

# SR-167/SR-52 Feasibility Study

## Kickoff Meeting Minutes

May 25, 2022

11:30 PM

Wiregrass Electric Cooperative

509 North State Highway 167, Hartford, AL 36344



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Two Perimeter Park South  
Suite 500 East  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243  
Telephone: (205) 940-6420  
Fax: (205) 728-2007  
[www.sain.com](http://www.sain.com)

### Attendees:

(Name)	(Firm/Agency)	(Phone)	(Email)
Aaron White	ALDOT	334-320-7466	<a href="mailto:whitea@dot.state.al.us">whitea@dot.state.al.us</a>
Daryl Calhoun	ALDOT	334-353-6878	<a href="mailto:calhound@dot.state.al.us">calhound@dot.state.al.us</a>
Justin Palmer	ALDOT	334-320-7229	<a href="mailto:palmerj@dot.state.al.us">palmerj@dot.state.al.us</a>
Mark Graham	ALDOT	334-534-6122	<a href="mailto:grahamm@dot.state.al.us">grahamm@dot.state.al.us</a>
Jack Kimbrough, Jr	Barge Design Solutions	256-203-8949	<a href="mailto:jack.kimbrough@bargedesign.com">jack.kimbrough@bargedesign.com</a>
Joe Nieder	Barge Design Solutions	251-752-1393	<a href="mailto:joe.nieder@bargedesign.com">joe.nieder@bargedesign.com</a>
Sherry McCormick	Barry Moore AL-02	334-547-6630	<a href="mailto:sherry.mccormick@mail.house.gov">sherry.mccormick@mail.house.gov</a>
Rod Morgan	Coffee County	334-894-5556	<a href="mailto:rmorgan@co.coffee.al.us">rmorgan@co.coffee.al.us</a>
Steve Shaw	Couch Aggregate	334-792-2888	<a href="mailto:sshaw@couchaggregate.com">sshaw@couchaggregate.com</a>
Colton Cureton	DACC	334-685-7036	<a href="mailto:ccureton@dothan.com">ccureton@dothan.com</a>
Lori Wilcoxon	DACC	334-718-0605	<a href="mailto:lori@dothan.com">lori@dothan.com</a>
Matt Parker	DACC	334-333-0965	<a href="mailto:mattpre@aol.com">mattpre@aol.com</a>
Toby Seay	Geneva County Commission	334-449-0428	<a href="mailto:toby.seay@genevacountyal.gov">toby.seay@genevacountyal.gov</a>
Mark Culver	Houston County Commission	334-677-4740	<a href="mailto:mculver@houston.countyal.gov">mculver@houston.countyal.gov</a>
Alicia Bailey	Sain Associates	205-263-2169	<a href="mailto:abailey@sain.com">abailey@sain.com</a>
Becky White	Sain Associates	205-263-2141	<a href="mailto:bwhite@sain.com">bwhite@sain.com</a>
David Coggin	Sain Associates	205-263-2126	<a href="mailto:dcoggin@sain.com">dcoggin@sain.com</a>
Emily VanScyoc	SEARPCD	334-794-4093	<a href="mailto:evanscyoc@searpcd.org">evanscyoc@searpcd.org</a>
Scott Farmer	SEARPCD	334-794-4093	<a href="mailto:sfarmer@searpcd.org">sfarmer@searpcd.org</a>
Jeff Sorrells	State Rep. D-87	334-248-2511	<a href="mailto:jsorrells@alhouse.gov">jsorrells@alhouse.gov</a>
Donnie Chesteen	State Senator D-29	334-449-5040	<a href="mailto:dchesteen@panhandle.rr.com">dchesteen@panhandle.rr.com</a>
Jessie Quillen	Wiregrass EDC	334-447-8303	<a href="mailto:jquillen@wiregrasedc.com">jquillen@wiregrasedc.com</a>
Brad Kimbro	Wiregrass Electric Coop.	334-701-8747	<a href="mailto:bkimbro@wiregrass.coop">bkimbro@wiregrass.coop</a>
Jennifer Ward	Wiregrass Electric Coop.		<a href="mailto:jward@wiregrass.coop">jward@wiregrass.coop</a>
Troy Fountain	Wiregrass Foundation	334-803-2611	<a href="mailto:troy@wiregrassfoundation.org">troy@wiregrassfoundation.org</a>



The purpose of this meeting was to discuss project background, identify study priorities, and determine expectations for the study.

