



Helms Road Grade Separation and Siding Extension Waxhaw, Union County, N.C. and Lancaster, Lancaster County, S.C.

State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Project No. P-5748

Issue 1, October 2020



The purpose of this newsletter is to inform the local community of the STIP P-5748 project and request your input. Comments from the public, local officials, and resource and regulatory agencies will be used to help refine the designs and be considered during selection of a preferred alternative.

Project Overview

The N.C. Department of Transportation is proposing rail and roadway improvements in the Helms Road, Tory Path Road, and N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) area in Union County.

The project proposes to:

- Construct a rail grade separation in the vicinity of Helms Road
- Close the existing at-grade crossing at Helms Road
- Construct a new roadway connection from the proposed grade separation to N.C. 16 (Providence Road)

In addition, the project will:

- Construct approximately 4,600 feet of rail siding from east of Hancock Road to west of Hector Road in Lancaster County, S.C.
- Track improvements and maintenance activities are for a portion of the track near downtown Waxhaw as well as closing the Hector Road railroad crossing

The Helms Road Grade Separation project is Phase II of P-5748, Phase I of P-5748 (Project No. F-14288) proposes to close the existing at grade rail crossing at Tory Path Road and complete an extension of Tory Path to Helms Road on new alignment.

Project Purpose

The proposed project will eliminate rail - highway conflicts and improve conditions for motorists and emergency vehicles accessing to and from N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway). Crossings along this rail corridor have experienced blockages by waiting trains. This is predominantly due to the need to make way for some trains to pass while other trains wait on the rail siding track. The existing rail siding is not sufficient to accommodate the length of the trains without blocking crossings. Rail siding extension in the area will reduce rail congestion in the state's rail network between the Port of Wilmington and Charlotte, resulting in increased rail efficiency, accommodation of future freight growth and improved air quality. This will also aid in keeping standing trains at a safe distance away from nearby rail crossings. The proposed grade separation and closing of the existing at-grade crossing at Helms Road and Hector Road will also support the projected long term increases in both vehicular and train traffic in the project study area location by providing a highway corridor in the project area by providing a highway corridor that has a free-flow crossing of the CSX rail line.

NCDOT began the process of studying the transportation needs in the study area due to the impacts of rail crossing blockages in the area. Several design alternatives for a new roadway connection from the proposed grade separation to N.C. 16 (Providence Road) have been identified for further study. The alternatives are presented in this newsletter and are currently being analyzed based on their potential to fulfill the project's purpose while minimizing impacts to the human and natural environment.

(continued on page 2)

Project Schedule*

| | |
|----------------|--|
| January 2019 | Project Start |
| September 2019 | Project Kick-Off |
| October 2020 | Project Newsletter distributed to study area Public Comments are due by November 13, 2020 |
| December 2020 | Notification to present preferred alternative via mail, project website, and completion of environmental documentation |
| Spring 2022 | Begin Right-of-Way Acquisition |
| Spring 2023 | Begin Construction |

