



US 70 Corridor Commission

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MONTH OF FEBRUARY, 2014 M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR

Now past the second month of the new year, at long last, we less frequently revert to 2013 on our checks and most have adjusted to 2014. A majority of New Year's Resolutions are now forgotten and there is no sense of guilt when violated.

Despite the "newness" discussed in the January report, the challenges of achievement remain; however, the extraordinary efforts of our regional MPO's/RPO's, supportive BOT representatives, DOT staff and Corridor Commission leadership have planned forward for continuing agenda success.

On February 5, the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission/BOT work group met in Raleigh, led by work group Chairman, Gus Tulloss, with presentations by DOT staff under the direction of Rob Hanson.

The presentation consisted of status reports on the major Corridor Commission projects as follows:

Goldsboro Bypass: Completion schedule April 2016. Contractors report projects are ahead of schedule with project completions estimated by Fall, 2015.

Kinston Bypass: NCDOT led by Division Engineer, John Rouse and local leaders and citizens have developed a new Bypass Route. Designated as a "Shallow" Bypass it generally parallels the existing U.S. 70 route. In order to consider this new route, it was necessary to abandon northern routes from consideration. As reported in the January report, Rob Hanson and his staff met with NCDOT merger team and remarkably achieved consensus on deleting northern bypass routes and adding "Shallow Bypass." This was a

milestone achievement in moving forward but full concurrence at initial meeting in short-time period is remarkable. Another significant issue from the merger meeting ensued: Officials of FEMA, for the first time, acknowledged the possibility of allowing road construction impacting FEMA owned properties. As currently planned, public hearings on route corridors will be conducted in 2015 with a corridor selection finalized in 2015. Currently the project is scheduled for construction "let" in SFY 2023 - 9 years away. This project is unfunded and must be scored in accordance with new STIP funding formula. A bypass of Kinston has been in planning for more than 30 years. We are hopeful there will be an opportunity to escalate "let" schedule by 4 or 5 years. Project escalation is our goal and objective.

HavelockBypass:

Prior to passage of HB817 with new funding formula reprioritization, this project was fully funded for right of way and construction. However, due to the delay for study of wood pecker nesting habitats, it will be necessary for the project to be scored utilizing the new funding guidelines. A final Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled for completion in fall 2014 with Record of Decision (ROD) planned for early 2015 and construction "let" in FY 2017.

This project is important to the military and deserves our best efforts in maximizing scoring to assure funding. We will continue to co-ordinate with area MPO's/RPO's, local leaders, DOT and Division Engineer. I am sure we have the complete support and assistance of all Corridor Commission partners in this endeavor.

U.S. 70 Safety Improvements at Wilson's Mills:

Funded for planning only. Study area being expanded at Church. Preliminary design underway. Must be scored with new funding formula criteria. Probably low scoring priority.

U.S. 70 Improvements at Pine Level:

Project Funded for right of way and construction.
Grandfathered under old funding formula. Right of Way acquisition in process. Construction Start, February, 2015.
Due to some unanticipated discoveries; i.e., an additional cemetery; ROW acquisition process may delay
Construction start scheduled for early 2015.

Slocum Gate Improvements (MCAS Cherry Point):

At last BOT/U.S. 70 Corridor meeting on February 5, 2014, Rob and his staff reported project fully funded in 2014-2022 Draft STIP. Project is grandfathered and not subject to reprioritizing.

Consultant to begin work on final design. After review by DOT and consultant, it was determined some major design changes will be required resulting from changes made by military inside the Gate. The Consultant estimated the necessary design adjustments would impose an 8 month delay in completing final design.

In a lengthy conversation on March 14 with Rob Hanson, new information emerged that further impacts the schedule and concern for maintaining “grandfather” status for funding.

The 8 month design delay has now escalated to 9 months. But a more alarming schedule impediment is the discovery of the necessity of relocating electrical transmission lines and/or design changes to accommodate those utilities.

The utilities issue is expected to add approx. 2 years to the planned schedule.

The ROW acquisition schedule originally suggested by DOT was ambitious at the urging of all project supporters; therefore, some slippage was anticipated. But the other issues that have surfaced are discouraging.

Best estimate schedule:

June, 2014	-	RW begin originally planned
March 2015	-	ROW to begin after design delay
March, 2017	-	Construction “let” goal now

Upon notification of the continuing delays, we became concerned this project would follow the path of the Havelock Bypass being forced to reprioritization process.

Ray McIntyre provided a statement as follows:

“This project was identified as one of the STI Committee projects as of October 1, 2013. Even though it appears the “let” date is going to slip beyond July 1, 2015, this project will still be considered an STI Committed project and will not have to go through SPOT’s prioritization process. The funding for this project will continue to remain in place.”

Gallant’s Channel Bridge:

Project fully funded and awarded. Completion 3 to 3 ½ years. Construction will be starting when weather breaks.

New Bern Bypass (New Route):

Feasibility study in process. Final report scheduled Summer, 2014. Unfunded.

The battle continues over the Newport wind energy project. You may recall the Corridor Commission unanimously approved a motion to oppose the project because of its potential impact on area military operations. The Carteret County Board of Commissioners and the Newport Town Board now has regulations that will provide protections requiring approval by both Boards.

