

Public Involvement Coordination Plan for the State College Area Connector Project



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Project Identification #: 112784

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Coordination Plan

The purpose of the *State College Area Connector Project Agency Coordination Plan* (Coordination Plan) is to define the process for meeting the agency requirements in the environmental review process, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related laws. The purpose of the coordination plan is to facilitate, and document structured and meaningful interaction with the federal and state resource agencies, and to inform the agencies of how coordination will be accomplished, and feedback will be received.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) requires that not later than 90 days after the date of publication of a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) the lead agency shall "establish a plan for coordinating public and agency participation in and comment on the environmental review process for a project."

Per the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Publication 10B (Design Manual Part 1B: Post-TIP NEPA Procedures, April 2022 edition), the coordination plan must be shared with the public and with participating agencies so that they know what to expect and so that any disputes are surfaced as early as possible.

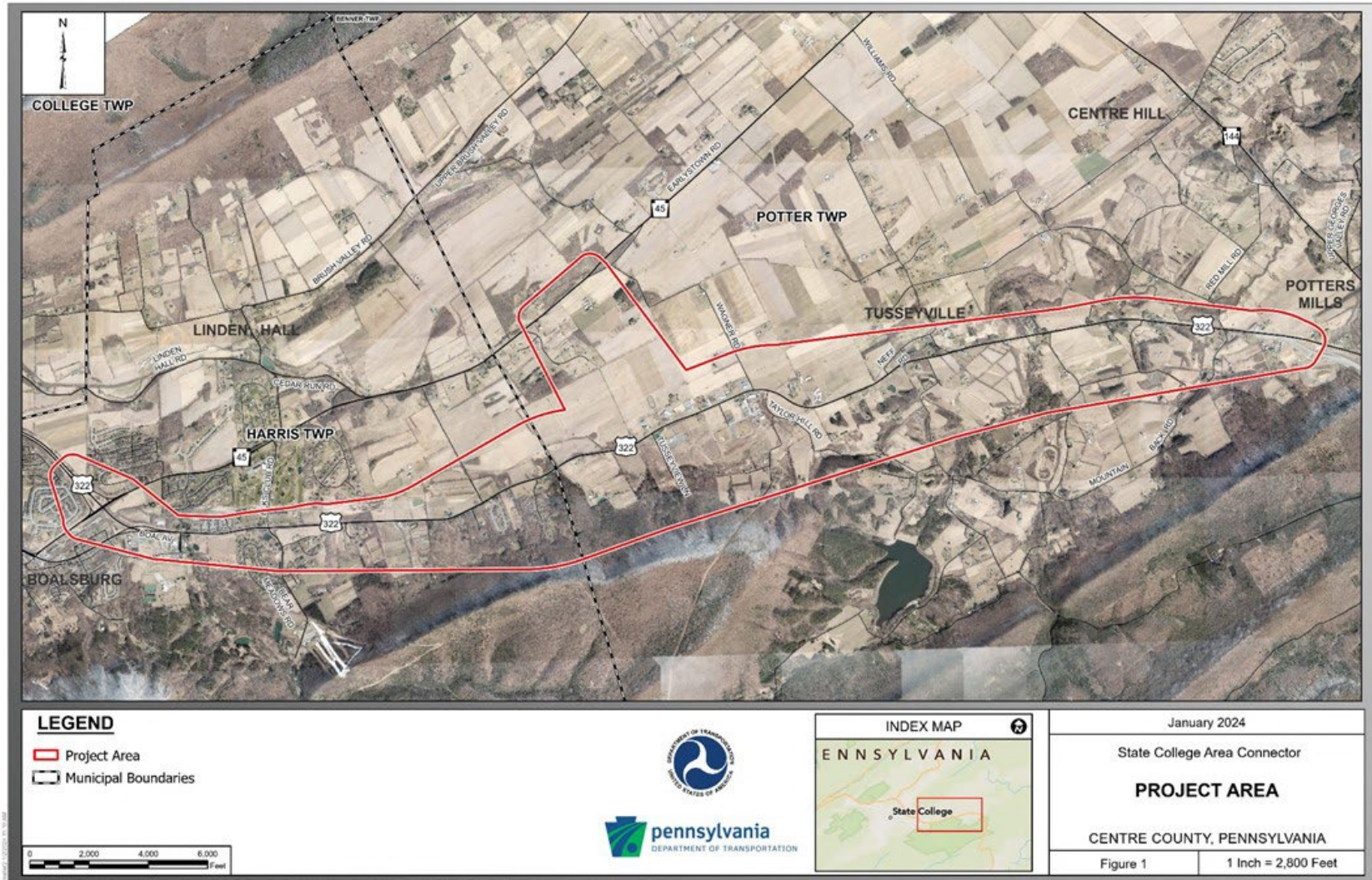
1.2 Project Description

PennDOT, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is initiating NEPA activities as part of an EIS for an 8-mile 4-lane limited-access facility from the end of US 322/Mount Nittany Expressway in Boalsburg to the newly constructed limited access portion of US 322 at Potters Mills in Centre County, Pennsylvania. The intent of this project is to build upon the State College Area Connector Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) document that evaluated a range of alternatives, and through a quantitative and qualitative screening process identified three Build Alternative corridor options for further study in NEPA and established the NEPA project area (**Figure 1**).

Subsequent to the PEL completion, additional traffic investigations and analysis and coordination with local officials for the State College Area Connector project determined that the connector road and interior interchange (included in each of the PEL US 322 Build Alternatives) would provide some localized improvements to PA 45. However, it was determined that the connector road and associated interchange was not necessary to address the project's purpose and need, nor did it address corridor wide issues along PA 45. As a result, the proposed interior interchange and local road connection was removed from this State College