



# Appendix E

## Environmental Justice Analysis



June 2021



# TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ANALYSIS

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



April 2021

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ANALYSIS

Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, signed by the President on February 11, 1994 directs Federal agencies to take the appropriate and necessary steps to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse effects of Federal projects on the health or environment of minority and low-income populations to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law. The Environmental Justice (EJ) Analysis looks at the effects of the Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A on these populations.

## 1.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Beaufort County propose improvements to the US 278 corridor between Bluffton and Hilton Head Island in Beaufort County, South Carolina. Figure 1 shows the project study area (PSA) extends from Moss Creek Drive to Wild Horse/Spanish Wells Road for approximately 4.11 miles. The project includes replacement of the eastbound Mackay Creek bridge and potential improvements to the three other bridges located within the PSA. The three additional bridges to be improved include the westbound Mackay Creek, the eastbound Skull Creek, and the westbound Skull Creek bridge. Improved access to the Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge and the C.C. Haigh, Jr. Boat Landing is also proposed as part of this project.



Figure 1: Project Study Area

US 278 currently extends for 1,074 miles from Hilton Head Island, South Carolina to Wickes, Arkansas and crosses through five states (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas). The PSA is in the southeast portion of Beaufort County, South Carolina. It extends west to east from Moss Creek Drive to Wild Horse Road/Spanish Wells Road and crosses Mackay Creek and Skull Creek via bridge. The land uses within the immediate vicinity of the PSA include both commercial and residential properties. Numerous businesses, including restaurants, outlet malls, retail stores, gas stations, car dealerships, banks, and health services along with outdoor recreational and conservation-related facilities are adjacent to the US 278 Corridor.

The Mackay Creek bridges are located along US 278 and connect the Moss Creek area on the Bluffton side (mainland) to Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge (PINWR), refer to Figure 1. The bridge that carries US 278 eastbound lanes over Mackay Creek is 2,190 feet in length and was constructed in 1956. The bridge that carries US 278 westbound lanes over Mackay Creek is 2,231 feet in length and was constructed in 1983. The roadway width, curb to curb, on the eastbound and westbound bridges is 36.1 feet. The Skull Creek bridges are located along US 278 and connect Pinckney Island to Hilton Head Island. The bridges carrying US 278 eastbound and westbound over Skull Creek are 2,821.9 feet in length and were constructed in 1982. The roadway width, curb to curb, on the eastbound and westbound bridges is 36.1 feet. Mackay Creek and Skull Creek are primarily used by recreational vessels. Public boat ramps and private docks are located along both creeks.

Within the PSA, US 278 is primarily a four-lane divided highway. From Moss Creek Drive to Salt Marsh Drive, US 278 is a six-lane divided highway with a 35-foot grass median. US 278 from Salt Marsh Drive to 1,700 feet east of Jenkins Road consists of two 12-foot lanes in either direction and a 40-foot grass median. The width of the median shifts to a 14-ft paved two-way left turn lane through the Squire Pope Road intersection. East of Squire Pope Road, three lanes exist in either direction.

The purpose of this project is to address structural deficiencies at the existing eastbound Mackay Creek bridge and reduce congestion within the PSA. While the original purpose of this project was to replace the structurally deficient eastbound Mackay Creek Bridge, the project has grown to include improvements throughout the corridor between Moss Creek Drive and Wild Horse/Spanish Wells Road. The eastbound Mackay Creek bridge (traveling to Hilton Head Island), which crosses the Intracoastal Waterway, would be replaced as part of SCDOT's bridge replacement program. The other three bridges in the PSA - the westbound bridge over Mackay Creek and the eastbound and westbound bridges over Skull Creek - have also been identified for potential improvements. In addition, the access to Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge and the C.C. Haigh, Jr. Boat Landing have also been considered for possible improvements.

The Mackay Creek Bridge was built during the 1950s and is scheduled for replacement as part of SCDOT's bridge replacement program. However, based on discussions with local officials, the scope of the proposed bridge replacement project was expanded to include the US 278 Corridor from Moss Creek Drive to Wild Horse/Spanish Wells Road to address traffic congestion within the project limits. A traffic analysis was used to determine base year conditions and to analyze future needs. The need for this project is derived from the following factors:

- Growth in population and employment
- Decreased mobility and increased traffic congestion

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY FOR THE EJ ANALYSIS

### 2.1 STUDY AREA

The study area for the EJ Analysis includes the proposed right-of-way limits (Figure 2). The study area is divided into two components, the Town of Bluffton and the Town of Hilton Head Island for the existing conditions and impacts analyses.

