

**State Route 126
From East Center Street to Interstate 81
Kingsport, Sullivan County
February 1, 2010**

Project Background

In 2003, the Tennessee Department of Transportation began a study to develop an improvement plan for State Route 126 using a Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process. The Community Resource Team (CRT) completed its work on the project in 2005. A final report and recommendation, dated August 2005, was approved by the TDOT in October 2005. The CRT recommendation called for widening State Route 126 to a varied typical section starting with a four-lane median divided section on the west end, narrowing to a two-lane section with center turn lane in the center section near Indian Springs, and ending with an improved two-lane section on the east end near I-81. The project is currently in the Environmental Documentation phase, which is expected to be completed in 2011.

In December 2008, State Representative Tony Shipley and the City of Kingsport Metropolitan Planning Office presented TDOT with a request for a Safety Improvements Project to implement safety enhancements in the interim while the larger State Route 126 project is developed. The Safety Improvements Project (SIP) report recommended short term improvements for fourteen areas of State Route 126. It also recommended "major improvements" for eight specific locations (the condominium complex at Milton Court, s-curves on Chestnut Ridge, Chestnut Ridge Road intersection, Cooks Valley Road intersection, the shopping center and Island Road intersection, Fall Creek Road intersection, Harr Town Road intersection, and Cochise Trail intersection).

Short Term Improvements

The short term improvements are funded through the Highway Safety Improvement Program and the Resurfacing Program. The work accomplished in 2009 includes installation of signs, paving, shoulder repair, vegetation removal, and drainage improvements. During the 2010 Construction season, work on rumble strips, pavement markings, and guardrail installation will be completed. Resurfacing from SR 36 to Fall Creek Road is also scheduled in Summer 2010.

Long Range Improvements

The Environmental Study for the Long Range Improvements is being developed under the Surface Transportation Program, and is in progress. The preliminary construction costs estimates for the project are \$55 million for Build Alternative A and \$47 million for Built Alternative B. These cost estimates will be further developed in the environmental and Phase I design processes. The two Build Alternatives and the No-Build Alternative are being evaluated and compared in the document. The Department worked closely with a Citizens Resource Team, the MPO, and the City of Kingsport to develop feasible, long range improvements to the route. This effort resulted in a concept which is now represented in the Environmental Study as Alternative A. Alternative B was developed as a refinement of Alternative A, and proposes to expand the two-lane section with center turn lane westward replacing the four-lane with landscaped, raised median in this critical portion of the project corridor. For comparison, the Project Location Maps of Alternatives A and B are included on the following two pages. The narrower section of Alternative B would avoid relocating gravesites at the East Lawn Cemetery (represented in green shading on the maps), and is further from the historic Yancey's Tavern Historic property (represented in light blue shading on the maps). The Draft Environmental Document is scheduled for completion in Summer 2010, and a Public Hearing is anticipated in Fall 2010.

Other short term improvements could possibly be constructed by the City of Kingsport and the Kingsport Metropolitan Planning Organization.

SR 126 Project Actions

2005 – 2006 - 21 month Context Sensitive Solutions Process conducted resulting in Recommended Alternative A.

2008 – 2009 - Consultant selected and Notice to Proceed with Project was initiated.

2009 – 2010 – Refinement of Alternative A developed to further minimize potential impacts. Field studies conducted on the two Build Alternatives.

2009 – 2010 – Interim Improvements, funded through Highway Safety Improvement Program and Resurfacing Program were initiated. Installation of signs, paving, shoulder repairs, removal of obstructive vegetation and drainage improvements implemented. The 2010 season includes further work on rumble strips, pavement markings, and installation of guardrails. Resurfacing from SR 35 to Fall Creek Road scheduled for Summer 2010.

Environmental Impact Statement developed to study Long-Range Improvements under the Surface Transportation Program, continues and is scheduled for completion Summer 2010.

Public Hearing – scheduled for Fall 2010.

SR 126 Technical studies have been completed and approved for:

Aquatic and Terrestrial - No impacts to Federally Threatened or Endangered Species.

Air Quality - No measurable impacts anticipated.

Noise - No measurable impacts anticipated.

Hazardous Materials – No measurable impacts anticipated.

Archaeological Investigation – TDOT conducted the field investigation, and no impacts are anticipated from either Build Alternative on any identified sites.

Relocation Report – Currently TDOT is finalizing the Relocation Report and reviews of the alternatives indicate that between 125 and 155 relocations will be required.

Architectural Historic Survey – Currently TDOT is finalizing this report. No direct impacts are anticipated for any historic resources in the project area.

Farmlands - The NRCS and the consultant have completed the LESA survey. No measurable impacts are anticipated and no mitigation would be required.

Streams – A total of six streams will be impacted, but major impacts are not anticipated. Permits will be required.

Wetlands - No wetlands will be impacted by the project.
