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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

As one of the most important and congested corridors in South Carolina, the I-26 corridor is a vital link connecting Lowcountry communities to the rest of the region. In response to rapid growth in the Lowcountry’s population and economy, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) commissioned a 15-month analysis to identify a viable transportation alternative as part of an overall strategy to help reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility in the region. The 2015 I-26 Fixed Guideway Alternative Analysis, also known as i-26ALT, was initiated to identify and evaluate a fixed guideway transit alternative for the I-26 corridor between Charleston, North Charleston, and Summerville to improve and enhance regional mobility. The i-26ALT study concluded bus rapid transit (BRT) along the US 78 and US 52 corridor, running parallel to I-26, was the preferred transit alternative to move forward into project development. As the administrator and planner for the region’s public transit, BCDCOG will lead this effort and oversee the planning, construction and implementation of the project.

The i-26ALT study preferred transit alternative is known as the Lowcountry Rapid Transit (LCRT). The LCRT is a proposed 23.1 mile BRT corridor extending from Charleston to Summerville, South Carolina parallel to I-26. The i-26ALT study noted that the LCRT corridor’s projected capital construction costs amount to \$360 million. In November 2016, residents of Charleston County approved a half-cent sales tax referendum to fund transportation projects, including transit. The tax will contribute \$250 million to the LCRT; \$180 million in capital construction costs and \$70 million in operating funds to support the first 15 years of service. The Charleston Area Transportation Study (CHATS) is governed by a Policy Committee Board and includes the project in the 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). BCDCOG intends to pursue federal funds through the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Capital Improvement Grant (CIG) program for the remaining capital construction costs and additional funding from state, local and private sources to cover any additional balance needed for construction.

1.2 Study Area

The study area for the LCRT was defined by using a half-mile buffer around the Recommended Alternative from the i-26ALT study, illustrated on Figure 1.1. The northern end of the study near Summerville was expanded beyond the half-mile buffer to ensure future consideration of alignment options that could connect to key destinations. On the southern end of the study area in the Charleston Peninsula, the study area extends to Broad Street.

The i-26ALT study defined five LCRT operating segments based on the guideway assumptions of the project. These segments may change as the project advances into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and design. The following presents the guideway assumptions.

- **Segment 1:** North Main Street & Richardson Avenue to US 78 & 165 (Berlin G Myers Parkway): This segment is assumed to operate in mixed traffic with one-way service circulating Summerville Square and in curb-side lanes to Berlin G Myers.

- **Segment 2:** US 78 (Berlin G Myers Parkway to Otranto Road): This segment is assumed to operate in an at-grade semi-exclusive guideway with cross traffic and curb-side lanes.
- **Segment 3:** US 78/US 52 (Otranto Road to Carner Avenue): This segment is assumed to operate in an at-grade semi-exclusive guideway in the median with cross traffic.
- **Segment 4:** US 78/US 52 (Carner Avenue to Mt. Pleasant Street): This segment is assumed to be a semi-exclusive dedicated guideway.
- **Segment 5:** Meeting Street (Mt. Pleasant Street to Line Street): This segment assumes curb-side mixed traffic operations.

1.3 Document Purpose

This document summarizes the existing and future conditions of the project study area and will provide a baseline for the comparison of impacts of the proposed project. It will also help to guide refinements of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA).

The document is organized by the following categories:

- Existing and Projected Demographic Profile
- Assessment of Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development
- Existing and Planned Transit Service
- Existing and Planned Multi-modal Access
- Assessment of Roadway and Infrastructure
- Travel Demand Model
- Existing Traffic Conditions
- NEPA Affected Environment
- Public Involvement and Outreach

1.4 Existing and On-going Plans/Reports

As part of the Advanced Planning task, previous and on-going studies and plans relevant to this project were reviewed and summarized to ensure the results of this project and the recommendations carried forward are consistent with the values of the community. This summary can be found in Appendix A.

