



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
Wilmington District

NCDOT I-26 Corridor Improvements Buncombe and Henderson Counties, NC (Regulatory)

Three projects comprise the I-26 corridor improvements in Buncombe and Henderson Counties, NC:

- TIP No. I-4400/I-4700 – Improve I-26 for 22.2 miles from US 25 in Henderson County to I-40 in Buncombe County, NC
- TIP No. I-2513 - Improve I-26 for 7 miles from I-26 south of Asheville through the US 19-23 interchange in Buncombe County, NC
- TIP No. A-10A - Improve US 19-23 (Future I-26) for 12 miles from Asheville to Exit 13 (near Mars Hill) in Buncombe County, NC

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS: NC 11

DATE: 01 APRIL 2022

1. PURPOSE:

To provide information regarding the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) I-26 corridor improvement projects located along approximately 41.2 miles of the I-26 corridor in Henderson and Buncombe Counties, North Carolina.

2. BACKGROUND:

a. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is the lead federal agency for these three projects. Both the FHWA and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) consider these three projects to be separate. Each project is being processed through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/404 Merger Process (Merger Process) in NC. The purpose of the Merger Process is to merge the requirements of NEPA with the 404 (b) (1) Guidelines of the Clean Water Act. The projects are listed below (2.b. - 2.d.) in a southern to northern progression.

b. TIP No. I-4400/I-4700, Action ID# SAW-2013-01883. Improve I-26 for 22.2 miles from US 25 in Henderson County to I-40 in Buncombe County, NC. The FHWA/NCDOT combined these two projects (I-4400 and I-4700) into one project to comply with a 2003 US District Court decision (Eastern District of NC, Western Division).

c. TIP No. I-2513 (commonly referred to as the I-26 Connector Project), Action ID# SAW-2004-9986803. Improve the interstate corridor from I-26 south of Asheville through the US 19-23 interchange in Buncombe County. This project is approximately 7 miles long. The “C” section of I-2513 is adjacent to the northern end of the I-4400/I-4700 project and the “B” section of I-2513 is adjacent to the southern end of the A-10A project.

PROJECT INFORMATION – NCDOT I-26 Corridor Projects in Buncombe and Henderson Counties, NC (Regulatory) – Continued

d. TIP No. A-10A, Action ID# SAW-2013-01886. Improve US 19-23 (Future I-26) for approximately 12 miles from Asheville (north of I-240) to Exit 13 (near the Mars Hill community) in Buncombe County.

3. **CURRENT STATUS:**

a. TIP No. I-4400/I-4700 – This project is being processed as a phased permit. To date, the Corps has issued authorization to impact waters of the U.S. for Sections I-4700 A & B (Phase 1) on June 21, 2019, and for Sections I-4400 BB and I-4400 C (Phase 2) on September 16, 2019. Applications have not yet been received for the remaining two sections of the I-4400/I-4700 project (I-4400 BA and I-4400 A), as final designs have not been completed for either section. Because final designs have not been completed for either section, neither section has completed review under the Merger Process. Currently there are no actionable items from NCDOT for the Corps, or the Merger Team, to address at this time.

b. TIP No. I-2513 (I-26 Connector) - The Merger Team has concurred on concurrence points (CP) 1 (Purpose and Need and Study Area), CP 2 (Detailed Study Alternatives Carried Forward), CP 2A (Bridging Decisions and Final Alternatives), CP 3 (Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative), and CP 4A (Avoidance and Minimization) for the entire project, with a commitment to revisit CP 4A based on additional information from NCDOT. The Corps has been notified that NCDOT will schedule the next Merger meeting for a date in March 2022. The FHWA completed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on January 9, 2020.

c. TIP No. A-10A – The Merger Team has concurred on CPs 1 (Purpose and Need and Study Area), 2 (Detailed Study Alternatives Carried Forward), and 2A (Bridging Decisions and Final Alternatives). NCDOT notified the Corps in July of 2021 that this project had been delayed and was put on hold; however, due to the condition of two bridges in the A-10A corridor, the FHWA/NCDOT separated these from the larger project and their replacement will be processed separately under STIP #B-4442. The Corps has not yet received an application for project B-4442/replacement of these two bridges. The next step in the process for the A-10A project is for NCDOT to submit their Merger Application to the Corps for this project. Once received, the Corps will issue a Merger Public Notice and the project will continue to advance through the Merger Process.