



US 70 Corridor Commission

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MONTH OF MAY, 2012 M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR

It is my task to find the right words to express the ideas and concepts that guide our agenda. The difficulty of that effort has been re-emphasized this past week as I have been engaged in several telephone conversations and follow-up personal meetings with individuals who are or may be impacted by Corridor projects. I was contacted by these individuals as a result of miscommunication conveyed by news articles, website and misinformed gossip. Although none of these mediums mis-communicated with unfavorable intent, the language was not clear enough to express future purposes and actual status.

The purpose of this report is to accurately depict the current status of the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission agenda with specificity of activities and actions taken by the whole team. It is a measure of progress by describing efforts by a team assembled to promote progression for Eastern North Carolina.

As representatives of the Corridor Commission, elected officials and interested citizens, we must be careful with our words. In all modes of communication, we must be clear, concise and accurate, never overly presumptive or speculative.

The month of May could probably best be summarized with a few words/phrases/topics:

- RPO/MPO Coalition
- Amtrak
- Legislative Discussions
- Southern Environmental Law Center
- Where are we now
- What is our future

M. Durwood Stephenson

Director

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RPO/MPO Coalition

As I have shared with many of you during my association and tenure as Director of U.S. 70 Corridor, prior to assuming this challenging task, I spoke with General Trogdon about the agenda and objectives. His words were wise, his counsel insightful and his encouragement enlightening. The General suggested I focus not on specific projects, but rather focus on the people of Eastern North Carolina. The challenge that would be paramount he said would be to unify local communities behind the specific goal that is the Commission agenda which ultimately will improve the economies of Eastern North Carolina. Unity of purpose is the challenge; not funding, not permitting, not overcoming a host of obstacles that confront every transportation project. U.S. Highway 70 is a designated strategic highway corridor that by definition is worthy of freeway status. It will become more mobile, safer and more opportunistic for commerce and trade with freeway status. It is inevitable these objectives will occur. Our task is to make it happen sooner rather than later. However, the inevitability rests solely on our ability to unify the area leaders on the “big picture” agenda, i.e., improved multi-modal, regional transportation will enhance economic opportunity.

I left our meeting convinced the Corridor Commission agenda is possible and “doable.” I must admit there have been periods when I personally and I suspect many of us have become “lost” in the agenda of projects. But as we followed his advice and stressed unity and regionalism, we began to see progress in advancing the Corridor agenda.

We approached October with regionalism and unity as our focus, the leadership of seven (7) of our Eastern RPO’s & MPO’s scheduled a meeting with leadership of Corridor Commission to discuss sharing points and maximizing scores for regional projects. In addition to the RPO and MPO representatives, DOT COO, General Trogon and Chief of Staff Bobby Lewis attended as did Board of Transportation members Leigh McNairy, Hugh Overholt and Mike Alford. Despite past tendencies to support only local projects, General Trogdon cautioned that success with the agenda would only be achieved if we all join together as a single unit promoting regional projects. We left the room in one accord following General Trogdon’s final admonition: “Get your act together and we will find funding for you.”

At Jack Best’s suggestion another meeting was scheduled to finalize project priority rankings. At this meeting a coalition of seven (7) RPO’s and MPO’s in Eastern Region came together and agreed on six (6) projects that are regional in scope, provide connectivity and promote military needs. It was a milestone achievement that initiated a movement for escalating unity and progress.

In response to Eastern Region RPO’s and MPO’s unity movement, BOT member Leigh H. McNairy led an effort for a policy change that provides more local influence in project assessments by granting signature status to RPO’s & MPO’s with merger process. The DOT Board has now adopted that policy.

On March 16, the Governor's Transportation Summit was held on campus of East Carolina University. The event and program has been documented and reported, but an unplanned benefit evolved from discussions at the summit: Several additional Eastern RPO's & MPO's, upon learning of the successful coalition of seven (7) RPO's and MPO's, requested an opportunity to become a part of the RPO/MPO coalition. We were excited by this positive movement and began plans to expand the coalition.

A meeting of all Eastern RPO's and MPO's was scheduled for May 11 in Jacksonville. A copy of the agenda is attached to this report. To summarize, as many as fourteen (14) RPO's/MPO's have agreed to coalesce and unify to promote a common agenda for Eastern North Carolina.

