



US 70 Corridor Commission

NOW AKA – INTERSTATE 42 CORRIDOR

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR

FOR MONTHS OF SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER, 2018

The July and August report concluded with a pending glimpse of a threatening storm. Hurricane Florence was looming off shore amidst predictions of devastation exceeding Hurricane Matthew less than a full 2 years ago.

The actual arrival of Hurricane Florence on September 14 forced cancellation of I-42/U.S. 70 Corridor Commission meeting scheduled for September 20 in New Bern. Road closures, power outages and damages, estimated as high as \$ 17 billion, forced a schedule and venue change.

I later learned the Convention Center was damaged by the storm and will be closed for at least a year.

After consulting with our leadership, we decided to reschedule the cancelled meeting for mid-November in Wayne County.

NCDOT leadership had requested the support of our Board to encourage expediting funding for I-540 Southern Loop; an agenda item planned for September 20 meeting. It was important to express that support as expeditiously as possible. Therefore, we requested and received, via email, Resolution of Support for I-540 Southern Loop. All votes received were positive, so we, like so many businesses and individuals, were able to “do” business via the Internet. A copy of the Resolution is attached as approved and was timely forwarded to NCDOT leadership.

Hurricane Florence also disrupted the P 5.0 Prioritization Process. The NCDOT prioritization Office has extended the time for public meetings to assist MPO's, RPO's and Divisions in assigning points in the 5.0 Process to November 29.

Unfortunately, hurricanes and floods have dominated the headlines in Eastern North Carolina this period. On September 18, North Carolina Emergency Management Flood Mapping Division announced Florence was a 1,000 year event, following Hurricane Matthew only two years earlier, categorized as a 500 year event with a \$ 4 billion impact from which Eastern North Carolina has not recovered. As many observers and historians have noted: It will be sometime before Eastern North Carolina returns to normal, after recent visits from Matthew, Florence and Michael.

M. Durwood Stephenson
Director

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As a region, we cannot continue to suffer the setbacks of major – 100-year – 500-year – and even 1,000-year storms. Each event requires larger sums of funds to rebuild and increases the recovery time in addition to the tragic loss of lives; Florence was responsible for 40 deaths.

There has been a large number of State, Federal, Municipal and private groups studying cause and effect and flood measuring options. As one local official noted, we know where the floods occur regularly, but what we need is a plan to make our communities less vulnerable to storms in the future. In the words of Governor Cooper, “We must plan long-term strategies to help North Carolina cope with future storms. We must build more resilient roads and communities.”

On October 3 I had an opportunity to speak with Governor Cooper regarding the devastation inflicted on Eastern North Carolina by Hurricane Florence and provided a printed narrative of a recent episode of **60 MINUTES** detailing the work of Henk Ovink called the “Dutch Water Ambassador.” Ambassador Ovink and his staff was successful in reducing flood impacts in the Netherlands with innovative storm water controls. The State of New Jersey employed Mr. Ovink and his staff following Hurricane Sandy. He also aided flood control measures in California.

NCDOT is now engaged in conversation with Ambassador Ovink soliciting advice to mitigate future flooding in our region. Leilani Paugh, NCDOT EAU is leading efforts to develop plans to minimize future flooding.

In a recent article published in **News & Observer** on October 11, written by Christopher Gergen, CEO of Forward Cities, and Frederick Mayor, Professor at Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University entitled, **“We need fresh ideas to rebuild after Florence,”** tells a successful story of flood control in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 2008. The measures taken in Cedar Rapids are very similar to Ambassador Ovink’s strategy in the Netherlands.

Quoting from the **News & Observer**, October 11 article;
“With two major hurricanes hitting North Carolina in the past three years, extreme weather may be the “new normal.” As in Cedar Rapids, protecting against future flooding is imperative. Nature based flood reduction strategies such as wetland creation, floodplain development and stream restoration can be done quickly, relatively inexpensively, and yield significant protection. Helping the most vulnerable communities relocate to higher ground through co-ordinated buy-out programs will also be important.”

As citizens and leaders of Eastern North Carolina, we must confront recent flooding as an area crisis and make recovery and future flood mitigation as priority number 1. There are many noted successful flood prevention programs. Earlier I noted flood reduction strategies developed by Ambassador Ovink and utilized in The Netherlands, New Jersey and California. In Texas, Federal funds for Flood Control totaling \$ 12 billion constructed a 60-mile “spine” of concrete walls, earthen barriers, floating gates and steel levees. Despite these high costs, preventative action is far less than the \$ 4 billion for Matthew and the \$ 17 billion for Florence and the saving of lives as an extra bonus.

Although hurricanes and floods have dominated our thoughts, energies and taken every dollar possible, there has been significant progress with positive movement forward.

FERC authorized Atlantic Coast Pipeline partners to resume construction of this important infrastructure project on September 17. Public Utilities in Virginia and North Carolina are depending on this project to meet accelerated energy needs of a growing population of consumers and businesses. A stop work order had been issued by Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in response to overly protective environmental advocates claims that the pipeline threatens federally protected species. U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Park Service reviewed and rejected those claims expressing satisfaction of the safety measures inherent and adopted for this process.

NC Highway 42 in Johnston County, east and west, has become heavily congested and is a focus for NCDOT. The Eastern section commencing at U.S. 70 Business in Clayton is now underway. The western section from U.S. 70 Business in Clayton to N.C. 50 in the Cleveland Community is now in planning to widen the 8 miles of congested road to a four lane, divided roadway and will include a sidewalk and a multi-use path.

NCDOT has approved a \$ 58.7 million contract to widen a 4.6 mile segment of N.C. 42 east of Clayton in Johnston County to alleviate growing congestion. The two-lane highway will be expanded to four lanes with a raised median.

