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Developing a Central Information Source for Project Information

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Developing a Central Information Source for Project Information

Each year the South Carolina Department of Transportation is asked to provide information about potential highway and transit projects in South Carolina. Requests for information on potential projects are generated from local and state legislators, congressional delegates, SCDOT and the general public. These projects range in description, size, scope, location, and funding amounts. This process improvement is an opportunity to validate project information internally and externally through a central information source.

Potential transportation and transit projects are overseen in different departments within our organization. The information about a project needs to be consistent, regardless of the content of the question. I will address a major need of the agency in this project, which is central sourcing potential projects electronically. A sequel to this project would be to link it to a complete engineering, electronic information system, which would include programming of the project, letting information, contract status, percent complete, and payout information.

Association & Benefit to the Agency

This project will benefit the agency on several levels and will fulfill several objectives of the Agency's Strategic Plan. We have a vital strategic plan that is re-visited on a regular basis to evaluate what is working and what needs improvement. Our efficiency and effectiveness trend has been one of continuous improvement. We are focused on

maintaining that positive trend in our customer service. By centralizing information on projects, we will address numerous goals and objectives. Of the 7 Goals in the SCDOT Strategic Plan, this project will have direct influence on 5 of these goals.¹

Goal 2: “Improve quality, efficiency, & appearance of the state highway system.”

Goal 3: “Improve & Expand multi-modal transportation system in SC.”

Goal 4: “Enhance and implement integrated and project management systems.”

Goal 6: “Improve management of our property, equipment, and technology.”

Goal 7: “Provide the highest level of customer service.”

To understand the vitality of this process improvement, it is important to understand the charge to the agency and the connection of the state and federal resources. The South Carolina Department of Transportation is one of many state agencies accountable to the citizens of South Carolina. The goal of the organization is simply defined in the South Carolina Code §57-1-30: “... to provide adequate, safe, and efficient transportation services for the movement of people and goods.”² SCDOT is able to build and maintain these roads through its dependency on both the state *and* federal funding it receives.

Additionally, each year Congress creates an annual appropriations act. It is comprised of separate sections, which provide funding for specific agencies and programs. Earmarks are used in the annual appropriations to direct funding for specific projects. They are typically written into appropriation bills by legislators. *An earmark refers to funding that is designated/set aside for a specific purpose* (program, project, activity, institution, or location).³ Usually, an earmark is included in the text of appropriation conference reports. For this reason it is in our best interest to provide Legislators, especially

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congressional members and staffers, who are able to fund a specific project (also known as earmarking), with information about potential projects in South Carolina. Securing money for projects is a vital part of our agency, so much so that almost 5 years ago, in 1999, SCDOT consciously began providing information to the South Carolina congressional delegation in hopes of securing money for projects. Below is a table representing the earmarks that have been secured over the past 4 years.