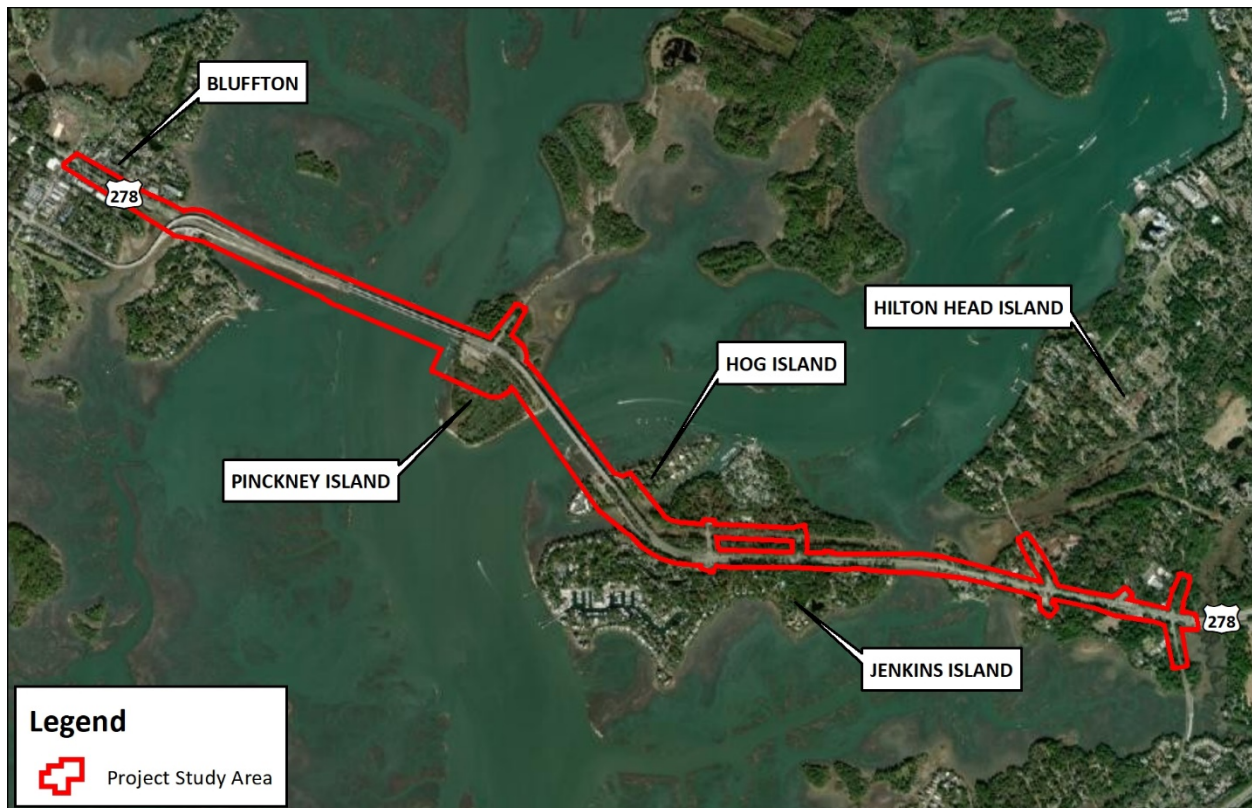


Figure 2: Project Study Area

### 2.2 DATA SOURCES

Data collection includes aerial imagery, field visits (2019), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), public outreach, websites, demographic data from the US Census Bureau and existing studies. A list of sources used to provide an overview of community characteristics within Beaufort County and the towns of Bluffton and Hilton Head Island is provided in Appendix A.

Utilizing FHWA's 2011 *Guidance on Environmental Justice and NEPA* the following steps were completed to identify any disproportionately high or adverse impacts:

- Section 3.0 identifies existing minority and low-income populations
- Section 4.0 explains coordination, access to information, and participation
- Section 5.0 identifies potential effects

## 3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS

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The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines environmental justice (EJ) as “identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse effects of [FHWA’s] programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations to achieve an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens. This includes the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.” *E.O. 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, focuses federal attention on the environmental and human health effects of federal actions on minority and low-income populations.

