

**Third Infantry Division Highway Corridor Study**

Expert Working Group Kick-off Meeting  
 September 16, 2010, 8:00 am – 12:00 pm  
 FHWA GA Division Office, Atlanta, Georgia

**Attendees:** (see attached sign-in sheet for individual names)

<b>Non-Federal EWG Members</b>	<b>Federal EWG Members</b>
Augusta-Richmond Co. Planning Commission Cleveland MPO Coastal Region MPO Georgia Department of Community Affairs Georgia DOT Knoxville Regional TPO North Carolina DOT Tennessee DOT WaysSouth/Stop I-3	Appalachian Regional Commission Eastern Federal Lands EPA Region 4 FHWA GA Division FHWA NC Division (video) FHWA TN Division (video) National Park Service, Southeast Region US Army Corps of Engineers US Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region US Forest Service, Southern Region
<b>Project Team</b>	
FHWA HQ ICF International Wilbur Smith Associates	

The initial meeting of the Expert Working Group for the Third Infantry Division Highway Corridor Study was held on September 16, 2010, from 8:00am to 12:00pm at the FHWA Georgia Division office in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the project team and members of the Expert Working Group (EWG); discuss the role of the EWG and establish expectations; provide an overview of the project history, scope of work, and schedule; and discuss the preliminary project study area boundary and control points, public involvement plan, and data collection. The following is a summary of the discussion topics, questions, and comments.

**Greeting and Introductions**

FHWA contracted with consultants ICF, Inc. and Wilbur Smith Associates (the ICF Team) to conduct the Corridor Study. John Mettille, Project Manager for the ICF Team, welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the other members of the project team to introduce themselves, which included Stefan Natzke (FHWA Task Monitor), Beverly Bowen (ICF Project Manager), Michelle Maggiore (WSA Deputy PM), Martin Weiss (Technical Advisor to the ICF Team), and Meredith Tredeau (meeting support). The members of the EWG then went around the table and introduced themselves. Non-Federal representatives included the Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission, Cleveland Urban Area MPO, Coastal Region MPO, Georgia DOT, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, North Carolina DOT, Tennessee DOT, and WaysSouth (formerly the Stop I-3 Coalition). Federal representatives included FHWA Headquarters, FHWA Resource Center, FHWA Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee Divisions, Appalachian Regional Commission, FHWA Eastern Federal Lands, EPA Region 4, National Park Service Southeast Region, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region, and US Forest Service Southern Region (see attached sign-in sheet).

### **Role of Expert Working Group**

John Mettille discussed the purpose and roles of the EWG, which include attending meetings, reviewing data, sharing information, and making recommendations. The meetings will be closed meetings, but meeting minutes will be available on the FHWA project website ([www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/sec1927corridors.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/sec1927corridors.htm)). The input and recommendations of the EWG will be included in a report at the end of the study process.

### **Project Overview – History and Statutory Basis**

Martin Weiss, a retired FHWA planner, provided an overview of the project history and statutory basis:

The project was initially identified in standalone bills in 2004, before being enacted in the 2005 SAFETEA-LU legislation. SAFETEA-LU included earmarks to study two corridors, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Highway and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Highway. Meetings were held in late 2005/early 2006 between FHWA, GDOT, and representatives of the Georgia congressional delegation to discuss the scope of the study and who would lead it. The parties agreed that FHWA would lead the studies.

The statutory basis is to carry out a study and submit a report to Congress on the necessary steps and costs to complete a new route from Savannah, Georgia to Knoxville, Tennessee by way of Augusta, Georgia.

### **Project Overview – Approach, Schedule, and Overarching Principles**

John Mettille presented the study approach, key milestones/schedule, and overarching principles, as described below.

Generally, the approach will consist of defining the study area and alternative alignments based on preliminary design criteria and EWG input. Analysis of the alignments (using a GIS-based alternative alignment tool) and cost estimating will occur in the fall of 2010. A report to Congress to document the necessary steps (including potential impacts/fatal flaws to consider) and costs to complete the highway is to be prepared during the spring of 2011. Recommendations will be made to FHWA concerning whether to undertake optional related sub-studies.