## Discussion

- Scott Farmer introduced the study and provided the background for funding, scope, and stakeholders. This study will evaluate the feasibility of widening SR-167 and SR-52 within the study area and prepare the project for pursuit of local, state, and/or federal funding.
- The project team includes all stakeholders, Sain Associates, Barge Design Solutions, MRS Consultants, and BioResources.
- Sain Associates walked through the scope of the study, what the process will look like, and what deliverables will be provided at the end of the study.
- Sain facilitated a group discussion regarding stakeholders' goals for the study, concerns about the study, and what success would look like at the end of the study.
- Sain facilitated a group discussion about the purpose and need of the project. Documentation of purpose and need is crucial to establishing a valid project and securing funding.
  - Stakeholders want four-lane connectivity to the state line and further to Interstate 10. Widening to the state line would entice Florida Department of Transportation to widen Florida State Route 79 to I-10 from the state line.
  - Upgrade infrastructure to increase capacity.
  - Four-lane access to the cities and counties in the region is a key to economic development. Not having four-lane highway access is often the first filter for consultants providing sites to clients for selection.
    - A four-lane highway is often the minimum requirement for "getting in the door" for consideration.
  - Increase safety performance of the roadway. There are slow drivers and a lack of opportunities to pass safely. Drivers tend to be impatient and attempt risky maneuvers while stuck behind a slow driver for long periods of time.
  - Beach traffic is a huge factor that impacts the performance of the roadway.
  - Better access is needed for rural communities to have access to better infrastructure such as broadband, utilities, and economic development.
  - Emergency evacuation brings traffic to a standstill and inhibits all people in the area from using public utilities (i.e., cell service, internet).
    - The heaviest traffic occurs two to three days prior to landfall of a major hurricane or tropical storm.
    - Florida's widening of FL-77 and FL-79 will create upward pressure on the Wiregrass region's transportation network, most notably Geneva and Houston counties.



- The increase in population of the Florida panhandle is only making this issue more critical. An additional 1,000,000 people are expected to move to the Florida panhandle in the next ten years, per stakeholders. Planning for the future needs to happen BEFORE this becomes a larger problem than it already is.
- Most evacuation traffic continues through Enterprise to Montgomery, Birmingham, etc.
- The Wiregrass region is often a staging area after a major hurricane event for reconstruction and restoration of utilities for affected communities in the panhandle.
- Visit Dothan could provide hotel accommodation numbers from Hurricane Michael in 2018.
- Medical access for the area is limited to Enterprise, Dothan, and a smaller hospital facility in Geneva. Some travel to Pensacola for specialists.
  - There are several military bases in the region that could benefit from a four-lane highway between Fort Rucker and airbases in the panhandle (Tyndall AFB, Eglin AFB, etc.). There have been significant federal investments in these bases recently.
- Political support is key in helping the project move forward during and after this study is complete.
- This is a planning document, which is the first stage in the project's life cycle. Once this study is complete, there are several remaining steps: environmental document, design, utility relocation, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.
  - Environmental screening is key to identifying some red flags. Missing clear environmental issues in the planning stage can lead to more cost in the design and construction phase of the project.
  - Any right-of-way acquisition at any point in the project life cycle needs to follow the Uniform Act of 1970 for the project to be eligible for federal funding.
  - Federal funding comes with specific requirements, and this study will help identify what is necessary to know before pursuing federal funding.
- A meeting with the FDOT director indicated that Florida would benefit greatly from a four-lane roadway along State Route 167. In addition to the obvious financial benefit of a four-lane roadway, they recognize how crucial it is for hurricane evacuation. Population growth in Florida only makes this more critical. Hypothetically, they would consider widening FL-79 from I-10 to the state line if the Alabama side of the four-lane comes to fruition.
- The State Route 52 widening project is the first major highway investment in Geneva County in over 50 years.
- The Wiregrass Electric Cooperative cited that in 2021 the number of water meters in Geneva County increased for the first time.