According to the FHWA definition, there are low-income and minority populations within the EJ Analysis study area. Demographic and economic conditions were examined using US Census Bureau data, the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year data and *EJSCREEN*—the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool. Using the *EJSCREEN* mapping application, a polygon was created encompassing the project study area. This area encompasses three census tracts and five block groups (Figure 3). Additional mapping, literature reviews, and field reviews were conducted to identify specific EJ communities and areas within the study area that would potentially be affected by the proposed project. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Four block groups have a minority population, and four block groups have households in poverty. The highest percentages of minorities (56 percent) and low-income households (19 percent) are found in CT 105 BG 2, which is the Stoney community on Hilton Head Island.

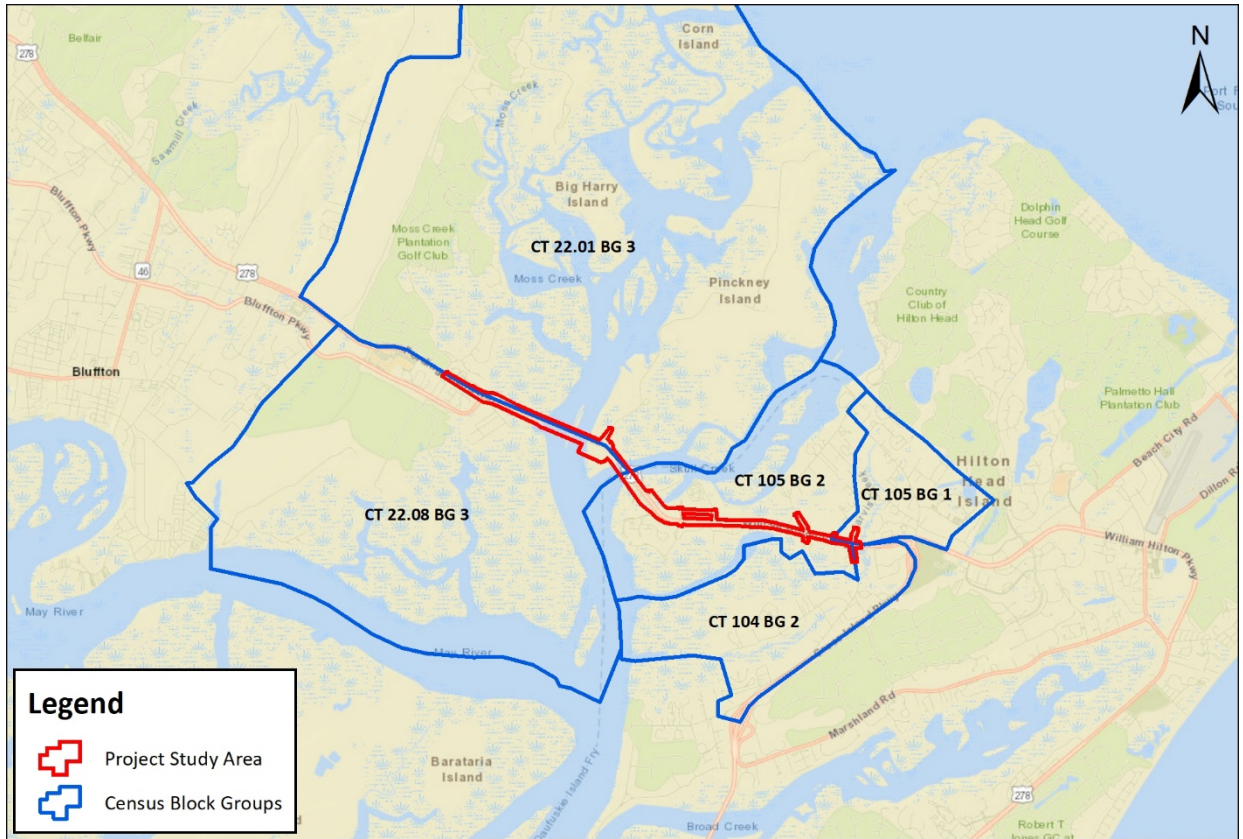


Figure 3: Study Area Block Groups

Table 1: Area Demographics

Area	Total Population	Percent White	Percent Minority	Median Household Income	Percent of Households in Poverty
CT 21.08 BG 3	1677	61	39	\$105,850	7.31
CT 105 BG 1	1976	72	28	\$48,322	11.23
CT 105 BG 2	2053	44	56	\$71,289	19.18
CT 22.01 BG 3	2173	94	6	\$55,530	5.22
CT 104 BG 2	814	100	0	\$99,293	0.00
Beaufort County	179,316	75	25	\$60,603	11.9
South Carolina	4,893,444	67	33	\$48,781	16.6