2000		2001		2002		2003	
\$2.7	CMCOG Transit	\$0.2	Rail Corridor Planning NC to GA	\$1.5	Anderson Transit	\$1.5	Columbia Metropolitan Airport
\$1.9	CARTA Transit	\$6.7	Bus Lease and Facilities	\$10.0	SC Bus Acquisition	\$1.0	Spartanburg Downtown Airport
\$0.5	Clemson Area Buses			\$9.0	Southern Rural Trans.	\$0.5	High-speed Rail Corridor in SC
\$0.5	Greenville Transit	\$2.0	Pavement Research with Clemson	\$0.8	Elimination of rail crossing hazards	\$1.0	Intermodal/Inland Port terminal
\$0.9	PeeDee Buses	\$2.0	ITS Deployment Projects				
\$0.4	Santee-Waterlee RTA	\$30.0	Cooper River Bridge	\$3.0	ITS Statewide	\$1.1	Myrtle Beach regional Multimodal Transit Center
\$1.2	SC VTE Statewide	\$9.8	SC Highway 5 - York County	\$1.1	Limehouse Bridge (Coast Guard)	\$0.5	North Charleston Reg. Intermodal Trans. Center
\$0.6	Spartanburg Transit	\$2.0	Limehouse Bridge	\$5.0	Harden Street	\$0.3	Greer Master Plan Rail Relocation Study
\$2.5	Charleston Mono-beam	\$0.3	Appalachian Dev.	\$0.5	Hwy. 41 and US 17 Intersection	\$7.0	SC Vehicles and Facilities
\$2.0	Job Access Rev. Commute			\$1.0	SC 277 Pedestrian Walkway	\$5.0	Sumter Intermodal Transportation Center/Union Station
				\$1.5	SC Route 38/I-95 Interchange	\$3.0	Anderson County Transit
\$1.3	Research Project			\$7.0	Cooper River Bridge	\$3.0	Intelligent Transportation Systems
				\$20.0	Charleston Parking Garage	\$1.2	Limehouse Bridge, Charleston
						\$2.0	Railroad Avenue Extension
						\$1.0	Arkwright Connector in Spartanburg
						\$0.6	Assembly St. RR consolidation and grade crossing elim. p
						\$1.5	Brown Road Bridge in Anderson
						\$0.5	Harden Street Improvements
						\$1.0	I-26 Little Mountain Interchange Improvements
						\$3.0	I-73 NC state line to Myrtle Beach, SC
						\$2.0	US 278
						\$2.0	US 17/521 Improvements
\$14.5 TOTAL		\$52.9 TOTAL		\$60.4 TOTAL		\$38.7 TOTAL	

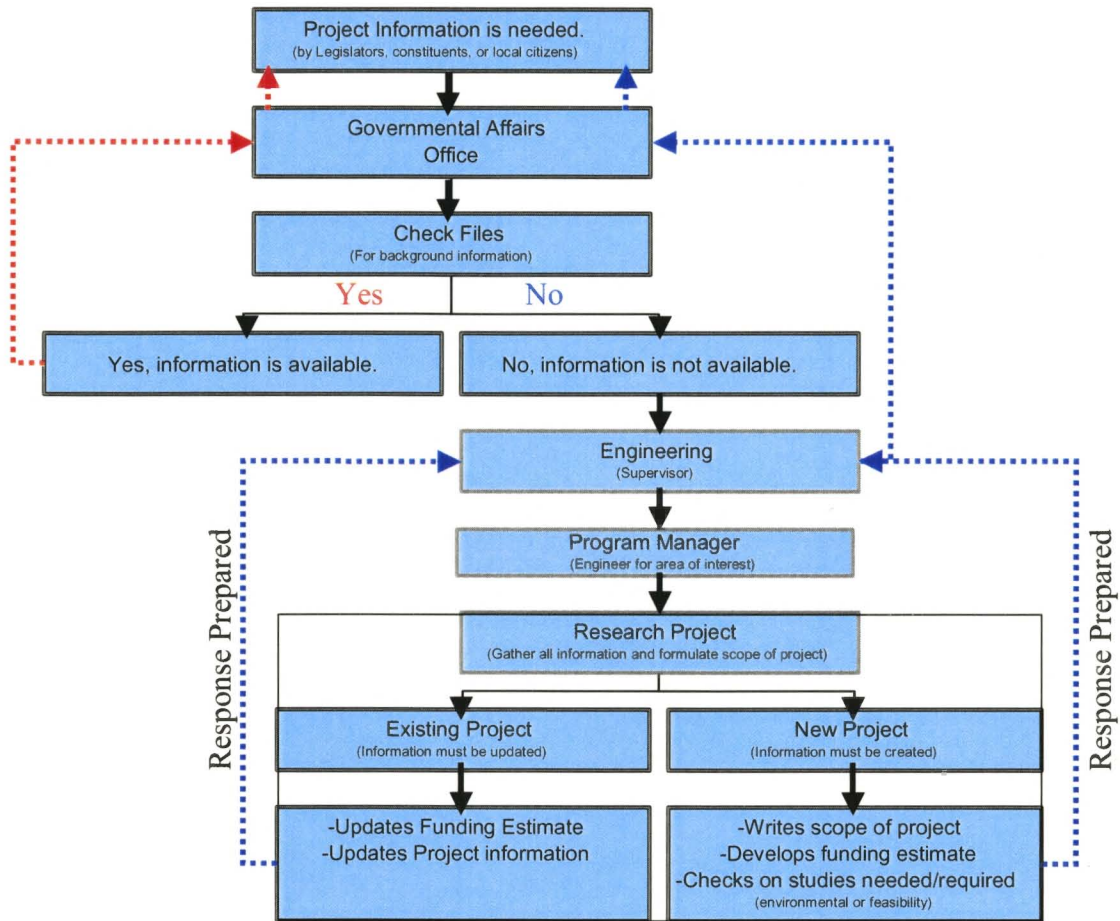
In South Carolina the state funding is solely a return of motor fuel user fees (also referred to as a gas tax). This is a finite amount; there is no General Fund Money, no surpluses, or extra pots of money. When motor fuel is purchased in South Carolina a portion of that “tax” is also sent to the Federal government. A federal formula measures the return to South Carolina. We receive about 90.5 cents for every dollar that we send to Washington. However, the funding received each year, both federal and state, is already obligated for existing projects. This is why “earmarking” is so important to us. This is funding above and beyond the normal allocations.

