

**14th Amendment Highway Study
Expert Working Group (EWG) Meeting 2
December 9, 2010**

Attendees List

- Project Team
 - Kevin Adderly, FHWA (Atlanta)
 - Stefan Natzke, FHWA (phone)
 - Marc Cutler, Cambridge Systematics (Atlanta)
 - Elizabeth Sanford, Cambridge Systematics (Atlanta)
 - Bruce Spear, Cambridge Systematics (phone)
 - David Kall, Cambridge Systematics (Atlanta)
 - Joanna Hite, Cambridge Systematics (Atlanta)
 - Harry Rice, PBS&J (Atlanta)
 - Wendy Dyson, PBS&J (Atlanta)
 - Martin Weiss, Consultant (phone)

- Expert Working Group
 - Federal Members
 - Bill Farr, FHWA Georgia Division (Atlanta)
 - Shaun Capps, FHWA Alabama Division (Montgomery)
 - Claiborne Barnwell, FHWA Mississippi Division (Jackson)
 - Jerry Ziewitz, Pete Pattavina, and Sandy Kilpatrick, US Fish and Wildlife (phone)
 - Randy Warbington, USDA Forest Service (Atlanta)
 - Ntale Kajumba (Atlanta), US EPA
 - Ed Johnson, US Army Corps of Engineers (Atlanta)
 - Jennifer Simpson and David Benefield, US Army Fort Benning (phone)
 - Non-Federal Members
 - Michelle Caldwell, Georgia DOT (phone)
 - Carey Kelly, Alabama DOT (Montgomery)
 - Paul DeCamp, Augusta MPO (Atlanta)
 - Robert Smith, Montgomery MPO (Montgomery)
 - Keith Bryan, Auburn-Opelika MPO (phone)
 - Don Tussing, Macon MPO (Atlanta)
 - Rick Jones and Lynda Temples, Columbus Consolidated (phone)
 - Mitch Stennett, Economic Development Authority of Jones County (MS) and Southern Economic Development Council (Jackson)

- Expert Working Group Members Not Present
 - Federal Members
 - Lewis Grimm, FHWA, Eastern Federal Lands
 - Bill Triplett, Delta Regional Authority
 - Stacy Jones, US Army Fort Gordon
 - Sarah Kennedy, US CDC
 - Non-Federal Members
 - Keith Purvis, Mississippi DOT

Welcome and Introductions

Marc Cutler, Cambridge Systematics, opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and for their flexibility in accommodating a change in meeting time.

Kevin Adderly, FHWA, was introduced as the 14th Amendment Highway Corridor Study's Task Monitor and he provided introductory comments to the group.

Marc Cutler asked for self introductions. Introductions were made by all individuals present and by videoconference and telephone.

Review of Project Objectives

Marc Cutler provided to the group an overview describing the project's background and purpose as defined by Federal legislation. The group was told that the study will not necessarily lead to construction of any specific highway improvements, will not commit the States or MPOs to further analysis, and will not result in recommendations for design unless requested by FHWA.

It was noted that the study is being conducted in coordination with its companion, the 3rd Infantry Division Highway Corridor study.

Marc Cutler spoke about the role of the EWG. Its establishment is a requirement of the study and its purpose is to provide input to the project team to help identify priorities, issues, or concerns that may impact specific alignment or design considerations. The group was told that the EWG must be comprised of both non-Federal and Federal members and meetings are to be held in person with teleconference options once per quarter throughout the project.

The first meeting of the EWG, held in September, focused on identifying control points and briefed on public involvement. The second meeting's focus is discussion of design levels and alignment and preparation for outreach activities.

Alternative Alignment and Design Levels

Harry Rice and Wendy Dyson, PBS&J, led a detailed discussion on alternative alignments and design levels for different sections of the corridor. The EWG was reminded of the five control points listed in the statute (Natchez, MS; Montgomery, AL; Columbus, GA; Macon, GA; and Augusta, GA), and the legislative specification that four alignments and design levels will be identified for the 14th Amendment Highway. Among the design levels, it is also specified that at least one must meet interstate standards and one must use substantial portions of existing highways. The team identified four design levels to frame the study: Interstate, Expressway, Highway, and Arterial. These are defined in the presentation slides. Using these classes as a base, the team created alternative alignments connecting the control points, sometimes varying the design level along the corridor depending upon local conditions. It was noted that revisions and/or variances to these designs may be needed to ensure context sensitive solutions, i.e. showing sensitivity to the local community context, including environmental and cultural resources. Several alternative alignments were developed for each of the four segments described below. A preliminary set of interchanges and major water crossings were marked on these alignments for cost estimate purposes and EWG members were asked to provide input on any additional interchanges or water crossing to increase the accuracy of the cost estimates.

