

Cornelius  
Davidson  
Huntersville  
Kannapolis  
Concord



Lincoln County  
Mecklenburg County  
Cabarrus County

September 21, 2017  
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM  
Huntersville Town Center  
Rotunda Conference Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor  
101 Huntersville-Concord Road  
Huntersville, NC

## Regular Meeting Minutes

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### Attendees:

Will Washam	Town of Cornelius
Jason Burdette	Town of Davidson
Bill Coxe	Town of Huntersville
Zac Gordon	Town of Kannapolis
Andrew Bryant	Lincoln County
Stuart Basham	NCDOT – Division 10
Mike Reese	NCDOT – Congestion Management
Andy Bailey	NCDOT – TPD
Julio Paredes	GCLMPO
Joe Lesch	Gresham, Smith & Partners (GS&P)
Brock LaForty	WSP
Jennifer Starnes	WSP
Blair Israel	Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG)

### Via teleconference:

Susie Morris	Cabarrus County
Margaret Pearson	City of Concord
Phil Conrad	Cabarrus-Rowan MPO
Anil Paniker	NCDOT – Division 12

### Welcome and Introductions:

Mr. Gordon opened the meeting at 10:30 am. All present introduced themselves. Margaret Pierson announced that she will be retiring in the next few months and will select an alternate representative to the COP.

### Administrative Matters

#### a. Minutes from the May 11, 2017 COP meeting:

Motion was made by Ms. Morris to approve the minutes with minor corrections, was seconded by Mr. Basham, and carried unanimously.

## NC 73 Corridor Preliminary Design and NEPA/SEPA Process

Looking for input from the assembly of key stakeholders that is the Council of Planning, Mr. LaForty presented a study of NC 73 Widening STIP Projects R-2632AB and R-5706, prepared by GSP for NCDOT. The presentation is made available with these minutes. The study reviews existing conditions and design considerations. Together, these projects traverse NC 73 from NC 115 to US 29/US 601. The purpose of each project is to reduce congestion, improve capacity, and enhance bicycle and pedestrian mobility. Tracy Walter, NCDOT Project Development and Environmental Analysis, is the NCDOT project manager.

The study area for R-2632AB includes portions of Davidson-Concord Road (SR-2693) and follows Sam Furr Road (NC 73) to within 1,500 feet of Old Statesville Road (NC 115), for a total distance of 2.67 miles. The Current Federally Approved schedule for this project sets categorical exclusion and engineering finished by the end of 2018, completion of Right-of-Way acquisition by 2020, and completion of construction by 2022. Traffic analysis should be ramping up this fall. The project calls for the current 2-lane, undivided, 55 mph posted segment of NC 73 to be widened into a "best-fit" superstreet with 23-foot raised median, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

Mr. Coxe expressed concern over the existing Norfolk-Southern rail crossing west of the R-2632AB project, near NC 115, and the complications that anticipated increased rail traffic will pose for the 115 intersection. He cited the need for a more efficient intersection design that would either separate the rail line from vehicular traffic, or otherwise improve the intersection efficiency. Mr. Coxe concluded with a request that the R-2632AB study include another look at this intersection and its integration with the rail. Mr. LaForty confirmed that this area would be included in the traffic analysis, but measures such as grade separation is not anticipated to be part of this project. Mr. Basham confirmed that the current project does not include funding for grade separation. Mr. Coxe pointed out that a major development node is anticipated for the northeast quadrant of that intersection. Mr. Reese confirmed that an increase in freight traffic would need to be addressed in the traffic analysis, otherwise specific note should be made of its exclusion. If the line were to be utilized for commuter rail, a traffic study would be required that would most likely consider options for grade separation. Mr. LaForty confirmed that CATS is now reconsidering this corridor for commuter rail.

Mr. LaForty requested input on typical sections, which showed 45 mph and 55 mph options for both projects, and included various scenarios for sidewalks and bicycle facilities. WSP discussed design options with relevant NCDOT departments and consulted the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) to develop these design sections. Mr. Bailey, who attended these design meetings felt that the COP should weigh in, particularly in regards to the 55 mph option, considering how that might affect future land use in this area.

Mr. Coxe inquired to what degree these designs for R-2632AB reaffirm or vary from the current environmental document. NC 73 functions more as a regional highway, though still must function as a local street in some segments. With that in mind, Mr. Coxe suggested designing another scenario that features a 6-lane highway.

Mr. Gordon followed with the question of whether the *NC 73 Land Use and Transportation and Corridor Plan* still has value, or whether are we starting over now with a blank slate.

Mr. Reese suggested that a typical 4-lane superstreet can handle as much or more traffic than a 6-lane conventional corridor. However, the highest recommended volume for a 4-lane superstreet is 50,000 AADT, and we are already seeing volumes exceeding that in the western portion of the corridor, particularly between Catawba and I-77. But along NC 73 between I-77 and I-85, the high degree of

growth and number of major intersections, it would be wise to consider a 6-lane right-of-way. But east of I-85, the numbers appear to drop considerably.