Area Connector project and will be considered in the independent PA 45 Corridor Improvements project, as appropriate. The State College Area Connector project will advance independently but will not preclude the inclusion of a future interior interchange and local road connection should the independent safety study along PA 45 determine that it would be beneficial in connection with other proposed PA 45 Corridor Improvements projects. **Figure 2** provides the revised project area for the State College Area Connector project that will move forward for alternative development and investigation.

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1.3 Purpose and Need

1.3.1 Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve roadway congestion by achieving acceptable LOS and to address safety issues by reducing the predicted crash frequency along the US 322 corridor between Potters Mills and Boalsburg. Additionally, the project will aim to provide a transportation network that meets driver expectations.

1.3.2 Project Need

Within the project area, there are transportation issues associated with high levels of congestion, potential safety issues along the roadway network, and a roadway network which presents a driver with irregular travel patterns and unexpected driving conditions. The following provides a summary of the needs statements and supporting documentation.

High peak hour traffic volumes cause congestion and result in unacceptable Level of Service (LOS) (LOS D [rural only], E, or F) on US 322 roadways and intersections.

- US 322 serves as the main travel route for local, regional, and interstate traffic, including trucks, within the project area. Currently during peak hours, US 322, between the US 322 Mount Nittany Expressway and the Mountain Back Road/Red Mill Road intersection (just west of Potters Mills), operates at a LOS D or E. The 2050 peak hour traffic volumes are anticipated to increase 41% which will increase congestion and worsen the LOS along the US 322 corridor. In 2050, LOS E is still anticipated for the entire US 322 corridor from the Mount Nittany Expressway to Potters Mills Gap, and travel speed will be further decreased with an average travel speed 15% less than the posted speed limit.
- Unsignalized intersections along US 322 are anticipated to operate at unacceptable LOS (LOS D, E, or F) due to high volumes of traffic along the uncontrolled main roadway which limit the availability of gaps in the traffic for making turning movements.
- US 322 averages three times more truck traffic within the project area in comparison to other similar roadways statewide, and truck traffic is expected to increase by 27% along the corridor by 2050. The additional truck traffic increases overall congestion and contributes to unacceptable levels of service.

