

**APPENDIX A:**

**EXPERT WORKING GROUP MEETING SUMMARIES**

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**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:**

<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 of 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 Mettelle (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 Mettille (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 Mettille (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 Mettille (ICF Team): Yes.

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

John Mettille (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 Mettille 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 Mettille (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 Mettille (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 Mettille (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 (WaysSouth): 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.

**THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STUDY**  
**Second Meeting of the Expert Working Group**  
**December 14, 2010, 1pm-4pm**  
**FHWA GA Division Office, Atlanta**

**Attendees:**

<b>Non-Federal EWG Members</b>	<b>Federal EWG Members</b>
Augusta-Richmond Co. Planning Commission Coastal Region MPO (remote) Knoxville Regional TPO Georgia DOT (remote) North Carolina DOT (remote) WaysSouth	Appalachian Regional Commission (remote) Eastern Federal Lands EPA Region 4, NEPA and Wetlands FHWA GA Division FHWA NC Division (remote) FHWA TN Division (remote) National Park Service US Army Corps of Engineers (remote) US Fish and Wildlife Service (remote)
<b>Project Team</b>	
FHWA HQ ICF International Wilbur Smith Associates	

**Greeting and Introductions**

The second meeting of the Expert Working Group for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Highway Corridor Study was held on December 14, 2010, from 1:00pm to 3:30pm at the FHWA Georgia Division office in Atlanta. The purpose of the meeting was to review the updated study area and control points; discuss the status of the public involvement and data collection tasks; and to review and discuss illustrative corridors. The following is a summary of discussion topics, questions, and comments.

**Greeting and Introductions**

John Mettille, Project Manager for the ICF Team, and Stefan Natzke, FHWA Task Monitor, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants, who then went around and introduced themselves. Non-federal representatives included the Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission, Coastal Region MPO, North Carolina DOT, and WaysSouth. Federal representatives included FHWA HQ, FHWA Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee Divisions, Appalachian Regional Commission, Eastern Federal Lands, EPA Region 4, National Park Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, and US Fish and Wildlife Service. The meeting sign-in sheet is attached; however, the majority of the EWG members participated by remote access

John Mettille went over the agenda and handouts, and explained that the focus of the meeting would be reviewing the illustrative corridors, and discussing what corridors the EWG would like to see studied.

### **Recap of Previous Meeting**

The meeting started with a recap of the first meeting and review of the overarching principles, which are: respect the statutory language; follow the contract and statement of work; coordinate with the EWG, agencies, and public; be consistent with FHWA guidance on major project cost estimates; be consistent with 23 CFR 450, Appendix A - Linking Planning and NEPA; stay on schedule; and submit all work products to FHWA for review and approval.

The group also reviewed “what the study is” and “what the study is not.” The study is occurring in two phases. Phase 1 is underway and the end product will be what we call a Conceptual Feasibility Report, which will be used to inform Congress of the steps that would be necessary to move the project forward and provide a planning-level cost estimate of cost to construct. Phase 2 would include additional studies if the project is recommended to move forward and ultimately might be, depending on the level of effort, close to a full feasibility study.

States and MPO’s are not required to implement any alternative or conduct any further analyses. The study will not result in a recommended alternative (unless directed by Congress) and will not necessarily lead to construction of any specific improvements. The study is not a traditional planning feasibility study. FHWA has guidelines for conducting feasibility studies, which this study does not fully address.

There were no comments or questions on any of the material presented up to this point, and the discussion moved on to the study area and control points.

### **Updated Study Area**

John Mettille presented a map of the updated study area. The study area identifies the area of influence for traffic and public involvement activities. The previously bow-tie shaped area has been redefined using input from the EWG. The new study area is bounded by a ring of Interstates which include: I-75, I-16, I-95, I-26, and I-40. A portion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Highway Corridor in the vicinity of Augusta, Georgia and Corridor K both occur within the study area. Corridor K is a corridor of the ARC’s Appalachian Development Highway System, sections of the corridor are currently under study in North Carolina and Tennessee. There were no comments on the refined study area map, and the discussion moved on to the updated control points.

### **Updated Control Points**

John Mettille gave a recap of the previously defined control points and presented an overall map of the revised control points. Control points are endpoints of a proposed highway improvement,

indicating independent utility. Primary points are located at places identified in the legislation. The map of control points from the previous meeting included dots, one at Savannah, Augusta, Lavonia, and Knoxville. The study team came up with revised control points based on EWG input. As suggested by the EWG, the new points are more linear as opposed to single dots, to not limit the development of corridors. The team has received an email requesting that the maps correctly identify the 441 interchange, and the maps will be corrected. Each of the control point areas was then discussed in detail.

### **Savannah Control Point**

The Savannah area control point would provide for a connection along I-95 between the east side of Fort Stewart and the Savannah River Parkway.

1. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Why stop at the Savannah River Parkway, why not extend along I-95 across the river and into South Carolina? And why stop at I-16?

John Mettille (ICF Team): The team's thoughts were that the Savannah River served as a good natural barrier; I-16 was the edge of study area border.

2. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Given that you have I-95 as an existing high capacity Interstate facility, are there any long term proposals to the I-95 corridor to alleviate congestion issues? This would be a question for the state DOT's and the MPO's.
3. Mark Wilkes (Savannah MPO): Long term plans for I-95 in Georgia include widening the Interstate to 8 lanes, the bridges are already built (this is a GDOT project not an MPO project).
4. Mark Wilkes (Savannah MPO): Why stop at I-95 instead of further south to the Savannah port to serve major freight carriers?

John Mettille (ICF Team): The study team was concerned about disruption in the Savannah area, so we looked at pulling the control point in further, and felt the I-95 corridor would work. We will however consider extending to the port.

5. Mark Wilkes (Savannah MPO): The Savannah River Parkway (SR 21) interchange is very problematic; coming closer to Jimmy Deloach Parkway instead would alleviate a lot of the SR 21 issues.

### **Augusta Control Point**

The Augusta area control point was expanded from single point based on EWG input and extends from west of Fort Gordon to the other side of the border. The point would provide for a corridor crossing I-520 around Augusta or I-20 from the western edge of Augusta to a point just

west of Fort Gordon. The team is coordinating with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Highway study team, and will look at the relationship of the two corridors (14<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>).

6. Paul Decamp (Augusta MPO): Looks reasonable to us.

### **Lavonia Control Point**

The Lavonia area control point is along I-85 from west of the Greenville Bypass (south side of Greenville) to the US 441 Interchange (just north of Commerce).

7. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): If the control point is now extended longer than a single point, why not extend through the entire width of study area? It wouldn't be possible to tie into existing I-26 as currently shown.

John Mettille (ICF Team): The study team thought the traffic would be best served if the Atlanta and Greenville areas were avoided. It also provides flexibility in looking at potential corridors to the north.

8. Donnie Brew (FHWA NC): From our perspective, it seems arbitrary that Lavonia is selected at all, regardless of the length; anything that limits the ability to use existing Interstate infrastructure seems arbitrary.

John Mettille (ICF team): Lavonia was added to the study scope of work to help focus the study of potential corridors.

Martin Weiss (ICF team): Lavonia is in the scope of work, and the study's overarching principles say we will stay true to the scope. This is not an area study, but a corridor study.

John Mettille (ICF team): It will facilitate the report to Congress if the study is focused.

### **Knoxville Control Point**

The Knoxville area control point would connect to an existing limited access highway in Knoxville. John Mettille explained that the team looked at I-75 south of the I-40 split for options for connecting to existing Interstate, and to facilitate sensitivity to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

9. Lewis Grimm (EFL): All of the other control points are long, linear sections, with the exception of Knoxville; from a consistency standpoint, why wouldn't we start somewhere along I-75 up to I-40, follow I-40 east to Knoxville, then over to where I-40 splits off to go to the mountains. We should use the same geography for consistency. I think it could be wider and more linear like the others, and wider than just connecting the dots currently shown.

John Mettille (ICF team): The study team will consult with FHWA on all the comments received on control points and then revise as appropriate.

There were no additional comments on the control points. John Mettille stated that the study team would consult with FHWA on all the comments received on control points and then revise as appropriate. The discussion then moved on to the Public Involvement Plan.

### **Public Involvement Plan**

John Mettille discussed the updates to the Public Involvement Plan. At the previous meeting, the EWG discussed what the PIP should be philosophically. One of the suggestions was that different strategies be used for phase 1 and phase 2, and that perhaps phase 2 could be more robust. The PIP has been revised as follows:

- Defined type and context of study
- Focused PI strategies on Phase 1
- Refined key messages
- Refined/expanded the discussion of appropriate PI tools for the study
- Revised study area description based on control point memo
- Incorporated FHWA preferences/comments
- Incorporated comments from first EWG meeting

The key PI strategies will be the EWG, website, newsletters and media announcements. The website will soon go live. The official mailbox (3<sup>rd</sup>infantry@dot.gov) is already up and running. By the first of the year, the website should be up.

The goals of the PIP are to be consistent with local PI strategies; keep message simple, focus on legislation; and get as much PI as possible with the resources available.

The key messages have been developed based on the input of EWG, FHWA, and ICF team. The team is working with Planning Communities (PI firm). The goal is to keep reinforcing these messages, which are:

- The law (SAFETEA-LU) directs that this study be undertaken, and it is being performed by ICF under contract to FHWA.
- The law requires the study document the steps and cost necessary to designate and construct a highway connecting the cities of... FHWA will submit a report to Congress with this information.
- The study will not recommend whether or not to build a project in the corridor, unless directed by Congress.
- No preferred alignment for the corridor has been or will be established, 'unless directed by Congress. No particular design level, including Interstate design standards, will be recommended, unless directed by Congress.

- The 3rd Infantry Division Highway Corridor has not been designated as a future Interstate. The ICF Team is looking at potential corridors within the study area as defined by law.
- The study will incorporate the results of previous planning efforts and public input.
- The public will be provided opportunities to provide feedback on the study, including draft concepts and reports.
- There is currently no funding identified beyond Phase 2 to support long-range planning, environmental review or construction. These activities must be initiated and undertaken at the state or regional level.

10. Lewis Grimm (EFL): I recall from the first meeting for both corridors, there was some discussion about what the purpose of these studies are other than a congressman including language in bill; has there been any more discussion among the team and FHWA on including a few sentences about what the purpose of the project is? It is a message I think a lot of people in the study area would be interested in.

John Mettille (ICF team): There have been discussions on the purpose of the study, which is focused on the congressional mandate to present a report to congress. We talked about the conceptual feasibility study's purpose being to document what steps are needed for the project to move forward. One element of that could be developing the purpose and need statement, it would be one of the first things to do. If the project was to move forward, one of the steps to complete would be development of a problem statement and P&N.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA): This is almost an academic study, documenting the basic steps for constructing a highway, not a feasibility study of a corridor. What we're doing is very limited in scope. It's a study of costs; we're not recommending an alternative, but recommending a menu of alternatives.

Martin Weiss (ICF team): I was involved in a feasibility study at one time, and as part of that, we did develop a purpose and need, but it was a congressionally designated future Interstate and, in addition, several States were advancing segments of independent utility consistent with the longer corridor. This is not that. May not be an appropriate time to develop Purpose and Need statement (P&N).

John Mettille (ICF team): The report to congress would indicate that development of a problem statement and P&N is one of the future steps that would be required, but not necessarily done as part of that report.

The primary stakeholder involvement and public information activities are the EWG and FHWA website. Recommendations for public involvement are to support Tasks 1 through 11, focusing on Task 5 (control points) and in particular Task 7 (alignments and designs), and to supplement options sub-studies (in Phase 2, beyond June 2011).

The FHWA website is being updated. Once the website is up and running, the new link will be sent out to the members of the EWG. There will be a new main page, which will include: Introduction, The Corridors, Statutory Language, FAQs, and a new Study Structure Page, plus links to both studies (3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry and 14<sup>th</sup> amendment). Content will include: Fact Sheet; Overview and Scope; Project Schedule/Calendar; EWG; Data Sources; Control Points; Study alignments; Design Levels; Cost Estimates; Draft Report; Final Report; and Comments/Contact (form based with a subject field so the public can select from the pool of topic areas).

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): We are just working on final tweaks to the site, it's ready for content.

11. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): I'm confused about the commenting format, forms are limited; I suggest making it feasible to include attachments, etc., so that comments are not restricted by character limits.
12. Kevin Adderly (FHWA): It is a form, with drop down boxes for topics, etc. We can't collect personal information, but the public will be able to provide contact information so that someone can get back to them to discuss issues in more detail. The study Email address could be used for sending attachments.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA): We can work with IT to work out any kinks or improve it if possible.

