



# I-26 Improvements

STIP Project Nos. I-4400 & I-4700



US 25 (exit 54) in Henderson County to I-40/I-240 in Buncombe County including Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge over I-26

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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE I-26 BRIDGE OVER THE FRENCH BROAD RIVER

### I-26 Bridge over the French Broad River Project Overview

The N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes widening I-26 from U.S. 25 in Henderson County to I-40/I-240 in Buncombe County. STIP Project I-4400 will widen I-26 in Henderson County and I-4700 will widen I-26 in Buncombe County. NCDOT's Preferred Alternative will widen I-26 from four lanes to six lanes between U.S. 25 (Exit 44) south of Hendersonville and U.S. 25 (Asheville Highway) (Exit 54), and widen to eight lanes from U.S. 25 (Asheville Highway) (Exit 54) to I-40/I-240. The purpose of the project is to reduce congestion, with a goal of achieving overall Level of Service D in the design year (2040), and to improve the pavement structure. STIP Projects I-4700 and I-4400C are expected to be let in July 2019.

The I-26 bridge over the French Broad River will be replaced as part of STIP Project I-4700. The current pair of parallel two-lane bridges are expected to be replaced by a single eight-lane structure. Construction of the bridge is expected to take approximately three to four years. Access roads and causeways on both riverbanks will be required to construct the new structure. Temporary extensions of the causeway into the river will occur as the new bents are constructed. The extensions are expected to be approximately 10 feet or 21 feet and will be in place for approximately five to nine weeks. A final extension to remove the center bents will be in place for approximately four weeks. Construction of the three spans is expected to provide a "safe passage lane" for river users. Construction activities that require work to be done from the top of the bridge, such as setting girders, are expected to occur at night.

This Communications Plan for the construction of the I-26 Bridge over the French Broad River is intended to supplement the Public Involvement Plan (2013) and communications already in place for STIP Project I-4400/I-4700. This plan focuses on specific activities to alert river users to the hazards of bridge construction and is not intended to be a comprehensive plan for the entire I-26 widening project.

### Goals of the Strategic Communications Plan

- Implement a diversified communication and outreach strategy in coordination with the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, N.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, RiverLink and other stakeholders that will relay the purpose of the I-26 Widening project and the replacement of the I-26 bridge over the French Broad River as an integral part of the project. It will help ensure that river users and businesses dependent on the river understand the river will be open during construction with an area of safe passage for boaters.
- Identify stakeholders using or benefiting from the French Broad River and understand their unique needs and concerns regarding construction/demolition of the I-26 bridge.
- Inform citizens of NCDOT's efforts to avoid and minimize disruptions to the river during construction/demolition.
- Provide thorough, up-to-date information regarding project progress and milestones throughout the life of the project.

- Provide information regarding river conditions at the I-26 bridge and any events that may cause a closure (e.g. flooding, overhead construction).
- Use various social media platforms to engage the community in two-way dialogue regarding the project’s impacts, benefits and progress.
- Encourage river users to “know before you go” with Twitter, Facebook, TIMS, 511, etc.

### **Targeted Audiences**

Targeted audiences may include, but are not limited to the following:

Property owners along the River	Government officials (continued):
Biltmore Estate	Mills River Town Council
River users including:	Transylvania County Commissioners
Individual paddlers	NC Department of Parks and Recreation (NCDPR)
Paddling groups	NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC)
Paddling/Tubing/Fly fishing businesses	Other civic groups:
River outfitters	RiverLink
Government officials:	MountainTrue
Asheville City Council	Asheville Greenworks
Brevard City Council	Clean Water for NC
Buncombe County Commissioners	Land of Sky Trout Unlimited
Buncombe County Parks and Recreation	Sierra Club – WNC Chapter
Henderson County Commissioners	

### **Implementation Strategies and Tactics**

- Develop a construction safety plan for river users that includes signage and river markers to alert river users to the safe passage lane.
- Identify specific stakeholders and partner with RiverLink in contacting the parties.
- Provide opportunities for small group meetings with identified stakeholders. The meetings will include a brief, targeted presentation tailored to the NCDOT identified concerns of the group and provide an opportunity for questions and answers.
- Update and maintain the comprehensive project website, <https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/i26Widening/>
- Issue news releases as needed, regarding project schedule, progress, impacts, and milestones.
- Provide a station regarding the Bridge Construction at the Design Public Meeting to be held April 16, 2018. River businesses and property owners along the river were included in the mailing list.
- Place notification signs at public input locations upstream of the I-26 bridge beginning at the headwaters of the French Broad River in Rosman, Transylvania County. Identified locations include:
  - Headwaters Outfitters – 25 Parkway Road, Rosman
  - Champion Park River Access (Transylvania County Parks and Recreation) – Old Turnpike Road, Rosman
  - Hannah Ford Campground - Headwaters Outfitters\* - Green Road (SR 1127), Rosman
  - Island Ford River Access (Transylvania County Parks and Recreation) – Island Ford Road, Brevard
  - Hap Simpson Park (Brevard Parks and Recreation) – 968 Greenville Hwy, Brevard
  - Wilson Road River Access (Transylvania County Parks and Recreation) – Wilson Road, Pisgah Forest
  - Penrose Boat Ramp (NC Wildlife Resources Commission) – 170 Apac Drive, Penrose
  - Blantyre Park (Henderson County Parks and Recreation) – 500 Cliff Road, Penrose
  - Horse Shoe River Access Park (Henderson County Parks and Recreation) – Horse Shoe

