

P R E S S \* R E L E A S E  
Coastal Conservation League  
Southern Environmental Law Center

July 28, 2010

\*\*\*\*\*

**SCDOT Planners Ignore Better, Cheaper Alternative to Mark Clark Expressway**

\*\*\*\*\*

Contact:

Josh Martin, CCL Land Use Director, (843-723-8035)  
Chris DeScherer, SELC Senior Attorney, (843-637-1054)

Charleston (SC) – The draft report released today by the South Carolina Department of Transportation, which describes the environmental impacts of the proposed Mark Clark Expressway, fails to consider alternatives that are far less harmful and less costly than building a major interstate through communities, open-space areas, and marshes west of the Ashley River in the Stono River watershed.

SCDOT is proposing to construct a four-lane highway that extends I-526 approximately seven miles from Savannah Highway to the James Island Expressway. At a cost of \$489 million, or more, the project would consume significant public funds but do little or nothing to reduce traffic congestion. In fact, according to an analysis by the Coastal Conservation League, Savannah Highway and Folly Road would still have failing levels of service with the I-526 extension completed.

The highway would include two major river crossings, threatening the water quality of the Stono River and Wappoo Creek watershed. Further, it would encourage sprawl development southwest of Charleston, bringing more traffic, tailpipe emissions and polluted stormwater runoff to the region, especially Johns Island.

The Coastal Conservation League and Southern Environmental Law Center, along with many concerned citizens, have for years advocated for new or improved solutions to traffic in the region. Solutions that cost less, pose less of an environmental threat, and that actually enhance economic opportunities and quality of life for the affected communities are sorely needed. The League's innovative "A New Way to Work" proposal establishes a network of connected streets to take much of the traffic off Savannah Highway and other busy roads, while redeveloping suburban areas to bring jobs, shopping, and services closer to residents. It would cost approximately half as much as the Mark Clark Expressway.

The SCDOT's draft environmental impact statement, however, completely ignores this proposal and any of the alternative solutions it offers.

"As a regional organization, we see a lot of highway proposals in the South like this one – projects that hearken back to the 1950s and 60s when building bypasses and beltlines was the sole solution," said SELC Senior Attorney Chris DeScherer. "We now understand how these massive projects backfire – pushing sprawl further out, pushing our infrastructure to the limit, chewing up farms and wetlands."

"Other alternatives embody the new national trend and policy of livable community design," said Josh Martin, CCL Land Use director. "Wisely reworking existing areas before developing new land; wisely focusing on a diversity of travel modes; wisely returning to town and village patterns proven through the years is possible through these other alternatives. This is the emerging vision nationwide and could be the vision here in Charleston County. It is truly unfortunate that the SCDOT's preferred alternative does not reflect this emerging vision."

DeScherer said that SCDOT's failure to include alternatives along the lines of the "New Way to Work" concept is legally flawed, since federal law requires agencies to consider all reasonable alternatives that meet the need and purpose of the project. Instead, SCDOT and the other agencies have only considered differently routed and designed highways, and used a computer model showing traffic results for those, refusing to use a different model that would account for the traffic benefits of the conservation groups' proposal.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Coastal Conservation League is a grassroots non-profit conservation organization, founded in 1989 to protect the natural environment of the South Carolina coastal plain and to enhance the quality of life of our coastal communities. The League works with individuals, businesses, and government to ensure balanced solutions. WEB: [www.coastalconservationleague.org](http://www.coastalconservationleague.org)

Facebook Fan Page: Coastal Conservation League

TWITTER: <http://www.twitter/scccl>

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a regional nonprofit using the power of the law to protect the health and environment of the Southeast (Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama). Founded in 1986, SELC's team of 40 legal experts represent more than 100 partner groups on issues of climate change and energy, air and water quality, forests, the coast and wetlands, transportation, and land use.

WEB: [www.SouthernEnvironment.org](http://www.SouthernEnvironment.org)

FACEBOOK: <http://www.fanofselc.org>

TWITTER: [http://www.twitter.com/selc\\_org](http://www.twitter.com/selc_org)