### **Database/Reports Inventory**

John Mettillie provided an update on the status of the data collection efforts, and requested that the EWG look over the database/reports inventory list and send an email with additions, etc., and list will be updated accordingly. There were no EWG comments related to the data collection task.

### **Illustrative Corridors**

Maps of illustrative corridors were presented to the EWG as a starting point for discussion purposes. The study team would like to get input from the EWG on potential corridors and resource sensitivity, to help focus Tasks 7 and 8. Sensitive areas are currently based on spatial data, but the EWG is encouraged to provide input on constraints/avoids. It was suggested that phone participants send mark ups of the maps .

The group is not limited to considering the corridors shown, they are wide corridors. The team is seeking input on things such as, whether or not the group would like for the team to consider more use of existing highways, what type of access the group would like to see, etc.

Corridor design levels were reviewed with the EWG. At least one alternative in each segment will include Interstate standard design level, substantial portions of existing highways, and for

Lavonia to Knoxville, at least one alternative will be outside of GSMNP. An alternative could include an alignment with a mix of design levels.

### **Savannah to Augusta Corridors**

The discussion started with review of the four illustrative corridors between Savannah and Augusta.

13. Jeff Welch (Knoxville MPO): What is the status of the Savannah River Parkway?

14. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Portions of it have been built.

John Mettille (ICF team): The team will coordinate with GDOT on the status of the segments and provide updates to the group as available.

15. Mark Wilkes (Savannah MPO): North of Rincon, the SR 21 corridor is a 4-lane rural divided highway; between Rincon and I-95, it is more mixed and urban, fairly congested. Not sure of GDOT's plans for the corridor, but it would probably not be a good corridor to consider.

16. Paul DeCamp (Augusta MPO): I am familiar with portions of the Savannah River Parkway, a good bit is 4-lane now b/w Augusta and Savannah. It comes into Augusta on SR 25, is 4-lane all the way from central Augusta to Waynesboro, a bypass around Waynesboro, 4-lane into Statesboro, and a Statesboro bypass is partially complete. This should be confirmed with GDOT.

John Mettille (ICF team): Illustrative corridor 1 follows US 1, using a mix of existing and new.

17. Lewis Grimm (EFL): I think we need consideration of access east of I-95.

18. Mark Wilkes (Savannah MPO): There is a freight corridor already planned under the Governor's bond program, going as far north as Jimmy Deloach Parkway. I think this would be a good connection point.

19. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Do you want comments on just new location, or a combination?

John Mettille (ICF team): All of the above.

20. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Using an existing facilities alignment that would give you a far eastern bypass of Augusta, would there be any consideration to beginning in Savannah, proceeding north along the RR corridor that parallels route 119/363? It would be more of a South Carolina north-south concept, as opposed to a north-south all in Georgia. It would be farther east of Augusta, but would connect to I-20 and have Interstate level access into Augusta. Theoretically, you have all the major routes that could be alternatives. There is also a potential to connect corridors 1 and 2 using US 78 as the link.

21. Jeff Welch (Knoxville MPO): What is the Savannah River Plant? Nuclear DOE owned property? Not something with a redevelopment potential, not much need for the corridor to go that way.
22. Kent Cochran (NPS): Why not have a corridor from Millen that uses existing as much as possible instead of new location? SR 21 or 17 down into savannah?
23. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Some level of development will exist on all of the existing routes; could be better to go new location.
24. FHWA remote access: you mentioned widening existing facilities, what are you cost estimating based on?

John Mettille (ICF team): We are looking at various options – at least one at Interstate design level, one utilizing existing highway upgrade; it could be anything, it could be a super 2 if that's what the EWG recommends.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA): Super 2 is a two-lane roadway, with 3-lane section where needed. Cheaper than 4-lane, safer than 2-lane; shoulders are paved, and pavement is at a depth enough to support trucks.

John Mettille (ICF team): To recap - use of 21 or 17 to millen, 305 to Louisville; this would be consistent with 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Highway study corridor and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Highway study control point. Also talked about utilizing existing as much as possible. Using I-26, outside of study area; 119/363 in South Carolina.

25. FHWA remote access: Have you considered I-520 around Augusta, to 121 in SC, over to I-26?
26. Lewis Grimm (EFL): is there any desired buffer for avoiding constraints, any general design philosophy?

John Mettille (ICF Team): we have used that approach in the NEPA process, it gives flexibility; at this conceptual stage, not sure about buffer zones; would be a good step to include in the report.

### **Augusta to Knoxville Corridors**

There were no more comments on the southern portion (Savannah to Augusta), and the discussion moved on to the northern five illustrative corridors from Augusta to Knoxville.

John Mettille (ICF team): the scope has us studying corridors inside GSMNP, with at least one outside, but we have flipped it around and have only one in the park and the rest outside.

27. Jamie Higgins (EPA): these corridors impact a lot of wilderness areas, which are impossible to go through (significant hurdle); most DOT's try to avoid them; a couple new ones have been recently added in TN.

28. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Wilderness areas can be treated like a park.

29. Jim Grode (Waysouth): Congress has to de-designate the area as wilderness for a road to go through; Cumberland Island is the only example, and that caused a lot of controversy.

30. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Endangered species, bear reserves are also a concern.

Martin Weiss (ICF team): keep in mind, the study team does not need five separate alignments; e.g., could have one alignment with several different design options.

John Mettille (ICF team): the team tried to avoid as many water features as possible, avoided corridors requiring major structures.

31. Jim Grode (Waysouth): Corridors 3, 4, and 5 (not sure about 2) would all at some point have to cross a mountain range with a ridgeline over 5,000 feet.

32. USFWS in NC (transportation liaison): I have concerns about using I-26 into Asheville to I-40, there are serious limitations to this corridor. I-26 is currently a 4-lane needing lots of improvements. Pigeon Gorge would be problematic. Corridor K will require 3000-ft tunnel, part of which would pass under the Appalachian Trail, very controversial; going over Snowbird Mountains would be a challenge, and very costly.

33. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Cost is not really an issue right now, just reporting on the options.

34. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Consider pyritic rock, big concern in Corridor K.

35. USFWS in NC (transportation liaison): Money could make anything possible, but just not practical; undesirable from environmental standpoint.

36. Kent Cochran (NPS): as opposed to the lower sections, where existing roadway was used, these corridor don't; recommend using more existing.

John Mettille (ICF team): To recap – difficulty of dealing with I-26 in Asheville area, and difficulty keeping I-40 open; cost and practicality; density of environmentally sensitive areas

(parks, wilderness); mountain issues/topography; look at more options that utilize existing roadway network; look at correcting issues currently on those routes; using more than one option in a potential corridor, would have to explain why didn't move to another alignment instead; cost of construction and mitigation of the effects upon threatened and endangered species .