A formal structure for the RPO/MPO Coalition has now been developed and a meeting to discuss and adopt a structure for a functioning Coalition has been planned for June 6 at Goldsboro City Hall.

The U.S. 70 Corridor Commission and, I believe, the U.S. 17 Commission will continue to encourage our citizenry to join the supportive coalition in order to minimize objections which are certain to appear, hopefully, on a minimal scale.

Eastern North Carolina is fortunate to have totally dedicated, hard working and wise individuals leading our RPO's and MPO's. It is through their tireless efforts and the support of our BOT members that we continue to make unparalleled programs with our agenda and a special salute to General Trogdon for his wise words and leadership in establishing this process.

AMTRAK

For several years many of our Eastern North Carolina communities have explored feasibility of securing passenger rail service in Eastern North Carolina. The Military insists it is a critical need.

In response to those discussions and military's request for the service, we began discussions with our rail partners.

Scott Saylor invited Jeff Mann, Amtrak representative, to Corridor Commission in Morehead City in January, 2011. Mr. Mann made a brief presentation suggesting a passenger rail service for Eastern North Carolina was being planned and would be finalized and submitted timely.

The formal plans were scheduled for presentation at Corridor Commission meeting in Havelock on January 12, 2012. During the meeting, Mr. Mann telephoned to advise he could not attend, but would be in touch. Subsequently we learned Mr. Mann was no longer associated with Amtrak and, unfortunately, we were told the plan for passenger rail service in Eastern North Carolina is on hold.

We continued to lobby Amtrak, soliciting more vocal support from our military friends.

Mr. Dennis Lyons, Product Development Officer for Amtrak was assigned to promote this course. We encouraged local governing bodies and RPO's/MPO's to provide Resolutions of Support. Many have responded.

On May 10, Sheila Pierce, Executive Director, Jacksonville Onslow Economic Development, and I met with Mr. Lyons in Jacksonville. Mr. Lyons was candid and reassuring in promising passenger rail service in Eastern North Carolina. I provided Resolutions and offer of assistance in any capacity possible in establishing expanded passenger rail service to the area.

Mr. Lyons has visited Eastern North Carolina several times during the past month and has proven to be very aggressive and active in pursuit of this service. We are grateful for his determined efforts and anticipate a formal announcement detailing the service in the fall of this year.

LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSIONS

The General Assembly convened for short session this month. There are a number of transportation issues eligible for consideration.

One obvious issue being discussed is a gas tax cap. The cap was passed by the House during last session, but time did not permit action by the Senate. The Governor has suggested a cap at 37.5¢ in her budget, so we are reasonably certain a cap will be passed.

Marc Finlayson reported at the May 11 meeting that gas tax revenues losses are estimated at approximately \$ 140 million due to reduction in consumption. It is estimated that every 1¢ of gas tax provides approximately \$ 50 million in transportation revenue. Several members of the General Assembly are suggesting it is time to explore other more sustainable sources of revenue for transportation. It is an issue worthy of further consideration and the idea appears to be gaining momentum.

Ferry tolls were passed last year, but was vetoed by the Governor. The citizens of communities subject to those tolls voiced opposition and with the assistance of their local leaders and RPO's and MPO's have been able to convince Eastern legislators to reconsider.

Secondary road funds continue to be redirected. Last year the General Assembly shifted secondary road funds to bridge replacements and repairs.

It appears secondary road funds and Powell Bill funds will take another "hit" with this budget.

The equity formula continues to be a hot topic. I have been assured by several legislators there will not be any movement to change the formula in this session. However, they admit as urban areas gain in representation, an equity formula change may be inevitable. Several of our Eastern delegation suggest we should develop a plan that is equally unfair to urban and rural communities. I am hopeful we can offer a plan that our legislators can sell to our rural Western allies and be acceptable to our urban leaders and representatives.

General Trogdon, Bobby Lewis and I have been engaged in conversations on this issue and solicit suggestions and ideas from all of you. I am optimistic we can begin conversations with Eastern legislators by fall of 2012 with a specific plan.

Funding will continue to be a major concern as Federal and State revenues for transportation decline.

I encourage you to continue to stay in close contact with your respective Representatives and Senators. We are fortunate to enjoy the support of the Eastern delegation for our agenda. Although there are minor differences on some specific resolutions of transportation issues, a majority of the delegation understands transportation and the importance of regional and multi-modal transportation for commerce and economic development.

SOUTHERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a major player in the project approval and permitting process.

