



# US 70 Corridor Commission

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

Generally I begin each monthly report with an introductory report of weather transitions, seasonal abnormalities and specialty days of observance. As I took a rear-view mirror glance at May, I was certain the month was noteworthy for its below normal temperatures and frequent rain despite the local weather area's assurance of the routine normalcy of this May. Determined to disprove that assessment, I consulted my monthly report for May of last year (2013). Quote from May 2013: "The month of May has passed slowly and somewhat reluctantly ebbing us to the summer we know awaits. May is generally an uneventful month, but noteworthy this particular year on the historical calendar because of its failure to produce an early spring with summerly trends....." Ditto May, 2014 which proves seasonal transitions can become trends when unusual patterns repeat.

As Patriots, we must acknowledge the historical significance of May as we observe Memorial Day evolved from Decoration Day now most celebrated as B&B Day (Beach & Barbecue).

The month began with a request from Down East RPO Community Planner, Lauren Tuttle on behalf of The Carteret County Transportation Committee for any/all data available from any transportation or economic development report or study that references the Morehead City Port or local rail. The U.S. 70 Corridor Economic Impact Study will be officially released on June 19. There are several other studies recently completed or now in progress that notes impacts of Port and rail:

- TRACK RELOCATION FEASIBILITY STUDY  
HAVELOCK TO MOREHEAD CITY (2007)
- NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME STUDY (2012)
- SEVEN PORTALS STUDY (2011)
- U.S. 70 CORRIDOR ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY (2014)

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- ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY – 117/795 (2014)
- SENATE BILL 402, SECTION 34.23  
INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT ASSESSMENT  
GLOBAL TRANSPARK and NORTH CAROLINA PORT  
AUTHORITY (In Process 2015)

As suggested at a recent meeting, perhaps it is time to collectively review and analyze the recommendations from all of these reports, adapting the best practices and promoting those that may positively impact the region.

In mid May NCDOT began implementations of Strategic Mobility Formula in accordance with last year's new Transportation Funding formula. A total of 3,100 projects have been scored based on criteria established by the new legislation and includes 500 new highway projects and 1,300 multi-modal projects. A total of 108 major transition projects were funded and scheduled for construction before July 1, 2015, the commencement time for new projects and will not be evaluated utilizing the new legislation criteria. The scores posted represents only the 3.0 scoring methodology and does not include scoring by MPO's/RPO's and Division personnel. Therefore, we can anticipate adjustments to final scores and funding schedule. Final scoring by all partners is now scheduled for August, 2014. As suggested by General Overholt in last month's report, the scoring for projects will continue a "tweaking" process with one noteworthy change already underway.

Final project rankings generated by new formula will define the next official State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) with final Board of Transportation approval in June, 2015, following a public hearing process of approximately 6 months.

Initial project scoring consisted primarily of highway projects, with only 11 aviation projects projected for initial 10 years and no rail projects making the cut.

Legislation was introduced early in the new session (S792) to reverse previously posted legislation regarding Ferry Tolling. This is a "hot" issue that continues to be discussed, "cussed" and argued – not between "D's & R's", but between coastal and inland opponents. The legislation introduced by Senator Cook identified as: A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT TO PROTECT THE CITIZENS OF NORTH CAROLINA FROM THE FERRY TAX AND TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FOR FERRY VESSEL REPLACEMENT. This legislation authorizes the transfer of \$ 5 million from the Highway Fund every year to finance the purchase of new vessels. This transfer of funds would replace the \$ 5 million established in last year's legislation as tolling funds on select routes.

The U.S. 70 Corridor agenda partners have anxiously reviewed, discussed, and monitored initial project funding rankings. Our obligation as an advocacy group is to continue to closely monitor the revolving landscape of project rankings. There will be numerous conferences and formal meetings with MPO's/RPO's and Division personnel as they establish their scores and priorities. We must be present to suggest, encourage and remain unified.

We were again recently reminded of the economic decline of our region by Andrew Keeney writing for The News & Observer focusing on Rocky Mount, citing a too well-known statistic noting that 47 of North Carolina's 100 counties have lost population in the last four years. Although the article reported the obvious decline concerns, it also defined the resiliency and optimism of the people. The most prophetic statement was attributed to a restaurant operator Ed Wiley III, "If you don't do anything, nothing will change." A message of hope for all of us.

The road building process is long, expensive and arduous. It requires patience, persistence and committed effort.

A recent example of the rewards of persistence and committed effort is the Gallant's Channel Bridge. The leadership at DOT coupled with the relentless deluge of letters and calls from the Carteret Chamber membership was successful in securing permits with construction now underway.

The month of June ahead is filled with meetings and activities supporting the region's ambitious agenda:

June 4 – BOT Work Group

June 11 – New Bern Bypass/Rail

June 19 – Corridor Commission & Release of Economic Impact Study

See you then!