



# US 70 Corridor Commission

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MONTH OF NOVEMBER, 2012 M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR**

Since last report we have all been through the highs and lows of an election and regardless of the outcomes for our favored candidates, we are elated it is over. The airways are quieter now and no one is sad to experience the absence of continuous, countless political ads.

It is appropriate and proper that we pause to express our appreciation for those exiting public service whether by choice or decided by voters.

It is also appropriate and proper that we reach out to our duly elected leaders and pledge to them our support and co-operation as they seek to offer solutions to the issues confronting us – recognizing there will be disagreements along the way on the methodology of problem solving, but all willing to compromise to achieve resolution.

The message of my report this month is a message of hope – hope that the leadership of Eastern North Carolina has looked beyond the smallness of individual pursuits and forges us into a region that maximizes economic opportunity for future generations.

The problems are many, but with unity of purpose and determined effort we can and will preserve and improve our many assets and build a better economic future for the children of Eastern N.C.

The National political scene is proof of the obvious – not much can be achieved without unity. The leadership of our region has coalesced and has found ways to work together for a successful tomorrow. Five counties have become 41 counties as the RPO's and MPO's promote regional transportation.

DOT has awarded a contract to study the economic impact of improving I-95 and possible funding sources primarily focused on tolling. Wake County recently began collecting tolls on newly completed major transportation projects around Raleigh. Public opinion has clearly expressed strong opposition to tolling I-95. A recent poll conducted by WRAL T.V.

indicates a majority of the population in this region is opposed to all tolls. In opinions recorded, most believe roads are good enough and should not be improved utilizing toll funding.

The Charlotte Business Journal offered an opposing opinion citing transportation deficiencies as an impediment to economic growth. Utilizing data compiled by TRIP and American Society of Civil Engineers illustrates the status of transportation in North Carolina:

- More than half (54%) of the State's major urban highways are plagued by congestion
- Almost half (44%) of major urban roads across North Carolina have declined to either poor or mediocre condition.
- 27% of the State's 4,400 bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

With the exception of I-95, tolling is not an issue of concern in Eastern North Carolina, but the absence of safe, mobile freeways are a detriment to economic opportunity.

In late October, Marc Finlayson, Executive Director, Highway 17 Association released a progress report on Highway 17 improvements. The report indicates significant progress with that agenda.

On November 7, Bobby Lewis and I discussed status of permits for Gallant's Channel Bridge and reviewed a petition circulated by Nelson Owens, an opponent of the NCDOT preferred 65 foot fixed span bridge.

Governor elect, Pat McCrory voiced strong support for transportation improvements throughout his campaign. As Mayor of Charlotte, he supported local option tax for transit expansion. He has repeatedly cited the connection between transportation and economic development. The business community led by the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce has endorsed exploration of new revenue sources for transportation in our State. It is incumbent upon us to join with the business community in advocating for investment in transportation – all modes and to assist the new Governor and General Assembly in promoting transportation and commerce.

On November 14, I joined several Corridor Commission members in a seminar sponsored by North Carolina League of Municipalities exploring transportation issues and particularly new transportation revenue sources. NCDOT Secretary, Gene Conti and NCDOT Chief Operating Officer, Jim Trogdon defined the escalating need coupled with declining revenue. A number of presenters offered a wide variety of revenue choices to be explored and considered. No definitive plan was endorsed, but the mere fact of the focus on the issue offers hope for the future.

In an email written by BOT Member, Leigh H. McNairy wrote, **“Over the past two plus years we have made tremendous progress through the Highway 70 Super Corridor**

**Association with the objective of establishing a freeway connecting the NC Port of Morehead with I-95.”** She continued, **“Projects all along the corridor, dormant for long periods of time, are amazingly in the chute for execution over the next 10 years.”** The progress cited by Mrs. McNairy is the result of persistent dedicated efforts of leaders throughout the East and the professional staff at NCDOT. The task before us is to continue to promote the agenda and remain engaged in the approval and funding process.

We have been able to make great progress by virtue of unparalleled unity. The membership of the Corridor Commission functions as a single unit with an agenda that benefits the region. The MPO’s and RPO’s have formally organized into a single purpose and speak with one voice. Our Eastern Legislative delegation is supportive of efforts to improve the East and will be joining the Eastern MPO/RPO Coalition on January 4 to discuss issues and seek solutions. After the holidays, we plan to seek strong support from the business community probably through co-ordination by all local Chambers of Commerce. A unified East will become stronger despite diminishing numbers and representation in Raleigh.

On November 26, BOT Member and U.S. 70 Corridor Commission Subcommittee Chair, Leigh H. McNairy convened a meeting in Goldsboro DOT District Office to preview status of major projects. The meeting was led by Rob Hanson and the following Corridor Commission members were present:

John Rouse  
Neil Lassiter  
Jack Best  
J. Mac Daughety  
Alex Rickard  
Chuck Allen  
Frank Price  
Durwood Stephenson

Projects discussed and status reports:

- **Gallant’s Channel Bridge**: “Let” delayed until July, 2013. Coast Guard has requested new navigation study. It is underway and should be completed and submitted to Coast Guard in December, 2012. An earlier study was disrupted by Hurricane Sandy.
- **Havelock Bypass**: NCDOT has reconfirmed Route Selection No. 3. Final EIS scheduled for 2013. FHWA ROW anticipated 12/12. SELC continues to monitor closely.

- **Goldsboro Bypass**: All sections under contract. Completion anticipated July, 2015 – twenty years ahead of original schedule. John Rouse reports contractors are ahead of published schedule.
- **Kinston Bypass**: GIS Environmental data confirmed. Expediting process with GIS data, experimental process as recommended by Neil Lassiter has proven worthy.
- **Wilson’s Mills U.S. 70 Improvements**: Unfunded TIP. Planning funded and in process.
- **Pine Level U.S. 70 Improvements**: Fully funded. ROW acquisition to begin January, 2013.
- **Slocum Gate**: Now fully funded - \$ 20 million (\$ 10 million from Mobility Fund). ROW acquisitions scheduled for 2014; construction “let” 2015.
- **Part C Harvey Parkway**: Feasibility Study scheduled for completion late December, 2012.

As noted in October report, the Corridor Commission has completed review of proposals from three (3) interested marketing firms and we have conducted interviews of all three on October 23. An agreement has been prepared by NCDOT and continues to be scrutinized by all parties. We were hopeful the process could be completed and project awarded and study commenced before year end. At this juncture, it appears it will probably be early next year (2013) before project award.

Kristine O’Connor and John Rouse will be co-ordinators and facilitators of the study.

Upon completion, the study should provide U.S. 70 Corridor communities with data to assist in marketing area and recommendations for promoting commerce.

This report began with a message of hope sprinkled with evidence of great progress. Certainly, we continue to face enormous challenges and every step forward comes with great effort and determination, but the progress does give rise to renewed optimism and a belief in a better tomorrow.

We will not allow the future to just happen, we will make it happen in concert with our agenda. We own the future and have the power to shape it in accordance with our needs by creating a vision of the world we want and applying the effort to make it so.

We are truly blessed to have so many committed to improving Eastern North Carolina.  
Thank You!