



US 70 Corridor Commission

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MONTH OF JUNE, 2011 M. DURWOOD STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR

The North Carolina General Assembly continued its deliberations primarily focusing on passage of the budget. As an organization, the Corridor Commission carefully monitored a large number of bills introduced during the session that directly impacts transportation in North Carolina. Although The Corridor Commission did not officially endorse a position on any of the pending legislation, the membership as individuals and various RPO's and MPO's did take official stands, opposing some of the legislation and endorsing others. Our organization having a diverse membership concentrated our efforts on providing information in an effort to educate legislators and our membership defining the pros and cons of various legislative initiatives.

The Corridor Commission did not take any official votes or issue any Corridor endorsed resolutions for or against any of pending transportation issues. However, in my opinion, there are some obvious Commission positions that are reflective of the primary purpose and mission as stated in the Commission mission statement.

HB 635:

An act to adjust the distribution formula for equity funds. The bill would increase population factor from 50% to 66%. The Corridor Commission has always opposed equity formula change that would increase the population factor which would significantly impact Eastern North Carolina road funds. As reported last month, the Metropolitan Mayors Association, a past supporter of equity formula change, has not endorsed this legislation.

HB 309/SB 183:

Permitted changes in selective vegetation removal within RW of State Highway System and allows installation of electronic billboards. A large number of Town and RPO's in the 5 County area of the Corridor Commission passed resolutions opposing this legislation. Toward the end of the Session, minor changes negotiated with legislators decreased opposition. It is anticipated action will be taken on this legislation during the upcoming short session scheduled to convene in July.

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Director

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HB 561:

A bill to prohibit construction of median barriers in several locations received considerable press coverage. Additional versions of the bill have also been introduced with prohibited locations varying. Professional engineering associations have been very vocal and active in opposing any legislation that will prohibit traffic safety projects. NCDOT officials are making an effort to negotiate a compromise that will engage the services of an independent consulting engineer to review crash data and necessity of median closures.

SB 235 & HB 399:

Both of these bills will impact motor fuel excise tax. NCDOT opposes this legislation which will impact transportation funding. The Corridor Commission has endorsed Mobility Funds and has concerns that any reduction in availability of dollars may impact Mobility Funds which are a source planned for some of U.S. 70 Corridor projects.

We, with your help, will continue to monitor the upcoming reconvening of the N.C. General Assembly and keep you informed on issues of interest that impact planned Eastern North Carolina projects.

On June 1, I met with General Trogdon and Debbie Barbour to discuss improvements at Williams Road intersection at James City. McDonald's continues to press for DOT schedule and plans for this intersection. Property owner Getty Oil Company has indicated a preference to abandon site and relocate in James City area. McDonald's is considering an expansion at present site. After developing possible options for intersection improvements, DOT will meet with McDonald's to preview options and McDonald's plans.

In late June, Debbie, Terry and Neil met with McDonald's. McDonald's indicated the plans proposed by DOT are not acceptable. They apparently prefer to seek another location at James City location after review of DOT's total plan for the James City area. At the present time, there is no official project at this location. Since this area is a high crash rate, low mobility intersection, we must make an effort to raise it as a high priority in order to establish a project here and begin planning in earnest.

On Wednesday, June 1, Stephanie Ayers and Glenn Carlson provided a PowerPoint Presentation to General Hugh Overholt's Intergovernmental Committee on current port operations citing an increase in exports comprised primarily of significant increase in the export of wood chips. In addition to the strong voice of support from Eastern area BOT members, several western areas BOT members expressed their support for improving highway and rail access to the port in order for logging operations from the West to access the Port with logs scheduled for chipping and export.

Leigh McNairy and I discussed reorganization plans that will transfer Ports Authority to DOT control. Following recent presentations by Commissioner Troxler and comments by other BOT members, it is obvious there are significant opportunities for growth and expansion at the Morehead City Port. It is incumbent upon us to assist the leadership at DOT and the Ports to provide infrastructure support that will provide aids to permit better and easier access and utility of the Port.