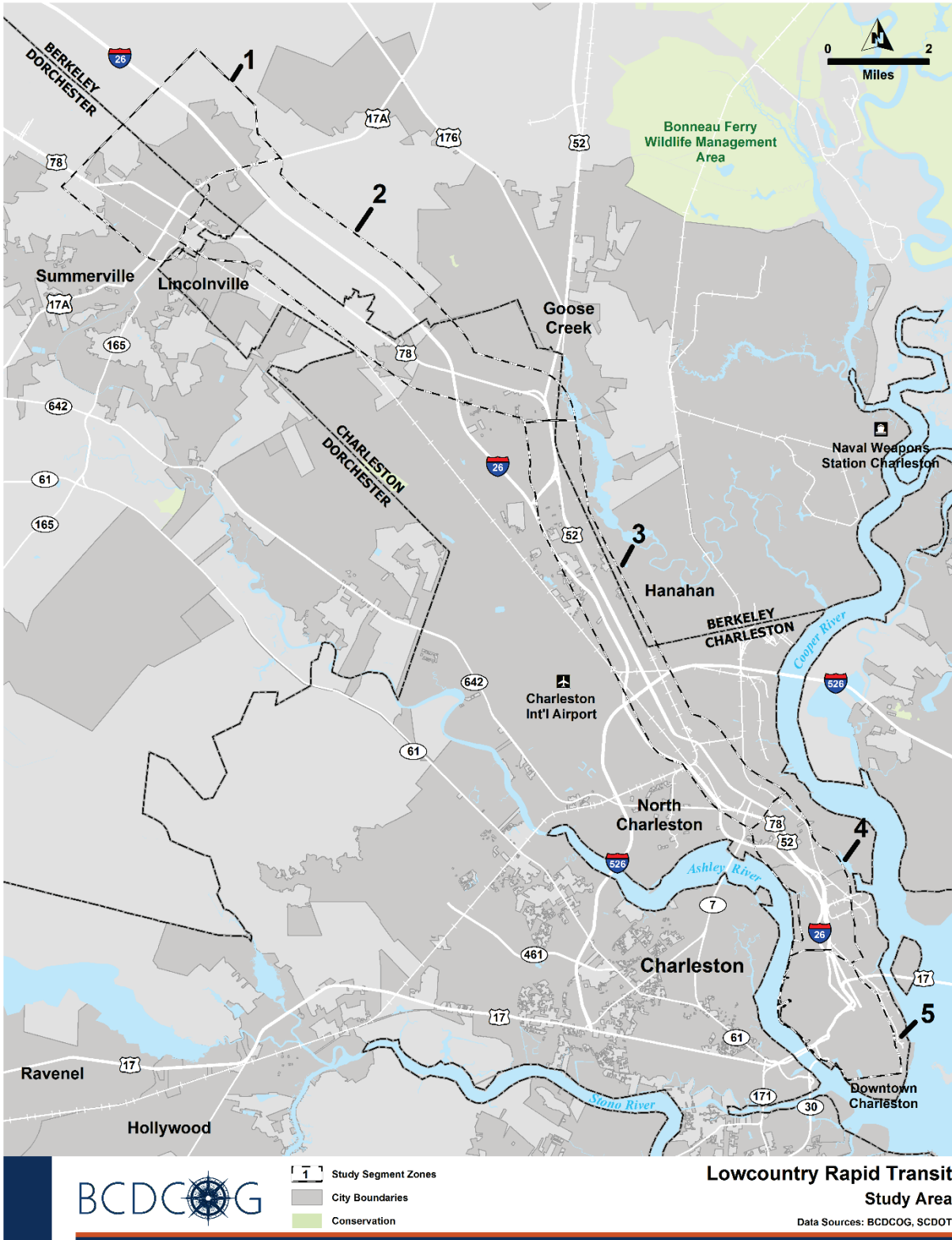


Figure 1.1 LCRT Study Area

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