

SCDOT transforms safety, quality of scenic highway

Partners with Dorchester community to retain S.C. 61's beauty

By Ted Creech

You can't help others or show them respect unless you truly listen to them.

That's that attitude the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) brought to the rehabilitation of SC 61, a scenic highway in Dorchester County.

The aging roadway was becoming more hazardous for motorists, requiring SCDOT to improve its quality and safety. The agency met with community members and initially proposed a plan to widen the road and its shoulders, but would have also required removal of more than 300 trees.

Residents objected. SCDOT, including Traffic Engineering and Project Management, met with more than 400 people in the Dorchester/Summerville area.

Through a weeks-long dialogue, SCDOT came to understand how citizens cherished the natural and historic beauty of SC 61. At the same time, the community developed a greater appreciation for the need to improve the safety and quality of the corridor, which was carrying a growing amount of traffic and had been the scene of multiple serious injury and fatal crashes.

As a result, SCDOT developed a plan to repave and install safety measures along the 6.5-mile southern portion of S.C. 61 while leaving all of the trees intact. The agency offered a solution unique to the environment in Dorchester County near the Charleston County line, and residents responded with support.

"Some people felt their voices wouldn't matter, but we encouraged them to participate in the process," said Rita Berry, CEO of the Greater Summerville/Dorchester County Chamber of Commerce. "From that, SCDOT definitely listened, and we were able to come to an agreement on how to address the safety issue while keeping the integrity of the scenic corridor in place."

"You had those people in the



This project won a
**2021 AASHTO
AWARD**
for Operations Excellence.
To learn more, please visit YouTube channel
SCDOT CONNECTOR VIDEOS
and search for "AASHTO SC 61"

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CODY CROUCH/THE CONNECTOR

Dorchester County's scenic beauty is showcased on S.C. 61, featuring live oak trees and significant historical sites. In collaboration with these historical sites and stakeholders, SCDOT revised the original S.C. 61 Phase 1 design in order to preserve the centuries old live oaks.

community who wanted to preserve the history of this place. You had a lot of people who wanted to preserve the beauty of the place, so the trees became very important," said Hank Taylor, Chairman of the Dorchester County Economic Development Corp. "Then, you had our business community and employees who connect with work opportunities in Charleston from our place here in Summerville, so this road is a very important artery."

All these factors came together to provide the community input needed and an appreciation for the results.

Another 8.25-mile section of

S.C. 61 from the Colleton County line to the intersection of US Highway 17-A will later be repaved, receive new four-foot shoulders and rumble strips, and better paint and reflectors will be added.

The S.C. 61 project is part of SCDOT's Rural Road Safety Program, one of the four 10-Year Plan initiatives to improve the quality of the state's roads and bridges.

Nearly 30 percent of South Carolina's fatal and serious-injury crashes in rural areas occur on five percent of the state's roads, which is why SCDOT is focusing on improving the safety of 1,000 miles of the state's more dangerous rural roads.



Featuring 11-foot wide lanes and 3-foot wide paved shoulders, center line and edge line rumble strips and updated guardrails and signage, this Rural Road Safety Program project makes this section of S.C. 61 much safer for the traveling public.