

Lee Hewitt
District No. 108 - Charleston and
Georgetown Counties
P. O. Box 928
Murrells Inlet, SC 29576

Committee:
Agriculture, Natural Resources and
Environmental Affairs



327-D Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29201

Tel. (803) 212-6927
LeeHewitt@schouse.gov

House of Representatives
State of South Carolina

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Mark Hoeweler
Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments
1230 Highmarket Street
Georgetown, SC 29440

Dear Mark,

On behalf of the constituents I represent, I want to comment on the draft Grand Strand Area Transportation Study's (GSAT) 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Update.

Concerns about transportation, particularly growing traffic congestion on the Waccamaw Neck and hurricane evacuation needs, are among the top issues I hear about from constituents.

Development of the Southern Evacuation Life Line (SELL) road project and a bypass around the city of Georgetown must be given a much higher priority in the MTP due to the following issues:

- Traffic from southern Horry County is directed south on Highway 17 through the Waccamaw Neck during hurricane evacuations.
- With the soon to be completed widening of Hwy 707 and the upcoming extension of Hwy 31 to North Carolina, traffic from these two roads will flow into Murrells Inlet and the Waccamaw Neck.
- Approximately one-third of the traffic passing through the Waccamaw Neck is North/South through traffic.
- Continued development in Horry and Georgetown counties will continue to put more cars into the system.
- An accident on Highway 17 will cause traffic to come to a standstill.
- Motorists will begin to seek alternative routes to avoid Hwy 17 affecting neighborhoods. We must study alternative routes to direct motorists and make sure they are prepared for the increased traffic

The S.C. Dept. of Transportation states in the draft SELL Environmental Impact Statement that the preferred road alignment does the following:

- Reduces hurricane evacuation time in the year 2030 by 25 percent for Georgetown County;
- Reduces the vehicle hours traveled, thereby reducing congestion;
- Reduces the vehicle miles traveled, thereby improving the efficiency of the road network;
- Reduces the distance between crossings of the Waccamaw River as measured south of Conway from 42 miles to 18 miles along highways east of the river.

Beyond the benefits to Georgetown County and the Waccamaw Neck, the SELL project will aid in reducing overall Grand Strand traffic congestion. The GSATS 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Congestion Management Process states that the SELL is an alternative to expanding Hwy 501, which cannot be easily expanded because of the terrain and adjacent land uses.

A 2012 analysis produced by the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce documents the importance of the SELL project in substantially reducing Grand Strand hurricane evacuation congestion and times. From the analysis:

- The SELL facility (without 1-73) provides major relief to the critical evacuation bottleneck at the US 501 corridor between SC 544 and Conway.
- Serves as a more efficient way to get southern Grand Strand and northern Waccamaw Neck evacuees to US 378 westbound and US 501 northbound at the junction of the Conway Bypass.
- Provides major evacuation congestion relief to US 521 in and west of Georgetown.
- Compared to the realistic no build future year alternative with reverse lane on US 501 from Aynor to Marion, if SELL is built (without the 1-73 project), it provides 7 hours of clearance time, giving roughly 50,000 people the time to escape, who otherwise would be trapped in the area under certain scenarios.

The SELL and Georgetown Bypass road projects are vital to reducing traffic congestion and vastly expediting hurricane evacuations. On behalf of my constituents, I ask that GSATS give these projects a much higher priority in the transportation plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Rep. Lee Hewitt