- One example of industry choosing a site with good four-lane access is the Ben E. Keith Southeast facility in New Brockton, Alabama, along US-84.
- Sain facilitated a roundtable discussion about public involvement options, noting that it is not required at this stage of the project, but there are advantages and disadvantages to holding it at the planning stage rather than the environmental document stage.
  - Holding a public meeting for this study at the same time as the SR-52 widening project could be confusing. We just need to make sure that if there is a meeting, it needs to be clear that this study is different in scope, stage, and commitment.
  - Elected officials in the area are on the same page regarding this study, and all are in favor of it. Public involvement usually goes more smoothly when this is the case.
  - We need to have answers to questions before going to the public.
  - Senator Chesteen and Representative Sorrells agreed that we need to have a plan before approaching the public for input.
  - ALDOT has an appetite for public involvement in nearly all project types aside from resurfacing.
  - If public involvement is done at the planning stage, stakeholders need to keep the public informed of proceedings throughout the entire process. For example, SEARP&DC could host a webpage for the project with periodic updates, even if things move slowly.
  - Typical ALDOT format for a public meeting is an open house without a formal presentation. Citizens come during a window of time, view relevant maps of the project, and can ask individual questions for the project team. There are other options, including having a formal presentation at a certain time and location. This does not have to be decided at this time, but it will need to be considered as we get closer to that stage of the study.
  - Stakeholders agreed that a public meeting after the existing conditions analysis is complete would not be productive. Citizens will want to see a plan, not just hear that there's a possibility of widening.
- The conclusion for next steps from the public involvement discussion are as follows:
  - No public meeting after existing conditions stage.
  - After the next stakeholder meeting, the team will make a decision on whether a public involvement meeting would be warranted after preliminary alignment alternatives are developed to gather more information from the public.
  - At the conclusion of the draft report stage after alternatives are identified, a public involvement meeting should be held to present the results of the study.
  - A format was not agreed upon, but it was noted that a meeting at one location would be sufficient. Whether the meeting will be open house format or a formal presentation format will be decided at a future stakeholder meeting.



## Action Items

- Sain Associates will begin the existing conditions analysis, including traffic data collection, traffic analysis, environmental screening, and conducting a field review (Barge).
- Local officials who were a part of the meeting with the FDOT director will provide further documentation of the discussions from that meeting.
- Local officials will provide any documentation of industries asking about four-lane access to industrial sites.
- If available, local officials will provide any economic data for Geneva, Coffee, Dale, and Houston counties compared to the rest of Alabama.
- Wiregrass Electric Cooperative will provide water meter data, most notably showing growth in 2021 compared to previous years.
- Sain Associates will reach out to Visit Dothan for hotel accommodation data from Hurricane Michael evacuation in 2018.
- Sain Associates will reach out to contacts in the Florida panhandle for appropriate data to use in travel demand modeling.
- Barge Design Solutions will conduct field reviews to inform the study.

# SR-167/SR-52 Feasibility Study

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August 11, 2022

11:30 AM

Wiregrass Electric Cooperative

509 North State Highway 167

Hartford, AL 36344



**SAIN**  
ASSOCIATES

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Two Perimeter Park South  
Suite 500 East  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243  
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Fax: (205) 728-2007  
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### Attendees:

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Aaron White	ALDOT	334-320-7466	<a href="mailto:whitea@dot.state.al.us">whitea@dot.state.al.us</a>
Daryl Calhoun	ALDOT	334-353-6878	<a href="mailto:calhound@dot.state.al.us">calhound@dot.state.al.us</a>
Colton Cureton	DACC	334-685-7036	<a href="mailto:ccureton@dothan.com">ccureton@dothan.com</a>
Toby Seay	Geneva County Commission	334-449-0428	<a href="mailto:toby.seay@genevacountyal.gov">toby.seay@genevacountyal.gov</a>
Emily VanScyoc	SEARPDC	334-794-4093	<a href="mailto:evanscyoc@searpdc.org">evanscyoc@searpdc.org</a>
Scott Farmer	SEARPDC	334-794-4093	<a href="mailto:sfarmer@searpdc.org">sfarmer@searpdc.org</a>
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Jessie Quillen	Wiregrass EDC	334-447-8303	<a href="mailto:jquillen@wiregrassedc.com">jquillen@wiregrassedc.com</a>
Brad Kimbro	Wiregrass Electric Coop.	334-701-8747	<a href="mailto:bkimbro@wiregrass.coop">bkimbro@wiregrass.coop</a>
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Troy Fountain	Wiregrass Foundation	334-803-2611	<a href="mailto:troy@wiregrassfoundation.org">troy@wiregrassfoundation.org</a>
Rhett Marques	State Rep. D-91	334-389-3056	<a href="mailto:rhettwmarques@gmail.com">rhettwmarques@gmail.com</a>
Susannah Cleveland	Sen. Richard Shelby	334-223-7305	<a href="mailto:susannah_cleveland@shelby.senate.gov">susannah_cleveland@shelby.senate.gov</a>
Brandon Shoupe	Houston County	334-791-8340	<a href="mailto:bshoupe@houstoncountyal.gov">bshoupe@houstoncountyal.gov</a>
Jonathan Tullos	City of Enterprise	228-323-3034	<a href="mailto:jtullos@enterpriseal.gov">jtullos@enterpriseal.gov</a>
Jack Kimbrough, Jr	Barge Design Solutions	256-203-8949	<a href="mailto:jack.kimbrough@bargedesign.com">jack.kimbrough@bargedesign.com</a>
Alicia Bailey	Sain Associates	205-263-2169	<a href="mailto:abailey@sain.com">abailey@sain.com</a>
Nathan Currie	Sain Associates	205-263-2129	<a href="mailto:ncurrie@sain.com">ncurrie@sain.com</a>
David Coggin	Sain Associates	205-263-2126	<a href="mailto:dcoggin@sain.com">dcoggin@sain.com</a>

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the results of the existing conditions transportation analysis, the purpose and need for improvements, the environmental evaluation (pre-NEPA) update, strategy for public involvement, and next steps for the study.



## Discussion

- Sain provided an overview of the traffic data, capacity analysis, crash data trends, and traffic forecasting.
  - The annual growth rate estimate Sain is proposing for SR-167 is an aggressive 5% per year from 2022-2045, based on traffic data from 2014-2022.
  - The annual growth rate estimate Sain is proposing for SR-52 is a continuation of the 2% per year growth rate used in design year traffic volume for the SR-52 widening projects east of Hartford.
- Sain provided an update on the environmental evaluation (pre-NEPA). The streams and wetlands mapping, cultural resources screening, environmental justice screening, and hazardous material site identification have been completed.
- The James S. Radford Recreational Park will qualify as a Section 4(f) property. There were Land and Water Conservation Funds used in the creation of the park, so it also qualifies as a Section 6(f) property.
- On the State Route 52 widening projects east of Hartford, ALDOT had to snake the alignment through certain areas to best avoid and/or minimize impacts to streams and wetlands.
- Sain presented the data-substantiated building blocks of the purpose and need for improvement along each corridor. The purpose and need statement will be a narrative, but for the purposes of this meeting, it was presented as a bulleted list. More detailed information has been identified for inclusion in the purpose and need statement.
- The regional cooperation and consensus of support from local and state government for this project should be highlighted in the purpose and need.
- Sain presented a preview of the evacuation analysis, which utilized traffic forecasts and time-distribution data from the Emerald Coast Regional Council for each category of hurricane.
  - Using this data, a conservative estimate of existing volume-to-capacity ratios was developed for three highways (FL-79/AL-167, FL-77/AL-109, and US-231) from three counties (Bay, Washington, Holmes) *directly* affecting State Route 167 in the event of hurricane evacuation.
  - Preliminary Conclusion: Widening AL-167/FL-79 to a four-lane highway brings projected Category 1 and Category 5 scenarios from above capacity to below capacity (improved traffic conditions). Projected Category 2, 3, and 4 scenarios remain above capacity across the evacuation period.
  - There was discussion about pulling from a wider area to draw traffic to SR-167. The concern is that adding other counties (specifically Walton, Okaloosa) would provide more opportunity to dismiss analysis. In other words, analyzing additional counties would result in more capacity along other roadways. This would dilute the numbers, making it more difficult to pin down an actionable effect that



