

Public Notice

July 31, 2014

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District

Notice of Intent to Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the RiverPort Development and Proposed New Interchange on I-95 in Jasper County, South Carolina and Notice of Scoping Meeting, SAC-2010-00064.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District intends to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to assess the potential social, economic and environmental effects of the proposed construction of a mixed use industrial, commercial and residential development with the potential to impact wetlands near Hardeeville in Jasper County, South Carolina. Associated with this development will be the evaluation of a new interchange on I-95, in the vicinity of mile marker 3 in South Carolina.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Corps published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on August 1, 2014. The purpose of the Notice of Intent is to inform the public that the Corps is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and to announce the location and time of the Public Scoping Meeting. To ensure that all interested parties are notified, this local public notice is also being issued to announce a Public Scoping Meeting on Tuesday, August 19, 2014.

WHAT	Public Scoping Meeting
WHEN	Tuesday, August 19, 2014 <i>Meeting Format:</i> Open House 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Formal Meeting Beginning at 7:00 p.m.
WHERE	Hardeeville City Hall 205 East Main Street Hardeeville, South Carolina 29927 <i>The Open House will be held in the City Council Chambers; The Formal Meeting will be held in the Community Room</i>
WHY	The Corps requests input and comments from the public in order to evaluate in a DEIS, the proposed construction of RiverPort (a mixed-use industrial, commercial and residential development) and new interchange on I-95 in the vicinity of mile marker 3
COMMENT DEADLINE	September 19, 2014 (30 days after the Public Scoping Meeting)

Background: The Corps is evaluating a proposal from Stratford Land, the City of Hardeeville, and Jasper County for a new development, RiverPort, and a new interchange on I-95 (Exit 3) in accordance with Corps regulations and the policies and procedures that are established through NEPA. Based on the available information, the Corps has determined that the RiverPort development and the proposed new interchange on I-95 have the potential to significantly affect the quality of the human environment and therefore warrant the preparation of an EIS. NEPA and the Corps' regulations provide for the use of third party contracts in the preparation of an EIS. The term "third party contract" refers to the preparation of an EIS by a contractor paid by the applicant, but who is selected and supervised by the Corps, as the Federal agency responsible for the preparation of the EIS. The Corps has approved Michael Baker Jr., Inc. (Baker) as the third party contractor in the preparation of an EIS for this project.

NEPA is the “basic national charter for protection of the environment” and it contains provisions that require Federal agencies (the Corps in this case) to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions, and reasonable alternatives to those actions. One of the basic tenets of these regulations is that comprehensive information is made available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made or actions are taken. This information must be of high quality and must contain accurate scientific analysis which is normally documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA), or a more detailed document entitled an EIS. Both of these documents must identify and evaluate the issues that are significant in relation to the action in question. Essential to the completion of the NEPA process are expert agency comments and public input. The purpose of the NEPA process is to help public officials (in this case the Corps) to make informed decisions that are based on an understanding of the environmental consequences and the alternatives available, and to take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment.

As indicated above, the Corps has determined that an EIS is required for the proposed RiverPort development and proposed new interchange on I-95 (Exit 3). The EIS will be prepared in two stages, a Draft EIS (DEIS) and a Final EIS (FEIS). Both of these documents will be made publicly available. A 45-day comment period will follow the circulation of the DEIS and will include a formal Public Hearing. Ultimately, when the Corps is prepared to make a final decision on the application, the agency will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD).

Scoping: One of the first ways that the public can participate in the NEPA process is called scoping. Scoping is an early and open process for determining the types and range of issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS, and for identifying the significant issues related to the proposed action.

In order to ensure that the public and interested stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input, the Corps will hold a Public Scoping Meeting. The purpose of the Public Scoping Meeting is for the public and interested stakeholders to provide input to the Corps on the type and range of issues to be addressed in the EIS, to identify the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts related to the proposed project, and to identify potential alternatives to the proposed project. This meeting is not a Public Hearing nor is it the proper forum to express broad-ranging opinions either for or against the proposed project.

