

Assembly PIM #2 – VIDEO #1 of 2 PROJECT INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Script

Slide 1:

Thank you for attending this online public information meeting for the Assembly Street Railroad Separation Project. You are watching the Project Introduction and Overview video, which is one of two videos provided for this online meeting. The other video includes the Project Preliminary Alternatives. These videos and all meeting materials will be available online for comments beginning October 12 through November 11, 2020.

Slide 2: Welcome!

The purpose of this public meeting is to present project information and preliminary alternatives for the Assembly Street rail project and gather input from you. With this video, we will:

- Provide an overview and brief history of the project
- Explain the purpose and need of the project
- Discuss the National Environmental Protection Act, or (NEPA) alternatives process and anticipated schedule,
- And request your input and feedback on these alternatives.

Slide 3: Project History

The Assembly Street Railroad project and related rail studies for the area have been around since 1981 when an Environmental Impact Study was completed as part of the “Columbia Railroad Relocation and Roadway Grade Separation Project.” From this study, four phases of improvement were recommended. This project is currently evaluating Phase 1-A: Assembly Street.

Coordination with agencies, local stakeholders and the public plays a vital role in gaining support and obtaining valuable input and local knowledge for a project. Since the spring of 2018 the project team has met and coordinated numerous times with appropriate state and federal agencies and has held several large and small stakeholder group meetings with local groups.

Please refer to the project website for additional details on the project’s history and previous public engagement.

Slide 4: Project Study Area

The area in which rail and road improvements are being proposed is called the project study area. This project study area encompasses a portion of “the ditch” from Elmwood Avenue to Blossom Street to the north as well as areas south of downtown; from Blossom Street through the Capital City Mill District and USC south toward the Jim Hamilton - LB Owens Airport and Andrews Yard.

Several rail lines crisscross the city for both Norfolk Southern, or NS, which is how it will be referred to going forward, and CSX. NS and CSX share corridors as they

- Enter from West Columbia over the Congaree River; the NS R-Line crosses through downtown, south of Blossom Street across Assembly Street
- Enter the City from Andrews Yard and travel through “the ditch;” the CSX AKA Line parallels Assembly Street near the State Fairgrounds and runs through the Capital City Mill District

- The NS SC Line enters the city from Andrews yard; and the western SC line crosses Assembly Street to meet up with the NS R-Line; the eastern SC line travels east towards Five Points and meets up with the NS R Line near Pickens Street.

Slide 5: Project Purpose

The primary purpose of this project is to implement a transportation solution that would improve vehicular operations in order to alleviate vehicle congestion associated with frequent freight rail movements through the project area.

Secondary purposes of the project include:

- Improving safety by reducing conflict points for all modes of transportation
- Implementing improvements to at-grade rail and road crossings
- Improving mobility for freight by eliminating road and rail crossings, and upgrading special track work and rail infrastructure.

In addition, project goals and objectives include minimizing community and environmental impacts.

Slide 6: Project Need

The need for this project can be summarized by the following factors:

- As trains travel through the project area and block roadway crossings, often for long stretches of time, vehicle congestion and delay increase and mobility decreases.
- Population within the area is expected to increase between 33 and 150 percent between now and 2050, with most of the growth focused in the downtown areas. Population growth, coupled with increase in development, will increase travel demand and, in turn, increase the potential for vehicle delays due to stopping during rail crossings.
- Vehicle traffic waiting for trains to clear an intersection often results in a loss of productive time and increased energy costs.
- As freight rail traffic increases and population and development continue to grow, there is a need to focus on safety within the project area and reduce the risk of collisions and accidents among all users.

Slide 7: Alternative Development and Schedule

An Environmental Assessment is being completed for this project, as federal funds are being used; SCDOT is required to adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (or NEPA) which provides a framework for how to make decisions and ensures that alternatives are thoroughly evaluated and analyzed for potential negative and beneficial impacts.

Anticipated dates for the various project milestones are also shown here. At this point, the data collection has been completed and the project team developed the range of alternatives. These were evaluated against the project purpose and need and whether the alternatives meet the roadway and rail design criteria or are able to be constructed. Alternatives that met these criteria have been carried forward as preliminary alternatives, which is what we are presenting to you today.

After receiving and incorporating your feedback on the preliminary alternatives, further evaluation, with respect to benefits and potential environmental impacts, will be completed to determine the reasonable alternatives.

The reasonable alternatives are then further analyzed in the Environmental Assessment and will be presented back to the public for your input before the selection of a preferred alternative.

Slide 8: Your input is important

We need your input! Please share your comments, ideas or concerns between October 12 and November 11 in any of the following ways.

Complete and submit a comment form for this meeting via the project website at assemblystreetrailproject.com.

Send an email message to info@assemblystreetrailproject.com

Download a comment form from the project website and mail a completed comment form to:
Joey McIntyre
Assembly Street Railroad Separation Project
P.O. Box 191
Columbia, SC 29202-0191

You can also stay up to date on project information by following us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AssemblyStreetRailProject

Please visit **assemblystreetrailproject.com** to review the project information handout, individual alternative exhibits, the interactive map application and provide online comments or print out a project comment form.

Scan this QR code to be automatically taken to the project website; *To scan QR code, open your phone's camera and hover over the image above. A website link will pop up; click on the link to access the project website.*

Upon request, an in-person meeting may be scheduled to discuss the project with the SCDOT Project Manager, Joey McIntyre, by phone (at 803-737-1842) or email (at McIntyreJD@scdot.org), to discuss the project.

You may also contact representatives from the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration. Contacts for these representatives are provided below.

Shane Belcher at FHWA by phone (at 803-253-3187) or email at Jeffrey.Belcher@dot.gov.

Jon Schmidt at FRA by phone (at 617-494-3439) or email at jonathan.schmidt@dot.gov.

Please check out the Preliminary Alternatives video for additional information.