Public hearings and planning are underway for widening NC 42 between U.S. 70 Business in Clayton and N.C. 50. This project is scheduled to be "let" in 2022.

Following numerous meetings with local officials and public hearings, NCDOT announced on October 31, its preferred design alternatives to upgrade a 6.7 mile stretch of U.S. 70 southeast of Raleigh between Pondfield Road near Princeton in Johnston County and U.S. 70 Goldsboro Bypass in Wayne County. The preferred design is a "compressed diamond" interchange that provides better connectivity into Princeton and requires less new right of way.

After years of planning and funding setbacks, NCDOT has won federal grants necessary to make improvements on I-95 in Johnston County. NCDOT will invest \$ 700 million to add lanes to the roadway from four lanes to eight lanes in Cumberland and Johnston Counties, the first major upgrade since the highway was built in the 1950's.

A Design-Build contract is scheduled for award in Spring 2019 that will double the number of lanes on a 25-mile stretch.

NCDOT plans to widen the entire length of I-95 in North Carolina, but next funding availability not expected until after 2027.

As rural residents, we frequently think of Eastern North Carolina as more remote than we are. Although we proudly acknowledge our rural heritage, we are by no means remote. According to an article in October issue of **OUR STATE** Magazine, one can never get more than 5.5 miles from a road. Known as the "Good Roads State," we can also be identified by the quality of our roads – second only in mileage to Texas.

The United States is the world's most digital nation, and despite the transferability of computer operations, it has negatively impacted less urban, more rural regions. Technology has clearly reshaped the nation's geography. Initially technology promised a level playing field for all. A computer can be as efficiently operated at home as in an office, in a rural environment as in an office high-rise in a big city. However, as technology has advanced with faster internet and greater broadband capability, the promise of a high-tech driven economy for rural communities has not evolved. A lack of appropriate infrastructure coupled with fewer quality of life assets, high tech has further divided us economically. Major population hubs with the latest high-tech infrastructure have provided more than 75% of our Nation's employment growth since 2015.

In 1965, Gordon Moore predicted computer speeds would double every two years. High-tech computer geeks now tell us Moore's Law has proven true, but reality has exceeded his predictions. Life is changing quickly in every industry. If we have learned anything, we have learned to be flexible and expect the unexpected.

Elon Musk, Tesla innovator, is promising Hyper Loop, transporting 16 people at a time in a pod at speeds exceeding, never imagined human transportation – up to 750 MPH. The frequently quoted, but not deemed precise or accurate, Musk prediction is promised by December 10 of this year.

Less ambitious, but more realistic predictions are coming from North Carolina's Electric Co-ops citing a dramatic increase in use of electric vehicles. This clean energy trend cites new government emission standards, lower maintenance and operating costs, tax credits and rebates, and trending consumer preference.

As vehicle planners and manufacturers explore and promise emission-free transportation, the aviation industry is developing and promising emissions-free air travel. There are currently 14 aircraft manufacturers exploring all-electric aircraft – some as early as 2022.

The bad news of weather was tempered by real-life stories. Division 4 has fostered three real-life heroes. NCDOT employee, Donnie Taylor, came to the rescue of a truck driver on I-95 near Selma, injured by flying metal. Division 4 Engineer, Ronnie Keeter, nominated Donnie for "Extra Mile" Award. But the heroics of Division 4 employees continued. Timmy Horne, Wayne County Bridge Maintenance Supervisor and a volunteer firefighter in Johnston County, trained in CPR was traveling on I-795 with fellow NCDOT employee, Steven Lane, a Bridge Crew Supervisor, when Lane spotted a wrecked vehicle and a man lying on the ground. The pair stopped, administered CPR and called 911. Another life saved by NCDOT career employees and another nomination for "Extra Mile" Award.

Big exciting news on the real-life front at the home of District Engineer, Sam Lawhorn and wife Kelsey with the arrival of Emmett Samuel Lawhorn on September 7. An 8lb. 4oz., healthy baby boy and lives enriched and a joy forever. Congrats Kelsey and Sam.

Flood mitigation must and will become a major priority for all of us. It will be a major focus for all of us in Eastern North Carolina for the days and months ahead.



US 70 Corridor Commission NOW AKA – INTERSTATE 42 CORRIDOR

Resolution in Support of the immediate funding and construction of I-540 (Southern Loop)

WHEREAS, economic development, travel, employment and highway safety are matters that are extremely important for the leadership, residents and citizens of rural Eastern North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, infrastructure is critical to the economic vitality of our region and communities; and

WHEREAS, adequate road access is an essential part of the infrastructure necessary to support new development, new investment, and expansion of the employment base; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. 70/I-42 Corridor Commission seeks to foster economic development and promote safe and efficient travel for all motorists along the I-540 corridor; and

WHEREAS, these matters could be better served and enhanced by immediate construction of I-540; and

WHEREAS, the completion of I-540 will aid in the reduction of traffic on existing highways and support the continuing growth of all communities within Eastern N.C.

WHEREAS, the U.S. 70/I-42 Corridor Commission supports the connectivity of I-540 to a planned and under construction transportation system to deliver goods and services and enhance the mobility of our citizens.

Now, Therefore Be It Resolved, U.S. 70/I-42 Corridor Commission hereby give its full and complete support for the immediate funding and construction of I-540 as soon as possible for the economic growth and safety for all citizens of North Carolina.

This Resolution was unanimously adopted by the U.S. 70/I-42 Corridor Commission this 26th day of September, 2018.

Tom Mark

U.S. 70/I-42 Corridor Commission
Chairman

M. Durwood Stephenson
Director

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