On March 15, 2012, the SELC submitted comments opposing NCDOT application for CAMA permit for Gallants Channel Bridge. DOT has responded to issues raised, but the project scheduled for contract award in July, 2012 may be delayed due to a notification delay by U.S. Coast Guard. DOT is currently awaiting the final permit from the Coast Guard and the subsequent 404 permit from Corps of Engineers.

Presently DOT is preparing a response to issues raised by SELC on Havelock Bypass. The current STIP schedule is for Right of Way acquisition in Federal Fiscal Year 2013. There may be a delay in that ambitious schedule if SELC persists in opposing project alternative selected by DOT.

On a positive note, the SELC was complimentary of DOT's 20/40 plan with only minor caveats and a few suggested additional considerations.

We must continue the dialogue with Southern Environmental Law Center and assist DOT as they make every effort to address all environmental impact issues.

WHERE ARE WE NOW

No one provides major corridor project status updates better than Rob Hanson and his staff. Therefore, I will not attempt to duplicate his effort, but will provide the latest major corridor project update presented by Rob to BOT on June 6. (Copy Attached)

Rob's report will in the future be posted on DOT website and on Corridor Commission website.

WHAT IS OUR FUTURE

We have made remarkable progress with our agenda during the past two (2) years. The Goldsboro Bypass has been escalated by more than 20 years. The Kinston Bypass has moved beyond 30+ year "wheel-spinning" status and is now on fast track with potential for permitting and construction on the horizon. Also after more than 30 years of "ups and downs," the Havelock Bypass appears to be in our immediate future with Right of Way acquisition scheduled for 2013.

In response to years of public outcry from the citizens of New Bern/James City, a Feasibility Analysis for a new route bypass is underway.

The Gallant's Channel Bridge Replacement is planned for "let" in July, 2012.

The Military's needs and wishes have been given priority: Slocum Gate is now being planned, Amtrak passenger rail service is underway, NC 11/241/24 has been introduced with regional connectivity to better serve military needs.

We have an agenda to benefit Eastern North Carolina; our purposes and mission are on target. But first and foremost, we have a unified citizenry.

With unity and purpose progress will continue – thanks to all of you. But we must continue to be diligent and aggressive.

I would be remiss if I did not extend our congratulations to General Trogdon for the earning and award of another star. I was fortunate to be present with several of you at a pinning ceremony on May 22 to the position of Deputy Adjutant General of North Carolina. General Trogdon is our hero and mentor as an outstanding soldier and great leader for North Carolina Transportation.



Management Team

Meeting Agenda

June 6, 2012, 10:00am

Goldsboro City Hall - Room 206,

200 N. Center Street,

Goldsboro, North Carolina

1. Brief History (5 min)
2. Coalition's Purpose (5 min)
3. Membership Criteria (5 min)
4. Board Members' Role (10 min)
5. Coalition Structure (25 min)
 - a. Leadership
 - b. Management team
 - c. Criteria for agenda items
 - d. Voting
 - e. Meeting schedule
6. Agenda Development (20 min) (*Draft*)
 - a. Coalition Structure
 - i. Vote to create structure
 - ii. Resolution committing each TPO to participating
 - b. Equity Formula
 - i. 10 min follow-up on what we heard at the last meeting
 - ii. Mobility Fund results
 - iii. Resolution opposing adjustments to the equity formula
 - c. Future agenda items and meeting location and moderator
7. Meeting Dates/Resources (5 min)



Eastern Carolina Coalition Structure

Coalition Membership

Member – Defined as the TAC Chair from each Transportation Planning Organization. Must be an elected official designated to speak for their respective Transportation Planning Organization.

Board Members Role

To support and provide guidance on Coalition activities

Elected Management Team – Elected to 1 year term with 2 year term limit

Chair

Vice Chair

Secretary

Roles and Responsibilities of Management Team Board and other members

Chair – Serves as Executive Director of the Eastern Carolina Coalition working with TAC members, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Moderator and Event Coordinator to organize meeting agenda.

Vice-Chair – Serves as Chair in absence of Chair. Works with Event Coordinator to set up meeting locations and other meeting logistics as needed.

Secretary – Serves as record keeper and records minutes for each meeting.

Event Coordinator – Works with Vice-Chair to set up meeting location and other meeting logistics as needed.