*Schedule is preliminary and subject to change

Potential Impacts to Human and Natural Resources for Each Alternative*

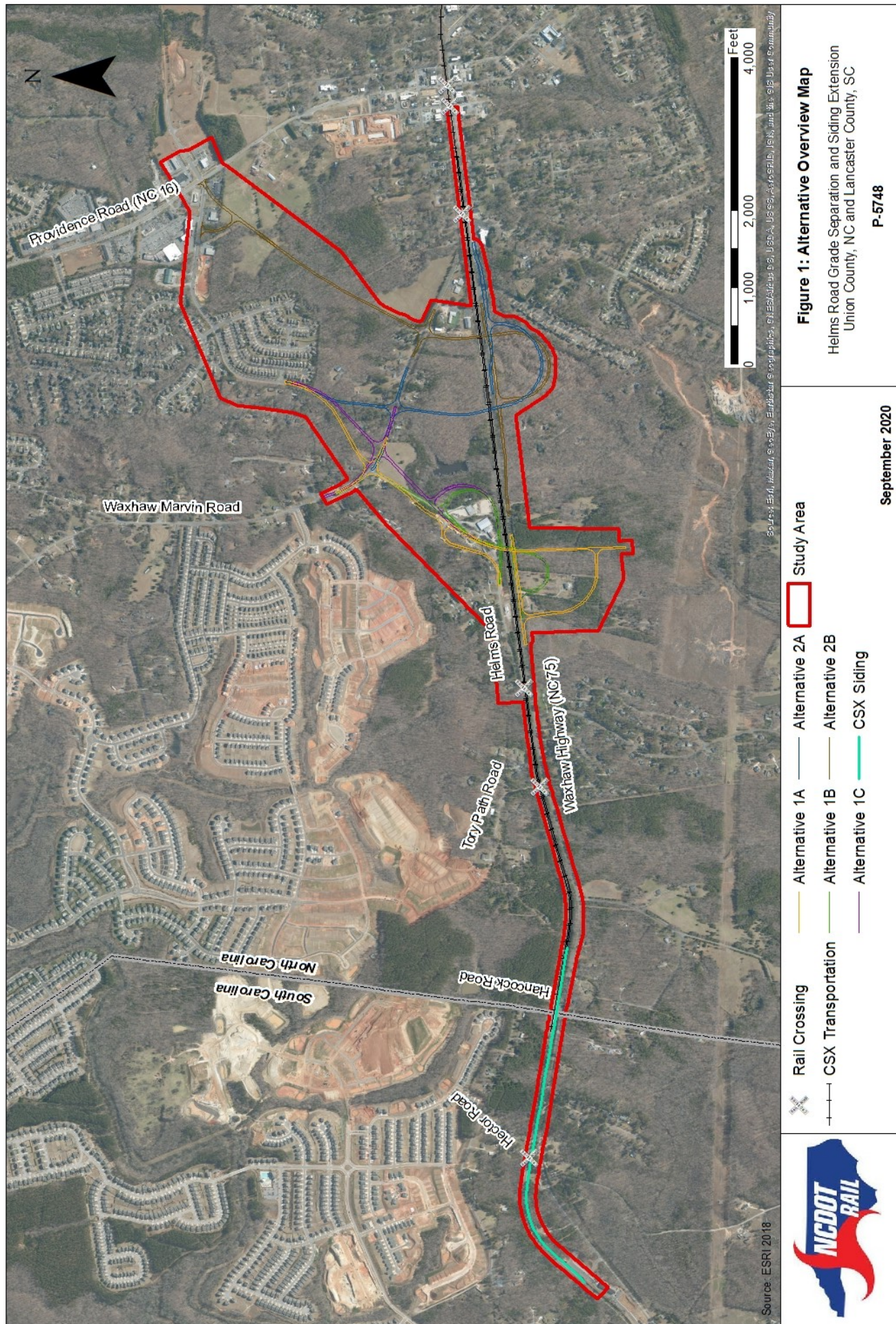
| | Alt 1, Option A | Alt 1, Option B | Alt 1, Option C | Alt 2, Option A | Alt 2, Option B | Rail Siding Extension |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Residential Relocations | 12 | 8 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Business Relocations | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Disadvantage Populations | No effect for all alternatives and rail siding projects | | | | | |
| Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities | Positive effect for all alternatives | | | | | No effect |
| Community Services | No effect for all alternatives and rail siding projects | | | | | |
| Protected Species | No effect for all alternatives and rail siding projects | | | | | |
| Cultural Resources | 1 cemetery | 1 cemetery | No effect | 1 cemetery | No effect | No effect |
| Streams (linear feet) | 177 ft | 0 ft | 0 ft | 490 ft | 977 ft | 77 ft |
| Wetlands (acres) | 0 ac | 0 ac | 0 ac | .10 ac | .14 ac | 0 ac |

*Impacts to these resources are considered during selection of preferred alternative.

