



# US 70 Corridor Commission

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

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. The only notable holiday in the month is Memorial Day, a most significant time of remembrance in our history, but not highly favored with trendy commercialization. It is a sacred, but more tranquil and spiritual time for those that have felt the loss of friends, neighbors and relatives to wars past and present.

Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day, as its purpose was to visit cemeteries and place flowers on the graves of soldiers who had died in the Civil War. In 1882, it became "Memorial Day" and by the time World War I and II had ended, it had evolved into a day to honor all fallen military men and women, no matter what war they fought.

It is fitting and proper that we pause for a prayer for our fallen heroes, wave our flags in public displays and hope for a world at peace, but we can best celebrate the sacrifice of so many by teaching and practicing tolerance and respect for ideas and customs that may differ from our own. This practice should not be an annual exercise but a daily habit.

Looking beyond the duties of citizenship and focusing our attention on the agenda of U.S. 70 Corridor Commission, the month of May highlights could be summarized by four (4) distinct events:

First and foremost, all with an expressed interest in transportation and infrastructure, are compelled to carefully and thoughtfully scrutinize the Strategic Mobility Formula funding allocation proposed by the Governor, defined by the House and redefined by the Senate. As suggested in the April report, the Governor's 40/40/20 plan has now become a 40/30/30 plan.

At the urging of rural legislators, the House Appropriations Committee amended the plan to provide equal 30 percent shares for the regional and division levels which puts more control of funding in local communities.

**M. Durwood Stephenson**<sup>1</sup>  
Director

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The current equity formula enacted under the leadership of Governor Martin in 1989 has generally been well received and frequently described as equally unfair to all. As transportation funds have decreased and population has increased, the Governor and Legislative leadership sought to address a dramatic shift in population demographics. The Highway Trust Fund Act of 1989 will no longer exist, reducing spending on DOT operations and maintenance with a shift of dollars to capital projects of statewide significance. There will be a transition period with projects funded and scheduled for construction in 2013/2014 to continue on schedule. New funding and new projects scoring will begin in 2015 with some additional “spill over” during the transition period.

The Governor’s emphasis on commerce/jobs in funding considerations for infrastructure needs, embellishes the importance of the long-awaited U.S. 70 Corridor Economic Impact Study. The study is under contract with consultant Cambridge Systematics, Inc. of Atlanta, Georgia. A steering committee is now being established. At the suggestion of the Consultant, the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission has developed criteria for the Steering Committee to assure widespread participation and informational exchange throughout the U.S. 70 Corridor Region. Steering Committee members will be selected as follows:

1 Representative selected by following Boards of Commissioners:

- Johnston
- Wayne
- Lenoir
- Craven
- Carteret

NOTE: Jones County is being asked to consider joining Commission. If they elect to join, they will also have 1 appointment.

1 Representative selected by the following Town Councils:

- Smithfield/Selma (1)
- Goldsboro
- Kinston
- New Bern
- Havelock
- Morehead City

1 Representative selected by:

- Farm Bureau
- Economic Developers Association

1 Person of Stature & Influence  
(Governor Martin has agreed to serve)

1 Person from U.S. 17 Commission  
(Marc Finlayson will serve)

An effort is underway initiated by Wayne County Commissioners and supported by Corridor Commission to expand the study to include the proposed extension of U.S. 117 identified locally as proposed 795. John Rouse is currently negotiating fees for the additional study area.

Corridor Chairman, Robin Comer and a committee of County Commissioners are in discussions with Attorney Arey Grady to establish a non-profit operating structure for the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission. At the present time, the U.S. 17 Corridor Commission has no legal structure and is, therefore, hampered by efforts to enter into binding agreements or to access possible grant funds for studies and planning. It will take several months to finalize non-profit status and secure required IRS approvals.

The fourth highlight of the month has been concentrated focus on a plan to revitalize the economies of Eastern North Carolina. In response to a recent article detailing the demise of commerce in rural Eastern North Carolina, a group of concerned participants have focused on developing a plan to reverse recent economic trends. Leaders from two of our major universities (North Carolina State University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) have rallied to our aid and are currently drafting a preliminary planning document to better promote our many assets and seek new venues for economic growth.