Natchez to Montgomery

Five alternative alignments were developed for this segment.

- Alternative 1: Full Interstate
 - Upgrade US 84 from Natchez to I-55 in Brookhaven to interstate standards
 - Utilize existing I-55 from Brookhaven to I-20
 - Utilize existing I-20 from I-55 to I-85 Extension
 - Utilize planned I-85 Extension to Montgomery Outer Loop at I-65
- Alternative 2: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (Brookhaven)
 - Utilize existing four lane rural section of US 84 from Natchez to I-55 in Brookhaven
 - Utilize existing I-55 from Brookhaven to I-20
 - Utilize existing I-20 from I-55 to I-85 Extension
 - Utilize planned I-85 Extension to Montgomery Outer Loop at I-65
- Alternative 3: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (Laurel)
 - US 84 from Natchez to I-59 in Laurel
 - Utilize existing four lane rural section of US 84 and would require upgrade to urban four lane section in Laurel or construct bypass around Laurel to I-59
 - Upgrade US 84 from Natchez to I-59 to Expressway standard
 - I-59 from Laurel to I-20
 - I-20 from I-59 to I-85 Extension
 - I-85 Extension to Montgomery Outer Loop at I-65
- Alternative 4: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (Grove Hill and Evergreen)
 - US 84 from Natchez to Alabama state line

- Utilize existing four lane rural section of US 84 and would require upgrade to urban section of US 84 in Laurel
- US 84 from MS/ AL state line to Grove Hill
- Requires upgrade of existing two lane section of US 84 to minimum rural highway design standard
- US 84 from Grove Hill to I-65 near Evergreen
- Requires upgrade of existing two lane to minimum rural highway design standard
- I-65 to Montgomery Outer Loop
- Alternative 5: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (Grove Hill and Greenville)
 - US 84 from Natchez to Alabama state line
 - Utilize existing four lane rural section of US 84 and would require upgrade to urban section of US 84 in Laurel
 - US 84 from MS/ AL state line to Grove Hill
 - Requires upgrade of existing two lane section of US 84 to minimum rural highway design standard
 - US 84 from Grove Hill to I-65 near Greenville
 - Requires new location roadway from US 84 at Grove Hill to Greenville and new interchange with I-65 near Greenville
 - I-65 to Montgomery Outer Loop

During discussion of these alternatives, Mississippi representatives stated that they believe the team captured all practical routes, but they may have more comments later on the type of access and design levels used in certain areas. A suggestion was made that the maps could be made more user-friendly by using symbols to represent design levels, such as a solid line for interstates, dashed line for freeway or highway, and dots for arterial. It was also noted that currently US-84 does not directly connect to I-59 in Laurel, which creates complications. When the team asked EWG members what type of bypass or improvements would be appropriate in Laurel, participants responded that a bypass to the west and north may be a consideration. Also, they responded that I-59 in that area has had a number of deficiencies, such as S-curves, and that improvements to the interstate were just made to correct that problem. It was also noted that in Laurel, there is no direct connection between US 84 west of I-59 and US 84 east of I-59, and that a flyover study was conducted to address this issue.

A comment was made that all five alternatives for this section follow US-84 from Natchez to Brookhaven and no alternatives were provided that would avoid impact to the national forest in the area. A suggested alternative through Union Church was suggested to minimize impact on the forest. This alignment was drawn on the map.

The discussion on the Alabama portion of this segment was minimal. Members of the project team asked if EWG members thought the new location proposed in Alternative 5 from Grove Hill to Greenville was feasible. Alabama representatives responded that they did not see any immediate “show-stoppers” for the new location other than perhaps the high cost, but they also noted that upgrading a two lane section of US-84 to four lanes (as shown in Alternative 4) would also be expensive. They stated a desire to

see both alternatives advanced to the cost estimate phase so that they can use the cost to compare the two.