Project Construction Cost Estimate*

| | Alt 1, Option A | Alt 1, Option B | Alt 1, Option C | Alt 2, Option A | Alt 2, Option B | Rail Siding Extension |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Construction | \$16.9m | \$15.8m | \$16.5m | \$12.3m | \$15.1m | \$5.4m |

*NCDOT, September 2020. Costs are preliminary and subject to change. Costs do not include right-of-way or utility costs.



STIP Project P-5748

C/O JMT

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Aquellas personas no hablan inglés, o tienen limitaciones para leer, hablar o entender inglés, podrían recibir servicios de interpretación si los solicitan llamando al 1-800-481-6494.

WE NEED YOUR INPUT!

Your questions and comments are important to us, and your input on the proposed project is encouraged. Please see below on how you can access project information, provide input, and submit questions and comments.

All comments will be taken into consideration, regarding of submittal method and are due November 13, 2020

Engagement Hub | Obtain project information, view maps, submit comments at: <https://publicinput.com/helms-rd-waxhaw>

E-mail | Send comments or questions to: helms-rd-waxhaw@publicinput.com

Phone | Leave comments or questions at: (855) 925-2801 Access Code: 8677

Project Contacts

NCDOT Project Manager

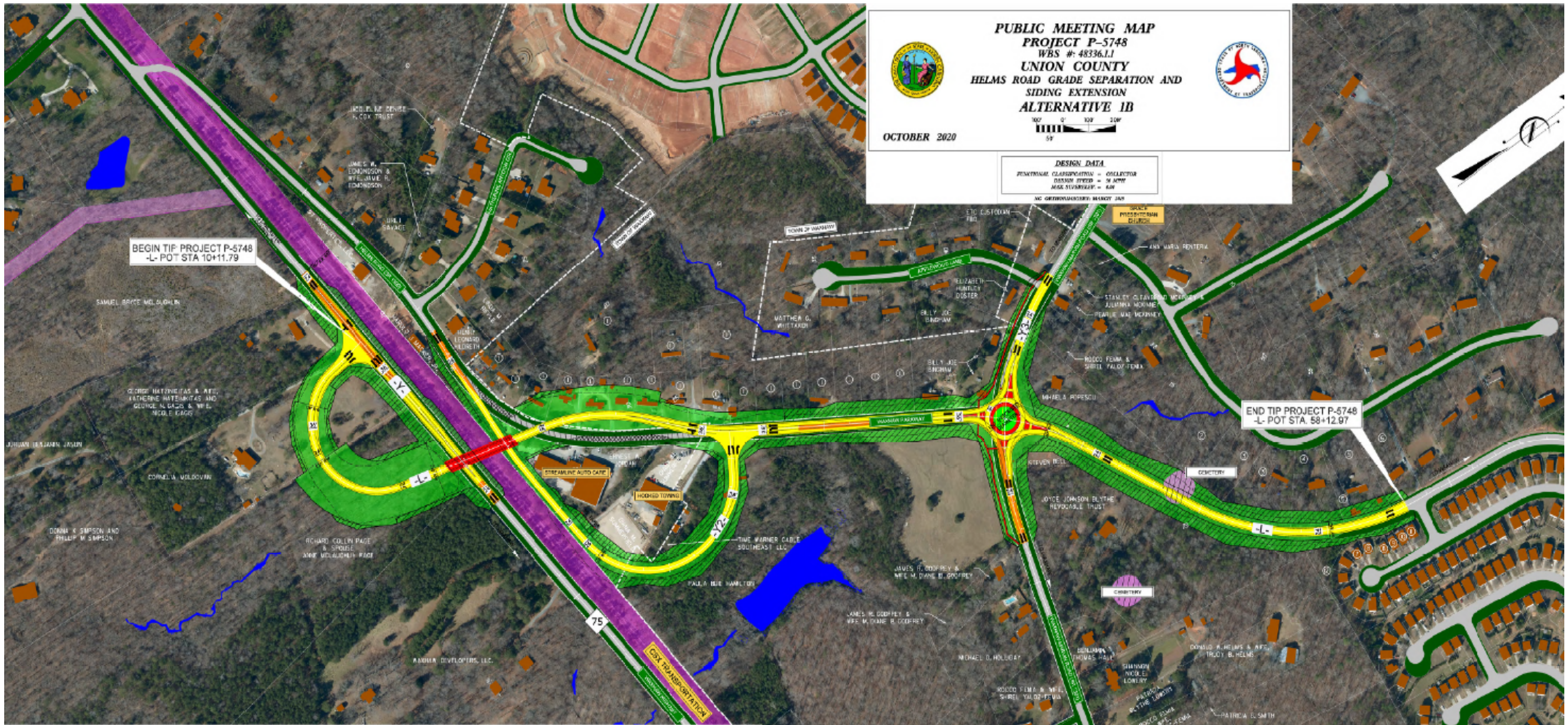
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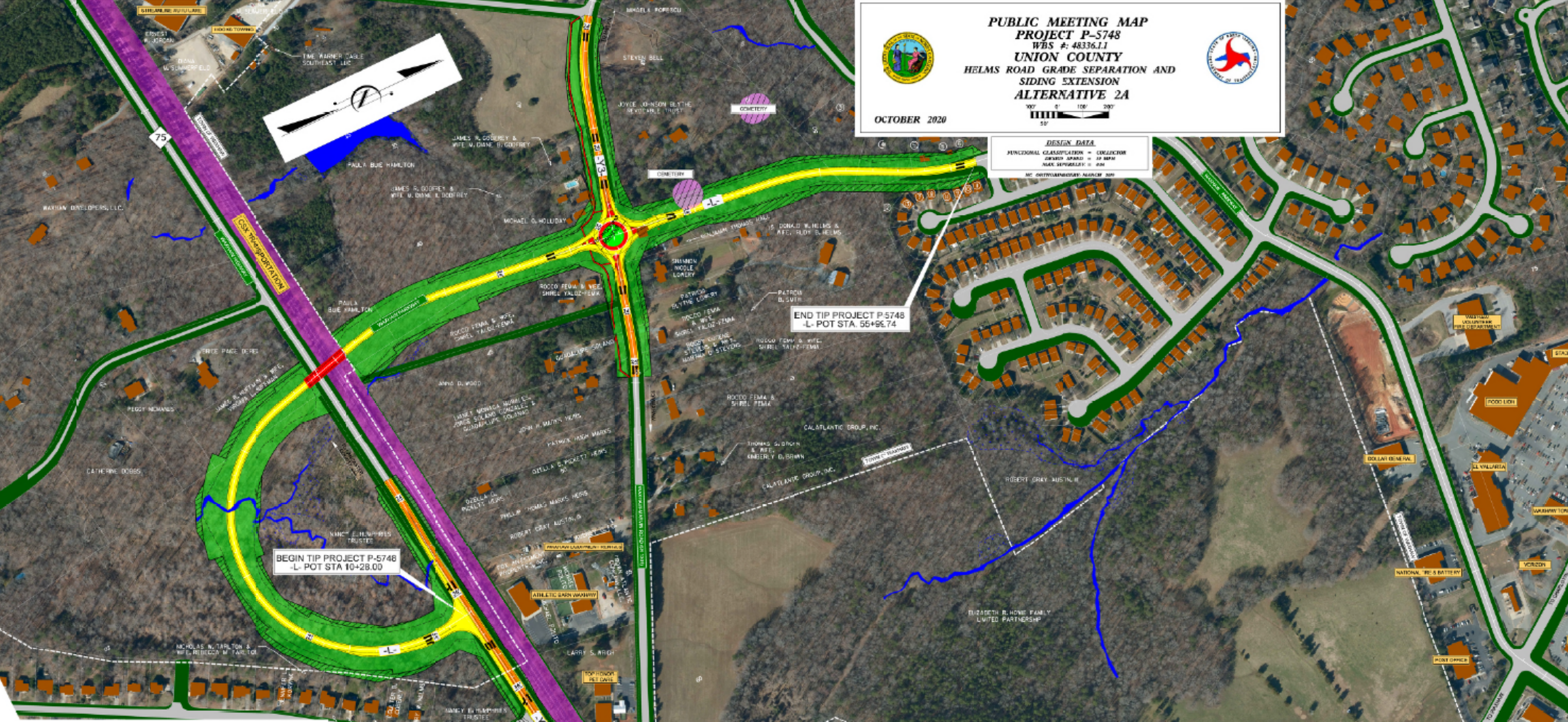
Alternative 1, Option B