To be considered a valued resource for the congressional delegation, it is imperative that we are recognized as a solid and a reliable source of information. SCDOT must be involved in the legislative process to provide knowledge and information on how legislative initiatives affect transportation at both the national and local level. SCDOT can assist legislators in doing their job by furnishing information on how their legislative proposals might affect users of transportation in their areas.

Senator Tip O'Neil, the Former House Speaker, was fond of the maxim stating, "All politics are local."⁴ The corollary to this is that, "all politics are personal." Without a relationship with the members of Congress from South Carolina, SCDOT will not get very far in capturing federal funding for transportation.

Current Process

When information on a project is requested from legislators, constituents, and coworkers, a response is formulated. Before a response can be generated, there are a number of process steps. Typically, a question is asked to the Governmental Affairs Office, where a large number of Congressional and State stakeholders relationships have already been developed. The questions would either be answered immediately, if information had been previously obtained, or a research path would follow. The research would flow through Governmental Affairs through engineering where a response would be created or updated, depending on the particular project. Once a response was formed and approved, it would then complete the loop, allowing a response to be submitted to the stakeholder. Following is a flowchart that depicts the levels of response needed for typical research.



Depending on the complexity of the question, the response would be generated in 1-2 days. Most of the time is spent checking to see if any other response has been generated publicly on a project, and, if so, is it analogous with our proposed response. In some events, queries are directly asked to Engineering (Program Managers). When this occurs, they work with the Governmental Affairs Office to respond. This assures that the same information is relayed to the appropriate personnel. It has been the case that one individual (Legislator, constituent, general citizen, etc) will ask several different employees the same question.

