



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

JAMES H. TROGDON, III
SECRETARY

March 15, 2017

Mr. Steve Schewel, Chair
DCHC MPO Board
101 City Hall Plaza, 4th Floor
Durham, North Carolina 27701

Dear Chairman Schewel:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding bicycle safety and expressing your concerns for bicyclists riding on Old NC 86 in Orange County. I appreciate the opportunity to hear from you and offer my response.

I think you have done a great job of documenting the MPO's and the Department of Transportation's efforts in trying to resolve the challenges of both motorists and cyclists using this section of Old NC 86. As you mentioned there are CMAQ, TAP, STPBG, and STI funding programs available to us, and they do have specific policy requirements regarding project type, funding match, environmental documentation, etc. that must be followed. I understand the MPO's frustration to clearly see a transportation need, but to not be able to identify under what program it can best be addressed.

Your request speaks to the need to explore a policy change in our existing programs or introduce a new program that is more favorable to resolving transportation needs for projects similar to what we have along Old NC 86. We can certainly begin a policy discussion regarding existing or proposed programs, and the best place to formally start this is at our scheduled NCDOT – DCHCMPO STIP meeting on April 12 in Durham.

Regarding the specific and immediate need on Old NC 86, I have asked NCDOT Division staff to continue to work with you under the current CMAQ, TAP, STPBG, and STI programs to identify a project with bicycle and pedestrian improvements for consideration under these listed programs as appropriate.

Regarding the signage along Old NC 86, the speed limit has been reduced from 40 MPH to 45 MPH and additional "Share the Road" signs have been installed. According to our State Traffic Engineer, the placement of "Bicycles May Use Full Lane" signs is not consistent with NCGS 20-146.

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However, the Division has recently installed a "Watch for Bikes Turning Left" sign, which is similar to a sign suggested during the presentation to the MPO Board meeting in December.

Thank you again for expressing your concerns regarding bicycle safety along Old NC 86. Should you need additional information, please contact Patrick Wilson at 336-487-0000 or via email at pwilson@ncdot.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James H. Trogdon, III, PE'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

MG(R) James H. Trogdon, III, PE
Secretary of Transportation

cc: Michael L. Holder, PE, Chief Engineer
Mike Mills, PE, Division Engineer
Patrick Wilson, PE, Division Operations Engineer
Ed Johnson, Interim Director of Bicycle and Pedestrian



January 30, 2017

Secretary of Transportation James H. Trogdon, III
 N.C. Department of Transportation
 1501 Mail Service Center
 Raleigh, NC 27699-1501

Dear Secretary Trogdon:

During the public comment portion of the December 14, 2016 meeting of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO Board, Heidi Perry of the Carrboro Bicycle Coalition discussed the conditions for cyclists along Old NC 86 in Orange County, specifically the area from Carrboro's town limits (near Farm House Road) to the intersection with Homestead and Dairyland roads.

Recent bicycle counts show that about 160 cyclists use this stretch of Old NC 86 each day, with higher numbers on weekends. Ms. Perry stated that the road is not wide enough for bicycles and cars to share a lane. She stated that the conditions for cyclists are further exacerbated by a blind hill where most cyclists must move from the right side of the road into the left turn lane ahead of the intersection..

Ms. Perry suggested three measures for improving conditions for cyclists on this section of Old NC 86 in the near term:

- (1) Replacing current "Share the Road" signs with "Bicycles May Use Full Lane" signs,
- (2) Extending the 35 mph speed limit from the Carrboro town limit to the Homestead-Dairyland intersection, and
- (3) Putting shared lane markings (sharrows) on the road to alert motorists to the presence of cyclists..

The federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) states that the "Bicycles May Use Full Lane" sign "may be used on roadways where no bicycle lanes or adjacent shoulders usable by bicyclists are present and where travel lanes are too narrow for bicyclists and motor vehicles to operate side by side," and "may be used in locations where it is important to inform road users that bicyclists might occupy the travel lane." It was also noted that on page 81, the NC Driver's License Manual states that "Bicyclists usually ride on the right side of the lane, but are entitled to use the full lane." Based on these documents, it appears that this section of Old NC 86 could be a good candidate for "Bicycles May Use Full Lane" signs.

Additionally, based on recent research from N.C. State University, "Share the Road" signs have been shown to be ambiguous and are interpreted very differently by bicyclists and motorists. The conclusion is that Departments of Transportation could "consider replacing "Share the Road" with "Bicycles May Use Full Lane" signage, possibly combined with shared lane markings, if the intent is to increase awareness of roadway rights and responsibilities."

A longer term issue has to do with adding bicycle lanes on Old NC 86. The Federal Highway Administration has documented the benefits of bike lanes on rural roadways in the recently published Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks (FHWA-HEP-17-024). There is high demand in Durham

and Orange counties for bicycle lanes to improve safety on NCDOT-maintained secondary roads such as Old NC 86, but the MPO has had limited success in providing these facilities. Here are details:

- A project to add bike lanes on Old NC 86 from Farm House Road to Homestead Road (B150435) was submitted for funding in the 2018-2027 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). However, under the P4.0 evaluation criteria, the project did not score as well as other Orange County bicycle and pedestrian projects. The MPO chose to apply Division Needs input points to higher scoring projects that had a better chance of being funded.
- DCHC MPO could allocate STPDA or CMAQ funds toward bike lane construction on this section of Old NC 86. Division 7 staff have stated that they are available to manage the project. But even if the Division manages the project, there is still a requirement for a significant local match (estimated to be at least \$200,000) to move forward. It is problematic that state policy requires local governments to make significant outlays for bike-ped improvements when similar contributions are not required for other types of safety improvements on secondary roads.
- The DCHC MPO Board has long advocated providing bicycle lanes as part of resurfacing projects. Old NC 86 was recently repaved, but the road was not significantly widened. It is our understanding that providing bicycle lanes on Old NC 86 would have required the relocation of ditches and drainage structures, as well as right of way acquisition and utility relocation, therefore exceeding the costs allowable using resurfacing or maintenance funds. On December 14 Ms. Perry stated that the recent repaving on Old NC 86 has actually worsened conditions for bicyclists. She showed photos of the roadside that appear to show drop-offs at the edge of pavement and coarse gravel on the shoulder. She described a recent crash where a bicyclist was forced off the road by a driver passing too closely, causing the cyclist to lose control on the shoulder, which then caused other cyclists behind the lead cyclist to crash, resulting in serious injuries.

The DCHC MPO has two requests:

Request # 1: The DCHC MPO Board requests information on the status of placing “Bicycles May Use Full Lane” signs on Old NC 86 between Carrboro’s town limits and Homestead-Dairyland roads, reducing the speed limit from 40 to 35, and placing shared lane markings.

Request # 2: The DCHC MPO requests information on other options, including policy changes, for providing bike lanes to improve safety for bicyclists on Old NC 86 and other secondary roads. The MPO has explored the use of routine resurfacing, STI, and STPDA/CMAQ funds as described above, but each of these options comes with challenges.

The DCHC MPO Board looks forward to working with you on these important issues. Please contact us if you have questions or need more information about our requests.

Sincerely,



Steve Schewel, Chair
DCHC MPO Board

cc: Mike Mills, PE, Division 7 Engineer
Ed Johnson, RLA, Interim Director, NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Division