View this map online to zoom in for greater detail:

<https://publicinput.com/helms-rd-waxhaw>

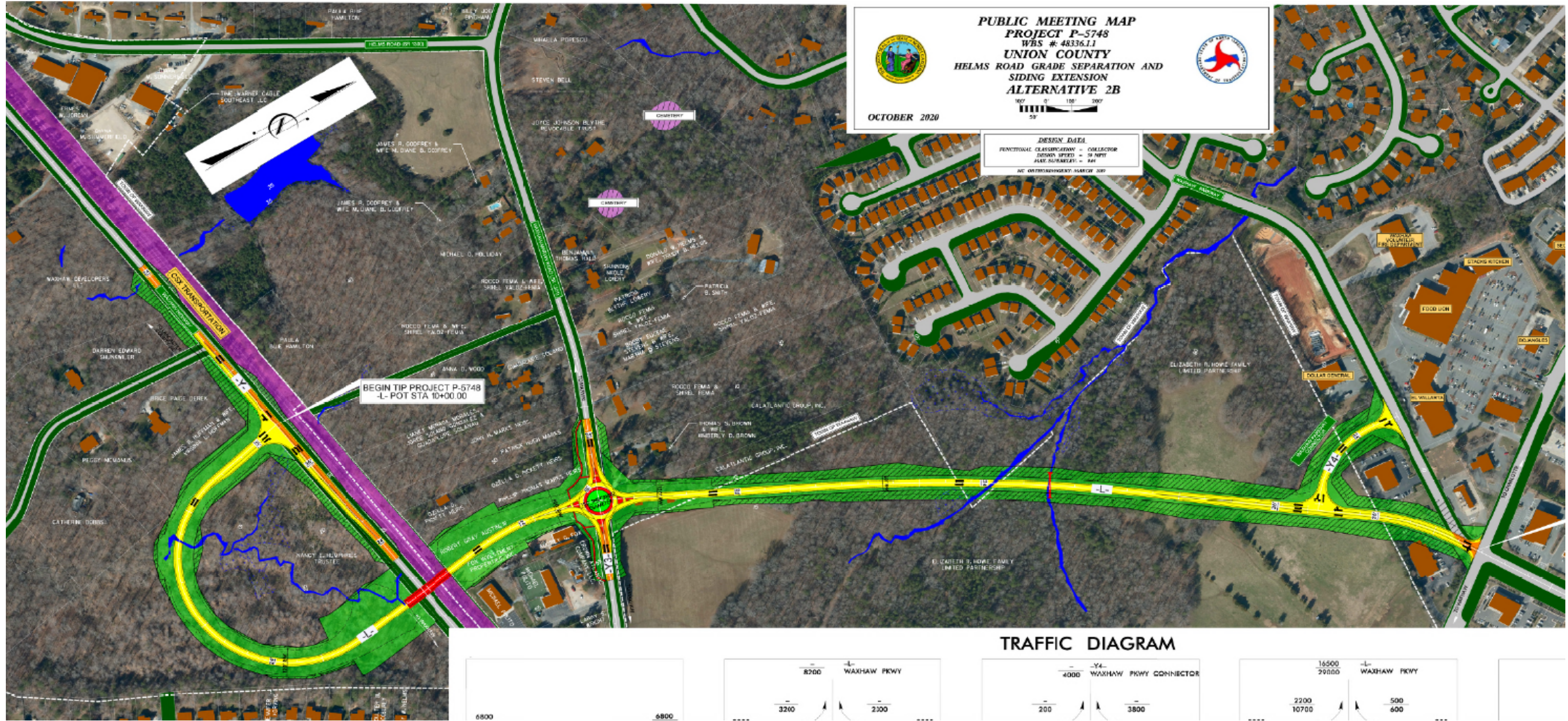
Alternative 2, Option A



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Alternative 2, Option B



View this map online to zoom in for greater detail:

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View this map online to zoom in for greater detail:

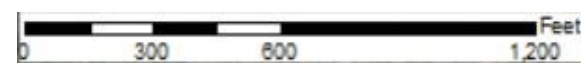
<https://publicinput.com/helms-rd-waxhaw>

Rail Siding Extension



Legend

| | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Rail Crossing | Study Area |
| Existing Right of Way | Wetlands |
| Proposed Siding Centerline | Parcels |
| Streams | |



Currently only a portion of the project is funded. The portion of the project from N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) to Waxhaw-Marvin Road is funded by Federal Rail Administration Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements and N.C. State funds.

Construction

NCDOT plans to maintain traffic on Helms Road during construction, using the existing at-grade railroad crossing while the bridge is being built. However, some construction activities would require that the road be closed for short periods of time, which would result in temporary detours for Helms Road travelers. Detour signs would be posted during these time periods. Construction is expected to last approximately 24 months.

Alternatives

NCDOT is evaluating two alternatives with varying options and one rail siding extension alternative. All the alternatives described below include a grade separation of N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway). The proposed closing of existing at-grade crossings include Hector Road and Helms Road.

Alternative 1, Option A Construct a grade separated bridge over N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) and extend existing Helms Road east on new location roadway. The new roadway would provide access from N.C. 75 to Waxhaw Marvin Road to Waxhaw Parkway. A roundabout is included in the design at the intersection of Waxhaw Marvin Road and Helms Road.

Alternative 1, Option B Construct a grade separated bridge over N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) over the railroad and extend existing Helms Road east on new location roadway. This alternative differs slightly from Alternative 1, Option A as it constructs the new location roadway toward the east and includes a loop to access the new roadway. This alternative would provide access from N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) to Waxhaw Marvin Road to Waxhaw Parkway. A roundabout is included in the design at intersection of Waxhaw Marvin Road and Helms Road.

Alternative 1, Option C Construct a grade separated bridge over N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) over the railroad and extend existing Helms Road east on new location roadway. This alternative is similar to the previous alternatives but is located further east. This alternative would provide access from N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) to Waxhaw Marvin Road to Waxhaw Parkway. A roundabout is included in the design at intersection of Waxhaw Marvin Road and Helms Road.

Alternative 2, Option A Construct a grade separated bridge over N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) over the railroad and will not include an extension of Helms Road. A new location roadway would be constructed from N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) to Waxhaw Parkway Road. A roundabout is included in the design at intersection of Waxhaw Marvin Road and Helms Road.

Alternative 2, Option B Construct a grade separated bridge over N.C. 75 (Waxhaw Highway) over the railroad and will not include an extension of Helms Road. A new location roadway would be constructed from N.C. 75 to N.C. 16 (Providence Road). A roundabout is included in the design at Waxhaw Marvin Road.

Rail Siding Extension Proposed to be constructed parallel to the existing rail line. It will be approximately 4,660 feet long. The siding will begin in North Carolina, 860 feet from the North and South Carolina border and end 3,800 feet into South Carolina near Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church. This siding extension will allow for stopped trains to move away from the active rail line and prevent rail congestion.

NCDOT and the Federal Rail Administration met on September 22, 2020 to discuss the alternatives and impacts to the project study area. As a result of the meeting, **Alternative 1, Option C was chosen as the agency preferred alternative.** This alternative impacts the least streams and wetlands, requires the fewest business relocations, and does not impact either of the unmarked cemeteries. After the public comment period, NCDOT will select the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) to move forward into final design. The preferred alternative will be selected by taking into consideration all stakeholder concerns including public comments, project costs, impacts, and safety.

The preferred alternative will be presented November 2020 through a newsletter and on the project website