Moderator – Works with TAC member to help develop Meeting agenda with Management Team Chair. TAC member serves as Chair/Moderator for meeting.

Designated Meeting Locations

Goldsboro, Greenville, Kinston, New Bern, & Washington

Annual summit held in Greenville?

Albemarle RPO • Cape Fear RPO • Down East RPO • Eastern Carolina RPO • Goldsboro MPO
Greenville MPO • Jacksonville MPO • Lumber River RPO • Mid-Carolina RPO • Mid-East RPO
Peanut Belt RPO • Rocky Mount MPO • Upper Coastal Plain RPO • Wilmington MPO

Funded US 70 Bypasses

Major freeway bypasses funded for right of way acquisition and/or construction in
NCDOT's 2012 – 2020 State Transportation Improvement Program

Goldsboro Bypass (R-2554)

Funding Status:

All segments funded for both right of way and construction.

Schedule:

- Record of Decision Approved – August 1998
- Section A
 - Right of way acquisition complete
 - Construction scheduled for June 2012
- Section BA
- Opened to traffic Dec. 16, 2011
- Sections BB & C
 - Design-build let accomplished January 2012
 - Estimated Completion July 2015

Activities Underway

Section A: Preparations for June 2012 let underway.
Sections BB & C: Right of way plan preparation underway, expect to complete early summer 2012.

Upcoming Actions

Sections BB & C: Permit coordination meetings scheduled for summer/fall 2012. Right of way acquisition expected to start summer 2012. Construction expected to start early 2013.

Project Manager (Section A): Brenda Moore, PE, (919) 707-6285, blmoore@ncdot.gov

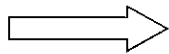
Project Manager (Sections BB & C): Teresa Bruton, PE, (919) 707-6610,
tbruton@ncdot.gov.

Kinston Bypass (R-2553)

Funding Status:

Right of way acquisition scheduled to begin in SFY 2020.

Schedule:



- Start-of-Study Letter – May 29, 2009
- Purpose & Need (CP1) Concurrence Achieved – October 13, 2010
- Detailed Study Alternatives (CP2) Concurrence Achieved – November 17, 2011
- Field verification of modeled wetlands – early 2012
- Citizens Informational Workshop #3 – mid 2012
- Environmental Studies for historic resources, natural resources, and community impacts – 2012 through 2013
- Traffic Forecast – late 2012
- Capacity Analysis – early 2013
- Bridging Decisions (CP2A) – late 2013
- State Draft Environmental Impact Statement – late 2013
- Corridor Design Public Hearing – mid 2014
- Corridor Selection (CP3) – late 2014
- Archaeological Survey – 2015
- Delineation of wetlands and streams – 2015
- Avoidance and Minimization (CP4A) – 2015
- State Final Environmental Impact Statement – 2015
- State Record of Decision – 2015
- Right of Way acquisition – SFY 2020
- Construction – Post Year

Activities Underway

- Preparation of Initial Construction and Right of Way Cost Estimates
- Preparation of Traffic Forecast
- Review of Comments from Citizens Informational Workshop #3.
- Environmental Studies on Detailed Study Alternatives

Upcoming Actions

- Initial Construction and Right of Way Cost Estimates – June 2012
- Completion of Traffic Forecast – Late 2012

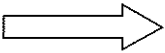
Project Manager: Mark Pierce, P.E., (919) 707-6035, mspierce@ncdot.gov

Havelock Bypass (R-1015)

Funding Status:

All segments funded for both right of way and construction.

Schedule:

- 
- Draft Environmental Impact Statement – approved Sept. 2011
 - Corridor Public Hearing – December 6, 2011
 - Conducted Post Hearing meeting Feb. 2012
 - Concurrence Point 3 Merger Update Meeting - April 10, 2012
 - Environmental Studies Updates
 - Final Environmental Impact Statement – mid 2013
 - Record of Decision – 2013
 - Right of Way acquisition – FY 2014*
 - Construction – FY 2016*

(*) STIP indicates RW acquisition to begin in FY 2013 with construction in FY 2015. PDEA & RDU assessing methods to maintain RW acquisition in FY 2013; however, project complexities may require shift to 2014/2016 as indicated above.