Existing roadway configurations and traffic conditions contribute to safety concerns in the project area.

- Crashes were identified along a majority of the US 322 corridor with some concentrations at unsignalized intersections (e.g., Elks Club Road/Bear Meadows Road, Neff Road, and Red Mill Road/Mountain Back Road). Additionally, between 2017 and 2021, nearly 19% of all crashes along US 322 were caused by a heavy vehicle.

- The Highway Safety Manual (HSM) analysis results indicate the potential for safety improvements along a majority of the US 322 corridor and at unsignalized intersections through the project area. Increasing traffic along US 322 has reduced the number of gaps available for side street and driveway traffic attempting to enter or exit US 322. This causes drivers to make turning movements outside of their comfort zone which contributes to crashes at side streets and driveway intersections. Additionally, the large percentage of through traffic exacerbates the issue as these drivers may be unfamiliar with the roadway characteristics.

The roadway network and configuration in the project area lacks continuity and does not meet driver expectations.

- US 322 is on the National Highway System and is classified as a principal arterial that is intended to provide long-distance connections. US 322, adjacent to the project area (near both Potters Mills and Boalsburg), is a four-lane, limited-access, divided highway facility with exit and entrance ramps to provide access to the local roadway network. This type of roadway is conducive to higher travel speeds and supports regional and interstate travel patterns. These adjacent sections of US 322 feed traffic into the project area, where US 322 is currently a two-lane, non-divided highway with unrestricted access to driveways and intersecting roadways. The abrupt change in roadway configuration and characteristics creates a roadway network that lacks continuity of facility type and function.
- Within the project area, US 322 serves local, regional, and interstate traffic (including truck and commuter traffic). The road also services other travel modes including farm equipment traffic and bicycle traffic. The change in the roadway cross-section at both ends of the corridor creates inconsistencies which may not meet driver expectations, particularly for regional and interstate traffic. The potential for additional uncontrolled access points along US 322 would continue to degrade roadway continuity along the corridor and create additional locations for conflicts that could result in crashes.

1.3.3 Project History

Within the State College Area Connector project area, there have been many transportation improvement studies and projects that have influenced travel within and immediately adjacent to the project area dating back to the 1970s. However, in the 1990s, key regional studies occurred which greatly influenced travel and development within the project area. The following provides a high-level summary of the local and regional transportation projects which have provided influence on the State College Area Connector project area.

Interstate 80

- I-80 was completed in Pennsylvania in 1970.
- I-80 through Pennsylvania influenced traffic patterns, particularly an increase in interstate truck traffic. This increase in traffic affected travel conditions within the project area.

- Roadway safety and quality of life in Centre County communities traversed by these roadways were influenced by the I-80 completion.

Interstate 99

- US 220 study west of the State College area led to the development of a major improvement project for a new north-south interstate through Centre County that culminated with the construction of I-99 extending from Blair County to US 322 (the Mount Nittany Expressway).
- PA 26 corridor study resulted in the construction of I-99 from US 322 (the Mount Nittany Expressway) north towards I-80.
- I-80 Exit 161 (Bellefonte Interchange) is under development to replace the existing interchange with a new high-speed interchange and complete the I-99/I-80 connection. Construction of the interchange improvements will complete the goal for a major north-south interstate (I-99) through the center of the Commonwealth connecting two major east-west interstates, the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-76) and I-80.

South Central Centre County Transportation Study (SCCCTS)

- SCCCTS was initiated in 1998 to evaluate and address transportation needs along the US 322, PA 144, and PA 45 corridors. The SCCCTS project needs identified specific transportation problems in each of the three corridors and on the local road system, as well as needs associated with regional travel patterns. The regional travel pattern need statement addressed the high percentage of through trips (in particular the high volume of truck traffic), high crash rates (including fatalities), poor Level of Service (LOS) including LOS associated with heavy truck traffic and increases in travel demand associated with local and regional planned development. However, SCCCTS was terminated in 2004 due to funding shortfalls and the NOI rescinded on July 29, 2019.

