



US 70 Corridor Commission

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

As we transition into another new season, we face new challenges as the hot winds of summer fall prey to the color and coolness of autumn.

It has been a tumultuous year; learning, planning and explaining the new rules for funding projects and adjusting to transportation budgets in decline in our State and Nation. Despite the challenges of a new funding environment, the last quarter of 2014 has been a time of reflection, but with opportunities to explore.

A wise historian once noted, "To win an empire you must seek and conquer an acre at a time." Although the obstacles and setbacks are always our first thought, we must admit and acknowledge we have identified and conquered many acres:

1. Gallant's Channel Bridge is under construction.
2. The Governor's \$ 1 billion transportation bond plan is scheduled to advance many almost "shovel-ready" rural projects. State Treasurer Janet Cowell has publicly stated the State needs to address its transportation infrastructure needs. She chairs the State's Debt Affordability Advisory Committee which concluded in its 2014 report that North Carolina has more than \$ 1.2 billion in debt capacity for transportation projects. Hopefully one potential obstacle averted.
3. A long-awaited general consensus by locals for Kinston Bypass.
4. Safety and traffic mitigation projects at Pine Level are funded with ROW acquisition nearly complete and construction planned for early next year.
5. HB 4829 providing Interstate designation for parts of U.S. 117 and U.S. 64
6. HR 5561 designating U.S. 70 and US 117/795 as future Interstates
7. New investments at our ports – especially the development and acceleration of wood pellet exports.
8. Slow, but steady continuing progress on Havelock Bypass.

These are but a few of the "acres" identified and necessary to winning the empire of the East. The acquisition of these "acres" are the result of full commitment and extraordinary

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effort by our elected leaders, NCDOT dedicated professionals and a host of area citizens who understand the importance of infrastructure and its relationship to our future.

We cannot, however, take solace in these small achievements. We cannot be lulled to sleep by habituation – a term coined by psychologists to describe a penchant to react forcefully to initial challenges, but ignore subsequent related events. In summary we sit up and take notice the first time something happens, but tune out after related events persist.

A recent publication entitled: SWITCH: HOW TO CHANGE THINGS WHEN CHANGE IS HARD. Although the publication is not about transportation, it does offer sound advice applicable to our present situation:

- Look at bright spots (which we attempted above)
- Do not expect too much too soon – settle for progress but move forward with assiduity.
- Raise the bar of expectations.
- Continue to identify and define mission – become more passionate – more committed.

Congressman Butterfield scheduled a conference at Global Transpark on October 28, with U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Fox. Both men reminded the conference participants of the importance of infrastructure to economic expansion. Although no surprise to the audience, Congressman Butterfield reminded us that U.S. Congressional District 1 in North Carolina is the poorest Congressional District in the United States. A title we abhor and are working hard to change. Secretary Fox implored all of us to continue to press our elected leaders in North Carolina and Washington to seek a reliable, consistent funding source for transportation infrastructure improvements. We should “sell” the concept as investments for our future and repel arguments opposing transportation allocations as expenditures to be avoided. Congress has failed to pass a transportation funding bill in several years and with the capping of the gas tax in North Carolina, transportation dollars are in decline. Governor McCrory persistently encourages General Assembly to diligently pursue new transportation funding sources.

Recently released statistical data confirms what we in Eastern North Carolina have lived for the past several years. North Carolina ranks near the top in number of rural citizens with poverty rates exceeding the National average. During a recent tour of Eastern North Carolina promoting the \$ 1 billion Transportation bond fund, Governor McCrory said, “The major metropolitan areas are growing and enjoying economic revival while rural areas are in decline. Our small towns are struggling.”

In a follow-up visit to the area by N.C. Transportation Secretary Tony Tata promoting the Governor’s 25-Year Transportation Plan, Secretary extolled the physical attributes of the Port at Morehead City and the great opportunities available for economic growth through our port.

All sea ports on the East Coast have been planning and investing for the future as the possibilities for a global impact upon completion of the expansion of the Panama Canal are considered. The much anticipated \$ 5 billion widening project which will dramatically impact logistics worldwide has once again been delayed curtailing a bit of the enthusiasm for the era of the large cargo ships.

Although our ports are not conducive to accommodate the large cargo ships, with appropriate improvements and planning, we can be a niche market, accelerating access to the global marketplace for exporting our products, especially regionally grown agriculture products. That is the point being emphasized by Secretary Tata. "We've got to get into the game. We're at risk," he said.

Secretary Tata emphasized the need for sound planning in assuring a proper balance that expands utility and operations at the port while preserving the aesthesis and livability of an area that derives significant revenue from tourists and retirees. Both are possible and necessary.

Opportunities abound to change the face and future of our region. If we can play our role in promoting the Governor's Bond Plan, the 25-Year Transportation Plan, the Interstate Designations proposed by HB 4829 (U.S. 17 & U.S. 64) and HR 5561 (U.S. 70) are all game changers, but will not happen without the support and promotion of all of us. We must not fall victim to habituation. Matthew Arnold, an 18th century poet and intellectual leader of Victorian England wrote, "It is a part of Special prudence never to do anything because no one has an inclination to do it, but because it is one's duty." We have a duty and obligation to endorse and support these ideas, proposal and investments in our future.

We cannot assume the best will happen. It is incumbent upon all of us to make the best of opportunities in front of us and capitalize on each. We should individually encourage our legislators to pass the bond legislation and provide political "cover" for their courage to do so as an investment in our future and not a budget expenditure to be avoided. As previously discussed, several of the projects suggested for funding by Governor and Secretary are rural projects that will impact our region.

Early hints reflect concern about the bond funding from metropolitan leaders. As we are aware they have an edge in number of votes; therefore, we need all of our delegation to support to assure passage.

Please take the time to activate local Town and County Municipal leaders involving local Chambers, RPO's/MPO's, Transportation Committee, local Chambers and Economic Development Boards and leaders seeking letters, emails, Resolutions and all means of advocacy.

Reminder notes:

December 4: BOT will vote on STIP funding list.

December 4: Corridor Commission Meeting
2:00 PM, 206 Skyland Drive, Smithfield, NC

January 7, 2015: Next BOT U.S. 70 Work Group

Happy Thanksgiving and see you on December 4.

Keep pushing. Let's collect some more acres.