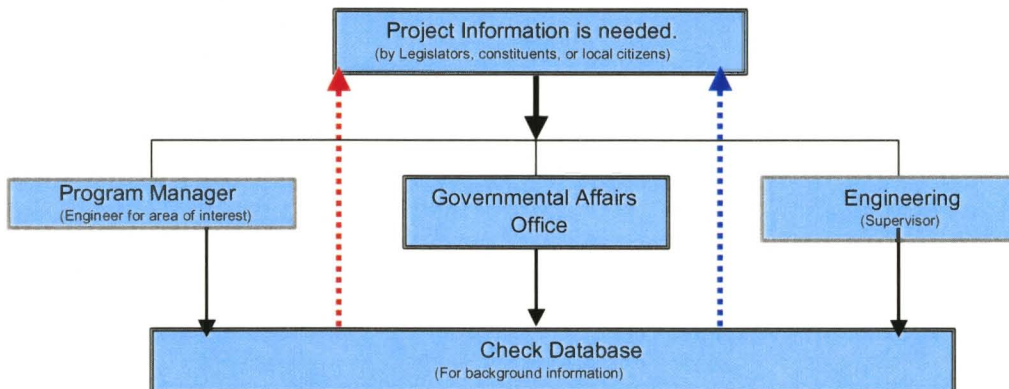
When SCDOT began to provide project information to congressional delegates (1999), projects were notably earmarked in federal legislation. From this point forward, the number of projects inquiries expanded, and there was a need for this information to be formatted. A master project list was created that contained general information about each project – the project name, the county, and desired funding. This information was gathered and confirmed through contact with the engineering office. It was then compiled into a Microsoft Office Word document and became known as the “earmark list.” The research on each potential project was laborious, but crucial in this initial step of creating a central database. A copy of one write-up is included as Appendix A.

Process Review and Survey Responses

Every six years a new transportation bill is created. This year, 2003, began the start of a new transportation bill. This new legislation solicits additional information on projects. Aside from the project name, county, and funding requests there were needs to include - (1) a funding history (and an on-going financial history), (2) a categorization of projects by congressional district, and (3) the description of the project. In filling the needs for a database that met the needs of the Governmental Affairs Office, there was also a need to meet the desires of the Program Managers (Engineers) who occasionally receive questions from legislators, locals, and media from their respective program area. A survey was prepared for the Program Managers to discern what information would be helpful to them. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix B

The initial survey was created to see what other information should be obtained for the development of a comprehensive database. Two questions of the survey were added for internal operations and not intended to be a product of this process improvement. They focused on understanding earmark processes and the desire to have a procedure in place; these are questions #1 and #2, respectively.

The surveys were personally delivered and explained to all of the engineers (7), transit personnel (2), and engineering supervisors (2). With this approach, there was 100% response to the surveys, which establishes that the responses are both valid and reliable. The next two questions (#3 and #4) revealed that the individuals surveyed receive an average of 16-17 calls a year regarding potential projects. And of those calls, 86% are *unable to respond immediately* without researching the project and then returning the call. Below is a flowchart depicting the desired outcome of the database.



With the ultimate intent of this project to be linked to a complete, internal electronic system, the Information Technology Service (ITS) group of SCDOT was contacted. With their understanding of the project and knowledge of software applications, it was decided to use a database format (Microsoft© Access) so that information can readily be pulled

by field or category for appropriation applications or general information. Project information would be consistent within the agency (Finance, Engineering, Federal Aid).

Understanding that this project could be limitless as to the information that could be generated on a particular route, question #5 of the survey asked, "What information would you like to have regarding a potential project?" Twenty-six available options were offered, as well as an "other" box that could be filled in with text. The following question (#6) asked the surveyor to rank the top five of their answers by importance. The surveys provided the following *ranking* information on what the database should include. This information determined the initial skeleton of the program, which is depicted below.

- 1) Project name
- 2) Project Location/Description
- 3) Funding Request
- 4) Project Owner/Sponsor
- 5) Contact Information

CPM Project Data Entry

SCDOT Potential Projects

Type: Highway

Number: 001 162 01

1 → Name: SC 162 - Charleston County

2 → Description: This project involves improvements on SC 162 from US 17 to SC 165 in Hollywood. This project has been identified as a System and Intermodal Connectivity project and \$1 million for Preliminary Engineering has been approved. Currently, the Department is analyzing various alternatives along with preparing the environmental documentation. No funding for right of way or construction has been identified to date.