Safety Improvements

- Following the termination of SCCCTS in 2004, short-term safety improvements along the US 322 corridor were conducted between 2006 and 2015. These improvements included general intersection improvements (e.g., turn lanes), safety improvements (e.g., safety dot warning pavement markings, removal of passing zones), minor roadway realignments, and bridge reconstruction. These improvements were initiated to address some of the safety concerns identified during the SCCCTS study.

Potters Mills Gap (PMG) Transportation Project

- PennDOT and FHWA initiated the PMG Transportation Project to improve a 3.75-mile-long section of US 322 in Potter Township within the area locally known as “Potters Mills Gap”. This project area encompassed the southeastern portion of the SCCCTS study area. It was determined that this project had independent utility and addressed a defined purpose and need. The project included the construction of a new limited access four-lane roadway section that started at the Sand Mountain Road intersection and extended west, tying back into existing US 322 with a new interchange and roundabout, west of the PA 144/US 322 intersection.

SCCCTS Data Refresh

- In 2018, PennDOT collected data to update the traffic and environmental information from the former SCCCTS (2004), to identify changes to travel patterns, the transportation network, and environmental conditions. This information supported the 2019 decision by state officials to restart efforts to address regional transportation needs in the US 322, PA 44, and PA 45 area. Nearly, \$15 million in state funding was allocated to advance the State College Area Connector Study.

State College Area Connector Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study

- In 2020, PennDOT, in cooperation with FHWA and coordination with the Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), initiated the State College Area Connector PEL Study. The PEL process promoted early coordination with the public as well as federal, state, and local agencies in a transparent and collaborative environment that identified and evaluated transportation needs in the area and developed and evaluated alternatives while considering community concerns in transportation decision-making early in the planning process. The PEL study identified a range of alternatives and screened them against the purpose and need and potential for environmental effects. Three Build Alternatives corridors were recommended for further study. These three recommended Build Alternatives and a refined study area are being advanced for NEPA study with a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS.

1.4 Project Public Outreach History

During the State College Area Connector PEL Study a robust outreach plan was developed and implemented that included stakeholder meetings, a public pop-up event, public and public official meetings, electronic notifications to interested citizens, and a study website. This coordination effort and level will be continued throughout the NEPA/EIS phase of the project.

1.4.1 Public Meetings

Four public meetings, virtual and in-person, were held during the PEL Study:

Virtual Public Meeting – October 2020

Due to COVID-19, the October 2020 public meeting was held virtually. The meeting was hosted on the study website (www.PennDOT.gov/SCAC), and presented an overview of the transportation development process, the SCAC PEL process, study area environmental resources, engineering and traffic data, and purpose and needs. Seventy-eight attendees signed in at the meeting and 358 different website IP addresses logged into the meeting materials.

Open House Public Meeting - September 2021

The September 2021 public meetings were held at the Wyndham Garden Inn State College in Boalsburg on September 21 and 22. The meetings introduced the PEL Study process; presented the range of alternative concepts, alternative screening process, and

preliminary environmental and traffic analysis; and solicited public feedback. These meetings had 859 registered attendees.

Open House Public Meeting – April 2022

The April 2022 public meetings were held at the Calvary Church in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania on April 5 and Centre Hall Fire Station in Centre Hall on April 6. The meetings provided an update on the PEL Study environmental data collection efforts, traffic analyses, Upgrade Existing and Build Alternative corridor refinements, and solicited public feedback. A video was shown at the meeting that provided a summary of key study changes since the September 2021 meetings. These meetings had 859 registered attendees.