37. FHWA remote access: Once Savannah River Parkway is complete, assume connection using existing is now available? Savannah River Parkway to Augusta, Augusta to Atlanta to Knoxville. Doesn't that address the legislative language?

Martin Weiss (ICF team): Section 1927, says carry out a study and submit report that describes steps and funding to construct highway; one of the project designations in SAFETEA-LU Section 1702, which funds the work in Section 1927, requires a study of "new" Interstate linking savannah...; one alternative has to have at least some new Interstate, but we also have alternatives, including one alternative that uses substantial portions of existing highways.

38. Lewis Grimm (EFL): question to pose to FHWA task manager, what is HQ definition of "some" new Interstate? 5 miles? 50 miles?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA): There are standards for what elements need to be there for Interstate designation (these are in 23 U.S.C. Section 103(c)).

39. NC DOT: Corridors 3 and 4 in the northern section will be controversial; 4 could be relocated to 441 from Franklin into NC, which is existing and already some 4-lane.

John Mettille (ICF team): if anyone on the phone would like clarification on corridor discussions, email me or Michelle. Another recap of north - use existing more; environmental avoidance will drive corridors, influence steps and costs.

### **Closeout**

John Mettille (ICF team): The next EWG meeting will be related to Tasks 7 and 8. Will be working with GIS and engineering staff on corridor analysis and design.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA): How did this meeting format work? Suggestions for improving? Potential dates for next meeting?

Several participants mentioned the considerable phone issues; suggestion to not use the same phone service provider the next time.

Next meeting, sooner than 3 months, February is the target date for the next meeting, team will send a save the date, and request roster for in person vs. telephone. The final meeting will be in April/May.

40. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Deadline for comments?

John Mettelle (ICF team): middle of next week would be good for map markups.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA): no critical cut-off date for the tech memo comments.

41. Jerry Ziewitz (USFWS): Suggest using an online scheduling tool for checking availability for next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30pm.

## THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STUDY

### Third Meeting of the Expert Working Group

March 8, 2011, 1pm-4pm

FHWA GA Division Office, Atlanta

#### Attendees:

Non-Federal EWG Members	Federal EWG Members
Augusta-Richmond Co. PC (remote) Cleveland MPO (remote) Coastal Region MPO (remote) Georgia DOT (remote) Knoxville Regional TPO (remote) North Carolina DOT (remote) Tennessee DOT (remote) WaysSouth	Appalachian Regional Commission (remote) Eastern Federal Lands EPA Region 4, NEPA and Wetlands FHWA GA Division, HQ, NC Division (remote), Resource Center (Remote), and TN Division (remote) National Park Service US Army Corps of Engineers (remote) US Fish and Wildlife Service (remote) USDA - Forest Service
Project Team	
FHWA HQ ICF International Wilbur Smith Associates	

#### Greeting and Introductions

The third meeting of the Expert Working Group for the Third Infantry Division Highway Corridor Study was held on March 8, 2011, from 1:00pm to 4:00pm at the FHWA Georgia Division office in Atlanta. The purpose of the meeting was to review and discuss the four study corridors that were developed and presented in the Draft Alternatives Report; discuss the environmental constraints, fatal flaw screening, and design levels; and to present the project team's preliminary recommendations for which study corridor(s) to carry forward into the next task of preparing costs and steps to complete. The following is a summary of discussion topics, questions, and comments.

John Mettille, Project Manager for the ICF Team, opened the meeting and welcomed participants, who then went around and introduced themselves. The majority of the EWG members participated by remote access.

The meeting started with review of the overarching principles; what the study is and isn't; and a recap of the second meeting. The second meeting focused on the updated study area, control points, public involvement plan, and illustrative corridors.

#### Study Corridors

Following the recap of the previous meeting, study corridors were discussed. The project team was originally tasked with developing four corridors between Savannah and Lavonia, five from Lavonia to Knoxville, with at least one Interstate-level design option. Four study corridors were developed based on avoidance of major environmental features and on EWG input on the illustrative corridors. The main components of the four study corridors (A, B, C, and D) were highlighted for the EWG.

### **Corridor A**

The southern portion of Corridor A (Savannah to Lavonia) tries to use as much of the existing Savannah River Parkway/US 25 as possible. There are some new location segments, including a bypass around Millen and a new link west of Augusta between I-20 and US 25. The northern portion (from Lavonia to Knoxville) follows the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) boundary as much as possible, and includes new location segments from I-75 to US 411 and from Dahlonega to I-85.

An eastern option was developed in collaboration with project team designers, following I-75 to Sweetwater, SR 68 through the national forest, and SR 60 at the state line to Dahlonega, Georgia.

### **Corridor B**

The southern portion of Corridor B follows SR 21 out of Savannah, with a Bypass option to avoid SR 21 congestion, based on EWG input. Corridor B north goes through national forest land and along the western boundary of GRSM, links to the Appalachian Development Highway System's Corridor K, and allows for a possible connection to Corridor C.

### **Corridor C**

The southern portion of Corridor C follows either the Savannah River Parkway/US 25 (Corridor A), the Savannah River Parkway/SR 21 (Corridor B), or the SR 21 Bypass corridor (Corridor B Bypass) from Savannah, and passes through the Cherokee reservation. The corridor uses US 441/Newfound Gap Road through the park (for approximately 20 miles), and avoids Sevierville congestion by creating a link on new alignment.

### **Corridor D**

Corridor D follows US 321 and existing Interstates. It avoids the geotechnical issues associated with I-40 by using US 25 at Newport. It also includes a potential new route through Asheville because of the controversy and congestion.

### **Corridor Comparison**

John Mettille presented a comparison of the corridors in terms of the percentage of existing alignment that each one uses, as well as the transportation network constraints. Corridor D is entirely on existing alignment. Corridors A, B, and C all have some new location segments.

1. Lewis Grimm (EFL): There is an obvious blank (in the table in the PowerPoint presentation) under transportation network for Corridor C (south).

John Mettille (ICF Team): That information will be added to the alternatives report.

### **Environmental Constraints**

Major environmental features were avoided as much as possible in development of the corridors. These environmental constraints include protected federal and state lands, particularly wilderness areas; geology and geotechnical issues, particularly the challenging terrain in northern portion of the study area and areas prone to landslides; and socioeconomics and environmental justice potential.