4 → Project Owner(s): SCDOT

5 → Contact Person: Leland Colvin

3 → Estimated Cost: \$70.2 (in millions)

Route Number: SC 162

Congressional District: 1

County: CHARLESTON

Close

Record: 1 of 57

Additional items that were needed for the Governmental Affairs Office were the congressional district(s), the route numbers (as opposed to the common name of a project, like Carolina Bays Parkway Project), and a numeric code. The numeric code was created to refer to projects that may be developed in phases. This is especially true for a large project on the list, since total funding is unlikely or in the event that a road is split between multiple counties and the funding structure could vary. These codes represent the counties (up to three alpha/numeric characters), the route number (up to three alpha/numeric characters), and the phase of the project (up to two alpha/numeric characters). For example the coding for Project SC 162 is *001 162 01*- designating county, route, and phase. The “smart numbers” are attached in Appendix C.

The final question on the survey (#7) was for comments and concerns in the development of the database. These varied in response and will be addressed accordingly.

Conclusion

The primary intent for centralizing project information was to develop a nucleus of project information for the Governmental Affairs Office. This developed into a practical application for a large portion of the South Carolina Department of Transportation. With approximately 95% of the employees at SCDOT being classified under the “engineering” organizational code, it is vitally important for any organization – especially transportation organizations – to recognize that it is impossible to “engineer” solutions to issues that are political in nature.⁵

Although the results of the creation of a database are still preliminary, the database is complete enough to provide appropriate project information for the annual congressional delegation request prior to January 1, 2004. The next phase of this project will be to train interested employees (program managers, transit personnel, and the engineering supervisors) on how to access and use the database. A target date for this training is spring 2004. There are some security issues that will need to be addressed before this exercise would occur.

Once this training occurs, a follow-up survey will be sent to the original surveyors. A proposed survey is attached as Appendix D. This feedback will help evaluate the concept of the database. Ultimately, a true indication of the success of this database will be in the earmarks dedicated for South Carolina in the passing of future Appropriation bills.

Footnotes

¹ South Carolina Department of Transportation, SCDOT Strategic Plan -Update 2002-2003 pgs. 3-7.

² South Carolina Code of Laws 1976 (Supplement), Section 57-1-30, pg. 430.

³ Oxford Color Dictionary, 1995, Maurice Waite, Oxford University Press, pg 199.

⁴ Tip O'Neill and the Democratic Century: A Biography, 2001, John Farrell. Little Brown & Company.

⁵ South Carolina Department of Transportation; Human Resources Division. Based on statistical evidence of total employees (4883) and the number of employees that fall in the organizational code for engineering (4617) being 94.55%

Appendix A

Project Title: Carolina Bays Parkway – Horry County

Project Description and Status: This project involves the construction of a new location roadway from SC 9 near Stephens Crossroads to US 17 north of Holmestown Road near Surfside Beach. SCDOT executed a design-build contract for the design and construction of the 20-mile portion of the Carolina Bays Parkway from S.C. 9 to U.S. 501 near the Myrtle Beach Speedway. This section will be completed December 2002. The EIS and Record of Decision have been approved for the complete route from SC 9 to US 17. Permit approval for the complete roadway has been secured. The State Infrastructure Bank (SIB) has authorized funding for the next segment of the parkway, which will connect US 501 to SC 544, approximately 5 miles. This segment is due to go to construction early 2003. The SIB also allotted 45 million for acquisition of right of way and partial construction of the North Myrtle Beach Connector. This connector is a vital link allowing traffic along the beach to access the Parkway. The Department is still in research of funding for completing the construction of this vital link. The estimated cost to complete the remaining work is given below with a breakdown for each phase.