Table 2: Minority Populations

Census Tract	Total Population	Hispanic	African American	American Indian	Asian	Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Two or More Races
CT 21.08 BG 3	1677	26%	9%	0%	2%	0%	0%	2%
CT 105 BG 1	1976	15%	7%	1%	2%	0%	0%	3%
CT 105 BG 2	2053	31%	22%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%
CT 22.01 BG 3	2173	0%	0%	3%	2%	0%	0%	1%
CT 104 BG 2	814	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: US Census

### 3.1 HISPANIC POPULATIONS

According to the US Census, Beaufort County has the second largest Hispanic community in South Carolina. The Hispanic population was 20,187 in 2017. Hispanics are the largest minority group in both Bluffton and Hilton Head Island. They comprise approximately 15 percent of the population in both municipalities.

The Hispanic population within the study area is represented in three block groups shown in Figure 3: Census Tract 105 Block Group 1 and Block Group 2 and Census Tract 21.08 Block Group 3. Using the EPA's EJ Screening Tool with 2013 to 2017 American Community Survey data, Hispanic population numbers were collected. Census Tract 21.08 Block Group 3, which includes Bluffton and Pinckney Island has a Hispanic population of approximately 430. Census Tract 105 Block Group 1 and Block Group 2 includes Hog Island, Jenkins Island and the portions of Hilton Head Island within the study area. Census Tract 105 Block Group 1 has a Hispanic population of approximately 294 and Census Tract 105 Block Group 2 has a Hispanic population of approximately 644. These Hispanic populations make up approximately 15 percent of the total population in the census tract.

### 3.2 GULLAH COMMUNITIES

The Gullah/Geechee people of the Low Country and Sea Islands of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina are the only African American population of the United States that have maintained a separate language and a distinct culture. This culture began with the transportation of African slaves to the islands of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The African slaves, who came from different regions in Africa, brought with them their language, culture and traditions. After the Civil War, freedmen established farms, small communities, schools, and churches throughout the Island. Due to the island's isolation prior to the 1950s, the native islanders maintained their African heritage including language, crafts, food, traditions, farming, fishing and relationship to the land. Because of their geographic protection from outsiders and strong sense of family and community, their language and traditions have remained intact by Gullah elders passing down the language and traditions to their children. Unique characteristics of the Gullah culture heritage includes eating habits, cooking styles, music, language, folklore and heirs properties.

The 2017 Town of Hilton Head's Comprehensive Plan identifies 13 historic Gullah neighborhoods on Hilton Head Island (Figure 4). Typically, these neighborhoods include a praise house, an oyster house and a cemetery. The residents own land passed down from generation to generation. The boundaries of these neighborhoods were developed with information provided by the Native Island Business and Community Affairs Associations (NIBCAA) Land Management Ordinance (LMO) Committee. Collectively, these 13 neighborhoods are comprised of approximately 2500 acres, of which approximately 1,000 acres are owned by Gullah.