Mr. Coxe advised acquiring the right-of-way now, while we still can, to build 6 lanes when needed. Mr. Gordon supported that notion citing that Concord has now eclipsed Asheville in population, with major business developments anticipated in the Kannapolis-Concord area.

Mr. Burdette expressed reservation over the proposed section sidewalk options because Davidson is planning for multi-use paths. The on-street bicycle facilities shown in the 55 mph options impart some concern for safety. A separated multi-use path intended for pedestrians and cyclists would be preferred. It is envisioned that such a facility would be located on a single side of the road, though some in the room, including Mr. Coxe, expressed preference for such paths to be located on both sides, as there would be limited opportunities to safely cross. Mr. LaForty cautioned that, for dual multi-use paths, NCDOT would likely require some cost sharing by the local jurisdictions. Mr. Coxe acknowledged that as an acceptable price if NCDOT incurs the cost of the right-of-way.

Mr. Washam also preferred the separated multi-use paths on both sides, particularly to serve the high volume of cyclists in the area.

Amidst some discussion regarding the limitation of median treatments allowed by NCDOT design standards, Mr. LaForty summarized the comments for R-2632AB, citing shoulder section for potential 6-lane widening, and multi-use paths on both sides. It was noted that the widening should occur solely on the north side due to documented environmental conditions.

The study area for R-5706 continues from SR 2693 along Davidson-Concord Road (NC 73) eastward to Concord Parkway (US 29/US 601), for a total distance of 11.3 miles. There is no federal money involved in this project. The State EA/FONSI is scheduled for completion by early 2019, completion of Right-of-Way acquisition by 2020, and completion of construction by 2022. Mr. Coxe noted that all of NC 73 will be seeing construction in 2022. The project calls for the current 2-lane, undivided, 55 mph posted segment of NC 73 to be widened into a 4-lane and likely superstreet design, with bicycle and pedestrian improvements and a diverging diamond interchange. There are three alternative alignments being considered for R-5706 to avoid impacts to the Coddle Creek Reservoir and dam. Ms. Starnes explained that the alternatives included the construction of new roads, or rerouting NC 73 to another existing road. The realignment would likely include the construction of one or two significant bridges. Widening to the north is not feasible.

Mr. LaForty summarized the typical section options for 55 and 45 mph speed limit scenarios. The current speed is 55 mph. The MTP calls for slower speed limit as the highway approaches Concord and Kannapolis, where the available right-of-way also narrows considerably.

Ms. Morris warned that protests to the widening and realignment should be anticipated, particularly by impacted homeowners. Ms. Pearson and Mr. Conrad agreed.

Mr. Reese offered some perspective on anticipated growth based upon past trends, and suggested that this segment of NC 73 would likely be completely urban/suburban within the next 25 years. Mr. Gordon identified with that issue, citing the amount of recent and expected growth around the Kannapolis Parkway intersection, including Amazon. Ms. Morris pointed out how this traffic underscores the need for more secondary east-west connections. We have the opportunity to make those alternate connections as new utilities and development occurs. Mr. Gordon agreed and reminded everyone that Untz Road has been considered as an option for one of those parallel connections. Mr. Coxe offered Independence Boulevard as an illustration of how a highway's role as a vehicle carrying

facility was made subservient to its role as a land development access facility, ultimately to the detriment of both. We may be replicating that history here if we are not very careful. One of the strengths of the COP was in the access management element of the corridor study. The roadway becomes dysfunctional if it has too many crossings and there is not the parallel network of facilities that lead users to the major intersections. The design of these intersections is crucial for long-term success. Mr. Reese noted that this segment of NC 73 will be the highest-class east-west running road in the area.

Mr. Coxe verified the clear-zone distance required for planting a small maturing tree in a 55-mph median is 20 feet (45-mph is 10 feet). Therefore, a minimum width for a tree-planted median would be 40 feet.

Mr. LaForty summarized the comments, saying that the room favored a 55-mph facility, with dual multi-use paths, except in the Cabarrus County area to Poplar Tent, where posted speeds decrease as conditions change.

## **Preliminary Alignments for NW Huntersville Transportation Study, Phase II**

Mr. Lesch described the project area, which includes NC 73, Gilead Road, and Babe Stilwell Road. He pointed out that the relocation of NC 73 is part of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). GSP was asked to define the alignments of the study area roads for right-of-way protection purposes, and to submit for projects to be funded as funds become available, as well as consider associated infrastructure improvements along the way. Once a final alignment is determined for these facilities, GSP will take them to the level of functional design. We began the project in March with mapping and environmental data collection. We held a 2-hour Open House event in June with significant attendance (over 200 people), and currently we are developing the alignment alternatives. Our second Open House is scheduled for October 19<sup>th</sup> following presentations to the Huntersville Town Board and the CRTPO TCC. Using the input gathered from these meetings and from elected officials and technical staff, we will refine the alternatives, develop our impact matrix, and determine recommendations for the study area network, which we will take back to those same boards for recommendations and approval. Following that, we will do the functional design work.

