

Date
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To
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From
HNTB

**PROJECT
CORRESPONDENCE**

Subject
Indirect Screening Report (2013) –
Update Memo

This memo is an update to the Indirect Screening Report (HNTB, 2013) for State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Project Numbers I-4400/I-4700, the proposed widening of I-26 from US 25, just south of Hendersonville, to I-40/I-240, just south of Asheville. Since the Indirect Screening Report (sICE) was submitted in 2013, notable environmental features have been found that alter both the Future Land Use Study Area and the result of the Indirect Effects Screening Matrix.

Future Land Use Study Area Update

In 2016, NC Wildlife Resources Commission documented the presence of the Gray bat in the project study area. In preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and through Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act for the Gray bat, other protected species were surveyed, including the Appalachian elktoe. The Appalachian elktoe was discovered in the French Broad River, upstream and downstream of the I-4400/I-4700 project area. In light of this new information, it is prudent to include the stretch of the French Broad River located west of the Asheville Regional Airport (see attached figure) within the Future Land Use Study Area (FLUSA).

Based on aerial photography, this area between the French Broad River and Asheville Regional Airport appears to be largely undeveloped except for the Sierra Nevada Brewing Company brewery and GF Linamar, an auto parts manufacturer. It is appropriate that the addition of this area, amounting to approximately 483 acres, be included as part of the FLUSA and any indirect and cumulative effects that the project may have on this part of the river be assessed.

Natural Environmental Features Update

The revised FLUSA boundary includes the French Broad River, which is on the 2014 303(d) List of Impaired Waters for fecal coliform. This additional portion of the French Broad River is not a trout water, high quality water, outstanding resource water, or within a water supply watershed.

As of October 19, 2017, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) lists 18 federally protected species in Henderson and Buncombe counties. These species are listed in Table 1, along with the Biological Conclusion rendered based on survey results in the study area. Further information about these species can be found in the Natural Resources Technical Report (NRTR) and NRTR Addenda.

Table 1. Federally Protected Species Listed for Buncombe & Henderson Counties

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	Habitat Present	County	Biological Conclusion
<i>Alasmidonta raveneliana</i>	Appalachian elktoe	E	Yes	Buncombe and Henderson	May Affect Likely to Adversely Affect
<i>Bombus affinis</i>	Rusty-patched bumble bee ²	E	No	Buncombe ^{1,2} and Henderson ^{1,2}	Not Required ²
<i>Epioblasma florentina walkeri</i> (= <i>E. walker</i>)	Tan riffleshell	E	Yes	Buncombe ¹	No Effect
<i>Erimonax monachus</i>	Spotfin chub (=turquoise shiner)	T	No	Buncombe ¹	No Effect
<i>Geum radiatum</i>	Spreading avens	E	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Glaucomys sabrinus coloratus</i>	Carolina northern flying squirrel	E	No	Buncombe and Henderson	No Effect
<i>Glyptemys muhlenbergii</i>	Bog Turtle	T(S/A)	Yes	Buncombe and Henderson	Not Required ³
<i>Gymnoderma lineare</i>	Rock gnome lichen	E	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Helonias bullata</i>	Swamp pink	T	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Isotria medeoloides</i>	Small whorled pogonia	T	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Microhexura montivaga</i>	Spruce fir moss spider	E	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Myotis grisescens</i>	Gray bat	E	Yes	Buncombe and Henderson	May Affect Likely to Adversely Affect
<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Northern long-eared bat	T	Yes	Buncombe and Henderson	May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect
<i>Platanthera integrilabia</i>	White fringeless orchid	T	No	Henderson ¹	No Effect
<i>Sagittaria fasciculata</i>	Bunched arrowhead	E	Yes	Henderson ¹	No Effect
<i>Sarracenia rubra ssp. jonesii</i>	Mountain sweet pitcher plant	E	Yes	Henderson	No Effect

Table 1. Federally Protected Species Listed for Buncombe & Henderson Counties

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	Habitat Present	County	Biological Conclusion
<i>Sisyrinchium dichotomum</i>	White irisette	E	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Solidago spithamaea</i>	Blue Ridge goldenrod	T	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Spirea virginiana</i>	Virginia spiraea	T	Yes	Buncombe ¹	No Effect

E – Endangered

T – Threatened

T(S/A) – Threatened due to similarity of appearance

¹Historic record (the species was last observed in the county more than 50 years ago)

²No Section 7 survey, conclusion, or consultation is required at this time.

³Species listed as T(S/A) are not biologically endangered or threatened and are not subject to Section 7 consultation and therefore no Biological Conclusion is required.