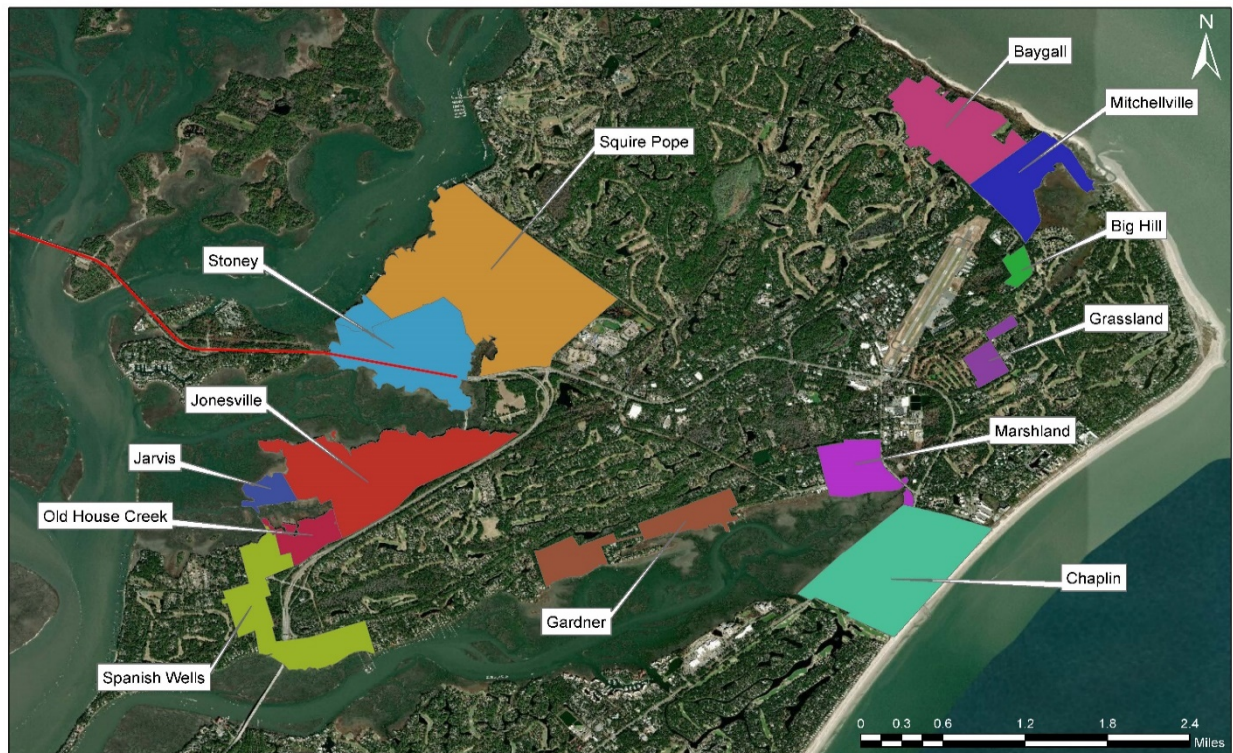


Figure 4: Historic Gullah Neighborhoods

Since the 1950's, land acquisition by non-Gullah people, increased development, tourism and changing demographics have resulted on the deterioration of the Gullah culture and population on Hilton Head Island. According to the Town 2017 Comprehensive Plan, the African American population decreased from 14.5 percent in 1980 to 7.5 percent in 2010. According to the US Census, the African American population was 2,768 or seven percent of residents of Hilton Head Island in 2010.

### 3.3 HISTORIC STONEY NEIGHBORHOOD

On Hilton Head Island, the Stoney community is an EJ population within the study area. This neighborhood has been established for over 100 years and is located just east of Jenkins Island. Stoney is bisected by US 278, which is the only route on and off the island. This community contains a mix of commercial and residential developments. It also includes parks, schools, Boys and Girls Club, marinas, restaurants, and the Humane Society.

According to the *Stoney Initiative Area Plan*, the residents of Stoney have a strong sense of community and they want to remain on their land and utilize it themselves as opposed to selling to other people to develop. Residents consider the community their family land, it provides ties to their culture, and plays

an important role in their lives. The strength of the community has kept the Stoney neighborhood intact despite the bisection caused by US 278.

Traffic through the Stoney community is very heavy since US 278 carries all vehicles entering or exiting the island from the mainland. Two other major roads cross through Stoney: Squire Pope Road and Wild Horse Road. Both roads are used by residents and business owners of Stoney and serve as alternative routes for the Hilton Head Plantation residents to reach their back entrance. The lack of frontage roads combined with numerous curb cuts on both sides of US 278, high traffic volumes and a 45 mile per hour speed limit present access problems to adjacent properties.

There are sidewalks along both sides of US 278 in Stoney, which are directly adjacent to the highway where the majority of vehicles pass at high speeds. On the south side of US 278, the sidewalk begins at the Crazy Crab and extends to the Spanish Wells Road intersection. On the north side of the road, the sidewalk extends the entire length of US 278 through Stoney. There are two pedestrian crosswalks with signals across US 278, at the Squire Pope Road and Spanish Wells Road intersections.