Mr. Coxe noted that the schedule would take us into the next set of elected officials. As part of the consulting team, Centralina Council of Governments developed presentation boards that included maps of existing conditions, facilitated the Open House event, and developed a MetroQuest survey that collected over 900 responses online and at the Open House. The survey included an interactive map that allowed users to contribute ideas and pinpoint specific issues of concern. Traffic control was a dominant expressed concern, particularly along NC 73, Beatties Ford and Gilead Road.

Mr. Lesch described eight different alignment options currently being considered. These include options that feature NC 73 realigned further to the south of Lake Norman, or remaining in its existing alignment, and feature proposed realignments or extensions of Hugh Torance Parkway, Gilead Road, Beatties Ford, and Ervin Cook Road, and Birkdale Commons Parkway. Among the options being considered is a network that essentially matches the CTP, where NC 73 is realigned and Beatties Ford is relocated, Birkdale Commons ties into Irwin Cook Road, and Hugh Torance extends through the Gilead Ridge neighborhood. Many who attended in the Open House expressed concern about this alteration to the Gilead Ridge neighborhood.

Mr. Coxe described the intention for Gilead Road to be a major north-south connector for western Mecklenburg County and posed the question of how its intersection with the regional east-west connector, that is NC 73, should be designed.

The next Open House for the project is scheduled for October 19<sup>th</sup>, again at the Charlotte Water Treatment Plant on Babe Stilwell Farm Road, with presentations before then to CRTPO TCC and Town of Huntersville planning staff. The final report should be ready in the beginning of 2018.

### **What's New along the NC 73 Corridor**

#### Lincoln County

Mr. Bryant discussed the Ingleside development. For that development and a few others to the east of it, the proposed widening of NC 73, from NC 16 to just west of Ingleside, is advancing at a faster rate than projected in the MTP. NCDOT Division 12 has submitted a revised version of the project as part of SPOT 5.0 that will probably include a bridge replacement. The Ingleside property is registered in the National Register of Historic Places and is a locally designated landmark. In our search for documentation describing what the registered status includes - whether it is just the house or the 243-acre property - we contacted the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and they informed us that any permits associated with the property (e.g. driveway permit, TIA approval) will be subject to a Section 106 review and a SHPO review per G.S. 121-12(a). The question posed is whether this would be an expanded interpretation of the general statutes. Mr. Coxe noted that he has never seen a driveway permit on historically registered property trigger an historic review. Mr. Reese added that in hundreds of TIA reviews, none has prompted an historic review. Ms. Morris recommended discussing the question with David Christenbury, Preservation Architect and State Rehabilitation Tax Credit Coordinator at SHPO, who is local to the area.

#### Cornelius

Mr. Washam reported that he is working through the West Catawba Avenue widening plans (R-2555B). Property acquisition is slated to start in June 2018. We had a zoning project for a large hotel near NC 73, but that has gone dormant.

#### Davidson

Mr. Burdette described a mobility plan just underway funded through UPW with CRTPO with ALTA Planning as consultant. The intent is to assimilate Davidson's previous transportation plans into one comprehensive plan, which will put the Town in better position for funding, and to develop policy and project recommendations to prepare for continued growth.

#### Huntersville

Mr. Coxe mentioned that the north-south parkway, which is a collaborative effort between Huntersville, Davidson, and Mooresville (with Mr. Washam representing Cornelius in the Stakeholders group) is being led by the Lake Norman Transportation Commission. It is essentially the Prosperity Church Road corridor, and will impact NC 73 as it crosses. Proposals are due by October 31. Work is to start at the beginning of 2018.

#### Cabarrus County

Ms. Morris had no new developments to report along NC 73 corridor.

#### Concord

Ms. Pearson reminded the Council of Odell Commons (which includes residential and commercial) and mentioned a preliminary sketch plan for an area east of Moss Creek of a development of 80 townhomes.

#### Kannapolis

Mr. Gordon reiterated that the new Amazon facility is coming to the Kannapolis Parkway. They are currently grading and plan to be operational by next September. 75%-80% of the jurisdiction's growth is happening north of NC 73 in the western growth area, with heavy development pressure occurring

around the NC 73/Kannapolis Parkway intersection. A new traffic signal is planned on NC 73 roughly 1,700 feet west of that intersection. This will be aligned with new mixed-use development to the south of NC 73.

Mr. Reese gave a quick update of traffic forecasting for the corridor. East of NC 115 is being worked on by WSP. West of NC 115, we expect to receive preliminary traffic results for projects R-5710 and R-5721 within the next month. So by the next COP meeting, we should have reports for pretty much the whole corridor. Mr. Basham added that a meeting will take place in the afternoon that will review the traffic volumes and typical sections for NC 73 west of I-77.

Mr. Coxe reminded the group of its strength in access management and described his efforts to challenge consultants and NCDOT to imbed access management concepts in the environmental documents. He charged the group to promote that in future projects. Mr. Reese agreed.

### **Next Meeting:**

The next meeting place will be determined and timed to review those traffic reports along with a functional design for the NC 73 corridor west of I-77, likely in early January.

Mr. Gordon adjourned the meeting at noon.