- Westfeldt Park (Henderson County Parks and Recreation) – 83 Old Fanning Bridge Road, Fletcher
- Glen Bridge River Park (Buncombe County Parks and Recreation) – 77 Pinner Road, Arden
- Corcoran Paige River Park (Buncombe County Parks and Recreation) – 9 Pinner Road, Arden
- Bent Creek River Park (Buncombe County Parks and Recreation) – 1592 Brevard Road, Asheville
- Hominy Creek River Park (Buncombe County Parks and Recreation) – 194 Hominy Creek Road, Asheville
- Mills River Park (Town of Mills River) – 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River *(This park is near the confluence of Mills River and French Broad River and a common starting point for paddlers of the French Broad River.)*

All locations are public with the exception of the privately owned launches marked with an asterisk (\*).

- Coordinate with NCWRC (<http://www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/Where-to-Boat>) and NCDPR to update their website.
- Provide notification information to identified stakeholders.
- Coordinate strategic social media campaigns.
  - Use an established Twitter feed (e.g. @NCDOT\_i26) for the project to keep the public informed of project progress, construction activities and project-related events. The tweets will consist of specific information about the project, information about alternative routes, photos and videos of crews working efficiently, and any good news about the project.
    - It is the responsibility of the Project Engineer in charge of the project to update the Transportation Information Management System (TIMS) on all parts of the project that will affect motorists, such as a lane or road closures, temporary detours, etc. as they come up on the project schedule. This is posted on the NCDOT website in the Traveler Information section (where it remains until that closure or detour is over), and automatically generates a feed for the NCDOT twitter account that covers this area of the state, as well as for our 511 travel phone system.
  - Collaborate with project field personnel to document the progress of the project by posting photos to the Department's Instagram, Pinterest and Flickr accounts. Links to the photos will be posted on Twitter, Facebook and used in news releases.

### **Communication Channels**

The Project Engineer also has the responsibility of informing the Public Relations Officer of updates to river conditions. The Public Relations Officer and the Project Engineer will decide whether the conditions are major enough to justify a news release. If it is not something that would be sent as a full news release, the Public Relations Officer or the Project Engineer may send a brief email to local recipients or post to social media for each of these updates.

In addition, the Project Engineer and Public Relations Officer may arrange for a weekly briefing regarding river conditions, which would then be distributed to local recipients. This briefing may be adjusted to include future work plans and may also be adjusted to daily or monthly briefings depending on conditions on the ground. These briefings would be distributed at a more local level than NCDOT is capable of doing through its traditional news release distribution system. The previously mentioned steps can and will be adjusted throughout the construction process to fit the needs of river users and NCDOT.

Traditional news releases would be distributed to the following:

- Television stations — WLOS (ABC), WYFF (NBC), WMYA, WSPA (CBS), WYCW (CW), WHNS (FOX), WETP (PBS), WUNE (PBS).
- FM Radio Stations — Asheville: WCQS, WLFA, WOXL, WKSF, WTMT, WRES, WMYI, WFSM, WPVM, and WMIT; Hendersonville: WFHC and WCQS; Fletcher: WQNQ; Biltmore Forest: WOXL)

- Newspapers — Asheville Citizen-Times, Mountain Xpress, Hendersonville Times-News (Blue Ridge Now), Hendersonville Lightning, Biltmore Beacon, and Transylvania Times
- Websites, blogs
- City government offices
- Libraries
- Local businesses (through Chamber and DWSP).

### **Required Resources**

#### Public Relations Officer

- Employed by NCDOT, managed by the Communications Office, and located in the Division 13 Office in Asheville
- Community-based, on-the-ground local marketing and communications specialist
- Responsible for development, coordination, and integration of communications including local social media efforts and traditional media marketing
- Partners with local media to promote awareness and ensure project understanding.

### **Timeline for Plan Implementation**

#### February through March 2018

- Identify and reach out to identified stakeholders
- Small group meetings held to present information regarding I-26 construction of the bridge over the French Broad River and its potential effects on river users and properties along the river. In addition, provided NCDOT's plan for river safety.
  - March 21, 2018 – Presentation given to Henderson County Board of Commissioners
  - April 10, 2018 – Presentation given to Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Board of Commissioners
  - April 11, 2018 – Presentation given to businesses that use the river and civic groups with an interest in the River's quality. Meeting summary and correspondence included in Appendix A.

#### April 16, 2018

Design Public Meeting – included a station to address I-26 bridge construction concerns

#### July 1, 2018 – ROW

#### July 1, 2019 – LET

#### July 2019 through July 2023 (four-year construction period expected)

Regularly update stakeholders and public regarding progress, conditions of the river, etc.