As previously stated, the public’s input is essential to the NEPA process in identifying significant issues, offering relevant information based on personal experience or knowledge, and providing assistance in defining the scope of the EIS. Upon arrival at the Public Scoping Meeting, each attendee will be asked to sign in and indicate whether they would like to make a formal statement at the meeting for the project record. In addition, attendees are welcome to bring written comments or to complete a comment form, which will be provided at the meeting. Written comments will be accepted at the meeting or up to 30 days after the date of the meeting, in this case September 19, 2014. Information on how to submit written comments will be provided at the meeting and below in this Public Notice. Attendees will also be asked if they would like to be included on the Corps mailing list for future project updates and information.

How can you assist the Corps in complying with the letter and spirit of NEPA and be an active participant in the NEPA process?

At the meeting, you are encouraged to offer your input on the issues you think should be evaluated in the EIS. The following topics may help you identify the issues important to you:

- What are the potential impacts of the proposed project?
- What is the scope of the EIS?
- Are there potential alternative locations, layouts, or construction methods available that may have fewer impacts to the public or the environment?
- In what ways do you see the proposed project affecting you, your community, and/or the environment?

- Are there methods of communication which the Corps has not considered, that could keep you better informed about the proposed project or the NEPA process?
- What criteria should the Corps use to choose which alternatives should be fully assessed in the EIS?

NOTE: So that the Corps can hear everyone who wants to provide their input at the Public Scoping Meeting, a time limit will be placed on each speaker. Therefore, if you will be providing oral comments, it is essential that they are concise to ensure that you are able to provide the input that you deem important. Written comments will also be accepted by the Corps through September 19, 2014.

Existing Information. In order to assist you in providing the Corps with your comments and input during the scoping process, the latest information about the proposed project is provided.

1. **Proposed Project.** The project proposed by Stratford Land is to develop the approximately 5,000 acre tract in Hardeeville, SC (Attachment A) as the RiverPort mixed-use residential, commercial and business park/light industrial site. RiverPort will consist of a 1,755-acre business park, 840-acre commercial village, and 2,390-acre mixed use (residential and commercial) village (Attachment B). The Business Park is to be one of the largest logistics and industrial sites in the Southeast. It will handle some of the increased container traffic into the Savannah port resulting from the introduction of the significantly larger post-Panamax Canal ships. As a result of increased traffic projected from this development, the City of Hardeeville and Jasper County propose a new interchange at I-95 that connects with the proposed RiverPort Parkway in the vicinity of mile marker 3 (Attachment C) to accommodate the increased traffic projected to occur. The Business Park and commercial development are projected to provide a significant economic impact to the area by providing thousands of construction jobs during the building phases and over 24,000 permanent jobs by Year 30 of the development.
2. **Issues.** Issues and potential impacts associated with the proposed project that are likely to be given detailed analysis in the DEIS include, but are not necessarily limited to: transportation infrastructure (roadways and railways), waters of the United States, air quality, noise, light, environmental justice, socioeconomics, visual resources/aesthetics, cultural resources, biological resources (including Federally listed threatened or endangered species), land use, water quality, and hazardous waste and materials.
3. **Alternatives.** The alternatives analysis "is the heart of the EIS," which is quoted directly from NEPA regulations. The Corps must evaluate reasonable and practicable alternatives to the projects as proposed by Stratford Land, the City of Hardeeville, and Jasper County, which will avoid and/or minimize effects on the quality of the human environment. By definition, *Reasonable* alternatives are those that are practical or feasible from the technical and economic standpoint and using common sense, rather than simply desirable from the standpoint of the applicant. *Practicable* alternatives are those that are available and capable of being done after taking into consideration cost, existing technology, and logistics in light of overall project purposes.

When determining which alternatives to the applicant's proposal should be rigorously explored and objectively evaluated in the EIS, the Corps will assess at least the following for comparison against the applicant's proposed alternative:

- No Action,
- Alternatives that may result in avoidance and/or minimization of impacts to waters of the U.S., and
- Mitigation measures not included in the proposed action.