The Appalachian elktoe and Gray bat were recently found within the FLUSA and study area boundaries. NCDOT and FHWA reached a Biological Conclusion of May Affect Likely to Adversely Affect for both species. USFWS has agreed that formal consultation (i.e., Biological Assessment) is necessary under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for the two species.

Indirect and Cumulative Effects Screening Update

The Indirect Screening Matrix has been updated to reflect the expansion of the FLUSA and the updated information to the Notable Environmental Features section. After review of the additional FLUSA boundary, the matrix remains the same except in the Notable Environmental Features column, which has gone from a moderate concern to a high level of concern with the introduction of two protected species known to be within the FLUSA.

Indirect Land Use Effects Screening Tool - STIP I-4400/I-4700 I-26 Widening										
Rating	Scope of Project	Travel Time Savings	Forecasted Population Growth	Forecasted Employment Growth	Available Land	Water/Sewer Availability	Market for Development	Public Policy	Notable Environmental Features	Result
More Concern	Major New Location	< 10 minute travel time savings	> 3% annual population growth	Substantial # of New Jobs Expected	5000+ Acres of Land	All services existing / available	Development activity abundant	Less stringent; no growth management	Targeted or Threatened Resource	
↑					X				X	
↔						X	X	X		Possible Land Use Scenario Assessment
↓	X	X	X	X						
Less Concern	Very Limited Scope	No travel time savings	No population growth or decline	No new Jobs or Job Losses	Limited Land Available	No service available now or in future	Development activity lacking	More stringent; growth management	Features incorporated in local protection	

Indirect Effects Conclusion

Indirect Summary Statement

Based on the result of the Indirect Effects Screening Matrix, the need for a Land Use Scenario Assessment (LUSA) is “Possible”, as there is a moderate concern for indirect and cumulative effects resulting from the I-4400/I-4700 project.

As noted in the Indirect Screening Report (2013), potential land use effects as a result of the I-4400/I-4700 project are still moderately low. Despite the apparently large amount of available land,

local officials suggest there are a number of constraints to development in the FLUSA, notably natural environmental features and topography, as well as the sizable extent of land occupied by Biltmore Estate in the northern section of the FLUSA. Potential land use effects as a result of the I-4400/I-4700 project are generally tempered by the fact that the project is not expected to provide any new access or opportunities for traffic exposure to properties in the FLUSA, and will generate marginal travel time savings. The extent of potential indirect land use effects as a result of the I-4400/I-4700 project will be largely dependent upon several key variables, including: the future local economy and market for development, public infrastructure projects, as well as the completion of other transportation improvements in the area, particularly the future planned Balfour Parkway, STIP Project No. R-5744.