Open House Public Meeting – October 2022

The October 2022 public meetings were held on October 19 and October 20 at the Mount Nittany Middle School in State College, Pennsylvania. The meetings provided an open house where the study boards were available along with staff to answer individual questions. A presentation that provided an overview of the PEL Study and the draft recommendations for alternatives to move forward into the NEPA process was given by project staff. Following the presentation, the public was afforded an opportunity to ask specific questions of the study team. The same information and format were presented and utilized at both meetings. These meetings had 502 registered attendees.

1.4.2 Public Official Meetings

Three public official meetings were held to offer the opportunity to learn about the PEL Study and discuss study results in advance of scheduled public meetings.

- Public official meeting was held on August 31, 2021
- Public official meeting was held on March 30, 2022
- Public official meeting was held on September 7, 2022

Additional workshops were held throughout the PEL Study to keep the local officials informed or to request input. **Table 1** provides an overview of when outreach was conducted during the PEL Study and Pre-NEPA process. Additionally, the State College Area Connector Study had a standing agenda line item at the Centre County MPO Coordinating and Technical Committees since September 2020.

Table 1: Local Official Workshop Summary

Date	Entity
August 10, 2020	Harris Township Board of Supervisors
August 13, 2020	Centre Hall Borough Council
August 17, 2020	Potter Township Board of Supervisors
August 20, 2020	College Township Council
September 3, 2020	Benner Township Council
September 8, 2020	Spring Township Supervisors
November 24, 2020	Centre County Commissioners
May 10, 2021	Harris Township Board of Supervisors
May 13, 2021	Centre Hall Borough Council
May 17, 2021	Potter Township Board of Supervisors
May 20, 2021	College Township Council
July 13, 2021	Potter Township Planning Commission
February 14, 2022	Harris Township/Potter Township/Spring Township Official Representatives
March 7, 2022	Harris Township/Potter Township Official Representatives
August 7, 2023	Potter Township Board of Supervisors
August 14, 2023	Harris Township Board of Supervisors
August 17, 2023	College Township Council
September 10, 2023	Centre Hall Borough Council
January 17, 2024	Harris Township, Potter Township, and Centre County Official Representatives

2 Stakeholder Identification, Outreach Tools and Strategies, and Public Notifications

In order to implement the Public Involvement Coordination Plan, key stakeholders need to be identified, a means of notifying the stakeholders and the public needs to be established, and various outreach strategies and tools identified. The following sections outline these various topics.

2.1 Tribal Outreach

PennDOT and FHWA, Pennsylvania Division, identified eight federally recognized tribes and nations that are likely to have an interest in Pennsylvania projects because of ancestral ties to the state. Therefore, FHWA, as part of the federal government, engages in government-to-government relations with the tribes and nations.

FHWA has delegated to PennDOT, with the consent of the eight tribes and nations, Section 106 consultation with the tribes and nations. PennDOT is responsible for initiating consultation with tribes and nations on a project-specific basis, transmitting documentation and information to the tribes and nations, and determining a tribe's or nation's level of interest

in a project. PennDOT has initiated consultation with the following tribes who have ancestral ties to this area:

- Absentee-Shawnee Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma
- Delaware Nation
- Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
- Oneida Nation
- Seneca Nation of Indians
- Seneca-Cayuga Nation
- Shawnee Tribe
- Delaware Tribe of Indians

This initial consultation was completed by PennDOT District 2-0's Cultural Resource Professionals through Project Path. As of August 1, 2023, no tribes have requested to be consulting parties. Official consulting party letters have been sent to interested parties along with the eight tribes to confirm their interest.

The project team will work closely with PennDOT 2-0's Cultural Resource Professionals to ensure compliance with PennDOT's Publication 689, The Transportation Project Development Process: Cultural Resources Handbook.

The FHWA Pennsylvania's Division Administrator also invited these tribes to be official participating agencies in the State College Area Connector study and project. To date, only the Seneca Nation of Indians and the Delaware Tribe of Indians have accepted participating agency status.