The “No Action” alternative means that the proposed activity would not take place. This alternative is used to compare the effects of the proposed project to what would occur if the proposed project were not constructed. Keep in mind that the effects from the proposed project will not be compared to conditions that exist today; the effects will be compared to the projected future conditions. Therefore, a specific period of time in the future will be chosen and projections will be made on what the conditions will be at that time and that is what will be used to compare the proposed project’s effects under the “No Action” alternative.

Of course, every possible alternative cannot be rigorously explored in the EIS. Therefore, the Corps will use a process and evaluation criteria to identify a set of alternatives that represent a range of reasonable, practicable alternatives to be examined in detail in the EIS. Your input on what those criteria should be is requested as part of the scoping process.

4. **Scope.** The scope of the EIS is a term used to define the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts to be considered in an EIS, which evaluates an applicant’s proposed action. There are three types of actions, alternatives, and types of impacts that the Corps must consider in determining the “scope” of an EIS.

Three Types of Actions:

- Connected- closely related
- Cumulative- viewed with other proposed actions
- Similar- common timing or geography

Three (3) types of Alternatives:

- No Action
- Other reasonable courses of action to achieve the project purpose (driven by purpose and need)
- Mitigation Measures (not in the proposed action)

Three (3) primary types of Impacts:

- Direct- caused by the action and occurring at the same time and place
- Indirect- caused by the action but occur later in time or removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable
- Cumulative- additive effects impacting the same resource, but may be caused by different projects

Public Outreach Program. The Corps wants you to remain involved throughout the NEPA process. At present, the following methods are planned to keep you informed and get your input. Therefore, please remember to let the Corps representatives know at the Public Scoping Meeting and/or in your written comments, the method by which you prefer to obtain information and provide input during the process. Also please be sure to sign in at the Scoping Meeting to ensure that the Corps has your contact information for future project updates and information.

- A. *Project Website:* www.riverport-exit3eis.com. Information and updates on the project will be available on the project website. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), descriptions of the proposed project, explanation of terminology, project status, maps, project schedule, meeting announcements, directions to meeting locations, and an overview of the NEPA process are examples of the information that will be available at the project website. Visitors to the website will also be able to register for the project mailing list, sign up for an e-mail notification system, request copies of documents, and submit comments via a standard comment form.

- B. *Public Meetings and Workshops:* If you are a representative of a group or organization that you believe is a stakeholder in the proposed project, please introduce yourself to a Corps representative at the Public Scoping Meeting and/or through written comments following the Meeting. Currently, it is planned that future public meetings and/or hearings will be announced on the project website and through the mailing list.
- C. *Project Updates:* Project Updates will be distributed at certain milestones during the NEPA process in order to update the public on the status of the EIS and the Corps decision-making process. The Project Updates will feature a project status update, articles explaining aspects of NEPA, and updates on studies being performed for the EIS evaluation.
- D. *Special Need:* Should you have special needs (e.g., hearing impaired, language), please contact the Corps at least seven (7) days prior to the Public Scoping Meeting by calling (843) 329-8158 or toll free at (866) 329-8187, or at the mailing address: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District, c/o Shawn Boone, Corps Project Manager, CESAC-RD, 69-A Hagood Avenue, Charleston, South Carolina 29403.