## 4.0 OUTREACH & COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENTS

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A Public Involvement Plan was prepared for the US 278 Corridor Improvement project. This plan includes specific outreach strategies for EJ populations in Beaufort County. These populations are Hispanic and Gullah communities as well as elderly and lower income residents. The following outreach strategies such as tailoring materials and outreach techniques to ensure full and fair participation were implemented:

- Provided project newsletters and surveys in Spanish
- Held meetings with community leaders
- Held outreach meetings in churches and social service organizations to inform, educate, and seek input from residents and businesses in these areas
- Distributed project information in The Gullah Sentinel (newspaper) and by WLVA 101.1 in Hardeeville
- Hosted information booths at the 2019 Gullah Festival and the 2019 Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival
- Held individual meetings with residents of the Stoney neighborhood

### Stoney Community Meetings

Outreach meetings were held with residents of the Stoney community that could be affected by the reasonable alternatives, refer to Table 3. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an opportunity to discuss the project, reasonable alternatives, and potential community enhancement opportunities.

Table 3: Stoney Community Meetings

Meeting Date	Location	Summary
March 10, 2020	Hilton Head Island Library	A series of four, one-hour meetings were held with the four Stoney families that may experience right-of-way acquisition.
August 20, 2020	Hilton Head Island Rowing & Sailing Center	This meeting started the dialogue about community enhancement.
September 29, 2020	Hilton Head Island Rowing & Sailing Center	This meeting focused on specific, potential community enhancement ideas including a Stoney community history video, family monuments, improvements to the Jenkins Island Cemetery, an access road for properties between the causeway and Squire Pope Road, and an access/driveway to the Stewart family properties.
October 27, 2020	Hilton Head Island Rowing & Sailing Center	The project team met with the Stewart family individually to discuss the proposed driveway to their property to address safety concerns.
December 8, 2020	Central Oak Grove Church	This meeting explored the previously discussed community enhancement ideas: signage, an open-air pavilion, theme-based street and multi-use path lighting, a community history video/story map, improvements to the Jenkins Island Cemetery and the access road for the Stewart family parcels.
January 26, 2021	Hilton Head Island Rowing & Sailing Center	As requested at the December 8, 2020 meeting, the project team discussed the additional renderings that were developed to better understand the community enhancements ideas.
February 8-9, 2021	Various	Individual property owner meetings to discuss the proposed project.

Potential community enhancements were initially developed based on recommendations presented in the Background and Recommendations Report for the Gullah Geechee Cultural Preservation Project (draft 2019) prepared by the Walker Collaborative. This document provides recommendations for strategies to better preserve Gullah cultural on Hilton Head Island. In September 2019, the Hilton Head Island Town Council approved 13 of the recommendations, which address land preservation, economic opportunities and Town regulations.

Initial discussions included the potential enhancement options derived from the background research and requested input from the Stoney community. Potential community enhancements developed through coordination with the Stoney community and based on the detailed cultural report it is recommended that the Stoney community be identified as a TCP, refer to Appendix M. Although it is anticipated that the US 278 Corridor Improvement project would not have an adverse impact on the Stoney community, the report recommended the project team “consider Stoney’s historic significance and help promote measures that lead to the preservation and understanding of Native Islander landownership on the Island”. Although the project would not have an adverse impact, it is the goal of the project to provide community enhancement options to preserve and highlight the history of the Stoney community. Potential enhancement options to further establish or reestablish the Stoney community as a “gateway” and a “place” include:

- Signage to demarcate the Stoney community to include a more “gateway” entrance/exit to the community based on the boundary established in the TCP Report
- Open-air pavilion on town-owned property near the US 278 and Squire Pope Road intersection to highlight history of the Stoney community and other Gullah neighborhoods on the island
- Create a theme based street and multi-use path lighting
  - Install flags/signage to the lighting poles along US 278 to indicate they are within the Stoney community
  - Landscaping along US 278 within the Stoney community
  - Seating along multi-use path
- Develop an online interactive map of the History of Stoney community to share important historical information about the Stoney community, Gullah Communities, and Hilton Head Island.