- widening SR-167 would have for various evacuation scenarios. Whereas, using the three counties directly south of SR-167 provides a clearer path to the purpose and need for improvements that would make a measurable difference.
- In discussions regarding economic development, a few additional points were identified:
    - At the Geneva County Industrial Park, 300-400 acres are undeveloped and available to expand.
    - The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission identified Geneva County as “distressed” using the Appalachian Regional Commissions index-based economic classification system, putting it in the bottom 25% of counties across the nation using the index-based economic classification system.
    - The specific distance to I-10 (less than 20 miles) should be mentioned in the purpose and need narrative for SR-167, as that alone should be a contributor to economic development.
  - Per ALDOT, the plan for the SR-52 widening project's terminus in Hartford is not finalized.
    - Public involvement for SR-52 east of Hartford should happen before the end of 2022. Efforts should be made to keep our current study separate from the widening project, because the two projects are in entirely different stages of the project life cycle. That will be difficult to communicate to the public. The ALDOT project is a for-sure-going-to-happen-project, whereas any project resulting from our study is still far off.
  - Stakeholders strategized regarding public involvement for this study.
    - Stakeholders agreed that Sain should proceed with future traffic analysis, typical sections, and alignments evaluation.
    - Sain will come back to the stakeholder group towards the end of the year (November/December timeframe) and provide an opportunity for review and commenting.
    - At the next stakeholder meeting, Sain needs to prepare talking points for the group so that everyone is conveying the same message. A one-page summary flyer would be ideal for the meeting and outreach to inform the public of the meeting.
    - At the next stakeholder meeting, the group needs to identify ideas for Environmental Justice community outreach and specifically what information/input we hope to obtain from the public at the meeting.
  - After the next stakeholder meeting, the group discussed details regarding the presentation to the public.
    - The current plan is for two public involvement meetings: one in Enterprise and one in Geneva County (Geneva or Hartford).
    - We really need to stress the regional support for this project in public meetings.
    - We should hold the meetings at approximately the same time and present the same information.





- We should be strategic about what information we share regarding environmental impacts. It should be clear that there will be impacts if improvements are made, but specifics about 6(f) or streams and wetlands should come with a caveat that these things can be overcome by avoiding and/or minimizing impacts.

#### Action Items

- Stakeholders to send any information to aid purpose and need narrative to [dcoggin@sain.com](mailto:dcoggin@sain.com), specifically regarding the following:
  - Notes or documentation from meeting with FDOT in 2019.
  - Any additional economic development metrics for Geneva County, meeting notes with industrial developers who did not ultimately come, etc.
  - Any population growth estimates for Bay, Washington, and Holmes Counties that should be used in place of the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research's *Projections of Florida Population by County, 2020-2045, with estimates for 2019* for this study's purpose and need narrative and/or hurricane evacuation analysis.
- Sain needs to follow up with ALDOT on several items:
  - Prime and unique farmland conversion forms and any other items needed.
  - ALDOT review and approval process for this study's final report, and if FHWA would be involved in that or not.
  - Next steps and Funding – Can they proceed with environmental phase (get FHWA to sign document) if construction funding is not set up?
  - Once the public involvement meetings are concluded, Sain will need more information on where the future four-lane alignment ties in Hartford.
- Sain will proceed with the widening feasibility analysis task.

# SR-167/SR-52 Feasibility Study

## Stakeholder Meeting Minutes

January 18, 2023, 11:30 AM  
Wiregrass Electric Cooperative  
509 North State Highway 167  
Hartford, AL 36344