Additional Review and Consultation. Additional review and consultation, which will be incorporated into the preparation of the DEIS, will include, but will not necessarily be limited to, Section 401 of the Clean Water Act; Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultation requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; the Endangered Species Act; and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Contact Information. For further information and/or questions about the proposed project, please contact Shawn Boone, Corps Project Manager, by telephone: (843) 329-8158 or toll free at (866) 329-8187, or by mail at the address provided below. The Corps respectfully requests that comments regarding the proposed RiverPort/Exit3 EIS project and the NEPA process be submitted in one of the following ways:

1. Public Scoping Meeting – Tuesday, August 19, 2014 (refer to Attachment D for directions to the meeting site).
2. Written comments submitted by September 19, 2014 (during public scoping period):

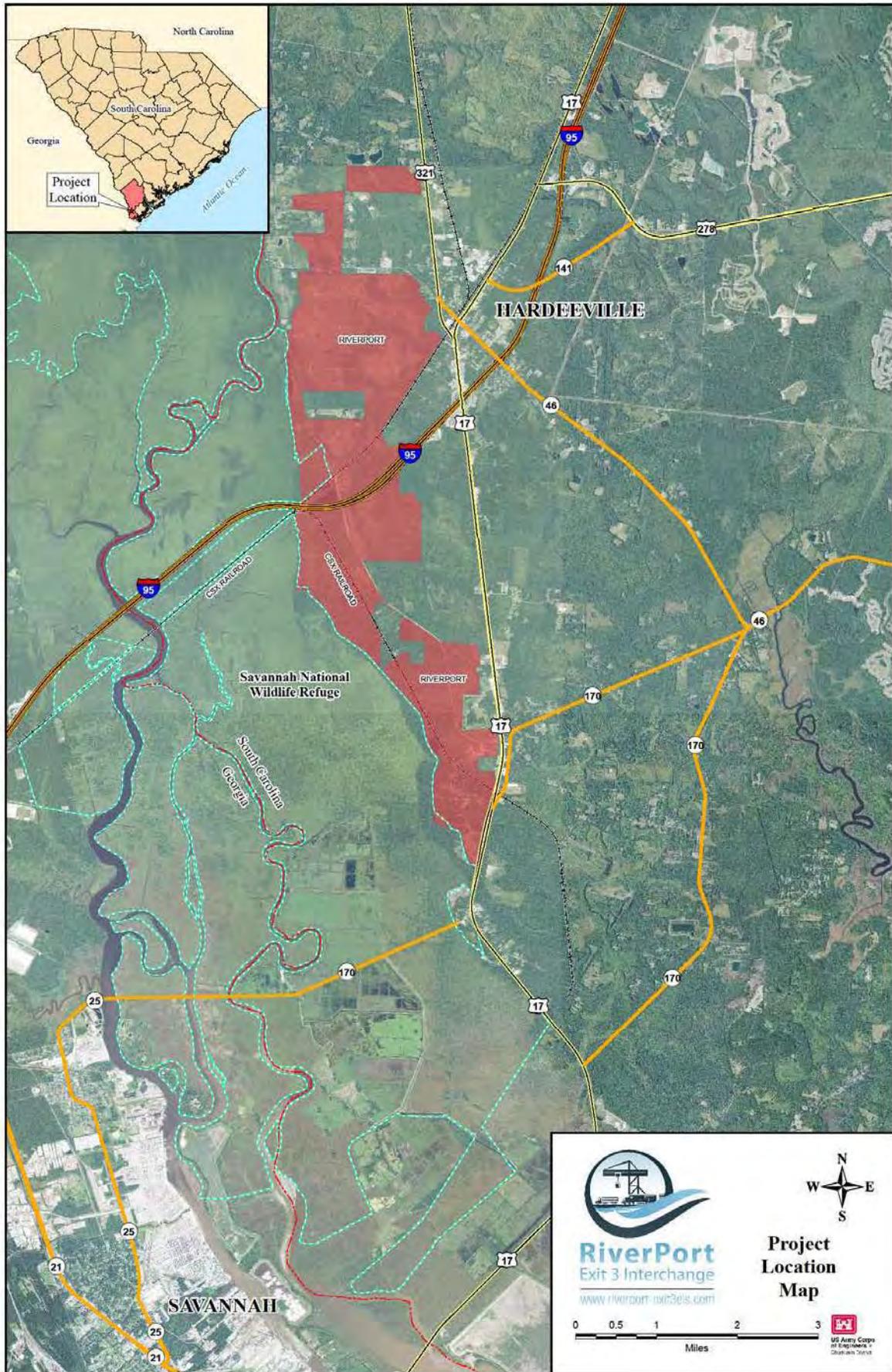
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District
c/o Shawn Boone, Project Manager
69-A Hagood Avenue
Charleston, South Carolina 29403