Figure 5: Community Enhancement Renderings

## 5.0 STONEY COMMUNITY IMPACTS

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The Stoney community on Hilton Head Island is the only EJ population within the study area. To minimize impacts through the Stoney community, the Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A follows the existing US 278 corridor. From the east end of Jenkins Island causeway to the end of the project at Wild Horse Road/Spanish Wells Road, US 278 will be widened to the north to minimize relocations. A 10-foot wide multi-use path would be constructed along US 278 from Blue Heron Point Road to Wild Horse Road/Spanish Wells Road.

### 5.1 ECONOMICS

The Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A would improve mobility, access and reduce congestion within the US 278 corridor, which could enhance economic opportunities for existing businesses and encourage new businesses to locate along US 278. Two businesses would be relocated by the Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A, both are within the Stoney community. However, it is possible that the two commercial establishments could relocate within the Stoney community.

### 5.2 RELOCATIONS

As a result of right-of-way minimization and design refinements, the Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A reduced the potential relocations to zero residential relocations and two commercial relocations. Both commercial relocations are within the Stoney community. Based on the relocation report completed by SCDOT, there are available locations for these businesses to relocate within the Stoney community.

### 5.3 AESTHETIC VALUES

The Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A would not introduce new visual intrusions to the viewshed of the Stoney Community along the US 278 Corridor. The project will include community enhancements such as landscaping along the multiuse path and within the median to add aesthetic value throughout the corridor. In addition, signage to demarcate the Stoney community to include a more “gateway” entrance/exit to the community, flags/signage on multi-use path light poles, and seating along the multi-use path is part of the project.

As the Stoney community has the character of a semi-rural Lowcountry area, the project is committed to retaining as much existing vegetation and tree canopy within the Stoney community as possible. Along US 278, strips of new right-of-way will require some tree/vegetation clearing in order to construct the project. However, those areas are buffered by additional wooded areas further off the alignment of the existing (and proposed) US 278, with the result that the loss of vegetation should not be impactful to the character

of the Stoney community. A tree canopy section along Squire Pope Road will be maintained through minimization efforts to reduce the proposed project footprint.

## 5.4 COMMUNITY COHESION

The Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A would not disrupt community cohesion causing isolation or altering or hindering access to community services and facilities. Additionally, the project would ultimately improve community cohesion throughout the US 278 corridor by providing a multiuse path, landscaping, improved signage, as well as improving access to commercial, residential, and recreational properties. The project will include the construction of an open-air pavilion on town-owned property in the Stoney community to highlight the history of the Stoney community and other Gullah neighborhoods on Hilton Head Island.

## 5.5 TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND SAFETY

The Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A would improve mobility, accessibility, and reduce congestion within the US 278 corridor. The traffic analysis concludes that three lanes per direction over Mackay Creek, and through PINWR and Jenkins Island are needed to meet 2045 traffic needs along US 278. Three lanes in each direction is planned throughout the project study area and through the Stoney community.

## 5.6 AIR QUALITY

The Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A may increase MSATs along portions of the US 278 Corridor, but the project is not anticipated to have an appreciable impact on regional MSAT levels. Construction-related impacts to air quality would be temporary, localized increased fugitive dust and mobile-source emissions. State and local regulations shall be followed for dust and other air quality emission controls. These potential impacts would occur throughout the project study area and would not be appreciably greater to the Stoney community.

## 5.7 NOISE

Based on the noise analysis completed, in 2045 the Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A will have noise impacts at 11 residential receivers within the study area, ten of these residential properties are in the Stoney community. According to the *Preliminary Engineering Noise Report*, June 2020, the properties would have noise levels that approach or exceed FHWA's noise abatement criteria for residential land use, Figure 6. The noise analysis also indicated that eight of these ten residential properties would have noise impacts in 2045 even if the proposed project was not constructed.

A noise mitigation analysis which included a barrier assessment, was conducted in accordance with SCDOT's Noise Abatement Policy. The analysis determined that none of the noise mitigation methods met the Noise Abatement Policy's feasible and reasonable criteria. Property values could decrease for homes and businesses adjacent to the US 278 and intersection improvements due to proximity and noise impacts. These potential impacts would occur throughout the project study.