The four (4) major highlights of the month:

Summarily identified as

- Governor's Transportation Funding Proposal
- U.S. 70 Corridor Economic Impact Study
  - Expand to study 795 route
- U.S. 70 Corridor Organizational Structure
- Revitalize Eastern North Carolina Commerce

Tolling has been a topic that has engaged much debate and considerable passion. The I-95 tolling study mandated by the General Assembly has been completed with study consultant Cambridge Systematics and NCDOT convening informational public sessions along the I-95 corridor. I attended some of the meetings and found most were not well attended and those in attendance generally were of two opinions; many were passionately opposed to any tolling considerations; the remainder do not support tolling but seemed resigned to the idea in the absence of a better funding solution. A few of the meetings experienced high turn-out and strong opposition to the idea.

A significant conclusion reported by the Interstate 95 Economic Assessment suggests that no improvements along I-95 will result in the loss of more than 16,000 jobs annually.

Tolling in general has been a much debated issue at the General Assembly with ferry tolling as volatile as the I-95 discussions.

The membership of the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission has not taken a position on any tolling proposals. In off the record discussions, I find many of our members have strong feelings about ferry tolling – most opposed. Debate on tolling is likely to continue throughout this session of General Assembly with some resolution of ferry tolling before adjournment, but the future of I-95, a decision to be kicked down the road.

For more than two (2) years, the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission has been fully engaged in efforts to deter the development of wind energy projects that encroach on military lands and impact military operations.

In an alliance with our military supporters and friends, we were able to discourage developers from proceeding with wind farm development plan at Pantego. The developer did, however, continue to explore wind farms throughout the Eastern Region; many within military operations space. It became obvious; our State should follow the lead of Texas, Maryland and Oklahoma in establishing local jurisdictional authority over permitting of these structures. House Bill 484 “Permitting of Wind Energy Facilities” was ratified by the General Assembly and has been signed into law by the Governor.

It is surprising and almost incomprehensible that local military leaders are by law prohibited from voicing any opposition to wind farm development, even if they seriously impact base operations. This prohibition is contained in Federal legislation HR 6523. Physicist and scientist, John Droz, Jr. has been a tireless advocate for North Carolina’s HB 484. He also suggests we commence an effort to repeal portions of Federal legislation HR 6523 which has serious consequences for Base commanders that may voice opposition to wind farms that negatively impact their operations. Perhaps we should join Mr. Droz in that effort and speak with our congressional delegation. We will plan to place this on our August agenda.

North Carolina and 32 other states are not in compliance with mandated federal funding guidelines as required by MAP-21. Failure to comply has dire consequences including costly penalties and loss of transportation funding. The General Assembly led by Representative Sheppard and Senator Rabon (HB 539 and SB 659 respectively) will rectify North Carolina’s deficiency upon passage. NCDOT is closely monitoring this legislation with enactment and signing by Governor anticipated.

The U.S. 70 Corridor Commission met in Havelock on May 16. Sixteen of the twenty corridor commission members attended, excellent attendance. We were also pleased to have three BOT members present: Gus Tulloss, Hugh Overholt and new BOT member and Vice-

Chairman of BOT, Ferrell Blount. The agenda was lengthy, interesting and informative with Rob Hanson providing a presentation on federally mandated merger process.

On May 21, the Eastern North Carolina MPO/RPO coalition met in New Bern. General Trogdon was the special guest. General Trogdon made a presentation and led a discussion on Strategic Mobility Formula providing invaluable insights and hints at best practice to maximize funding opportunities.

In the afternoon, Secretary Tata spoke directing basic comments to future of transportation funding under Strategic Mobility Fund. He opened the floor for discussions on any area project or issue. There were some interesting comments from the floor. Thanks to General Overholt and U.S. 17 Executive Director, Marc Finlayson for scheduling the event.

NCDOT Transportation Mobility and Safety Eastern Region Engineer, Haywood Daughtry and staff are currently compiling individual county crash data for U.S. 70. The data will be submitted to Marcia for posting on our website.

Events have a way of disrupting the best laid plans. Our agenda and plans for the future of U.S. 70 East have been well co-ordinated and planned. However, with the new funding formula, it is incumbent upon us to adapt and change.

During the month of June the final details of the Strategic Mobility Funding plan will probably be finalized. The Eastern North Carolina Coalition of MPO's and RPO's will develop 3.0 Score criteria for prioritizing projects. That plan will be presented to the Board of Transportation in July and approved by General Assembly in August.

It is absolutely imperative for our MPO/RPO coalition members, U.S. 70 Corridor members, U.S. 17 Commission and local jurisdictions to ban together to establish scoring criteria that maximizes opportunities for key project funding. I am confident our leaders will accomplish that goal.