3. Project website- www.riverport-exit3eis.com

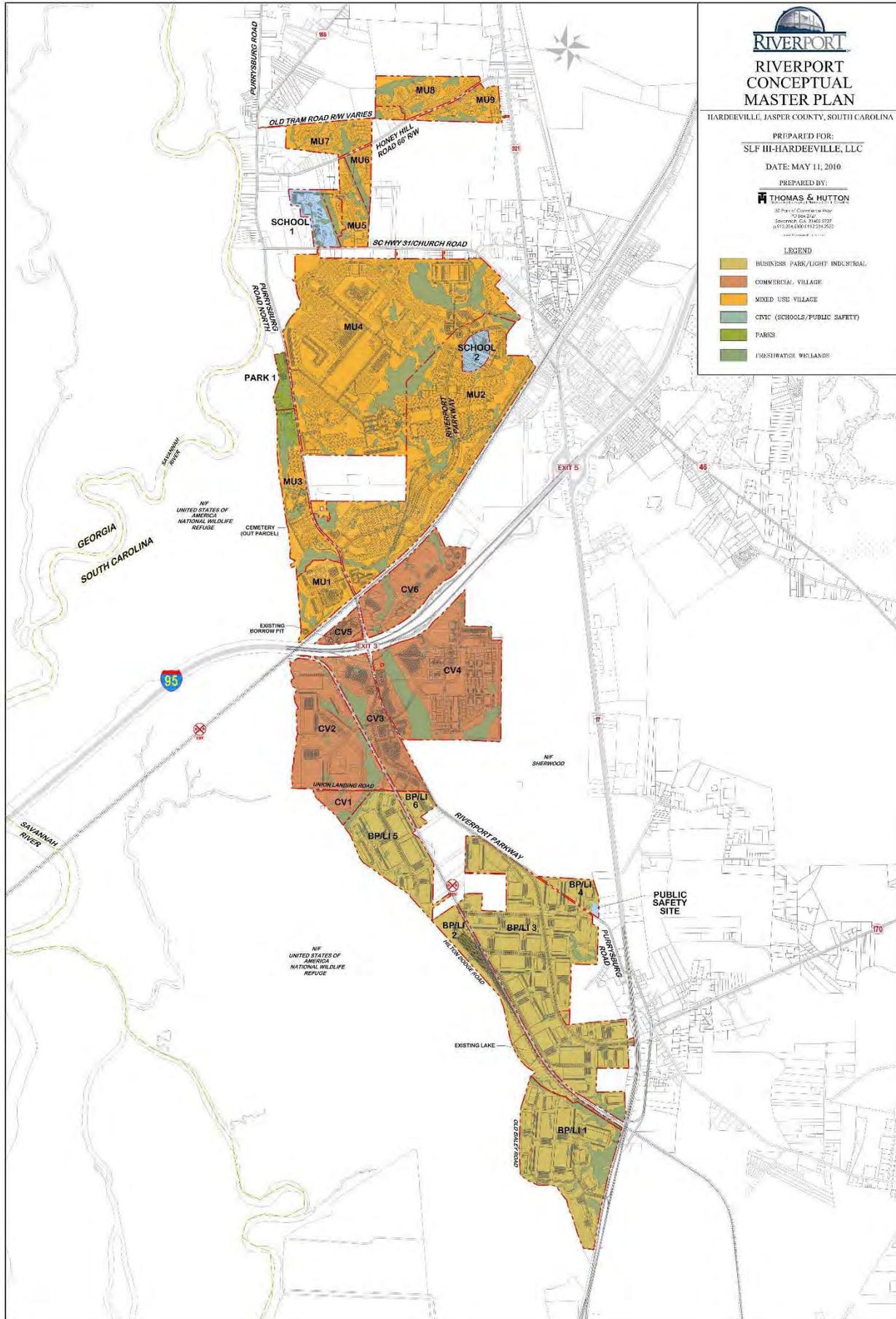
Using one or more of these methods will ensure that your comments are made a part of the Corps' formal record. For inquiries from the media, please contact the Corps, Charleston District Corporate Communications Officer (CCO), Ms. Glenn Jeffries by telephone: 843-329-8123.

