



US 70 Corridor Commission

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

We have embarked on a continuing journey through a new year with much trepidation. With January behind us, we face a larger calendar of 334 days filled with challenges and opportunities. The new year is a chance to start fresh with new ideas and new approaches to old ideas, writing a history of success as we forge onward to a brighter future for our region.

The Young Year now witness to plethora of discarded resolutions is embellished with “newness”; new organization, new transportation funding formula, new leaders, new challenges, new opportunities, new goals but the same objectives, new – but hopefully less bureaucratic flotsam.

This “newness” requires adjustment and adaption. Unfortunately we find ourselves on the down side of the “two North Carolinas”; a term coined in the late 1980’s as rural communities experienced a significant loss of manufacturing and jobs. As jobs left the region, the transition from rural to metropolitan influence commenced and continues to take our young: The stark contrast between the booming metropolitan regions and our struggling rural communities is cause for concern and mandate for change.

The new year began for Eastern North Carolina leaders and U.S. 70 Corridor Commission Directors in Carteret County, focused on a wind energy project. John Droz, a resident of Carteret County and a fierce opponent of alternative energy development has led the fight to thwart approval of the Newport wind energy project. He has been totally focused on the Newport project and he has chided the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission for its obsequiousness on the subject.

The persistent position of the Corridor Commission has been to oppose only wind energy projects that negatively impacts military operations, but supportive of the principal and purpose of alternative energy. At the Corridor Commission meeting in Carteret County on January 16, the Corridor Directors adopted a Resolution of Opposition to Mill Pond Wind Farm Project in Newport Wind Energy project and the Pasquotank County Wind Energy Project.

Alternative energy development and proposals will continue to be an issue that we must constantly monitor. The interests of alternative energy developers will remain focused on North Carolina as a result of SB3 which mandates 12.5% of energy production in State by 2021 will be provided by non-traditional alternative sources.

We will continue to be diligent in monitoring potential projects and will only exert opposition effort if and when military operations are impacted.

Brandon Goldner, reporter for WNCT TV conducted several interviews and narrated an on-camera story of new funding formula and its implications for Eastern North Carolina road projects. The story was well balanced, somewhat optimistic for our region and without perfidious assault of reality. The positive report generated continuing hope for a region in need of hope. Reporter Goldner has recently reached out again seeking updated information on Corridor Commission and our agenda. We will continue to encourage good news for the East.

John Nelms, Director, Duke Energy Economic Development presented an informative program on the activities and opportunities to partner with Duke Energy for economic development in Eastern North Carolina at Corridor meeting of January 16. In follow-up conversations, the Directors and the region's Economic Developers expressed enthusiasm and optimism for Duke Energy's role as a partner in Economic Development. I believe Mr. Nelms will be receiving several requests for site approval assistance as detailed in his presentation.

As Commission Directors were meeting in Carteret County, Rob Hanson and his staff and the NCDOT Merger Team were meeting with full Merger Team seeking consensus on the deletion of northern bypass routes for Kinston Bypass, adding the recently conceived "shallow" Bypass of Kinston. Rob and his staff are to be commended for great preparation and a convincing presentation to the full Merger Team. This was a milestone achievement in moving forward, but full concurrence at initial meeting in short-time period is remarkable.

Special acknowledgement of John Rouse for his good work in our early "sell" to COE of "Shallow" Kinston Bypass and his successful introduction of the concept to local citizens.

Stephanie Ayers continued the good news day with a report on activities and plans for our ports. Updated information on the public-private partnership in developing a wood pellet export facility suggests niche marketing for our ports will produce results and provide jobs and economic opportunity.

Probably the best of the good news stories at January 16 meeting was confirmation of Coast Guard permits for Gallant's Channel Bridge. The permits were officially signed on December 13. Requests for bid proposals were promptly issued with project award planned by February 5. Bids were subsequently received with favorable bids received approximately 9% below engineers' estimates. The 3 ½ year project is expected to commence weather permitting around March, 2014. Special commendation to Bobby Lewis and Jamie Shern for their diligent, persistent efforts in successfully securing this permit.

NCDOT and Highway 17 Association Executive Director, Marc Finleyson announced full funding is now available to construct a Highway 17 Bypass in Jones County. The Bypass as designed will commence on the outskirts of Craven County traveling through Jones County into Onslow County bypassing Pollocksville and Maysville. The four-lane roadway is a much anticipated infrastructure improvement and will increase safety and alleviate congestion in the region. More good news for our region that will allow traffic to avoid the 35 mile per hour zones. Construction is scheduled to begin by late 2015.

Secretary Tata has announced a critical regional highway link between U.S. Highway 64, Interstate 440 in Raleigh and Interstate 95 in Rocky Mount with Interstate designation I-495. The designation paves the way for DOT to widen the shoulders to meet interstate standards. DOT has 25 years to complete the improvements and become a full status interstate.

As noted previously in this report, the first meeting of the new year of the Corridor Commission provided several good news reports and actions. The only negative message emerging from the meeting was the raw, cold, rainy weather day. Several Directors questioned our meeting schedule cycle which regularly meets in Carteret County during the winter months. Many of the area's favorite restaurants are closed and beach visits are not pleasant during mid winter. As noted in an exchange of emails, in order to transition the annual rotating meeting locations, it is necessary for an inland County to host back-to-back meetings. I have prepared a transition schedule to allow Directors an opportunity to visit our great beaches in season in the future. The transition schedule was endorsed by several Directors via email. A copy of the new schedule is attached for future reference. The next scheduled meeting will be in Craven County on Thursday, March 20 at 2:00 PM. The specific site for the meeting will be announced soon.