### **Protected Lands and Major Features**

Protected land constraints include national forests, the Savannah River Plant, Army bases, lakes and rivers, major population centers, and sensitive threatened and endangered species habitat. Density of protected lands in the northern portion of the study area is higher than in the southern portion. There are more resources and unique features in the north, and the team tried to avoid as many as possible in developing the corridors.

John Mettille presented a comparison of the corridors in terms of park impacts, distance in national forests, and wilderness/wildlife zones. In the southern portion, parks are adjacent to Corridors A, B, and C; the extent of impacts depends on the design level and will be evaluated in more detail. Wildlife management areas/refuges are adjacent to corridors in the south. The density of protected lands is higher in the northern portion, especially with Corridors B and C. Corridors C and D in the north cross a number of black bear sanctuaries, which restrict new roadway mileage. Again, the team tried to avoid these resources as much as possible.

2. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): There is inconsistency in the alternatives report for Corridor A – text says adjacent to forest, appendix says within; need to check wording.

Rebecca Thompson (ICF Team): Corridor A skirts the park, except for one part near Chatsworth. However, these are mile-wide corridors, with room for refinement.

Features that could be involved, e.g., water features, lakes, rivers, etc., were presented for each corridor. Corridor D (south) does not intersect the Augusta or Lavonia control points. There are a large number of resources in Corridor B in the northern section. Corridor C involves the Cherokee Reservation.

### **Terrain, Karst Features, Landslide Potential**

The corridors were compared in terms of the geology and geotechnical issues; maps depicting terrain, karst features (caves, fissures, etc), and landslide susceptibility were presented. The southern portion of the study area is level, while the northern portion presents substantial terrain and elevation challenges. Newfound Gap Road uses the lowest elevation passage crossing north-south through the park; however, we are looking for a better way through the mountains. Corridor C has the worst/most aggressive terrain challenges.

Karst features over 1,000 feet in length are prevalent in the northwestern portion of study area; the southeast portion has a lot of smaller karst features, but also wetlands and low lying areas.

Areas of high landslide susceptibility and frequency, such as where I-40 is located, are indicated in red on the landslides map. All corridors cross high susceptibility areas, but Corridor A to a lesser extent than the others.

### **Socioeconomics**

The highest concentrations of low-income, economically distressed, and minority populations in the study area are found between Savannah and Augusta.

### **Potential Fatal Flaws**

GRSM impacts, mountainous terrain, missing control points, and strong public opposition have been identified as potential fatal flaws for the corridors.

### **Impacts to GSMNP**

Corridors A and D avoid the park, Corridor B runs along 11 miles of the western border on US 129, and Corridor C passes through the park for 20 miles along US 441. To emphasize the challenges of going through GRSM, two historical projects that were reduced or cancelled were discussed. 1) Resurfacing of Newfound Gap Road with proposed turn lanes into the campground - turn lanes were not included because of environmental and design constraints. 2) North Shore Road, which was supposed to be constructed in 1939 - engineering and environmental issues led to cancellation of proposed project.

### **Mountainous Terrain**

Corridors B and C involve sections with elevations over 5,000 feet.

### **Missing Control Points**

Corridors A, B, and C hit all control points. Corridor D misses the Augusta and Lavonia control points.

### **Strong Public Opposition**

Public opposition is likely for any of the four corridors in the northern section, particularly the corridors that impact GRSM (Corridors B and C). EWG input stated that the team shouldn't pre-aggravate the public; the team recommends only the least controversial corridors move forward for further analysis to develop planning-level cost estimates.

The EWG was asked if there are any other potential fatal flaws that should be considered.

3. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): Not sure if it's a fatal flaw, but acid-bearing rock is another geologic issue, and there is a significant amount throughout the southern Appalachians. It impacts stream habitat, causes fish kills. Also, prohibition of commercial traffic through the GRSM park is an issue; if the road serves a commercial purpose, the law/policy would have to be changed.
4. Kent Cochran (NPS): A major parkway, the Blue Ridge Parkway, has the same cultural/historic resource issues as Newfound Gap Road. The 20 mile estimate in the comparison table seems inaccurate; the mile points of the road are approximately 31 miles through GRSM.

John Mettille (ICF Team): The corridor is straight, and doesn't account for loopy roads, which may account for the mileage discrepancies.

### **Design Levels**

The discussion moved on to the corridor design levels. At least one corridor in each segment has to be designed to Interstate standards; one has to use substantial existing alignment; and at least one has to be outside of GRSM. Interstate level includes 4 to 6 lanes, grade-separated interchanges, and can use tunnels or viaducts. Arterials are 4 lanes with at-grade intersections. A Super-2 Highway has 2 to 3 lanes, at-grade intersections, and truck climbing/passing lanes. All design levels were kept on the table because of the mile-wide corridor, all design levels could apply.

5. Lewis Grimm (EFL): A number of sub-segments of corridors are using the route already designated the Savannah River Parkway; if it's proposed as a 4-lane rural as opposed to Interstate, would the two blend, would we downgrade to a Super-2, or upgrade the rural to Interstate? This would affect cost estimates; the team needs to look at existing/planned design levels.

Martin Weiss (ICF Team): On any given alignment, with the exception of Interstate, there could be multiple design levels. For example, one could have an alignment with a certain design, and the same alignment with a different design, which would be two different alternatives for steps and cost to complete. Also, design can change along the alignment; it doesn't have to be one level along the entire alignment (with the exception of the one that has to be Interstate level). Mixing and matching alternative corridors and design levels that occur within them is possible.

### Preliminary Fatal Flaw Screening

A preliminary screening and comparison of the potential fatal flaws for each corridor was provided in a summary table, shown below. Based on EWG input, the Blue Ridge Parkway, pyritic rock, and truck traffic issues need to be added to the screening. Anything is technically possible, but the report would include what steps need to be done to allow trucks through park, which would be very difficult.

Corridor	GRSM NP Impacts	Terrain	Control Points Crossed	Public Opposition
A	No	Moderate	4	Likely
B	Maybe	Aggressive	4	Likely
C	Yes	Extremely Aggressive	4	Likely Strong
D	No	Aggressive	2	Likely Strong

### Preliminary Recommendations

John Mettille presented the project team’s recommendations for consideration by the EWG of which corridor should be carried forward for preparation of steps and costs to complete in the project’s next task.