For the study, the corridor is divided into segments: Savannah to Augusta, Augusta to Lavonia, and Lavonia to Knoxville. Four alternative alignments per segment will be evaluated, except for the Lavonia to Knoxville segment, which will also evaluate one additional alternative that does not go through the GSMNP (5 total for this segment). At least one alternative in each segment will include Interstate-level design standards and another using significant portions of existing highways.

The study is divided into the following 11 primary tasks:

1. Kickoff Meeting
2. Inventories
3. EWG
4. Project website

5. Control points
6. Public involvement
7. Study alignments and design levels
8. Detailed spatial analysis
9. Draft estimates and costs
10. Final Report
11. Recommendations of sub-studies

Overarching principles of the study are

- Respect the statutory language
- Follow the statement of work
- Collaborate with the EWG, agencies, and public
- Consistency with FHWA guidance on cost estimating for major projects
- Consistency with linking planning and environmental processes
- Stay on schedule

States and MPO's are **NOT** required to implement any alternative or conduct further analysis.

#### **Comments/Questions – General Study**

The following is a summary of comments and questions from the EWG about the study and the information presented so far.

1. Ken Wester (ARC): Why Savannah-Augusta-Knoxville? What is the purpose and need for the project?

Martin Weiss: Possibly economic development, but the driving force and goal of the original proponents is uncertain.

2. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): Want to reiterate Ken Wester's (ARC) comment. Need to develop a problem statement, or why bother spending money on linking planning/NEPA?
3. Jamie Higgins (EPA): The purpose and need drives the alternatives. What is the end product of this process?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): A report to Congress, a menu of options that shows costs of alignments.

4. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Where will the extra/left over money (of the \$1.3 million) go?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): Into Phase/Tier 2. The funding for the first phase is \$400,000 (not \$1.3 million). The approach follows the statutory language. This phase of the study can be thought of as providing the denominator of a benefit/cost ratio.

5. Ken Wester (ARC): Isn't benefit tied back to purpose and need?

Martin Weiss: Benefits are decisions after Step 11.

6. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Just providing a report to Congress? They don't have to do anything with it?

Martin Weiss: It would depend on the outcome.

7. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Didn't it evolve out of the States?

Martin Weiss: Correct.

8. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): Will the report include the cost to upgrade existing Interstates? If so, the study area would need to be expanded.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The study will not be looking solely at building new freeway. One of the steps will be defining the study area and control points.

9. Lewis Grimm (EFL): The study area as shown includes four States; who is the South Carolina representation?

John Mettille (ICF Team): South Carolina has indicated they would like to be involved by being kept informed of the study progress. SCDOT and FHWA SC are not members of the EWG.

10. Paul DeCamp (Augusta-Richmond Co.): The Augusta MPO is bi-State, including a portion of South Carolina.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): More on the relationship between the states and the Feds – Congress does not compel States to do anything; the decision rests with the States.

11. Paul DeCamp (Augusta-Richmond Co.): The GRIP (Governor's Road Improvement Program) corridor from Savannah to Augusta may have contributed to the project's origin.
12. Matthew Fowler (GDOT): SR 17 from Thompson to north of Toccoa and the Savannah River Corridor are GDOT's priorities. These are rural 2-lanes being widened to 4-lanes.

There were no more comments up to this point, and the EWG paused for a short break.

### **Study Area and Control Points**

Following the break, the meeting resumed with a discussion of the study area. John Mettille presented an initial draft study area map, explaining that it was preliminary and based on the statutory language, which calls for a route from Savannah to Knoxville by way of Augusta. The ICF team will develop the study area with FHWA and the EWG input. Input from the EWG on the study area was sought, e.g., what should it include, what features should be shown on the base map, etc. Definition of the study area will identify areas of traffic influence, and will also affect how public involvement for the project is shaped.

Control points are end points of proposed improvements, and can have sub-points in between. Control points can be cities or other points. Segments between control points have to have independent utility.

#### **Comments/Questions – Study Area and Control Points**

The following is a summary of comments and questions from the EWG about the study area and control points.

1. Bill Farr (FHWA GA): Does the route have to include Lavonia? That limits the alternatives.

John Mettill (ICF Team): The study scope of work references a Lavonia break, but the legislation does not.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): Lavonia was added into the study as a logical point for the consideration of route(s) that avoid the Smoky Mountains.

