 at SC 22 to US 17 near the Horry/Georgetown County Line. RIDE III funding only includes the Environmental Document and purchase of some right-of-way based on final alignment determined through the Federal Record of Decision (ROD).

Status: Efforts are underway to obtain the data necessary to perform the preliminary environmental studies and design for the project.

## **TIP Changes**

Chairman Hewitt invited Mr. Hoeweler to present the TIP Changes. Mr. Hoeweler described the TIP changes. The cost increase of the Tournament Boulevard and McDowell Shortcut intersection improvement to \$12.6 million has been incorporated into the TIP budget. The cost of the Shetland to Backgate widening project increased by \$9 million. It is anticipated that GSATS will receive an additional \$3.8 million in guideshare funding per year from SCDOT, which is proportional to the MPO's increase in population. This has also been incorporated into the budget. Mr. Hoeweler concluded by noting that current projects are now essentially being funded with future funding. Mr. Anderson inquired why the cost of the projects increased so much. Mr. Johnson replied that material and labor costs have increased exponentially rather than linearly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that projects in Horry County also have very few bidders. Mr. Servant asked if there was a way to increase the number of bidders. Mr. Cox replied that SCDOT is trying to recruit contractors from other states and that projects in Columbia are also more expensive than they were in the past. Mr. Hoeweler was happy to report that an additional \$3 million has been added to the budget from past projects being completed under budget. He then noted that he received input on the budget from the Study Team and will complete the TIP changes by the next Policy Committee meeting.



### **Proposed Study Area Boundary Change**

Chairman Hewitt invited Mr. Hoeweler to present the proposed study area boundary change. Mr. Hoeweler, who provided attendees with a map of changes, stated that GSATS staff expanded the study area boundary around Conway and the SC 9 corridor to accommodate new urban areas and expanded the boundary around Georgetown to be more in-line with Census block group boundaries. Mr. Cox asked if the study area boundary was also expanded in the North Carolina portion of the MPO as well since it was not visible on the map. Mr. Hoeweler responded that there was a massive expansion in North Carolina that encompasses several municipalities along the coast including Southport and Oak Island. Meetings about the expansions are now being held with the leaders of those municipalities.

**Mr. Servant moved to approve of the study area boundary change as presented. Mr. Anderson seconded. All committee members voted in favor.**

### **Safe Streets 4 All Grant**

Chairman Hewitt invited Mr. Hoeweler to present the Census Update. Mr. Hoeweler described the status of the Safe Streets for All Grant. Both GSATS and the City of North Myrtle Beach applied for the grant and both applications were combined. The grant was awarded. Mr. Hoeweler concluded by noting that it will focus on addressing bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries, which is a major problem. Mr. Servant asked how much funding the grant will provide. Mr. Hoeweler replied that the grant will provide \$750,000 to develop an action plan and additional funds will be received in the future to implement projects outlined in the action plan.


### **MTP Update**

Chairman Hewitt invited Mr. Hoeweler to present the MTP Update. Mr. Hoeweler stated that the MTP update is proceeding on schedule to meet its November deadline and that another round of public hearings will occur in September. He added that the meetings will be held in Shallotte, Conway, North Myrtle Beach, and Pawleys Island on September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> with a session in the morning and a session in the afternoon.

### **Adjourn**

With no further discussion Chairman Hewitt called for an adjournment. **All members present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 11:20 AM.**

Respectfully Submitted,

  
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GSATS Chairman, Rep. Lee Hewitt

10/16/23  
Date