North of Lavonia – Corridor A Western Option, Interstate design level (could have combination of design levels for cost estimate)

South of Lavonia – Corridor A, B, or B Bypass, Interstate or arterial (combination)

6. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): Since no purpose and need has been stated, and if, as the name suggests, honoring the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division is part of the purpose, we should consider a no-build/signage-only alternative (signage would honor 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry).

John Mettille encouraged the EWG to take some time to review the alternatives report and provide additional recommendations or comments.

7. Daniel Sellers (NCDOT): I agree with Jim’s signage-only recommendations, because of the public opposition, and resources.
8. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): I’m confused as to the purpose of the Draft Alternatives Report Memo: is it intended to be a memorandum that informs, and will flow into the final Report to Congress? Final report should include several things that are missing. Instead of recommending further study is necessary, say if Congress deems further study is appropriate, then further study would be incorporated. If other alternatives are so ridiculous they wouldn’t be taken to the final report.

John Mettille (ICF Team): This report is a recommendation for the next task, a recommendation for one of the alternative corridors for which steps and costs to complete can be prepared, that will feed into the final report.

9. Jamie Higgins (EPA): So we will get the opportunity to comment on a final report? I was under the impression early on that since no DOT or MPO is sponsoring, that we were going to recommend no further alternatives move forward.

Martin Weiss (ICF Team): All that Congress requires per the statute is the steps and cost to complete, no recommendations. Recommendations on what if anything to do next, following the Report to Congress, will go to FHWA who administers the money (not to Congress).

10. Mark Wilkes (Coastal Region MPO): I do not have a copy of the alternatives report.

11. Greg Thomas (Cleveland MPO): I also did not get the report.

John Mettille (ICF Team): The report was sent out last week, we will resend it to the EWG. Will two weeks be enough time to review?

12. Jamie Higgins (EPA): I don't understand what this report is, if there is another final report coming, I don't want to spend time reviewing this one.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): This is an interim step to getting to the final report, to identify the alternative for which to prepare cost estimates.

13. Ralph Comer (TDOT): Looking back at the email, everything in the report is in slides, except for the last few slides of recommendations for next task.

John Mettille (ICF Team): That is correct; we wanted input from the EWG before including any recommendations in the alternatives report.

14. Loretta Barren (FHWA NC): Can we get a copy of the presentation? The summaries are better in the presentation. Is the cost estimate going to be based on design details, or just the corridor?

John Mettille (ICF Team): It will follow FHWA's Major Project Program Cost Estimating Guidance.

15. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Wouldn't you lay out all of the phases in project development, e.g., first you have to get the project into some plan/program (statewide multi-modal plan).

John Mettille (ICF Team): It will include the planning steps required before construction.

16. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Congress could say ok, let's move forward with Corridor A.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): Congress has directed money to projects that never get built. States retain decision-making ability on what to include in plans and programs.

17. Jamie Higgins (EPA): What if states decide to take it up, move to TPR, NEPA - why not just recommend none of the corridors move forward?

John Mettille encouraged the EWG to review the alternatives report/memo if possible.

### **Next Steps**

The EWG will provide comments on the Alternatives Report, the ICF team will provide a meeting summary, and the next tasks will begin (additional GIS/cost estimates/steps).

### **Public Involvement Update**

John Mettille informed the EWG that four letters have been received from interested groups asking for public meetings. The letters indicated locations where the groups would like to see meetings held, and that the groups would like to see the final report. John asked for ideas from the EWG on how to solicit public input, are there other ways besides meetings, e.g., meeting in a box. The URL of the project website will be emailed to the EWG.

18. Jamie Higgins (EPA): If you are making a recommendation to Congress for Corridor A, need to have public involvement.
19. Steve Luxenburg (FHWA GA): We may want to reconsider going to the public about a highway project that may or may not ever move forward.
20. Jamie Higgins (EPA): But it could move forward.
21. Elizabeth McMullen (USFS): Would the alignment be included in the final report?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Yes.

22. Kent Cochran (NPS): Does the Report to Congress have to include an alignment with the costs?
23. Loretta Barren (FHWA NC): If we are going to public, we need to be very sure of what we're doing. Congress asked for costs to construct a potential route. We need to find a way to develop a planning level estimate, that doesn't single out one corridor.
24. Kevin Adderly (FHWA HQ): We're looking at how to put our report (for the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Highway study) together; we have multiple corridors, multiple costs. We're doing napkin estimates of various corridors, not one particular corridor.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): Our situation is different, because does it really make sense to expend effort and resources to generate cost estimates for C and D, which have fatal flaws that couldn't be overcome?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Because of all the issues, why prepare cost estimates for those with fatal flaws?

25. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): Will the report show all corridors but just costs for one, or just the one alternative with costs?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The former, the report will show everything, what makes sense and doesn't, and only provide costs for those that aren't ridiculous. Back to the public involvement, the website has been very problematic, but is going live today. This is one public outreach tool we have so far.

26. Lewis Grimm (EFL): Are there examples from the most recent STIP public involvement efforts? Statewide plans are approached differently because of the large area, and may be a more appropriate level of involvement for this study. We will have x numbers of meetings, here's where we are in the study process, etc.

27. Steve Luxenberg (FHWA GA): This differs from statewide plans and TIPS in that there is at least some level of buy-in for those projects, whereas there is no support for this project. We may cause undue concern and open a can of worms.

28. Jamie Higgins (EPA) and Jim Grode (WaysSouth): The can of worms is already open.

29. Jamie Higgins (EPA): There may actually be public support.

Martin Weiss (ICF Team): What is the value added of a public meeting versus the cost of a meeting?

30. Steven Luxenberg (FHWA GA): What did you do on the SR 99 project in California?

Martin Weiss (ICF Team): In CA, people generally wanted to upgrade the road. Local meetings have been held for over 20 years, incorporated with general meetings, e.g., county commission meetings. Our study would be better compared to the transcontinental Maglev or superhighway or the Kansas City to Chicago Expressway, which people generally knew there was no funding for and benefit/cost ratios showed it was not economically feasible. These did not have public meetings. Another multistate project was the first feasibility study for the I-69 corridor which did have a benefit/cost analysis but did not have a public meeting. The second study did have one public meeting but by then there was interest among the States in completing portions of that corridor. We will not have benefits for our studied sub-corridors (i.e. Section 1927 study). Ours

is a less mature study than any of these and certainly less than the one that held a public meeting, that is, the second I-69 study.

31. Kent Cochran (NPS): What's required for making the report, is public involvement required? Use that to make decision.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): It is not in the statutory language.