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Two Perimeter Park South  
Suite 500 East  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243  
Telephone: (205) 940-6420  
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Becky White	Sain Associates	205-263-2141	<a href="mailto:bwhite@sain.com">bwhite@sain.com</a>
Brad Kimbro	Wiregrass Electric Coop.	334-701-8747	<a href="mailto:bkimbro@wiregrass.coop">bkimbro@wiregrass.coop</a>
Colton Cureton	DACC	334-685-7036	<a href="mailto:ccureton@dothan.com">ccureton@dothan.com</a>
Daryl Calhoun	ALDOT	334-353-6878	<a href="mailto:calhound@dot.state.al.us">calhound@dot.state.al.us</a>
David Coggin	Sain Associates	205-263-2126	<a href="mailto:dcoggin@sain.com">dcoggin@sain.com</a>
Donnie Chesteen	State Senator D-29	334-449-5040	<a href="mailto:dchesteen@panhandle.rr.com">dchesteen@panhandle.rr.com</a>
Emily VanScyoc	SEARPDC	334-794-4093	<a href="mailto:evanscyoc@searpdc.org">evanscyoc@searpdc.org</a>
Gregg Bissot	Barge Design Solutions	205-298-1773	<a href="mailto:gregg.bissot@bargedesign.com">gregg.bissot@bargedesign.com</a>
Jack Kimbrough, Jr	Barge Design Solutions	256-203-8949	<a href="mailto:jack.kimbrough@bargedesign.com">jack.kimbrough@bargedesign.com</a>
Jennifer Ward	Wiregrass Electric Coop.		<a href="mailto:jward@wiregrass.coop">jward@wiregrass.coop</a>
Jonathan Tullos	City of Enterprise	228-323-3034	<a href="mailto:jtullos@enterpriseal.gov">jtullos@enterpriseal.gov</a>
Josh Carnley	State Sen. D-31	334-726-1252	<a href="mailto:josh.carnley@alsenate.gov">josh.carnley@alsenate.gov</a>
Mark Graham	ALDOT	334-534-6122	<a href="mailto:grahamm@dot.state.al.us">grahamm@dot.state.al.us</a>
Matt Parker	DACC	334-333-0965	<a href="mailto:mattpree@aol.com">mattpree@aol.com</a>
Michael Cole	Barge Design Solutions	334-793-6266	<a href="mailto:michael.cole@bargedesign.com">michael.cole@bargedesign.com</a>
Nathan Currie	Sain Associates	205-263-2129	<a href="mailto:ncurrie@sain.com">ncurrie@sain.com</a>
Neil Strickland	City of Hartford	334-791-1328	<a href="mailto:mayor@cityofhartfordal.org">mayor@cityofhartfordal.org</a>
Rhett Marques	State Rep. D-91	334-389-3056	<a href="mailto:rhettwmarques@gmail.com">rhettwmarques@gmail.com</a>
Rod Morgan	Coffee County	334-894-5556	<a href="mailto:rmorgan@co.coffee.al.us">rmorgan@co.coffee.al.us</a>
Scott Farmer	SEARPDC	334-794-4093	<a href="mailto:sfarmer@searpdc.org">sfarmer@searpdc.org</a>
Steve McKinnon	Dale County	334-301-1468	<a href="mailto:smckinnon552@yahoo.com">smckinnon552@yahoo.com</a>
Toby Seay	Geneva County Commission	334-449-0428	<a href="mailto:toby.seay@genevacountyal.gov">toby.seay@genevacountyal.gov</a>
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The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the progress of the study, the public involvement meeting format, the public involvement meeting materials, and next steps for the study.



## Discussion

- Sain provided an overview of the completed, in progress, and upcoming tasks within the scope of the study.
- Sain presented a recommended public meeting format and the comment form, mapping, and stakeholder one-pager.
- The point person for all media requests at the public involvement meeting is Scott Farmer of SEARP&DC.
- Brad Kimbro and Senator Chesteen stressed the importance of conveying the message about FDOT widening their segment between the state line and Interstate 10.
- The public involvement information could be posted on Scott's website and/or the ALDOT public involvement web page to encourage attendance at the public involvement meeting.
- ALDOT discouraged posting the public comment form online.
- A press release for news outlets and social media is needed.
- Add a slide to the looping PowerPoint explaining that even non desirable alternatives must be shown to document that all possibilities have been evaluated.
- The north bypass alternative for SR-52 at SR-167 needs to be reevaluated for conflicts with the industrial park.
- There will be two public meetings—one in Hartford and one in Enterprise. The location of the Hartford meeting will be the Wiregrass Electric Cooperative meeting room, and the Enterprise location is yet to be determined.
- Add a note to the advertisement and meeting handouts that states, "No formal presentation will be given."

## Action Items

- Sain to update meeting materials based on input received from stakeholders.
  - Comment Form
  - Looping Slides
  - Stakeholder One-Pager
  - Mapping
- Sain to revise SR-52 Bypass at SR-167 Alternative #2 based on input from stakeholders.
- Sain and Barge to send updated meeting date availability to Scott Farmer.
- Sain and SEARP&DC to coordinate on materials for meeting (listed above).
- Sain to update SEARP&DC address at the end of comment form.
- SEARP&DC to coordinate with Jonathan Tullos for a meeting location in Enterprise.
- SEARP&DC to formulate a press release for advertising the public meeting and where to house meeting information on their website.