Montgomery to Columbus

Three alternative alignments were developed for this segment.

- Alternative 1: Full Interstate
 - Utilize planned Montgomery Outer Loop at I-65 to I-85
 - Utilize existing I-85 to US 280/431 near Opelika (exit 62)
 - Upgrade existing four lane divided section of US 280/431 to US 80 (JR Allen Pkwy) to interstate standards
 - Upgrade existing four lane section of US 80 to SR 27 (Veterans Pkwy) to interstate standards
- Alternative 2: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (Opelika)
 - Utilize planned Montgomery Outer Loop at I-65 to I-85
 - Utilize existing I-85 to US 280/431 near Opelika (exit 62)
 - US 280/431 to US 80 (JR Allen Pkwy)
 - Utilize existing four lane divided section, or
 - Upgrade this section to the Expressway standard with a full grade separated interchange at US 80.
 - Utilize existing four lane section of US 80 to SR 27 (Veterans Pkwy)
- Alternative 3: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (US 80 near Tuskegee)
 - Utilize planned Montgomery Outer Loop at I-65 to I-85
 - Utilize existing I-85 to US 80/SR 186 near Tuskegee
 - Upgrade existing two lane section of US 80/SR 186 to US 80/JR Allen Pkwy to a four lane divided section.
 - Requires the existing two lane section of US 80 be upgraded to a four lane divided section
 - Utilize existing four lane section of US 80/JR Allen Pkwy to US 27 (Veterans Hwy)

Columbus to Macon

Three alternative alignments were developed for this segment.

- Alternative 1: Full Interstate on New Alignment
 - New Interstate construction from US 80/JR Allen Pkwy to Sardis Church Road near Macon
- Alternative 2: Maximum Use of Existing Highways (Fall Line Freeway)
 - US 80 (JR Allen Pkwy) from SR 27 interchange to SR 96 near Geneva, GA to SR 49 C (Fort Valley Bypass) to SR 49 (Peach Pkwy)
 - SR 49 to I-75 near Byron (exit 149)
 - Requires upgrade of existing four lane undivided section of SR 49 near Byron to four lane divided section
 - I-75 to Sardis Church Road
- Alternative 3: Upgrade Fall Line Freeway to Interstate Standard

- US 80 (JR Allen Pkwy) from SR 27 interchange to SR 96 near Geneva, GA to SR 49 C (Fort Valley Bypass) to SR 49 (Peach Pkwy)
- Requires upgrade of existing roadways to Interstate standard
- SR 49 to I-75 near Byron (exit 149)
- Requires upgrade of existing SR 49 to Interstate standard
- I-75 to Sardis Church Road

A comment was made that Alternatives 2 and 3 follow US 80 (JR Allen Parkway) out of Columbus, GA. Specifically, there would likely be opposition to upgrading the four-lane section to interstate standards as residential communities currently line the highway. The Columbus representative stated that he would forward an alternative suggestion.

Macon Area

Three alternatives were developed for the Macon area.

- Alternative 1: Full Interstate Design and
 - Utilize existing I-75 NB to I-16
 - Utilize existing I-16 SB to US 23/129 (Exit 6)
 - Upgrade US 23/129 to US 80 (Jeffersonville Road) to interstate standards
 - Upgrade US 80 to SR 57 (Irvington Road) to interstate standards
- Alternative 2: Maximum Use of Existing Highways
 - Utilize existing I-75 NB to I-16
 - Utilize existing I-16 SB to US 23/129 (Exit 2)
 - Upgrade US 23/129 to US 80 (Jeffersonville Road) to Expressway standard
 - Upgrade US 80 to SR 57 (Irvington Road) to Expressway standard
- Alternative 3: Sardis Church Road and Sgoda Road Extensions
 - Sardis Church Road extension from Avondale Mill Road to SR 247 (programmed) and from SR 247 to Sgoda Road at I-16 (endorsed by the Middle Georgia Regional Council)
 - Sgoda Road extension from I-16 east to US 80 at Riggins Mill Road (endorsed by the Middle Georgia Regional Council)

A question was asked to clarify which exit from I-16 Alternative 2 utilizes (MLK or Gray Highway). The team responded that it will use MLK. The Macon representative said that he liked how the alternatives presented avoided the monument area. With regard to the Sgoda Road extension alternative, the EWG asked the Macon MPO if it would not be better to utilize SR 49 through Byron to access the proposed Sgoda Road extension rather than connecting north to the proposed Sardis Church Road extension. The Macon MPO agreed and noted that the proposed Sardis Church extension goes through some new residential areas and would likely generate controversy which makes the idea of using SR 49 a strong alternative.