32. Elizabeth McMullen (USFS): A public meeting is never going to change anyone's belief whether there is a conspiracy. We can go to the public and tell them where we are, but we can also point to the website, etc.

33. Jamie Higgins (EPA): We're not trying to change minds, but disclose. By identifying a corridor, it plants a seed.

34. Greg Thomas (Cleveland MPO): If we're not asked to recommend a corridor, can we not frame the report around a particular corridor? Something like "...of all the alternatives we looked at, this is the least problematic, and these are the costs associated with it..." Doesn't make sense to get the public riled up, maybe just the website makes sense.

35. Jim Grode (WaysSouth): Conspiracy theorists aside, there are people out there who could benefit from seeing the ambivalence. Whether or not that means a public meeting makes sense over other methods, I don't know.

36. Jim Grode (WaysSouth) and Jamie Higgins (EPA): Include disclaimers/caveats about what the report is/isn't, e.g., there is no purpose and need, this report should not be considered...etc., go with the "least problematic" approach.

37. Jamie Higgins (EPA): The least problematic still has lots of issues.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): That will come out in the documentation of the project development steps and costs in the report.

Martin Weiss (ICF Team): The price tag of the least problematic alternative should scare everyone away from any actual implementation studies.

38. Loretta Barren (FHWA NC): Can disclaimer/caveat language be included on the website?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The site is factual.

39. Elizabeth McMullen (USFS): In the report, include information that will illustrate why/how things are problematic, e.g., going through the mountains will cost five times as much, etc.

### **Closeout**

John Mettelle provided a brief recap of the meeting. The next meeting will be in late April to discuss the steps and costs to complete.

The meeting adjourned at 3:40pm.

### **Action Items**

The Alternatives Report, meeting presentation, meeting summary, and URL of the project website will be emailed to the EWG.

**THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STUDY**  
**Final Meeting of the Expert Working Group**  
**April 28, 2011, 1pm-4pm**  
**FHWA GA Division Office, Atlanta**

**Attendees:**

<b>Non-Federal EWG Members</b>	<b>Federal EWG Members</b>
Augusta-Richmond Co. PC Coastal Region MPO (remote) Georgia DOT North Carolina DOT (remote) Tennessee DOT (remote) WaysSouth	FHWA Eastern Federal Lands EPA Region 4, NEPA and Wetlands FHWA GA Division and HQ FHWA NC Division (remote) National Park Service US Fish and Wildlife Service (remote) USDA - Forest Service (remote)
<b>Project Team</b>	
FHWA HQ ICF International Wilbur Smith Associates	

**Greeting and Introduction**

The fourth meeting of the Expert Working Group (EWG) for the Third Infantry Division Highway Corridor Study was held on April 28, 2011, from 1:00pm to 2:45pm at the FHWA Georgia Division office in Atlanta. The purpose of the meeting was to review the corridors that were advanced for costing; discuss the cost estimating methodology and review the costs; and to discuss upcoming public involvement activities. The following is a summary of discussion topics, questions, and comments.

John Mettille, Project Manager for the ICF Team, opened the meeting and welcomed participants, who then went around and introduced themselves. Six EWG members attended the meeting in person. The majority of the EWG participated by remote access.

The meeting started with brief review of what the study is and isn't and a recap of the third meeting. The study is a conceptual feasibility study that will form the basis of FHWA's report to Congress (Phase 1). States and MPOs are not required to implement any of the corridors discussed. The report to Congress will not include any recommendations. The study team may recommend potential follow-on studies to FHWA as part of Phase 2 of the study.

The third EWG meeting focused on the corridors that were evaluated and screened against potential fatal flaws. Based on the study team's evaluation and on input from the EWG, two corridors and a no build alternative were advanced for costing. Planning-level cost estimates were prepared for Corridor A West (entire length), Corridor B and B Bypass (Savannah to

Millen only), and a No Build alternative (signing an existing route). Maps of Corridors A and B/B Bypass were reviewed with the EWG.

One new alternative was suggested by a member of the public through the project website. The route would parallel the Savannah River on new alignment through South Carolina from I-95 to I-85 near Greenville. The alternative would face the same type of challenges as Corridor D, thus it was not recommended for additional consideration.

Costs were estimated for the design levels (Interstate, Arterial, Super-2, and Context Sensitive) as applicable to each corridor. The Interstate design level would provide at least four travel lanes with grade-separated interchanges, designed to Interstate standards. The Arterial level provides four travel lanes with at-grade intersections at cross-streets. The Super-2 design level provides an enhanced two-lane highway (two travel lanes plus a third lane for passing, truck climbing, etc) with at-grade intersections. The Context Sensitive design level is the minimum level of improvement necessary to have a continuous two-lane highway along a corridor. If the existing facility provides better mobility than a design level proposed for a corridor, that segment was not included in the cost estimate for any lower design levels.

### **Cost Estimating Methodology**

The study team looked at the state of the practice for cost estimating in Georgia and Tennessee. Planning-level cost estimating tools developed by GDOT and TDOT were used for segments of the corridors within their respective states. The estimates include costs for preliminary engineering, right-of-way and utilities, construction, construction engineering inspection (CEI), as well as contingency costs.

Costs: Preliminary Engineering – includes environmental/NEPA work, public involvement, and engineering design efforts. The TDOT tool estimates these as 10% of construction cost; the GDOT tool estimates these as 10% of the total project cost. The preliminary engineering/environmental costs resulting from the application of either model are consistent with estimates from previous FHWA reports to Congress, and comparable to the per-mile costs of some of the study team’s recent environmental projects.

Costs: Right-of-Way & Utilities – includes costs for acquiring new right-of-way and relocating utilities. TDOT estimates are adjusted for land use type. GDOT’s tool adjusts for land use, project type, and location; it also includes a 50% contingency for unknowns in ROW.

Costs: Construction – includes mainline construction, plus per-item costs for structures, interchanges, intersections, mitigation, and more. TDOT base estimates are adjusted for terrain and facility type; GDOT estimates are adjusted for area and facility type, and use per-item unit costs for bridges and interchanges.

Costs: Other – CEI is estimated at 10% of construction cost. Approximately 10-30% of project cost was added to account for contingencies, which are built into the GDOT model but not the TDOT model.

