

February 23, 2021

Ms. Desiree Fragoso  
City Administrator  
City of Isle of Palms  
1207 Palm Blvd  
Post Office Box 508  
Isle of Palms, SC 29451

Re: Isle of Palms Connector, Pavement Marking Project

Dear Ms. Fragoso:

I appreciate you and your staff engaging with the South Carolina Department of Transportation to discuss the pavement marking project on the Isle of Palms Connector. Following the dialogue that began between SCDOT staff and the City in mid-January, a draft set of plans were provided to the City, a meeting was held with you and me to discuss the project, and SCDOT staff participated in a virtual meeting hosted by the City. This generated some questions and concerns posed by the City. Below is additional information regarding the purpose and timing of the project, the design considerations and criteria, my conversation with Battalion Chief Hathaway, and additional signs requested by the City.

One of the questions asked by the City was when project development began and the purpose of the project. The timing and purpose of the project is tied to multiple factors that I am happy to share. First, SCDOT has been in the process of implementing a Complete Streets policy to help guide implementation of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in future infrastructure projects. The Complete Streets policy became effective for SCDOT on February 4, 2021. Unfortunately, South Carolina has the highest fatality rate in the nation, and on average there are a thousand fatalities in our state annually. Pedestrian and bicycle fatalities make up sixteen percent of the total fatalities, and are on the rise both in South Carolina and across the country. It is my sincerest hope this policy will help in reducing fatal and serious injury crashes for pedestrians and bicyclists.

You may recall an article about one of these unfortunate fatalities in the Post and Courier last September that involved a bicyclist traveling on the East Coast Greenway. That fatality prompted SCDOT staff to review locations along the Greenway where transportation improvements were planned to ensure existing modal gaps were included in decision making during project development. This review identified that the pavement markings on the Connector were reaching the end of their useful life. Also, since the last pavement marking project, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations were implemented on both ends of the Connector.



It should be noted that the Isle of Palms Connector has been identified in numerous local, regional and national bicycle and pedestrian plans. These include locally the Town of Mt. Pleasant's Comprehensive Plan, the Battery to Beach route from Folly Beach to Isle of Palms; regionally it is identified in the Berkley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Government's Walk Bike Plan; and finally, it is part of the national East Coast Greenway, which runs from Maine to Florida.

In addition, during project development it was found that a municipal water improvement project was going to eliminate pedestrian and bicycle access between Sullivan's Island and Mt. Pleasant for several months this year. Hopefully this fully explains the questions of why this project is taking place. Contrary to speculation by some, the timing of this project is not associated with the parking issue associated with the state-owned highway system on the Isle of Palms.

We have also been asked to explain the engineering judgement used for the design of this project. SCDOT, like all transportation agencies, utilizes the Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) adopted by the Federal Highways Administration when designing signing and marking projects. While this project is in compliance with design guidelines for buffered bike lanes included in the MUTCD, it is important to go into further detail based on the concerns received about emergency responders' use of the existing 10' wide median.

As previously mentioned, the Connector now has pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on both ends of the bridge which cannot be ignored as walking and bicycling are modes of transportation. To accommodate all modes of transportation currently using the Connector, the project will reduce the existing 10' wide median to 4' in width, continue to maintain two travel lanes for motorists, and now have a 3.5' marked buffer, a 4.5' bike lane, and a 5' wide bridge shoulder that pedestrians may utilize. While the median will be reduced by a total of 6', the shoulders are being increased in space to 13' in width that may be used by emergency responders as needed to cross the Connector. In addition, in this new configuration not only will emergency responders have 3' more space, they will no longer have to contend with two way traffic as they currently do utilizing the 10' median.

SCDOT considered several options for incorporating pedestrian and bicycle accommodations to include, only marking one side of the Connector for bicycles and pedestrians. However, there are currently shared use paths on both sides of SC 517 in Mt. Pleasant approaching the Connector. Marking one side of the Connector would require pedestrians and bicyclists to cross multiple lanes of opposing traffic on SC 517 to access the marked side of the Connector. For this reason, the request was ultimately dismissed as it would introduce major crash risks for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists on the Mt. Pleasant side of the Connector where speeds are likely higher.



Ms. Desiree Fragoso  
February 23, 2021  
Page 3

There have been multiple references to an emergency helicopter landing that took place on the Connector several years ago, and how the revised pavement marking plan may impact similar operations in the future. Any event that would require an emergency helicopter landing would result in the bridge being closed to all motorists, bicycles and pedestrians at the emergency landing location. The revised pavement markings will not impede this type of emergency response operation in the future.

City staff did bring forth concerns of visitors parking on the bridge shoulder to take pictures of the skyline which may disrupt emergency response use of the wider shoulders. SCDOT staff has reviewed this request, and will add new signs prohibiting parking on the bridge to assist with emergency response efforts.

In addition, SCDOT has offered to coordinate traffic incident management training with staff from the City, the Town of Mt. Pleasant, and state agencies to enhance planning efforts for emergency response. This training will address how to handle traffic during an event in order to create a safe work area for the first responders to operate.

I trust this information will be helpful. Thank you again for taking the time to express your interest in highway safety in South Carolina.

Sincerely,



Robert E. Perry, P.E.  
Director of Traffic Engineering

REP:mmb

cc: Christy A. Hall, P.E., Secretary of Transportation  
Leland D. Colvin, P.E., Deputy Secretary for Engineering

