



US 70 Corridor Commission

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MONTHS OF OCTOBER, NOVEMBER & DECEMBER M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR

Our calendar ends with successive holidays: tricks and treats of October; gratitude expressed with the gluttony of Thanksgiving; followed by the glitter of lights and colored paper as Christmas highlights December.

Time bends forward as the soft air of autumn, more tranquil than the record setting sting of summer heat evolves toward the wintery blast of January & February. I claim no meteorological talents nor penchant for prognosticating weather trends, but do recall the winter of 1985. December, 1984 was the warmest, wettest December ever; but January and February, 1985 was the coldest, most bitter weather in a century with record snowfalls. December, 2015 the warmest, wettest December in history. We anxiously await January and February, 2016 with trepidation.

The long legislative session of 2015 ended with the summer and the August/September report recapped the progress on transportation issues.

With transportation funding deadline looming at U.S. DOT on October 30, the House Transportation subcommittee began marking up the Transportation bill on October 22 incorporating the Interstate Designations we have been seeking for five (5) years.

As a member of the Infrastructure/Transportation Subcommittee, Representative Rouzer successfully got the Interstate Designations introduced by Representative Butterfield the last day of the 2014 Session inserted into Transportation Bill.

Both Representatives have continued to press for a major transportation funding bill in this session. Several years of sparsely funded continuing resolutions has seriously imperiled infrastructure and thwarted transportation planning.

Federal Transportation Legislation followed its normal, predictable course in October. With funding deadline looming at October's end, Representative Shuster introduced HR 3819 Surface Transportation Act, a straight short term extension of transportation funding – just 7 days before expiration. In unusual bipartisan action, the House passed HR 3819 on Tuesday, October 27. Continuing to act in bipartisan fashion, the Senate passed a Companion Bill, S7574, the following day, Wednesday, October 28. With a looming deadline that would stop projects and employment across the nation, the President signed the legislation into law on Thursday, October 29.

M. Durwood Stephenson
Director

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In continuing dialogue with members of our Congressional delegation, key staff personnel and political pundits eager to share their wisdom, the message was mixed. While some predicted a fully funded Transportation bill by end of October's continuing resolution, most suggested a full Transportation bill would most likely be enacted in early spring, 2016; many of the political observers and writers expressed doubt that Transportation Legislation would be possible until after next Presidential election electing to continue temporary funding via a series of continuing resolutions.

An earlier report noted Environmental Protection Agency's Plan to expand authority over all bodies of water subjecting them to EPA's stringent permitting requirements. The assumption of expanded authority was made without following mandated process. The regulation was scheduled to become effective August 28. In the interim, 13 states won a preliminary injunction blocking the EPA from enforcing additional control. The EPA began attempts to enforce the authority in all other jurisdictions. An October ruling in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals blocked EPA's effort to enforce the new authority in any jurisdiction; a victory for agriculture and commerce.

We express our sincere appreciation to Myles Stempin for his long, effective service to the Corridor Commission and a warm welcome to Michael Wagoner and Jesse Vinson, newcomers to our Board of Directors from Carteret County.

On October 26, Congressman G.K. Butterfield announced the City of Wilson was awarded a \$ 10 million Infrastructure grant from U.S. DOT's Tiger Grant Fund for infrastructure improvements.

Significant events of note continued in October as FEIS for Havelock Bypass was at long last approved and signed by FHWA. This represents a major milestone for this project and thanks to so many of you who worked and responded to every request for "push." A special thank you to Rob Hanson, Brian Yamamoto and DOT staff for their diligence and persistence in pursuing this approval. As Corridor Commission Director Linda Rouse Sutton said, "this will benefit the region as a whole."

The good news of October continued with the announcement that Seymour Johnson Air Force Base was selected as the preferred alternative for the first Reserve – led KC-46A Pegasus. The KC-46A's are expected to begin arriving in 2019, predicting a promising future for growth and expansion at Seymour Johnson.

In November the focus was centered on a legitimate long-term well-funded Transportation bill. For the first time in a decade Congress agreed to a long-term transportation bill that will fund highway and other transit systems for the next five years.

Initially Congress authorized a six-year bill funded for only 3 years. Congressional leaders struggled to find dollars to fund transportation rejecting calls for an increase in the gas tax. The gas tax has been stagnant at 18 cents a gallon since 1993.

Lawmakers on both sides of the isle are keenly aware of the crumbling of our Nation's infrastructure. Potholes are in every part of every state in the United States; the Interstate 35 Bridge collapse in Minneapolis killed 13 people, the subway system in Washington has routine fires with a fatality in a fire in January. Congestion and fatalities in highway crashes have become commonplace.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation officials estimate there is a \$ 700 billion backlog in highway projects to meet capacity, congestion and bridge replacements.