Activities Underway

- Preparation of responses to comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement
- Preparation of responses to comments from the Corridor Public Hearing
- Preparation of responses to comments on the Public Notice by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Preparation of minutes and responses to action items from CP3 (LEDPA) Reaffirmation Meeting
- Protected Species Field Surveys
- Preparation for CP2A (Bridging Decisions) Revisited

Upcoming Actions

- Corridor Selection Announcement & Newsletter (May - June 2012)
- CP2A Bridging Decisions Field Meeting (June - July 2012)
- CP4A Avoidance & Minimization Meeting (late 2012)

Project Manager: Mark Pierce, P.E., (919) 707-6035, mspierce@ncdot.gov

Other US 70 Corridor Upgrades

Interchanges, access management upgrades and other improvements funded in
NCDOT's 2012 – 2020 State Transportation Improvement Program

US 70 Improvements near Wilson's Mills, Johnston County, W-5600

Upgrade of two intersections to interchanges.

Funding Status:

Funded for planning and environmental studies only.

Schedule:

- Preliminary Engineering Funding – Approved May 2012
- Categorical Exclusion – January 2014

Upcoming Actions

- Project kickoff meeting with consultant scheduled for May 29, 2012
- Project scoping meeting – summer 2012

Project Managers: Jay McInnis, PE (919) 707-6029, jmcinnis@ncdot.gov;
Kim Gillespie, PE (919) 707-6023, kgillespie@ncdot.gov

US 70 Improvements near Pine Level, Johnston County, W-5107

Median cross-over closures and upgrades of two intersections to interchanges.

Funding Status:

Fully funded.

Schedule:

- Categorical Exclusion Document – Approved February 2012
- Right of Way Acquisition – June 2012
- Construction – June 2013

Upcoming Actions

- Begin Right of Way Acquisition – June 2012

Project Manager: Jay McInnis, PE (919) 707-6029, jmcinnis@ncdot.gov;
Joe Miller, PE (919) 707-6031, josephmiller@ncdot.gov

Slocum Gate Improvements (MCAS Cherry Point, Havelock), Craven County, R-5516

Construction of flyover on existing US 70 at Slocum Gate.

Funding Status:

Funded for planning and environmental studies only.

Schedule:

- Feasibility Study prepared by Dept. of Defense (complete).
- Categorical Exclusion – November 2013 9+
- Right of Way Acquisition – Unfunded
- Construction – Unfunded

Activities Underway/Completed

- Project Initiation Meeting (November, 2011).
- Scoping Meeting (February, 2012).
- Environmental surveys (Fall 2012).
- Develop traffic forecast (July, 2012).

Upcoming Actions

- Citizens Informational Workshop and Public Officials meeting to be held (June, 2012).

Project Managers: Charles Cox, PE (919) 707-6016, ccox@ncdot.gov;
Matthew Potter, PE (919) 707-6036, mwpotter@ncdot.gov

US 70 Improvements in Beaufort (including Gallants Channel Bridge Replacement), Carteret County, R-3307

Funding Status:

Fully funded

Schedule:

- Finding of No Significant Impact – Approved Sept. 2006
- Right of Way Acquisition – Underway (began July 2008)
- Construction Consultation – Approved February 2012
- Begin Construction – July 2012 (US Coast Guard has recently indicated that their permit will not be completed in time to meet this let date)

Activities Underway

- Environmental permits under review by agencies.

Upcoming Actions

- Coordinate 404 and USCG permits.

Project Managers: Kristine O'Connor, P.E., (919) 707-6034, kaoconnor@ncdot.gov
Rekha Patel, P.E., (919) 707-6301, rpatel@ncdot.gov

Feasibility Studies

Unfunded projects with a study to determine scope and general cost.

Kinston

Conversion of existing US 70 Skinners Bypass intersection to an interchange

Feasibility Study complete

US 70 in James City

Upgrade along exiting US 70 corridor

Feasibility Study complete.

US 70 from New Bern to Proposed Havelock Bypass

Construct freeway on New Location in Craven County

Feasibility Study in early stages (scheduled completion – summer, 2014)

James City to Havelock Bypass

Near term and long term US 70 corridor improvements

Feasibility Study complete.

Northern Carteret Bypass, R-4431

New location freeway

Feasibility Study complete.

Morehead City to Beaufort

Widening of existing US 70 causeway

Feasibility Study underway (projected completion – summer, 2013).

NCDOT contact for Feasibility Studies:

Derrick Lewis, P.E., Unit Head
Feasibility Studies Unit
(919) 707-4663
dlewis@ncdot.gov