### Corridor Cost Estimate Comparison

Corridor maps with cost estimates were reviewed and compared between control points as well as along the entire corridor length. Total project costs are shown in the table below:

<b>Comparison of Total Corridor Costs</b>				
<b>Corridor</b>	<b>CSD</b>	<b>Super-2</b>	<b>Arterial</b>	<b>Interstate</b>
A West	\$694 million	\$1.2 billion	\$2.5 billion	\$4.8 billion
A West (Dalton spur)	\$562 million	\$872 million	\$2.0 billion	\$4.2 billion
B/A West	N/A	N/A	\$2.5 billion	\$5.2 billion
B Bypass/A West	N/A	N/A	\$3.1 billion	\$6.1 billion
No Build	N/A	N/A	N/A	< \$500,000

1. Martin Weiss (ICF Team): It looks like alignment bands are 1-mile wide?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Correct.

2. Martin Weiss (ICF Team): For the signing only estimate, how many centerline miles would be signed?

Rebecca Thompson (ICF Team): The estimate is not route specific, it's just ballpark estimate to sign an existing Interstate route between the three control points.

### Cost Uncertainties

John Mettille pointed out that the project cost estimates become more accurate as projects advance through the project development process. Large contingencies have been used because there are a lot of unknowns at this very early conceptual planning stage.

Types of risks affecting costs could include unclear project definition; inflation; delays in implementation; and indirect risks. Costs could be significantly higher than the estimates shown in the presentation. The contingency factors built into the estimates (10% to 30%) help account for some of these risk elements.

3. Steve Luxenberg (FHWA GA): That's \$6 billion in today's dollars?

John Mettille (ICF Team): Yes.

### Project Development Steps

Both state DOTs (GDOT and TDOT) have very complex project development processes. The final report to Congress will inform them of the complexity and will include both states' flow charts. Similar features from both are summarized in the bullet points below:

Identify need – The first phase of study looks at route conditions and needs. Projects must meet one of the Long-Range Plan goals to move forward.

Program funds – Adequate funding must be identified in each state before a project can develop. GDOT and TDOT Long Range Plans identify needs over next 30 years and show large funding gap between needs and funds.

4. Steve Luxenberg (FHWA GA): Are the plans based on revenue projections in the current authorization?

John Mettelle (ICF Team): Yes.

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has been explicit that the authorized funding in the next surface transportation law will be aligned with actual revenues in the Highway Trust Fund. There will be no additional influxes of cash to the Highway Trust Fund from the General Fund of the Treasury, as has occurred in the past few years.

Planning – This step involves the development of project purpose and need, development of conceptual alternatives, and an overview of potential issues that must be considered.

Preliminary Design – This begins the evolution of design work. Alternatives are refined and evaluated; environmental analysis can begin as the project location is better defined.

NEPA – The NEPA phase involves analyzing and documenting project impacts. A tiered EIS could work if this project were to move forward, allowing for an overview of the entire corridor before advancing individual sections. It can take several years to progress through this phase.

Final Design – This step involves the development of detailed plans, specifications, and estimates necessary prior to construction.

Permitting – A number of permits would be required for each construction section. Permitting is often begun during final design, as soon as an adequate level of detail is known.

Construct Project – The final step, culminating in the project opening to traffic. Right-of-way acquisition and utility relocations must occur in this phase.

Project development is a 10-12 year process for a typical highway project, from planning to opening to traffic. Legacy projects can last much longer, 30+ years.

## **Upcoming Public Involvement**

Three public webinars/Q&A sessions are scheduled for May 17-18. The EWG members have been asked to distribute fact sheets and flyers to their constituents. Comments will continue to be accepted through the public website.

5. Steve Luxenberg (FHWA GA): Will the webinars cover the same material presented in this meeting?

John Mettille (ICF Team): It will be a condensed version of the project tasks completed to date.

6. Steve Luxenberg (FHWA GA): Will that be the only public involvement?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): We also have the website. Other options were considered; our approach is consistent with state plans. We wanted the public involvement program to reflect that this is a conceptual corridor study, and not a project in the development stage.

7. Ralph Comer (TDOT): TDOT has distributed the materials. However, we did include several caveats: this is an FHWA consultant-led project; the state is not expected to include the project in plans; no alternative is being recommended, and there may be no alternative moving forward for additional development.

8. Jamie Higgins (EPA): How are you letting people know about the webinars?

John Mettille (ICF Team): We are using state/MPO public involvement avenues.

Rebecca Thompson (ICF Team): We emailed a fact sheet/flyer that has login info and will resend to the EWG.

John Mettille (ICF Team): The majority of comments received through the website (approximately 120 comments so far) are concerns about impacts and funding. Four comments have been in favor of the project; the rest are opposed.

## **Next Steps**

The EWG was asked to review the information on cost estimating and next steps and provide any comments or concerns.

Next tasks: public involvement, assembling final report to FHWA, and possibly a final EWG call/webinar in late May/early June.

9. Steve Luxenberg (FHWA GA): Once we submit the report to Congress, what happens?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The study report that will be submitted to FHWA will shape the report to Congress; part of the study report will be recommendations on further studies, if any. We may end up stopping at the report to Congress.

10. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Will the draft report be released to the public before Congress?

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): The report to Congress will not be released; the consultant report, maybe – we need to think about that.

11. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Will we get to review a draft of the study report?

John Mettille (ICF Team): A potential fifth EWG meeting will could the opportunity to comment. Or the draft final report could be circulated via email with comments submitted electronically. The report will primarily be a compilation/summary of work to date.

12. Jamie Higgins (EPA): Please provide enough review time (more than two weeks).

13. Martin Weiss (ICF Team): I have one request to the EWG – a key thing we haven't really covered – what should the contractor recommend in Phase 2, if anything? We may not have time for this discussion, as the focus has been on Phase 1. Should there be no further sub-studies conducted, or certain studies conducted all along a corridor, or on certain segments only, etc?

Martin Weiss (ICF Team): There have been hundreds of studies that FHWA has been required to give to Congress; USDOT sends a transmittal letter (5-6 pages, with or without study), key points/conclusions. In some cases, nothing happens but Congress may request another study (very rare circumstance).

Stefan Natzke (FHWA HQ): Martin gave a pretty accurate description of the process; however, we are just speculating what might happen. The study report and recommendations for Phase 2 are separate products.

14. Lewis Grimm (EFL): In addition to providing costs associated with corridor, for the benefit of Congress, should we include something that says from this stage of conceptual study, even if it is identified in a state plan, there are years and years of work in the project development process?

John Mettille (ICF Team): It will require a champion at every stage; could take someone their whole career to get through the project development process.

The meeting adjourned at 2:45pm.