The gas tax is on the decline and now provides only \$ 34 billion, but spends approximately \$ 50 billion on highway projects. A failure to adequately fund transportation/infrastructure for decades has created a near crisis situation throughout America.

The administration requested \$ 478 billion for transportation/infrastructure. The House authorized a six year bill totaling \$ 325 billion. The Senate approved the six-year bill, but funded only three years initially.

I had an opportunity to meet with Congressman Rouzer on Thanksgiving Day. He again assured me Congress would pass a funded Transportation bill. At that juncture, the legislation on the table was a six-year bill funded for three years.

The Thanksgiving recess gave constituents an opportunity to visit with Congressional Representatives and Senators to plead their case for adequately funded transportation.

The recess visits home proved beneficial for transportation. Almost immediately upon return to session; the House, Senate and Administration reached an agreement. The pre-recess transportation six year, three-year funded transportation became a five-year fully funded bill with \$ 305 billion over the next five-years for Highways and transit lines. In addition to the good news funding, the stability and predictability of the legislation is the most exciting news for the Nation's Transportation agencies in nearly a decade.

On December 3, as we at the Corridor Commission were sharing lunch, the U.S. House passed Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST ACT) a fully funded five-year transportation bill. The legislation provides \$ 305 billion over the next five years which will allow State Transportation Departments to better plan and operate Transportation Improvement system. FAST Act represents a funding increase for North Carolina of approximately \$ 490+ million. Interstate Highway Designation bills for North Carolina made the final bill.

- SEC. 1416. HIGH PRIORITY CORRIDORS ON NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM**

- PAR. (a)(13) Raleigh-Norfolk Corridor from Raleigh, North Carolina, through Rocky Mount, Williamston, and Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to Norfolk, Virginia.**

- PAR. (81) United States Route 117/Interstate Route 795 from United States Route 70 in Goldsboro, Wayne County, North Carolina, to Interstate Route 40 west of Faison, Sampson County, North Carolina**

- PAR. (82) United States Route 70 from its intersection with Interstate Route 40 in Garner, Wake County, North Carolina, to the Port at Morehead City, Carteret County, North Carolina**

Later in the evening the Senate passed FAST Act without amendments. The legislation was signed into law by the President Friday morning.

As noted in an earlier report, Transportation fared well in the 2015 session of N.C. General Assembly. Their response to Transportation coupled with the good December news from Washington, will escalate several NCDOT projects. On December 3, the Board of Transportation approved and released a list of projects to be included in five-year funding cycle.

Approximately five-years ago, together we stepped far out in front of the curve and began a quest to convert U.S. 70 to an Interstate. That quest now appears to be a real possibility, thanks to a responsive Congressional delegation that agreed with the benefits of an Interstate that we espoused.

The designation represents a major step forward in achieving our objective, but we must continue to advocate and plan to make the dream a reality. In addition to Havelock and Kinston Bypasses, major upgrades of U.S. 70 in Johnston County (now in planning) with new projects to Interstate standards from the termination of proposed new Bypass in Kinston to port of Morehead will be necessary.

The FAST ACT doesn't give us an Interstate, but it does provide an opportunity and is a foundation for future progress. The new designation signs will give us a mental uplift and expose our region to new commerce opportunities.

The first of what will be countless challenges for Interstate development has already surfaced: There is a movement to expand WYSE Fork battleground by several thousand acres. The expansion lies within the path of the favored route for the Kinston Bypass. The Lenoir County Commissioners with the aid of a large number of landowners have commenced an opposition plan to the expansion.

Undoubtedly other issues and challenges will emerge as we move forward to provide Eastern North Carolina a much needed boost via an Interstate Highway.

As we continue to express excitement about the new Federal Transportation Bill, we must be aware of countless caveats; some of which are not favorable to our State. As Haywood Daughtry and Matthew Day reminded us in a recent email regarding future tolling of our Interstates:

“The tolling provision in the bill is an improvised expansion of existing law. Congress created a pilot project in 1998 that allowed Missouri, North Carolina and Virginia to add new tolls to Interstate Highways, but toll expansion in those states have run into political opposition. Under the new transportation bill, these states will have only one year to move ahead with plans to add tolls or lose their slots to other states ready to add tolls to their highways. The new states then would have three years to complete projects or be removed from the pilot.”

This provision may be a death knell for planned improvements along I-95. We can only hope that a failure to expand and improve I-95 will not diminish its significance in Eastern North Carolina.

The 1000+ page Transportation Bill is filled with major and minor new ideas, revisions of past legislation and futuristic opportunities. An Executive Summary of FAST ACT HR 22 is available upon request.

As noted in my email of December 8, we should individually and collectively express our appreciation to those in our delegation that showed courage in supporting the bipartisan Transportation Bill. I have sent letters to all supporters on behalf of the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission.