2.2 Environmental Justice (EJ) populations and Plain Sect Communities

As part of the PEL Study, the State College Area Connector project team conducted an environmental justice investigation to assess the presence of environmental justice communities within the PEL study area. Demographic data was collected from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) EJ Screen tool and the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates for all census block groups within the PEL study area. The analysis identified one Census Tract (CT) block group within the project area (CT 118 Block Group 3 15.2%) with a higher concentration of minority populations when compared to the County (12.4%). Coordination with local officials and field investigations identified one community within this CT block group which is likely home to minority populations. This community is adjacent to existing US 322 and was specifically avoided during development of the PEL alternatives. None of the CT block groups had concentrations of populations below poverty level greater than the County (18.2%) or the state (12.0%). As the alternatives are further engineered and refined, avoidance and minimization of effects to this community will be advanced to avoid a disproportionate and adverse effect to environmental justice populations. Continued coordination with local officials will be

conducted during the development of the EIS studies, and targeted public outreach will be conducted with this community.

The team will utilize several available tools to monitor changes in the presence of low-income and minority populations and will continue to coordinate with local leaders to fully understand the communities within the project area. The benefits and burdens of each alternative to any identified low-income and/or minority population will be evaluated. The project team will prepare a community assessment technical report to document the existing conditions, impact assessment and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation.

In addition to a potential environmental justice community, the project area is in proximity to a Plain Sect Community/Amish community. While no Amish farms are in or adjacent to proposed project alternatives, the Amish may use the roadway network within the project to traverse to other communities. To ensure they are aware of the project and have meaningful engagement opportunities, targeted outreach will be conducted by posting flyers in locations that are frequented by these communities and letter invitations with flyers will be sent to the three church district bishops that include and are adjacent to the project area.

The State College Area Connector Project will be evaluated in accordance with the following key regulations and guidance:

- Executive Order 14096, Executive Order on Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All, 2023
- Executive Order 13985 Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, 2021
- Executive Order 13166, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Linguistic Minorities
- Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Order 5610.2 (c) on Environmental Justice (May 2021)
- Council on Environmental Quality's Environmental Justice Guidance Under the National Environmental Policy Act (December 1997)
- Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice's Promising Practices for EJ Methodologies in NEPA Reviews (March 2016)

If disproportionate and adverse impacts on EJ populations result from any project alternatives, appropriate mitigation measures will be developed and documented in coordination with the affected communities, consistent with the requirements of environmental justice laws, regulations, and guidelines.

2.3 Stakeholders

The project team will utilize stakeholders within the project area to provide localized knowledge of the communities and environment. Meetings with stakeholders could be held at the stakeholder's request or to provide needed information for specific design activities.

These meetings would be intended to address a specific project issue or concern. These meetings will be documented and included in the public outreach technical file.

2.4 Project Website

A project-specific website that is associated with PennDOT's main website is provided at www.PennDOT.pa.gov/SCAC. The website will be updated with specific project information at major milestones. The website content may include, but not be limited to the following:

- Project fact sheets, updates, and other public information materials including public meeting dates
- Project photos or videos
- Meeting announcements
- Media releases
- Visualization (e.g., renderings, drawings, maps, photos, videos) to provide visual examples of projects or concepts)
- Project technical reports, as appropriate
- Project milestones and schedule
- Contact information (email address, and the PennDOT Engineering District 2-0 office address)
- Online form(s) to gather contact information and feedback
- Important website links

All feedback and any associated responses provided via the website will be recorded and included in the stakeholder tracking log and included in technical reports and the project record, as appropriate.

2.5 General Meeting Notification Process

Notifications for all public meetings and hearings will include, but not be limited to:

- Newspaper advertisements
- Direct mail invitations
- Electronic invitations
- Electronic and social media
- Targeted media relations
- Flyer postings at local businesses and other establishments

Public meeting notifications, materials and exhibits will be presented in English. However, if attendees need communication accommodations, or an interpreter, or have a disability and need assistance, all advertising will include contact information for PennDOT's District 2-0 Public Information Office who will make appropriate arrangements to accommodate most needs.