SC 544 to US 17 CONSTRUCTION-	\$ 150 million
MAIN STREET CONNECTOR (r/w & con)-	\$ 75 million
TOTAL	\$ 225 million

Funding Request: \$ 225 million

FY 04	\$31 million
FY 05	\$100 million
FY 06	\$51 million
FY 07	\$43 million

Appendix B

Potential Project Survey

- 1) Do you understand the process by which earmarks are selected?
 Yes No
- 2) Should the process be documented so that all understand it?
 Yes No
- 3) Do you receive inquiries regarding potential earmark projects?
 Yes, if so approximately how many per year _____.
 No
- 4) Are you able to respond to the inquiry immediately?
 Yes.
 No, I usually need to research the information and then call back.
- 5) What information would you like to have access to regarding a potential transportation or transit project? (Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Project name	<input type="checkbox"/> Project location	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding requested
<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Match	<input type="checkbox"/> Source of Match	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Category
<input type="checkbox"/> Project category	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal Aid eligibility	<input type="checkbox"/> NHS Project
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor/Owner	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding History (prev. obligated funds)	
<input type="checkbox"/> GPS coordinates	<input type="checkbox"/> Letters of Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Project Terminus
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact info	<input type="checkbox"/> Actual/Proposed Photo	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding dates
<input type="checkbox"/> National significance	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Allocation Plan (if multiple years)	
<input type="checkbox"/> MPO/COG inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> New Start Program Info	<input type="checkbox"/> Scenic Route
<input type="checkbox"/> Congressional district	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion in Long-range plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Project phase
<input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Mile Marker	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
- 6) Of the checked boxes above, please rank the top 5 in order of importance (with 1 being the highest). If less than 5 were chosen, rank only those selected.
1 - _____
2 - _____
3 - _____
4 - _____
5 - _____
- 7) Comments/Concerns regarding the development of a database to house "earmark" information: _____

Appendix C

Smart Number Listing

•	<u>I-73 (North Carolina State Line to I-95 on towards Conway and the Grand Strand Area)</u>	<u>561 i73 01</u>
•	<u>Carolina Bays Parkway (Phase II)– Horry County</u>	<u>005 cbp 02</u>
•	<u>Cooper River Bridge Replacement Project – Charleston County</u>	<u>006 crb 01</u>
•	<u>SCDOT <i>InRoads</i> Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) – Statewide</u>	<u>008 its 01</u>
•	<u>Vehicle Acquisition Program – Statewide</u>	<u>008 vap 01</u>
•	<u>US 278 Corridor – Beaufort County</u>	<u>002 278 01</u>
•	<u>Railroad Avenue Extension S-732 – Berkeley County</u>	<u>006 732 01</u>
•	<u>Intermodal Terminal/Inland Port- Statewide</u>	<u>008 itp 01</u>
•	<u>Light Rail Study – Richland County</u>	<u>002 lrs 01</u>
•	<u>Extension of the Mark Clark Expressway – Charleston County</u>	<u>006 mce 01</u>
•	<u>Lexington Connector– Lexington County</u>	<u>002 lc 01</u>
•	<u>Highway 17A from US 176 to Moncks Corner – Berkeley County</u>	<u>006 17a 01</u>
•	<u>Bobby Jones Expressway (I-520) Extension (Phase II) – Aiken County</u>	<u>001 520 02</u>
•	<u>James Clyburn Connector – Clarendon, Calhoun & Sumter Counties</u>	<u>001 jcc 01</u>
•	<u>I-26/US 1 Airport Intermodal Connector – Lexington County</u>	<u>002 26/1 01</u>
•	<u>Harden Street Improvements – Richland County</u>	<u>002 hst 01</u>
•	<u>Assembly St. Enhancement ,RR Cons. & Grade Crossing Elimination Project – Rich. Cty.</u>	<u>006 ast 01</u>
•	<u>I-77/Peach Road Interchange – Fairfield County</u>	<u>004 i77 01</u>
•	<u>US 521 – Williamsburg, Clarendon, Kershaw & Sumter Counties</u>	<u>006 521 01</u>
•	<u>US 378 from Lake City to Conway - Florence, Marion & Horry Counties</u>	<u>005 378 01</u>
•	<u>High Speed Rail Service – Statewide</u>	<u>008 hsr 01</u>
•	<u>BMW/I-85 Interchange Accommodation Project – Spartanburg County</u>	<u>004 i85 01</u>
•	<u>Lee County Road Improvement Project – Lee County</u>	<u>005 lee 01</u>
•	<u>Extension of SC 61 Expressway – Charleston & Dorchester Counties</u>	<u>016 61 01</u>
•	<u>Bees Ferry Road – Charleston County</u>	<u>001 bzf 01</u>
•	<u>Loop Ramp at Interchange I-526 with SC 61 Expressway – Charleston County</u>	<u>001 526/61 01</u>
•	<u>Extension of the Berlin G. Myers Parkway - Dorchester County</u>	<u>006 bmp 01</u>
•	<u>Extension of Ashley Phosphate Road – Berkeley & Charleston Counties</u>	<u>001aph 01</u>
•	<u>Orleans Road (Phase I) – Charleston County</u>	<u>001 orl 01</u>
•	<u>Orleans Road (Phase II) – Charleston County</u>	<u>001 orl 02</u>
•	<u>SC 162 – Charleston County</u>	<u>001 162 01</u>
•	<u>Lower Richland Road Projects (Phase I) Richland County</u>	<u>002 lor 01</u>
•	<u>Transit Facilities Construction Program – Statewide</u>	<u>008 tfc 01</u>
•	<u>I-95/SC 327 Interchange Improvement Project - Florence County</u>	<u>006 i95/327 01</u>
•	<u>I-26/Route391 Project – Newberry County</u>	<u>005 i26/391 01</u>
•	<u>701 Connector (S. Conway Bypass) Project-Georgetown, Horry & Marion Counties</u>	<u>016 701 01</u>
•	<u>Paris Road – Spartanburg County</u>	<u>004 pr 01</u>
•	<u>SC 9 – Spartanburg County</u>	<u>004 sc9 01</u>
•	<u>Old Furnace Road – Spartanburg County</u>	<u>004 ofr 01</u>
•	<u>Hardscrabble Road Widening Project – Richland County</u>	<u>002 hsr 01</u>
•	<u>West Georgia Road – Greenville County</u>	<u>004wgr 01</u>
•	<u>Scuffletown Road – Greenville Countv</u>	<u>004sr 01</u>