The January 16 meeting was also election time for the Commission. Directors unanimously re-elected current officers for a second term as follows:

Chairman, Board of Directors – Robin Comer, Carteret County
Vice Chairman, Board of Directors – J. Mac Daughety, Lenoir County
Secretary-Treasurer – Frank Price, Johnston County

Chairman Comer has asked Frank Price, Jack Veit III and David Whitlow to continue to serve as Finance Committee.

Secretary Tata has announced organizational changes to improve effectiveness and efficiency of DOT operations.

Nick Tennyson will now serve as NCDOT's Chief Deputy Secretary, the position formerly held by General Trogon.

Mike Holder has been appointed as Chief Engineer, the position formerly held by Terry Gibson who has been named the new Director of Operations for the North Carolina Turnpike Authority.

Eastern Region Director, John Chaffee is working on a story about highway improvements in the East and the impact on trucking/manufacturing. Time savings travel is an important consideration for trucking, manufacturing and employees who must travel longer distances for jobs; a trend in Eastern North Carolina.

With the assistance of Division 4 Engineer, Tim Little, we were able to determine the Goldsboro Bypass will bypass 10 traffic signals plus one additional to be avoided.

The goal and planned agenda of the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission is to improve and promote jobs and economic development in Eastern North Carolina. The central focus is to promote a Freeway along U.S. 70 Corridor from I-40 in Wake County to the port at Morehead City. Improvement of the 135 mile corridor will reduce travel times through the region.

As we look back and plan forward, it is reasonable and appropriate to measure recent progress of the U.S. 70 Corridor Freeway Plan and evaluate projects in planning with a traffic signal count.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. of SIGNALS</u>
2008	70
2013 (Current)	60
* 2015	49
*2019	33
*2022	10

These projections are based on master plan for U.S. 70 improvements with funding assumptions as noted.

In 2011 in a joint meeting with General Trogdon, Eastern North Carolina Coalition of MPO's/RPO's and U.S. 70 Corridor Commission, a priority list was approved consisting of six (6) projects. One of the 6 priorities was U.S. 264 Southwest Greenville Bypass, a loop funds project of regional significance. Loop funds are no longer available which could jeopardize funding for this significant project.

Greenville Mayor Alan Thomas and area leadership has commenced an effort to fund the project with alternative financing. BOT member Ferrell Blount has endorsed the concept and is leading the battle to escalate funding and construction. Some have labeled Greenville

“the Charlotte of Eastern North Carolina.” Connectivity between Greenville, Wilson, Kinston and Global Transpark is an important event that will enhance economic opportunity in the region.

The Corridor Commission has joined the movement led by former BOT member and Corridor Commission activist, Leigh H. McNairy and current DOT Board Member, Ferrell Blount to accelerate construction of this project.

At the request of Corridor Commission Directors, Chairman, Robin Comer, has extended a letter of invitation to all Corridor municipalities to join Corridor Commission.

Ferry Tolls are a hot topic in Coastal Regions. Several public hearings are scheduled within the next few weeks. RPO's, local citizens and NCDOT will continue to debate the issue. The Corridor Commission has not taken an official position, but will follow the lead of our membership.

For the past three or four years, future funding of transportation has been a major concern for DOT, FHA, cities, towns, legislators, local leaders, highway contractors, MPO's/RPO's and citizens throughout the State of North Carolina and the Nation. The seriousness of the funding issue is now magnified by recent discussions in Congress suggesting Congress may reduce the authority to obligate funds in 2015 to zero in both the highway and transit accounts. North Carolina could lose as much as \$ 1 billion in appropriations. The failure of Congress to address the pending fiasco will disrupt state transportation programs and at a time when jobs are critical, a loss of transportation dollars will cost construction jobs.

The primary objective of the U.S. Corridor Commission is revitalization of the economy of Eastern North Carolina. The State recently published North Carolina Jobs Plan Priorities consisting of eight major targets.

Rural Prosperity is one of the target areas with goals described: “Improve-last mile – broadband connectivity and the transportation infrastructure system in rural communities. Expand rural tourism and expand capacity to help rural communities develop strategies for growth.”

We are elated the Jobs Plan Priorities has included Rural North Carolina in the plan and believe the goals are realistic and “on-target.” It is interesting to note these are the same goals identified and recommended by the Rural Prosperity Task Force chaired by Erskine Bowles in 1999. Earlier this year Governor McCrory cited the need and plan to complete Broadband connectivity in rural North Carolina.

It is our duty and responsibility to work in concert with State and local elected officials and community leaders to assure these goals are achieved before another 14 years has passed.

In conclusion, a year of challenges lies ahead as we embrace the newness of a changing environment. We need to stay united and persistent in our effort and purpose.

A few reminders:

- The next meeting of U.S. 70 Corridor Commission Directors is scheduled for Thursday, March 20 in Craven County at 2:00 PM at a location to be determined.
- Please notify me ASAP of Director Appointments from each Member County. Each County has 5 appointments. I have received notice of appointments from Johnston and Lenoir Counties. Need Carteret, Wayne and Craven finalized ASAP.

Thanks to all for your continuing hard work and support.

See you in March.



US 70 Corridor Commission

PROPOSED 2014/2015 SCHEDULE

	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>
January	Carteret County	Johnston County
March	Craven County	Wayne County
May	Lenoir County	Lenoir County
July	Carteret County	Carteret County
September	Wayne County	Craven County
November	Johnston County	Johnston County

M. Durwood Stephenson

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