John Droz has been a strong critic of the project and has been a strong voice and advocate for the adoption of new laws – in Newport and Carteret County. Working with local planners and elected leaders in both jurisdictions, Mr. Droz continues to promote regulation that probably prohibits the development of wind energy facilities at this location. Elected leaders and staff are striving to enact an ordinance that protects the environment, local citizens and minimizes impact on military operations while bearing the scrutiny of constitutional issues that may be raised by proponents or legal pundits. The **Tall Structures Ordinance** was submitted to County Commissioners in February. Following a public hearing, a final vote is planned for March 17. As noted in my report last month (January, 2014), the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission adopted a resolution at our January 20 meeting opposing all Wind energy development in North Carolina that does/may impact military activities.

In mid February, project consultants for new location New Bern Bypass Feasibility Analysis requested comments on DRAFT of Feasibility Study by March 7. I have not noted any comments submitted, but caution all interests to be diligent and observant. This is an important document that will have significant impact on the future of this project. As we have

learned from previous experiences every detail is important: From Purpose & Need to probability of Environmental Permitting can seriously jeopardize a project. The rail addition is a component of cost and is an important consideration affecting future project funding and should be carefully evaluated by local community in conjunction with local MPO, Division Engineer and NCDOT.

On February 14, a day noted for remembrance of a Third Century Christian martyr, St. Valentine, which has nothing to do with the subject, but is note worthy for all connoisseurs of history. On that historical date, the Upper Coastal Plain RPO released its carefully planned and drafted "pre-final" Draft of the strategic Transportation Investment Act (STI) Ranking Methodology. This proposal has been given conditional authorization by NCDOT STI Methodology Committee. UCPRPO staff and leadership crafted this plan to maximize opportunities for securing funding focusing on the unique characteristics of the region. We are in their debt for this aggressive effort to improve scores and funding possibilities.

On February 20, I met with U.S. 70 Corridor Impact Study consultants, Cambridge Associates and Sanford-Holshouser Group to discuss studies and schedule for release. We agreed to assemble the steering committee of Study in Kinston on March 13 in Kinston for a preview of the report findings and an opportunity to communicate local opinions and sentiments on the study with the final study scheduled for release soon after the preview, probably late March, 2014. In view of some gaps in the data being collected for the companion 795 Study, it was agreed to separate the reports with pre-draft copies of 795 Study being previewed by steering committee in April (with final report due in mid May, 2014)

Also on February 20, I met in Kinston with Lenoir County Commissioner, J. Mac Daughety; Economic Development Director, Mark Pope; NCDOT Division Engineer, John Rouse; Jim Van Derzee, Economic Development Director CXS Railroad and Allen Pope, GTP & Logistics. The agenda and purpose of the meeting was to discuss strategy and action plan to escalate "let" schedule for Harvey Parkway Section "C" and the possibility of a second rail component at Global Transpark. We also discussed the possibility of connecting rail between Wallace and Castle Hayne, an issue addressed by the General Assembly.

From our discussions, interest by CSX on pursuing either expansion into Global Transpark or connecting rail between Wallace and Castle Hayne is devoid of alacrity.

On February 7, Feasibility Studied Engineer, Lynnise Hawes released preliminary draft of Feasibility Study of U.S. 70 from New Bern to the proposed and much hoped for Havelock Bypass. Project Consultant Mark Reep, ICA Engineering and NCDOT Program Development Branch asked for comments on the study and proposed project, not later than March 7. We did send a comment reminder to Corridor Commission Directors and leadership of Craven and Jones Counties.

The looming deficits between transportation's growing needs and the continuing decline of availability of dollars dedicated to transportation continues to be a challenge for

transportation advocates throughout the United States. This on-going dilemma lends credibility to the sagacity of a new funding formula that recognizes and rewards statewide and regional projects promoting economic development, connectivity to major state assets, while minimizing congestion and enhancing safety.

The chimerical proclivities of Congress to reduce the authority of the Federal Highway Trust Fund to obligate funds in 2015 to zero in both the highway and transit accounts is a great cause for concern. This “Year Zero” as it has been tagged will devastate an industry and need already financially challenged.

This is a battle to be waged in Washington and should be a priority for our Commission. It is a non-partisan issue with a national and state constituency.

The North Carolina Railroad Company, chartered in 1849 by Governor John Motley Morehead, is celebrating its 165th Anniversary this year. Featured in **BUSINESS NORTH CAROLINA** magazine, the article provides a memorable history of the railroad and reminds us of its importance to our state’s economy. I encourage you to read the article. If you do not have access, please send an email and I will forward the article to you.

The cold, wet month of February has been filled with meetings, discussions and planning ahead led primarily by the planners and leaders of our MPO’s/RPO’s. We are optimistic about the fate of our primary projects, but the month has also been filled with skepticism and concern for our military bases.

FEBRUARY NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

- Hagel wants deep defense cuts
- A potential hit to Camp Lejeune
- Troop cuts could hurt in N.C.
- Proposal could drain bases, cause ripple effect for business

As residents of Eastern North Carolina, we are all aware of the economic impact of the military in our region; the second largest economic engine of the region trailing only agriculture.

We are all also aware of the BRAC process that is, like death and taxes, certain, but probably more threatening than in the past.

Another headline of note and one that should be acknowledged with genuine warmth and thankfulness:

JONES ADVOCATES FOR F-35 MAINTENANCE FACILITY AT FRC EAST

Our commitments and total efforts are necessary as we continue the process of scoring projects, establishing and “pointing” projects, protecting our military interests (wind energy & BRAC issues). Stay close to our Congressional delegation seeking their support in opposing “Year Zero.”

Agreements between member counties and Corridor Commission and invoicing for FY 2014/2015 membership fees have been forwarded. If you do not have those documents and/or if you have questions about the process and the documents, please contact me.

Your commitment, energy and voice are important and are deeply appreciated.