Cumulative Effects Summary Statement

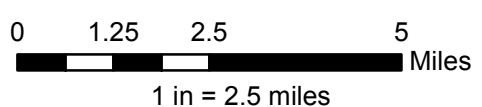
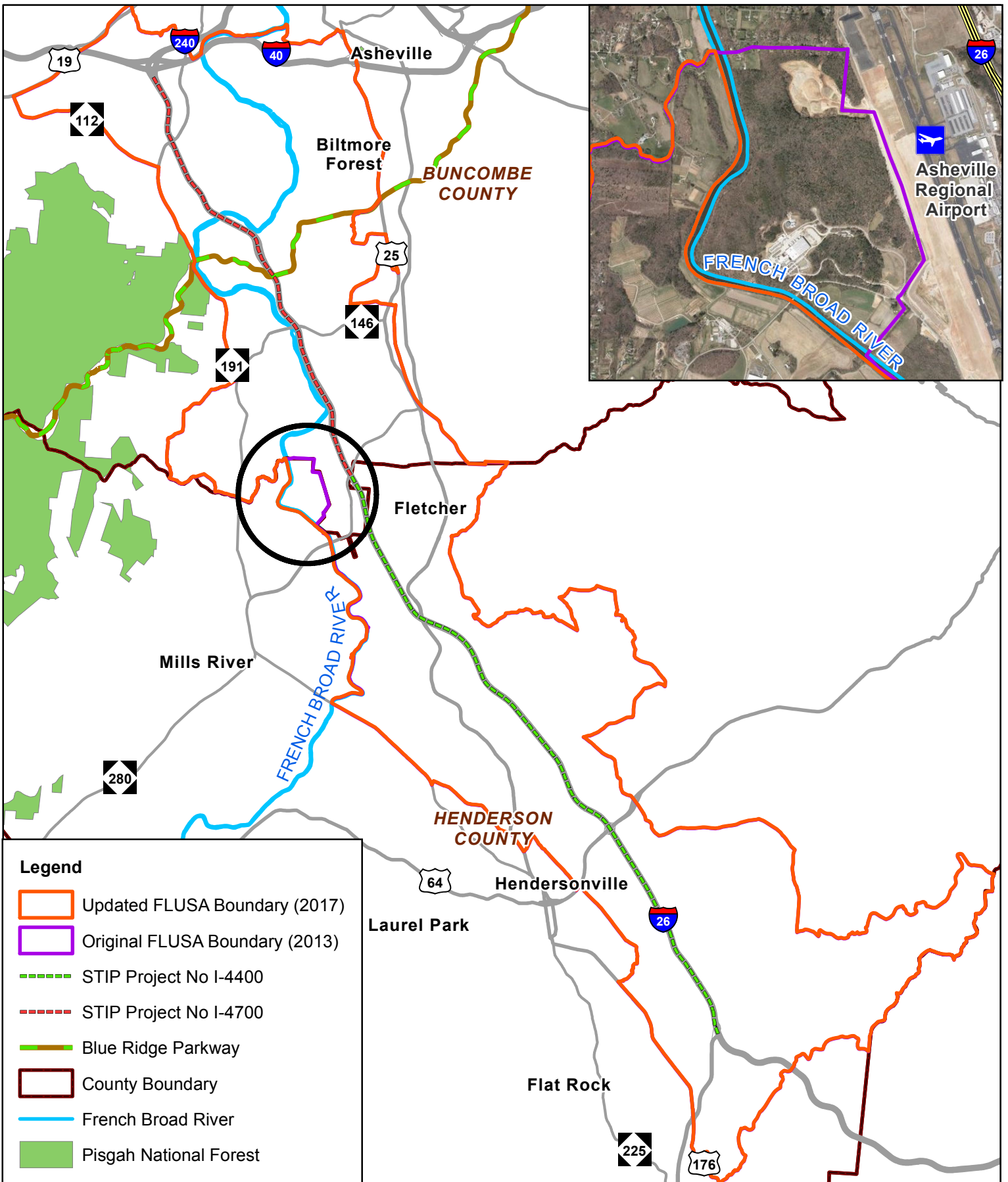
STIP Project I-4400/I-4700 is the proposed widening of I-26 from US 25 south of Hendersonville in Henderson County to I-40/I-240 south of Asheville in Buncombe County, approximately 22.2 miles. The Preferred Alternative is the Hybrid 6/8-Lane Alternative that will widen I-26 from four to six lanes between US 25, south of Hendersonville, and US 25 (Asheville Highway) and from four to eight lanes between US 25 (Asheville Highway) and I-40/I-240 south of Asheville. The widening is asymmetrical at different locations along the project corridor that “best fit” the current roadway’s location and surrounding land uses. This project would complement other local STIP projects in the provision of greater regional mobility.

Due to the growing and planned expansion of sewer service throughout the FLUSA, relatively economical housing prices, anticipated growth of local jobs in the area, and expected moderate population growth, the local market for development is relatively robust at present. Land use throughout the FLUSA is mixed, consisting of large sections of residential areas, commercial and industrial stretches, and agricultural tracts. Commercial development is largely concentrated near the I-26 interchanges with US 64, NC 280 (Airport Road), NC 146 (Long Shoals Road), and NC 191 (Brevard Road). The Buncombe and Henderson County planners expect the I-26 corridor to largely maintain its mix of residential and commercial characteristics.

Based on this assessment of the currently identified project alternatives, the I-4400/I-4700 project is not expected to have a notable indirect effect on land use in the FLUSA. Any direct natural environmental impacts by the project will be addressed through coordination with federal and state regulatory and resource agencies involved in the Section 404/NEPA Merger process, and in the environmental permitting process. Other developments will be required to follow local, state, and federal guidelines and permitting regulations.

NCDOT has conducted a Regional Cumulative Effects Study (CES) (URS, 2014) of other planned projects for Asheville and the surrounding areas. The Regional CES examined a study area larger than the I-4400/I-4700 FLUSA that included Henderson and Buncombe Counties and encompassed a number of projects beyond, but including, the scope of the I-26 widening. The Regional CES analyzed the potential cumulative effects of projects from the cities, counties, French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO), and major projects planned by private sector businesses and institutions in the region. The findings of the Regional CES show that the cumulative effects of the regional projects are predominantly due to notable cultural, community, water quality, and natural habitat features having minimal incorporation in local planning protections and/or policies. Protections and/or policies are undergoing shifts to increasingly include communities, water quality, and/or natural habitat features.

Based on current data, because few indirect impacts are anticipated, the cumulative effect of this project when considered in the context of other past, present, and future actions, and the resulting impact on the notable human and natural features should be minimal. Therefore, the project’s contribution to cumulative impacts resulting from current and planned development patterns is expected to be minimal.



Future Land Use Study Area (FLUSA) Update
 STIP Project I-4400/I-4700
 I-26 Widening
 Henderson and Buncombe Counties