Macon to Augusta

- Alternative 1: Full Interstate
 - New Interstate construction from SR 57 to I-20 near US 221
 - I-20 from new interchange to I-520
- Alternative 2: Maximum Use of Existing Highways
 - Utilize existing SR 57 to Wilkinson County line
 - New location, four lane divided roadway from SR 57 at Wilkinson County line to SR 243 near Ivey (Gordon Bypass – programmed)
 - Upgrade existing two lane section of SR 243 from Gordon Bypass to Baldwin County line to a four lane divided section
 - New location, four lane divided roadway from SR 243 at Baldwin County line to SR 24 (Milledgeville Bypass – programmed)
 - Upgrade existing two lane section of SR 24 from proposed Milledgeville Bypass to SR 68 west of Sandersville to a four lane divided section.
 - Utilize existing SR 24 from SR 68 to Sandersville Bypass to SR 88
 - Utilize existing SR 88 to US1/221
 - US 1 from SR 88 through Wrens to just north of US 221/SR 47
 - Upgrade of existing two lane section of US 1 to a four lane divided section, or
 - Construct a four lane divided bypass around Wrens
 - Utilize existing US 1 from north of Wrens to I-520

Outreach Plan

Liz Sanford, Cambridge Systematics, led the discussion on public outreach. She noted that while the primary technique to gain input on the study is the Expert Working Group, additional public outreach to a broader audience is being planned. Two tracks will be taken for this public outreach: public information and public involvement activities.

The public information track will distribute information to the public through frequent updates to the FHWA website and through distribution of informational materials to EWG members. These updates can be shared with local constituents through DOT and MPO communication infrastructure, such as board meetings, committee meetings and agency websites. In addition, the FHWA website is currently being revamped. It will exist as a more robust resource to document the progress of both the 14th Amendment Highway Corridor and 3rd Infantry Division Highway Corridor and will offer a comments section for public input and inquiries. This new site is expected to be operational in early January and will be available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/section1927/>

The public involvement track will facilitate direct input from the public that can be used to support key decisions. This track will initiate a speakers bureau for each of the three states, and speaking engagements will be scheduled between February and April. The intention of the speakers bureau will be to work with the non-federal members of the EWG to determine the most effective and efficient venues for project meetings. The project team will also conduct a webinar for a large audience from any location, which will take place in the April – May timeframe. Public comment will be invited at all of these events and participants will be directed to the FHWA website to record their comments any time between February and June.

The team asked EWG members for any input on the outreach process. A suggestion was made to incorporate a speakers bureau event into both the Macon and Warner Robbins MPO committee meetings coming up at the end of January or early February.

Next Steps

The next steps for the project team are to finalize alignments using comments received from the EWG, develop a comprehensive spatial database to support alignments, develop cost estimates for the alignments, and initiate broader public outreach activities. The next EWG meeting will be held in March 2011. Input was gathered from the group on preferred dates.

Immediate next steps for public outreach include update of web materials in December 2010, arrangement of speaker's bureau events in January and February 2011, attending speaker's bureau events in February -April 2011, EWG Meeting #3 in March 2011, and updating web materials again in March 2011.

The team asked for any final comments. The Fish and Wildlife Service noted that they would have more comments after further examination of the maps. Similarly, the representative from Army Corps of Engineers said that he would provide wetland data to add to the map. A question was asked about environmental impacts. Specifically, would wetland mitigation costs be accounted for in the cost estimates. The team responded that large scale mitigation would be considered in the cost estimates and that any known large wetland areas should be sent to the project team. The EWG members were thanked for their contributions and the meeting adjourned.