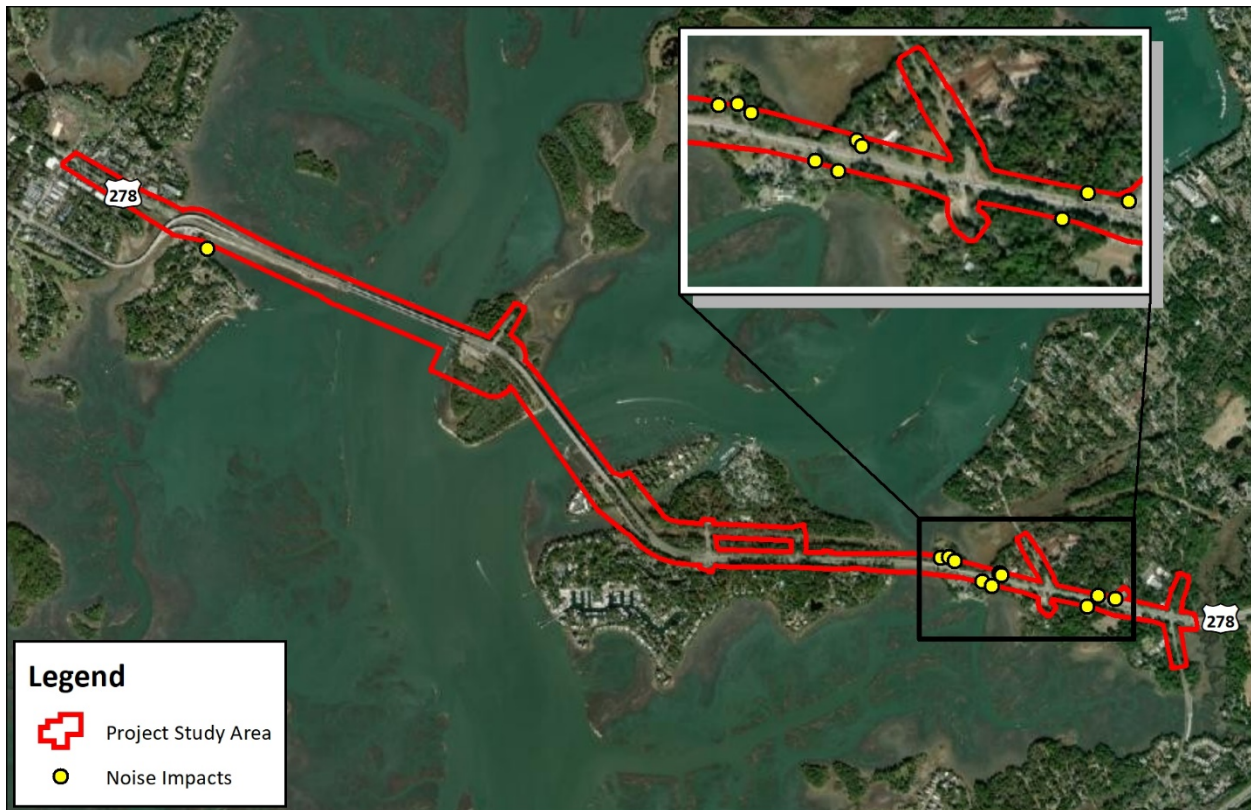


Figure 6: Noise Impacts

## 5.8 WATER QUALITY

The proposed bridge replacement project is not expected to result in adverse impacts to water quality in Mackay Creek and/or Skull Creek. Siltation and turbidity may occur in the channel and tidal creek beds as sediments are disturbed during construction of the bridge pilings. However, this increase will be temporary and should settle within a few hours of completion of each piling installation. Any direct impacts to water quality would be limited to the area within construction limits. These potential impacts would occur at the bridge locations and would not be appreciably greater to the Stoney community.

## 5.9 HAZARDOUS WASTE

The Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A would impact four sites that have the potential for hazardous waste. Additional investigations will be completed before construction of the project begins. Two of these four properties are located within the Stoney community.

## 5.10 SUMMARY

The potential impacts on the Stoney community, in comparison to the overall population in the study area, would not be appreciably greater. Based on the above discussion and analysis, the Recommended Preferred Alternative 4A will not cause disproportionately high and adverse effects on any minority or low-income populations in accordance with the provisions of E.O. 12898 and FHWA Order 6640.23A. No further EJ analysis is required.



# APPENDIX A LIST OF REFERENCES

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## Websites *(Accessed January-March 2020)*

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