Mr. Shawn Boone
Project Manager
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
69-A Hagood Avenue
Charleston, SC 29403

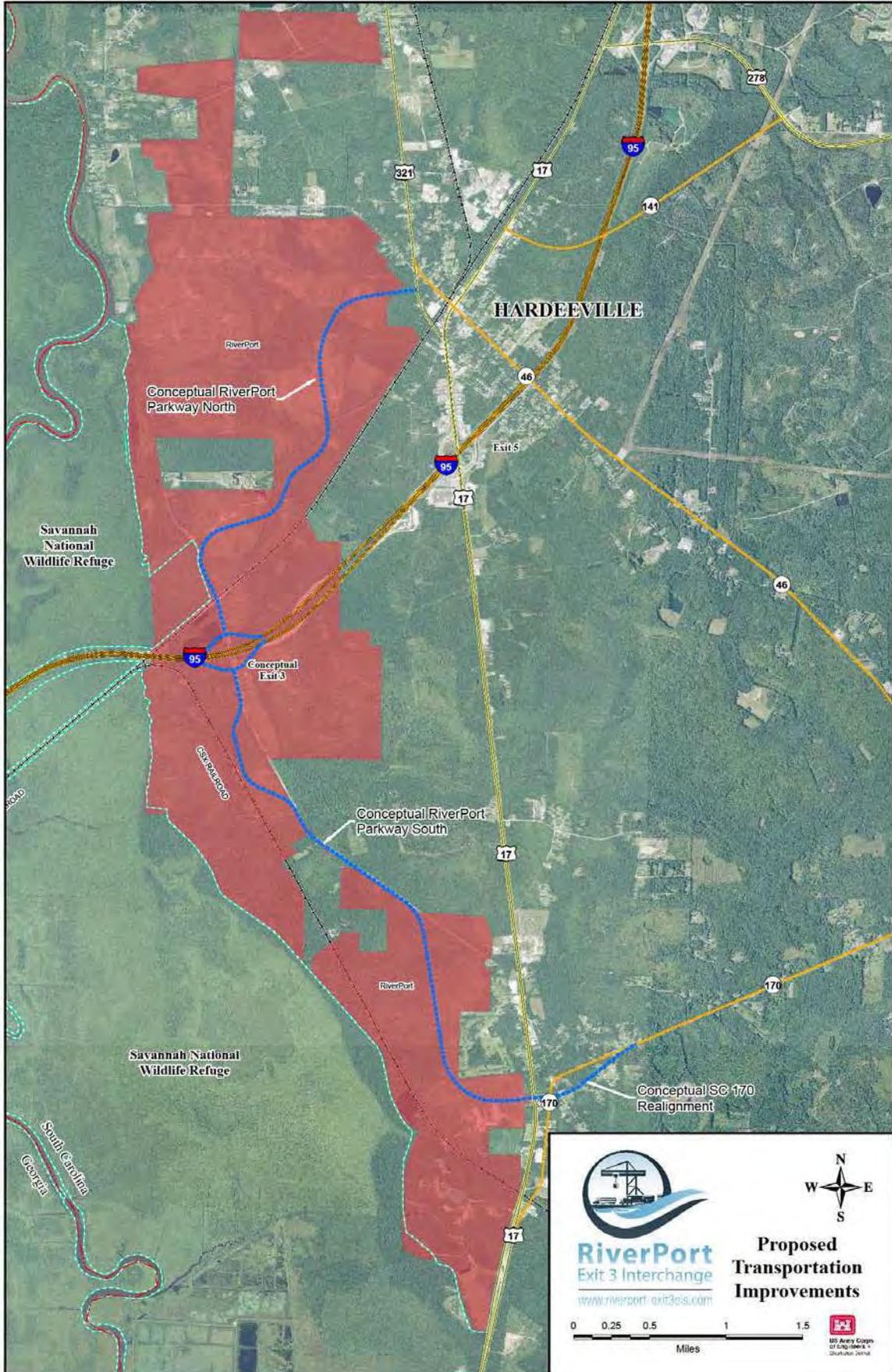
Attachment A: Project Location Map



Attachment B: Proposed RiverPort Master Plan



Attachment C: Proposed Transportation Improvements



Attachment D: Directions to Public Scoping Meeting

City of Hardeeville City Hall
205 Main Street
Hardeeville, SC 29927

From the North:

Follow I-95 S to US-278 W/Independence Boulevard in Hardeeville
Take exit 8 from I-95 S, merge onto US-278 W/Independence Boulevard
Turn left onto US-17 S/Whyte Hardee Boulevard
Turn left onto Main Street- destination will be on the left.

From the South:

Follow I-95 N to US 17 N/Whyte Hardee Boulevard in Hardeeville, take exit 5 from I-95
Merge onto US 17 North/Whyte Hardee Boulevard
Turn right onto Main Street- destination will be on the left

Attachment E: Preliminary List of Issues that May Be Addressed in the EIS

Preliminary List of Issues that May Be Addressed in the EIS	
Transportation – Roadways and Railways	Land Use and Zoning
Water Resources/Water Quality – Surface and Groundwater	Energy Use and Greenhouse Gases (GHG)
Wetlands and Waters of the U.S.	Noise and Vibration
Federally-Listed Threatened or Endangered Species	Light
Hazardous Materials and Solid Waste	Air Quality
Socioeconomics	Visual Resources/Aesthetics
Public Health and Safety	Historic Properties
Environmental Justice	Geology and Soils
Flood Hazards and Floodplain Values	Economic Analysis
Fish and Wildlife Values	Recreation

Attachment F: Definition of Terms

Three (3) Types of Actions:

- **Connected Actions**, which means that they are closely related to the proposed action and therefore should be discussed in the same impact statement. Actions are connected if they:
 - Automatically trigger other actions which may require Environmental Impact Statements
 - Cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously
 - Are independent parts of a larger action and depend on the larger action for their justification

- **Cumulative Actions**, which when viewed with other proposed actions have cumulatively significant impacts and should therefore be discussed in the same impact statement

- **Similar Actions**, which when viewed with other reasonably foreseeable or proposed agency actions, have similarities that provide a basis for evaluating their environmental consequences together, such as common timing or geography. An agency may wish to analyze these actions in the same impact statement. It should do so when the best way to assess adequately the combined impacts of similar actions or reasonable alternatives to such actions is to treat them in a single impact statement.

Three (3) Types of Alternatives:

- **No Action Alternative**

- **Other Reasonable Courses of Action to Achieve the Project Purpose**

- **Mitigation Measures (in addition to and not in the proposed action) Include:**
 - Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action
 - Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation
 - Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment
 - Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action
 - Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments

Three (3) Primary Types of Impacts:

Effects and *impacts* as used in the context of NEPA are interchangeable. *Effects* includes ecological (such as the effects on natural resources and on the components, structures, and functioning of affected ecosystems), aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, social, or health, whether direct, indirect, or cumulative. *Effects* may also include those resulting from actions which may have both beneficial and detrimental effects, even if on balance the agency believes that the effect will be beneficial.

- **Direct Impacts**, which are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place
- **Indirect Impacts**, which are caused by the action but occur later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect impacts may include growth-inducing impacts and other impacts related to the induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate, and related effects on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems.
- **Cumulative Impact** is the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.