Voting YEA:

Senate

Thom Tillis
Richard Burr

House

G.K. Butterfield
Renee Ellmers
David Price
David Rouzer
Robert Pittenger
Patrick McHenry
Mark Meadows
Alma Adams

An official number for the new proposed Interstate along U.S. 70 will be assigned by ASHTO at May, 2016 meeting. It is anticipated it will be between 40 and 60. However, we plan to proceed to post signs throughout the region noting Future Interstate. Signs are now being fabricated and should be available by mid-March. At that time, we will begin posting signs. Thanks to Tim Little and John Rouse for ordering the signs and planning for installation prior to Interstate Nos. being assigned. They too are excited about the prospects and advantages an Interstate provider in their respective districts. We will be coordinating sign posting events with Commission members and Congressional delegation.

Congratulations are extended to Corridor Commission Director and Wayne County Commissioners Joe Daughtery, elected as Chairman of Wayne County Board of Commissioners and Bill Pate, elected as Vice Chairman of Board. Also special salute to Honorable Chuck Allen, now Mayor of Goldsboro. They all continue to expand their efforts in public service.

More good news from N.C. Ports Authority, reporting a reversal of revenue losses to a \$ 6.8 million increase in revenue. As Stephanie Ayers reported to us at December meeting, the improved revenue results from a decrease in expenses coupled with a 17.2 percent increase in container traffic over last year. The recent General Assembly awarded the ports for good stewardship with an annual appropriation of \$ 35 million for infrastructure improvements. It is anticipated the positive financial picture will continue to grow.

As I noted in an earlier report and as evidenced by a presentation by Patrick Woodie, President of N.C. Rural Center, we have a partner and advocate for rural North Carolina. I am attaching a copy of a letter delivered to our N.C. Congressional Delegation. We share a common agenda and serve a constituency that continues to suffer economically. We are grateful for the support of the N.C. Rural Center and encourage you to join in support of their efforts and attend their regional briefing sessions on their Rural Advocacy Agenda when in your area. I will ask President Woodie to give us a schedule of planned meetings when scheduled and we can post on our website. Together we can/will make a difference in rural North Carolina.

I attended a recent event with Senator Richard Burr. He reminded us of the strong presence and economic impact of the military in Eastern North Carolina. He also noted that North Carolina now has nearly one million retired veterans, a majority of them in Eastern North Carolina. They bring a positive work ethic and special job skills that are pertinent in the 21ST Century economy. We should

foster this special population accessing and marketing those special job skills to new, innovative industries.

Don't forget to thank your congressional Delegation that supported FAST ACT and if they did not – ask why not?

Thank you for your strong advocacy and support in 2015 and let's plan an even bigger 2016.

See you January 21 in Goldsboro.



Durwood Stephenson <durwoodus70@gmail.com>

Fwd: NC Congressional Delegation Letter

1 message

Patrick Woodie <pwoodie@ncruralcenter.org>

Tue, Nov 3, 2015 at
2:09 PM

To: Durwood Stephenson <durwoodus70@gmail.com>

Durwood,
Attached is a copy of our letter that will be hand delivered to each NC member today. My understanding is that votes on amendments will begin tonight and continue tomorrow morning.
Patrick

Patrick N Woodie

President

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 NC Congressional Delegation.pdf
178K



November 3, 2015

The North Carolina Congressional Delegation
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Transportation Reauthorization Bill

Dear NC Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, I am writing to thank you for supporting the inclusion of the Raleigh-Norfolk Corridor from Raleigh through Rocky Mount, Williamston and Elizabeth City to Norfolk; US Route 117/Interstate 795 from Route 70 in Goldsboro to Interstate 40 west of Faison; and Route 70 from its intersection with Interstate 40 in Garner to the Port at Morehead City identified in the bill as High Priority Corridors on the National Highway System. It is our understanding that the language is included in H.R. 3763, the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015, as well as the Senate amendments to H.R. 22, pending before the House of Representatives this week.

Thank you again for supporting the inclusion of these critical transportation corridors on the National Highway System. As you consider H.R. 3763 and the Senate amendments to H.R. 22, the Drive Act, please ensure that these North Carolina corridors remain in the final legislation. We understand that the current extension expires November 20 and Congress is in the process of finally reauthorizing the Transportation bill.

The Rural Center recently completed a series of roundtable discussions with rural leaders across our state. All across our state, we consistently heard from the public and private sectors how important it was to improve basic transportation infrastructure in order to better facilitate the flow of goods and services into and out of rural North Carolina communities. The designation of these critical transportation linkages as High Priority Corridors is vital to the economic development competitiveness of communities and companies throughout our state generally and in eastern North Carolina specifically.

Again, thank you for supporting these critical infrastructure investments.

Grant Godwin
Chair
Patrick N. Woodie
President

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Sincerely,

Patrick N. Woodie
President