On Monday, June 6, Marcia distributed Director's Report for month of May. As noted in that report NCDOT agreed to provide \$ 350,000 for Slocum Gate project with the stipulation the priority for this project would be elevated by local RPO. Rob Will agreed to place on next RPO agenda and recommends a high priority for Slocum Gate improvements. A discussion ensued on opportunity and procedure for exchange of points between RPO's and MPO's.

Commission Chairman, Chuck Allen after consulting Subcommittee Chair Jack Best and members of his committee suggested we schedule a meeting of RPO & MPO leadership along U.S. 70 Corridor to develop a plan of action for developing project priorities.

On June 7, Bobby Lewis and I met with Daniel VanLiere at Division office to plan a meeting of appropriate RPO's and MPO's. Daniel and Bobby agreed to provide maps depicting Interstate and Freeway Transportation Routes in North Carolina. As we are aware, Eastern North Carolina has fewer miles of Interstate and Freeway than any other region of the State. Division 2 has no interstates and very minimal miles of freeway. It is also no coincidence that a majority of the counties in this division are Tier 1 counties. Global Transpark Board member, Tom Bradshaw, recently reminded us of observations of former State Treasurer Harlan Boyles. Treasurer Boyles said we must either invest in developing Eastern North Carolina or plan on utilizing a large portion of State assets by sending welfare checks to the area.

Treasurer Boyles was prophetic as the region has continued to decline economically despite its many assets and the potential of our people. We have a duty, a responsibility and an opportunity to reverse our fortunes.

During the month of June, NCDOT Planning Branch in concert with RPO's and MPO's conducted seminars across the State as part of the ongoing public engagement activities for the 2040 plan. The presentations focused on educating us on the challenges and opportunities in establishing an equitable Long-Range Transportation plan for North Carolina. We must be involved and engaged in that process.

HB 561 introduced early in the session which prohibits construction of median barriers in Kinston and included Rocky Mount, Wake County and Asheville failed to clear the Senate. Representative LaRoque introduced another bill and submitted to House Transportation Committee on June 14. This bill specifically targeted safety median projects in Kinston, Falls of Neuse Road (Wake County) and Asheboro. The bill also prohibited further studies of the Kinston median project by third party independent engineering consultants, a compromise

negotiated by DOT in response to original legislation. This legislation has not yet passed House and Senate, but may reappear on agenda when General Assembly reconvenes on July 21.

I am encouraged that our message is resonating with the larger citizenry and business community. During the past few weeks I have been contacted by several business owners operating in Eastern North Carolina. A majority of them are not natives of our State, but have located here by choice despite some obvious deficiencies with infrastructure. They seem to have a better understanding of our needs and possess a more optimistic assessment of resolution of the challenges we face. I am pleased they are becoming involved and elated at their recognition of deficiencies that can be remedied. Their obvious impatience in correcting is admiral, but also in some instances, unrealistic. They are unaware of the process that governs road building obstacles. I am attempting to acquaint them with the NEPA process and funding realities. Hopefully, I can educate without clouding their enthusiasm for change. Perhaps their quest for improvements and impatience for needed change will become infectious and those of us that have accepted too little for too long will engage together and demand a better Eastern North Carolina.

I believe the stars are now aligned and the leaders in our region are united for change. The military, the GTP, the Ports, Agriculture, Tourism, the NC Railroad and our elected leaders are more determined as a group than in the past as we recognize mutual benefits in the missions of U.S. 70 Corridor Commission and the U.S. 17 advocacy.

The local concern over increased congestion at Skinner's Bypass during construction of Queen Street/Highway 258 bridges in Kinston was expressed in last month's report. Under the leadership of Commissioner and Transportation Chair, J. Mac Daughety, efforts are underway to seek solutions to ease congestion at this location. We will continue to monitor their progress.

Rob Hanson advised us on June 17 that final updated GIS dated information for Lenoir County was being reviewed by project consultant (URS Corporation) and the info is currently being used to evaluate potential corridors for the Kinston Bypass (I am attaching a copy of Proposed Schedule for Kinston Bypass – Project R-2553. We must regularly monitor this schedule and make every effort to assist DOT in maintaining that schedule).