Appendix D

	Name: _____																											
Follow-Up Project Survey																												
1)	Do you continue to receive inquiries regarding potential earmark projects? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, if so approximately how many per year _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No																											
2)	Are you able to respond to the inquiry immediately? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No, I usually need to research the information and then call back.																											
3)	Other than Project Name, Project Location/Description, Funding Request, and Funding History, is there any other information needed for potential transportation or transit project? (Check all that apply) <table border="0"><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Funding Match</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Source of Match</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Funding Category</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Project category</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Federal Aid eligibility</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> NHS Project</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor/Owner</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Mile Marker</td><td></td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> GPS coordinates</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Letters of Support</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Project Terminus</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Contact info</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Actual/Proposed Photo</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Funding dates</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> National significance</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Funding Allocation Plan (if multiple years)</td><td></td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> MPO/COG inclusion</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> New Start Program Info</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Scenic Route</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Congressional district</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion in Long-range plan</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Project phase</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Match	<input type="checkbox"/> Source of Match	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Category	<input type="checkbox"/> Project category	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal Aid eligibility	<input type="checkbox"/> NHS Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor/Owner	<input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Mile Marker		<input type="checkbox"/> GPS coordinates	<input type="checkbox"/> Letters of Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Project Terminus	<input type="checkbox"/> Contact info	<input type="checkbox"/> Actual/Proposed Photo	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding dates	<input type="checkbox"/> National significance	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Allocation Plan (if multiple years)		<input type="checkbox"/> MPO/COG inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> New Start Program Info	<input type="checkbox"/> Scenic Route	<input type="checkbox"/> Congressional district	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion in Long-range plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Project phase	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
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4)	Comments/Concerns regarding the development of a database to house "earmark" information: _____ _____ _____																											