



US 70 Corridor Commission

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MONTH OF AUGUST, 2013 M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR

Roads play a huge role in the planned revitalization of the rural regions of Eastern N.C. A comparative view of Eastern transportation infrastructure re-emphasizes the importance of highways and rail in commercialization of a region. To the north of the congested U.S. 70 Corridor lies US64/264; a freeway that moves goods, people and services between the capital and the more rural Towns east of I-95. Looking to the south of the Strategic 70 Corridor, the region is blessed with an Interstate. I-40 resurrected Wilmington and the area beaches and grew the rural communities of Western Johnston County into a highly developed region with an expanding population and commercial center.

The promise for an improved U.S. 70 Corridor has been defined as “more jobs and fewer stoplights.” Concerned with a declining economy, several Eastern regional leaders recognized the need to increase the value of this main street of commerce by promoting and developing a corridor that alters traffic patterns, increases travel efficiencies, reduces congestion, improves safety and ultimately changes lives of future generations of the proud people of Eastern N.C.

It started with a simple idea, but the complexities of road building necessitate a prolonged, detailed master plan to retrofit the corridor and the region.

As consultant, Paula Dowell noted, there are notable challenges to this vast undertaking:

- Balancing local and regional priorities and the impact of redistribution of traffic flow
- Capitalizing on strong corridor anchors to serve the “middle”
- Serving trade and tourism traffic safely and efficiently

In a presentation to U.S. 70 Economic Impact Study Steering Committee, Paula described the relationship between transportation and economic development. A copy of the chart detailing that relationship is attached. It is an excellent model for us as we move forward

with our agenda to improve transportation infrastructure bridging to more economic opportunity.

Probably the biggest accomplishment of our organization to date is the sheer number of people that have merged together to rewrite our future. A message has been programmed to explain why improving the 70 Corridor is the right thing to do coupled with a motivational message to support and build consensus for persistence and determination in keeping the plan alive.

As General Trogdon has consistently reminded us, success is only possible if we avoid divisive rhetoric tailoring our message as possible, genuine and sincere. In looking to the future, we must continue to explore new ways to motivate more stakeholders and groups to pursue the documented agenda. It is incumbent upon us to go beyond explaining the base agenda, and to provide a "how to do it" plan. The importance of "how" has increased significantly with the new mobility funding formula. I believe we can be successful in securing funding under the new rules, but we must make some adjustments and learn to play the game according to the new rules.

Within the next few weeks the 70 Corridor Commission, the 17 Commission and the Eastern Carolina Coalition with the aid of local RPO's & MPO's should review current project priorities to evaluate scoring by the new rules to determine if priority adjustments are necessary. Hopefully we can commence that process soon.

Adhering to the advice tendered by General Trogdon, we have to work together to assure our descendents tomorrow will be better than today. At the moment, our biggest challenge is convincing our folks that we can be successful and make Eastern North Carolina better.

On August 15, Corridor Commission met in Wayne County with a full agenda. Marcia recently mailed minutes of the meeting. I trust you have had an opportunity to review those minutes. I will not attempt to report every presentation and agenda item. Marcia has provided that info in detail, but I will highlight a few significant critical discussions and key actions taken by the Commission.

- After months of discussions and planning, the Corridor Commission enacted a plan to formalize an independent organizational structure. Attorney Arey Grady prepared the documents which were carefully scrutinized and revised by membership. The new independent organization will be more flexible and capable of engaging with NCDOT and FHWA as we continue to pursue our agenda. Chairman Robin Comer appointed Frank Price, Jack Veit III and David Whitlow to lead new organization's Finance Committee.

- The Corridor Commission has been very active in efforts to aid in protecting military operations against development of wind energy that will negatively impact military. Federal Legislation HR 6523 promotes wind energy development, but prohibits Military from engaging or commenting on developments. The N.C. General Assembly introduced the following bills to define a process for wind energy development approvals:

H484	-	Passed
H433	-	Passed
H298	-	Remains in committee

In addition to these actions, Speaker Tillis is appointing a 20 person Blue Ribbon Study Committee to study Alternative Energy.

Senator Louis Pate was present at our meeting and expressed opinion that H484 and H433 will be valuable tools in negotiating wind energy development. He also expressed belief that H298 will pass next session and will further solidify efforts to protect military. Representative John Bell expressed similar sentiments on the legislation, but scientist John Droz, Jr. continues to question the effectiveness of this legislation. Perhaps we can invite all three (3) to our October meeting for a discussion and further analysis of the legislation and the prospects for the passage of H298 during next session.

Sherman Lupton NCDOT Director of Logistics alerted us to additional potential negative impacts as he told the story of an incident in Oregon. He encouraged us to continue to assist military by opposing wind energy development in close proximity to military facilities.

As we continue our efforts to protect our Down East military bases, we must be careful with our rhetoric. A recent poll reflected an 80% approval among civilian population for alternative wind energy development. It has been our plan to voice support for alternative wind energy, but not at the expense of military operations. We will continue that course of action.

Also at the August 15 Corridor Commission meeting, a Resolution Supporting Regional Interstate Connectivity in Eastern North Carolina was unanimously passed stipulating Corridor supports a regional interstate system along highways US 264, US Highway 70, US Highway 17 and continuing Interstate 795/US Highway 117 from current terminus at U.S. 70 in Wayne County connecting to I-40 in Sampson County. Subsequently a contract was negotiated with Cambridge Associates to study the potential economic impacts of extending I795 to I-40. NCDOT has previously prepared a Feasibility Study of this proposed route in 1994 and again in 2004. An administrative proposal by NCDOT to proceed and secure Interstate designation was rejected. After consultations with area Congressmen

Butterfield, Holding and McIntyre, a decision was made to pursue a Congressional designation. On August 29, Commissioner Steve Keen; Kevin Lacy, NCDOT Traffic Engineer; John Sullivan, FHWA Division Administrator; Division Engineers, John Rouse and Tim Little; and I met with key staff of area Congressmen; Butterfield (Annette Taylor); Holding (Jonathan Nabavi) and McIntyre (Tony McEwen) to discuss a plan to request the Interstate 795 designation. FHWA Administrator, John Sullivan and NCDOT Traffic Engineer, Kevin Lacy provided a procedural process in accordance with Section 11.05, C Part E to make the formal request. This request can only be formalized by attaching an amendment to Transportation Appropriations Legislation – hoped for in September, 2014. At that time, we will plan to engage the remainder of the Congressional delegation, including Senators Hagan and Burr.

The month of August was very busy with numerous planning and education activities that continue to pursue the infrastructure agenda and the betterment of Eastern N.C.

During the month, we witnessed some positive accomplishments with priority projects: The navigational study for Gallant's Channel Bridge was completed and submitted to U.S. Coast Guard; the count of woodpecker nests in Havelock was also completed. Hopefully the information presented in these reports will benefit the progress of both projects. The U.S. 70 Corridor Economic Impact Study is continuing along with the 795 Study. Interviews and focus group meetings are planned for September and October. I encourage each of you to become involved in the process with local stakeholders to assure the consultants have sufficient information to evaluate and measure impacts, both positive and negative.

As I stated earlier, the development of transportation infrastructure is a lengthy and complicated process – the more information we can assemble, the better our decisions.

I think each of you for your participation and encouragement as we continue to move this agenda forward.

Relationship Between Transportation and Economic Development