2. Matthew Fowler (GDOT): How about the control point being broadened to be where the route hits I-85, instead of singling out Lavonia?
3. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Why not make the study area broader? Why does it become narrow at Augusta? A broader area would link better with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Study.

John Mettill (ICF Team): The goal is to keep it broad at this level, and with today's feedback, we will make recommendations to FHWA.

4. Jeff Welch (Knoxville MPO): Is one avoidance alternative for GSMNP the minimum?

John Mettill (ICF Team): Yes.

5. Jeff Welch (Knoxville MPO): There could be several alternatives to avoid the park.

John Mettill (ICF Team): Five alternatives are based on the language from the study scope.

Martin Weiss: We would want to have enough alternatives to have a reasonable basis for follow-up, but not have so many that you'll never finish the study. We want to avoid making it an area or system study, which would not be true to the statute. We want to have flexibility, but stay true to the statute.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The goal is to inform Congress, provide a menu of options for their consideration.

6. Mike Bruff (NCDOT): We feel the study area in North Carolina needs to be expanded to the northeast to include the Asheville/I-40 area. There would be resistance to any alternatives that go through the park. We would also oppose any I-40 alternatives because of rockslide and other issues.

7. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): We would like to see Asheville, Greenville, Columbia, Atlanta, and Chattanooga areas included in the study area – more of a circle than a bow-tie shape.
8. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): Why are you considering any that go through the park?
9. Bill Farr (FHWA GA): Specifying Lavonia as a control point seems to direct the route straight through the park.

Martin Weiss: The purpose of including Lavonia was, as I understand it to focus the study on a corridor.

10. Ben West (EPA): I agree that the study area should be broadened significantly to the east and west beyond Lavonia.
11. Kent Cochran (NPS): I concur with all statements made about the park, and recommend that we strike Lavonia and reword the scope of work to say only consider one alternative that goes through the park (instead of considering only one that avoids it).
12. Jamie Higgins (EPA): There would be public uproar if it goes through the park.
13. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): If economic development at the Savannah port is a potential purpose of this project, the study area should include Charleston as well. Also, add Savannah River Parkway and US 17 to the map, if scale allows.
14. Matthew Fowler (GDOT): I believe the map primarily shows US routes at this scale.
15. Ben West (EPA): County boundaries do not need to be shown on the map.

John Mettelle briefly summarized/recaptured the comments and recommendations made by the EWG so far:

- Broaden to the east and west to include existing Interstates; expand to be more circular
- Reconsider Lavonia as a control point and alternatives through GSMNP
- Show more detail on the map to show the potential of existing routes
- Avoid I-40 (rock slides, etc.)
- Area of impact/influence should include Charleston in terms of economic development

16. Jerry Ziewitz (USFWS): There was some discussion in the Tuesday meeting (for the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment study) about use of existing corridors. New roadway corridors have significantly increased impacts to resources, and FWS would prefer alternatives that consider existing roadway improvements.
17. Bill Farr (FHWA GA): Can the EWG agree that alternatives through the park are not feasible? And recommend that none are considered?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The report to Congress should include at least one.

18. Jamie Higgins (EPA): I think the report should fully explain why alternatives through the park would not be feasible.

John Mettille (ICF Team): Full disclosure of the impacts and costs of all alternatives should be included in the report.

19. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): What about the Section 4(f) implications, requiring the least harm alternative?

Martin Weiss: More than one design as well as more than one route would be evaluated.

20. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): What is the (cost) baseline when considering feasible and prudent? What is a feasible alternative when it comes to avoidance alternatives?

Martin Weiss: This would be addressed post-Task 11 (i.e., in a potential second phase of this project).

John Mettille (ICF Team): Potential fatal flaws would be documented in the report to congress.

21. Ken Wester (ARC): The focus should be on the steps.
22. Jamie Higgins (EPA): So this is a study to determine if we should do a feasibility study?

Martin Weiss: It may not even make it to the NEPA process; and many NEPA documents don't include a B/C analysis.