2.6 Stakeholder Database

A master stakeholder database, which was started during the PEL Study, will be used to disseminate electronic information concerning the State College Area Connector Project, including public meeting announcements. The stakeholder database will include anyone that has expressed an interest in the project including elected officials, agency officials, residents, businesses, neighborhood groups, and professional membership organizations. The project team will grow the database by offering meeting and event attendees the option to sign up for updates. Visitors to the website will also have the opportunity to sign up for email updates.

2.7 Media

PennDOT will promote the widespread dissemination of information by engaging reporters and soliciting media coverage, distributing news releases, and coordinating special events. The State College Area Connector project team will coordinate outreach with PennDOT's Press Office prior to any outreach.

2.8 Social Media

PennDOT will use their existing PennDOT X and Facebook® social media accounts to publicize project information. This will allow members of the public who follow the PennDOT X and Facebook® social media accounts to post their comments in these social media platforms. The State College Area Connector project team will engage PennDOT's Press Office prior to any outreach. The project team will partner with local municipalities to post information to their social media accounts.

2.9 Demographic Data

PennDOT will ask meeting participants and survey-takers to voluntarily provide demographic data, including age, race/ethnicity, zip code, etc. This the collected information will be compared with overall demographics to ensure a broad cross-section of people are participating.

2.10 Project Document Repositories

PennDOT will ask municipal offices and libraries within the vicinity of the project area to serve as repositories for project documents, including EIS documents for those who may not have internet access. The repositories will enable members of the public to examine project documents, independent of computer or internet access. Any interactive survey materials will also be printed and made available at the repository locations so community members can complete the paper surveys.

3 Public Involvement Coordination Plan

The State College Area Connector Project Coordination Plan for Public Involvement is prepared in cooperation with FHWA and PennDOT. The plan follows PennDOT's Publication 295, Project Level Public Involvement Handbook and expands upon the public involvement

activities conducted during the PEL Study (Outlined in the project history section of this document).

The information in this section will be shared with the public and addresses the anticipated methods of public involvement. The plan provides for public input during the project development process, including refining the purpose and needs and the alternatives analysis. The plan will be posted on the project website – (www.PennDOT.pa.gov/SCAC).

State College Area Connector Project public involvement objectives mirror those of PennDOT's Publication 295. Informative, timely, concise, and responsive communication is essential for building trust and relationships among the community's numerous and varied stakeholders.

Key Objectives:

- Hold an open dialogue with interested citizens
- Allow the public to help develop solutions for their community
- Assess the public's reaction to the proposed project
- Integrate public views and preferences into decision-making and document their consideration
- Provide a meaningful way to gain input into understanding what is important to the community
- Avoid, minimize, and mitigate for environmental consequences, and disclose the environmental consequences and potential mitigation of a proposed action
- Ensure targeted and thoughtful coordination and outreach with environmental justice communities.

3.1 Inclusion of Project in Regional, State and Local Plans

The State College Area Connector or major transportation improvements to arterial roadways are included in regional, state, and local plans, providing the public with an opportunity to comment on the project, including the following:

- Centre County Long Range Transportation Plan 2050 (September 2020)
- Centre County Comprehensive Plan Phase I (2003) and Phase II Implementation Strategies (2016 to 2020)
- Centre Region Comprehensive Plan (November 2013)
- 2023-2026 Centre County Transportation Improvement Program
- 2023 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.
- 2021 Pennsylvania 12-Year Program (August 2020)
- Centre County Unified Planning Work Program (November 2021)
- Penns Valley Regional Comprehensive Plan, adopted on January 30, 2006

3.2 Public Scoping Meetings

PennDOT will host scoping meetings for the public and agencies. Scoping is an open process involving the public and other federal, state, and local agencies to identify the significant

issues for consideration during the development of an EIS. PennDOT anticipates hosting two in-person public scoping meetings.