On June 20, Don Black, a transplanted resident and business owner located in New Bern, advised he had spoken with Representative Norman Sanderson and he had voiced his support for the general mission of the U.S. 70 Corridor Commission. We agreed to schedule a meeting with Representative Sanderson after budget recess.

I contacted Don Voelker on June 21 and the leadership of RPO's and MPO's at DOT to continue our efforts to schedule a meeting with Eastern Region RPO's and MPO's to discuss project priorities.

On June 22, I contacted Fleta Byrd, Zoning & Planning Director, Wilson's Mills and member of U.S. 70 Corridor Commission, to schedule meeting with Division Engineer, Bobby Lewis and his staff to discuss a U.S. 70 plan proposed by local planning Board.

Mark Pierce, Project Planning Engineer, for Kinston Bypass provided available dates for local officials meeting to discuss preliminary corridors for Kinston Bypass. A date was scheduled for July 28 in Kinston.

Leigh McNairy and I met on June 29 with Jim Fain, new President of Global Transpark and former N.C. Secretary of Commerce. We discussed at length the mission and purpose of the Corridor Commission and the relationship to Global Transpark. President Fain obviously has a profound understanding of the economic issues of Eastern North Carolina and the need of the Transpark for success. He is and will be an invaluable asset to our Corridor team and mission. We welcome his assistance and request his advice and suggestions.

Jay Bender invited me to meet with PlanIT East regional meeting on August 17 & 18 to offer comments on significance of U.S. 70 Corridor Mission to the long-term health and sustainability of Eastern North Carolina. I accepted the invite and look forward to the opportunity.

On June 30, Corridor Commission Subcommittee Chairman, Jack Best, hosted a meeting of subcommittee at his office. The following individuals attended:

Leigh H. McNairy	Mac Daughety
Jack Best	M. Durwood Stephenson
Bobby Lewis	Neil Lassiter
Robin Comer	Chuck Allen
Lee Smith	Tom Steepy

We had no specific agenda, but had general discussions focused on promoting U.S. 70 projects, specifically projects not currently in 5-year plan – outside 2018 – TIP projects. We discussed at length project priorities and agreed we should unite all of our asset resources and support our fellow Eastern North Carolina Transportation partners – the U.S. 17 Commission.

During the month of June I had interesting encounters with two major players in the export and import business. The first was several conversations with an official of Beumer Corporation, a German company that manufactures heavy industrial equipment. They export a significant volume of their products to the east coast and are currently in the process of supplying equipment to Eastern North Carolina. I asked the obvious question, inquiring about the port being utilized. The answer was Norfolk despite the close proximity of the destination to Morehead. Following our conversations, I asked for a written explanation of why Morehead was ignored in favor of Norfolk port.

Also during June, I also had a discussion with a high ranking official of an American Company that has manufacturing facilities in the United States and seven foreign countries. Again I asked about ports utilized for import and exports. The answer again was Norfolk. I requested from them a written narrative of why Norfolk without an opportunity for Morehead. They have provided a written explanation.

We have the plan, the momentum and you provide the energy and effort.

Let's do this now!

Kinston Bypass (Project R-2553) Proposed Schedule of Upcoming Work

March 17, 2011

Receive GIS Data	Mid April 2011
Utilize GIS to analyze and to determine preliminary corridors	Mid April - mid June 2011
Hold meeting with environmental agencies (Merger Team) to share "preliminary corridor" information	End of June 2011
Hold Local Officials Meeting	End of July 2011
Advertise for Citizens Information Workshop	Early August 2011
Hold Citizens Information Workshop	End of August 2011
Obtain Comments from Workshop	End of August – mid September 2011
Review comments and make revisions as necessary	Mid Sept.-mid October 2011
Prepare information for Concurrence Point 2 and Distribute to Merger Team Members	Mid-October-mid November 2011
Hold Concurrence Point 2 meeting with agencies (Merger Team)	End of November 2011

(Note: Concurrence Point 2 is the selection of the Corridor Alternatives to be fully evaluated in the Draft EIS)

*The time lapse between some of the activities listed above allow for minor revisions to be made to address comments that may be received at the various meetings. This time would need to be reevaluated if numerous or major comments are received.