23. Ken Wester (ARC): Should we make this a more high-level study? Is it necessary to study detailed alternatives now? Could present the range of lowest and highest cost/impact.

Martin Weiss: The project could be a CE or FONSI (e.g., if an alternative followed existing routes and only moderately upgraded the design).

24. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Is there a common/acceptable definition of "route"? Is there a route number available to assign to existing segments that could be combined to become this route?

Martin Weiss: Existing is almost certainly less than new location; AASHTO defines routes as U.S. routes.

25. Jamie Higgins (EPA): It happens often, I-69 for example.
26. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): The feasibility/corridor study should report impediments (and public input, etc., full disclosure) up front as well as costs.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The "steps" aspect of this study would document the impediments of constructing any particular alternative (e.g., 4(f)).

John Mettille (ICF Team): Yes, the report will include fatal flaws/full disclosure.

27. Greg Thomas (Cleveland MPO): The legislative history implies economic development, which could be a route that reduces travel time between Knoxville and Savannah via Augusta?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Travel time evaluation is part of the second phase.

28. Ben West (EPA): Will the report include both tiers/phases?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Task 10 is the final report to Congress (costs and steps to complete). Task 11 is a report on sub-studies to FHWA on whether or not any alternatives should move forward.

29. Ralph Comer (TDOT): How much flexibility is there in city/control point definition, i.e., could it be the census defined MSA/UA boundary?

Martin Weiss: A more specific control point = more precise cost estimate; more flexibility = less precise estimate.

30. Ken Wester (ARC): I think more flexibility/less precision at this stage is more important; detail comes later in the NEPA process.
31. Paul DeCamp (Augusta-Richmond Co.): At the Tuesday meeting, control points were sometimes interchanges; I-16/SR 25; Augusta to I-20 could be a control point; US 1 would tie into the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Corridor (fall line freeway).

John Mettille (ICF Team): So, a non-specified point along I-20 could be the control point, similar to the I-85 recommendation.

32. Mark Wilkes (Coastal MPO): Recommend considering major freight connections; I-16 alone won't do that. Other studies include SR 21 and the Port's Last Mile project.

There were no more comments on the study area or control points. John Mettille requested any other comments or map mark-ups be sent to him.

### **Public Involvement Plan**

John Mettille provided an overview of the public involvement plan for the study, as summarized below:

It is a living, dynamic document. The initial draft is underway, and identifies the purpose and key messages (engagement, transparency).

Key stakeholders have been identified. MPO's were consulted about stakeholder groups, successful vehicles for engagement, etc. Elements of the initial plan include the EWG, project website, newsletters, and media/announcements.

EWG input on the plan is needed to make sure the messages and strategies are right.

### **Comments/Questions – Public Involvement Plan**

1. Ralph Comer (TDOT): We need to dispel rumors that the corridor has already been determined. (Shared a recent news article.)

Martin Weiss: Do you all send out public affairs announcements? Would standard press release templates for the project be helpful?

2. Paul DeCamp (Augusta-Richmond Co.): Consistency among the group is important.
3. Jeff Welch (Knoxville MPO): The message to the media needs to be consistent.
4. Ben West (EPA): Is the purpose of the public involvement to seek input, or just inform? What types of questions would be asked/what input are you looking for?

John Mettill (ICF Team): Initially to inform, and then engage as we move forward; want a two-way, transparent process. One option would be an on-line survey for taking comments.

Martin Weiss: The public can help provide input on costs; they know about local resources, for example, pending National Register nominations, planned business parks, i.e., things that could increase or decrease the costs; however it does not always happen that this type of information is elicited.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The scope of work calls for input on alignments, design levels, whether or not to go to Phase 2.

5. Ken Wester (ARC): Be careful and think about what it is you want to get; think through messages and potential questions the public may ask.

John Mettill (ICF Team): We have a P.I. firm on the team, Planning Communities, who will lead the process.

6. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Are you having public meetings? At various locations?

John Mettill (ICF Team): Yes, at the milestones Stefan mentioned, and they will be coordinated with the EWG.

7. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): I recommend establishing a protocol for determining meeting location, e.g., a minimum driving time to location.
8. Bill Farr (FHWA GA): Is it too early for open houses? Should they come later in the process? The study might get away from us.
9. Jamie Higgins (EPA): The public/media has already grabbed hold of the story.
10. Bill Farr (FHWA GA): The Tuesday group decided against public meetings; preferred a speaker's bureau.
11. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): It's not clear on what the contract deliverables are, but perhaps the public involvement that's proposed is too robust.

John Mettille (ICF Team): The deliverable to Congress includes cost to complete and steps, as well as input from the EWG and public at the two milestones. The purpose of the PIP is to define what involvement is appropriate to get the information we need. Education about the high-level study process is important. What I'm hearing is concern about what the right level of proactiveness is and finding the right balance.

12. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): FHWA should consider whether the scope of work should include public involvement. This is FHWA's study.
13. Mike Bruff (NCDOT): Holding meetings for projects not in the State's long range plan would not be prudent.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): This is good input; we want the PIP to be consistent with the States' goals.

14. Ken Wester (ARC): I recommend consulting with the State FHWA Division Offices.
15. Ben West (EPA): In reference to the problem statement – if we're trying to substantiate the need, it would make sense to reach out to the public and stakeholder groups, such as freight carriers. Also suggest involving the Cherokee Nation.
16. Mark Wilkes (Coastal MPO): There should be a lot of data available about freight movement.

John Mettille (ICF Team): the Eastern Band of Cherokees has been identified as a major stakeholder.

17. John Sullivan (FHWA NC): We can provide support for tribal coordination as needed.
18. Jeff Welch (Knoxville MPO): Suggest trying to keep the public involvement low key. Will the PIP be shared with the EWG?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Yes.

19. Greg Thomas (Cleveland MPO): I would be hesitant to go to the public without knowing what our problem statement is. I also think you should consider keeping it low key, but seek input of what the range of issues is.
20. Jim Grode (Waysouth): As a representative for the public, I would prefer a robust public involvement program.
21. Jamie Higgins (EPA): I agree, and also request that EPA is made aware of the public's input.

John Mettille (ICF Team): Stefan and I will be the points of contact for the public.

22. Randy Warbington (USFS): Were congressional champions/proponents for the project identified?

John Mettille (ICF Team): No, and current congressional representatives would like to be involved passively, kept informed.

Michelle Maggiore (ICF Team): Former Congressman Max Burns, who was the original author of the legislation, was contacted by the ICF team, and he indicated that it was now the responsibility of those currently in the congressional district, and suggested they be contacted.

23. Mark Wilkes (Coastal Region MPO): This project is sounding like an orphan.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The U.S. DOT cannot invite post-enactment statements of congressional intent. We favor a study guided by a technically expert group.

24. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): I've never seen any media coverage to show support.

Martin Weiss: Projects are not born in a vacuum; there probably were advocates/champions in the constituency, e.g., Chambers of Commerce, who can be intimidated in the face of public opposition.

25. Mike Bruff (NCDOT): The primary deliverable should be a problem/purpose and need statement that the EWG agrees with.

John Mettille summarized the input related to public involvement that had been heard so far:

- Keep it low-key
- Make it robust
- Seek input on issues/problems
- Involve stakeholder groups (freight, etc.)

26. Jerry Ziewitz (USFWS): What is the origin of the name "3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Highway"?

27. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): The 2004 bill included language about troop transport, which was omitted in SAFETEA-LU.

### **Data and Reports Inventory**

John Mettille provided an overview of the data collection approach for the study:

- The study will be driven by readily available data.
- We'll be reaching out to States and MPO's for data (GIS, previous studies)
- A list of collected data to date will be circulated to the EWG; if something is missing, please advise of the best information to use in evaluating corridors.

### **Closeout**

John Mettille informed the group that the next EWG meeting would be in 2-3 months. The plan is to hold one every three months.

1. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): Are you considering other meeting locations?

John Mettille (ICF Team): We haven't, but could.

2. Jerry Ziewitz (USFWS): I would like to involve some of our field office highway liaisons, perhaps by teleconference.

John Mettille (ICF Team): Shouldn't be a problem.

There were no additional comments from the members of the EWG. John Mettille and Stefan Natzke thanked the group for their time and participation, and the meeting adjourned at 11:30am.