3.2.1 Public Scoping Meeting #1

Public scoping meeting #1 will occur after the NOI is issued and will present detailed traffic analysis, updated environmental features and preliminary engineering alignment alternatives. Public scoping meeting #1 will be held in-person and will include a virtual meeting component via the project website. Public notifications of this meeting will be conducted as outlined in Section 2 of this document. This meeting is anticipated to be held in August 2024.

3.2.1 Public Scoping Meeting #2

Public scoping meeting #2 will be held following alternative refinement and identification of a draft recommended preferred alternative. This public scoping meeting will also present the associated potential environmental effects and conceptual mitigation. Public scoping meeting #2 will be held in-person and will include a virtual meeting component via the project website. Public notifications of this meeting will be conducted as outlined in Section 2 of this document. This meeting is anticipated to be held in early 2025 to confirm the alternative alignments to be studied in the Draft EIS (DEIS).

3.3 Notice of Availability of the DEIS – Public Hearing

Following the issuance of the Notice of Availability of the DEIS, a public hearing event will be held to present the results of the preliminary engineering and environmental analysis and present the recommended preferred alternative. The public hearing event may extend over multiple days, if appropriate. The DEIS will have a 45-day comment period, and the public hearing will occur 15-30 days after the DEIS is available for public and agency review. It is anticipated that the public hearing will occur in August 2025. The public hearing will follow PennDOT's *Project Level Public Involvement Handbook*. The public hearing will be advertised in the newspaper at least two weeks before the hearing. There will be an opportunity for both written and oral comments.

Attendees will have a chance to provide oral comments either publicly or privately. Stenographers will record the oral testimony provided. The project team will ensure all hearing materials can be viewed virtually along with instructions on how to provide written comments.

3.4 Elected Officials & Community Leader Briefings and Workshops

PennDOT will coordinate meetings with elected officials to provide program and project information and answer questions. The elected officials may review project information to understand how it potentially affects their constituents. The project team intends to meet with elected officials before each public meeting and public hearing. These meetings will allow the public officials to learn about the project and, in turn, present questions their constituents may have. In addition, the project team anticipates conducting periodic workshops with local

officials to discuss potential design treatments and obtain local input on the project design as it advances.

3.5 Noise Workshops

PennDOT will host noise workshops, if warranted. The FHWA's regulation on highway traffic noise requires a noise study when building new highways or changing or expanding existing ones. Noise abatement measures that are feasible and prudent will be considered based on the findings of the study. Workshops would allow owners of adjacent properties to learn about the study and vote on any proposed adjacent noise abatement measures.

3.6 Section 404 Permit Public Comment

This project is planning to utilize a merged NEPA/Section 404 process in which the FHWA and PennDOT's NEPA environmental document serves as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's (USACE) NEPA decision-making document and the Section 404 permit application. Therefore, the public hearing requirements for both NEPA and Section 404 would be covered with a joint public hearing event (as outlined above) at which the public has the opportunity to provide comments to the USACE on the Section 404 permit application in addition to the NEPA document.

4 NOTICE OF INTENT

The EIS process begins with the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI), stating the intent to prepare an EIS for a particular proposal. The NOI is published in the federal register by the lead federal agency and provides basic information on the proposed action in preparation for the scoping process. The NOI notifies agencies, tribes, and individuals about the proposed action and identifies the issues that should be analyzed.

Additional supplementary information is also included with the NOI and includes a brief description of the proposed action and possible alternatives. It also describes the agency's proposed scoping process, including meetings and how the public can get involved. The NOI will also contain an agency point of contact who can answer questions about the proposed action and the NEPA process. An NOI to prepare an EIS for the State College Area Connector project is anticipated to be published in the federal register in July 2024.