



Durham–Chapel Hill–Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization

Member Organizations: Town of Carrboro, Town of Chapel Hill, Chatham County, City of Durham, Durham County, Town of Hillsborough, NC Department of Transportation, Orange County, GoTriangle

March 8, 2017

Mr. Joey Hopkins, PE
 Division 5 Engineer
 North Carolina Department of Transportation
 2612 North Duke Street
 Durham, NC 27704

Dear Mr. Hopkins:

The Board of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) was recently presented with preliminary results of feasibility studies for installment of managed lanes on both I-40 and NC-147 (Durham Freeway) within Durham and Orange counties. Additionally, at the joint CAMPO DCHC board meeting in November 2016, an update on the Regional Toll Study was presented. While we, the members of the DCHC MPO Board, appreciate the willingness of NCDOT to evaluate the use of managed lanes as a fiscally responsible way to combat congestion in our region, we have serious concerns regarding the equity of these lanes should tolls be one of the methods used to manage them.

Many members of our board are concerned that if the managed lanes being studied become toll or HOT-lanes, a substantial proportion of our lower-income residents will be unduly affected by the tolls, or be forced into higher-congestion alternatives due to an inability to afford the tolls. More specifically, our concerns relate to payment type and toll account maintenance fee requirements. Low-income users could lack credit cards or checking accounts which would prevent them from accessing pre-paid, lower cost options. Furthermore, they may find toll account requirements burdensome, especially maintenance fees that deplete an account even if the driver uses the express lane infrequently.

While studies exist that point to general acceptance of HOT lanes by residents in lower income brackets, they do not necessarily address the regressive nature of these tolls and the effect they can have on commuters of lesser financial means. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Regional Toll Study incorporate the following principles:

- Dedicate a portion of toll revenues to transportation improvements within the corridor, this has been found to increase acceptability of toll charges by lower-income users;
- Set aside a portion of toll revenues to improved transit service within these corridors to benefit those who are transit-dependent;
- Permit transit providers (i.e., GoDurham and GoTriangle buses) free use of the managed lanes;
- Consider a toll pricing mechanism that allows the use of cash to open and replenish toll accounts, this will ameliorate the difficulties of low-income drivers who lack either a credit card or a bank account;
- Waive account maintenance fees for low-income toll users;
- Explore the implementation of video license plate recognition as an alternative toll-collection technology;
- Study subsidization options for lower-income users;
- Conduct outreach activities to low-income drivers and households during planning, design, and implementation of managed lanes; and

- Incorporate issues of income and economic equality into public outreach efforts in order to fully understand the effects, both real and perceived, of toll lanes on lower-income commuters.

As I expressed in our MPO Board meeting on January 11, 2017, our Board's support for installation of toll lanes of these roads is contingent on finding a solution to issues of economic equity. I understand that such considerations are relatively new in analyses of managed lanes, and pledge that we will work with NCDOT staff at the state and division levels to develop a solution.

Sincerely,

Steven M. Schewel, Chair
DCHC MPO Board

cc: James H. Trogdon, III, North Carolina Secretary of Transportation
Patrick Norman, PE, Division of Planning and Programming
Mike Mills, PE, Division 7 Engineer
Jamal Alavi, PE, Transportation Planning Branch
Julie Bogle, PE, Transportation Planning Branch
Derrick Lewis, PE, Feasibility Studies Unit