

MEMORANDUM **REVISED**

TO: DCHC MPO Policy Board
FROM: Doug Plachcinski, AICP, CFM, Executive Director
Andy Henry, Principal Transportation Planner
DATE: June 13, 2023
RE: **U-6067 IMPROVEMENTS PLANNING AND DESIGN**

PURPOSE

This agenda item is to provide the board members the opportunity to discuss a recent conceptual design that an NCDOT consultant presented to MPO and local government and agency staff for project U-6067 – upgrade US 15-501 to an expressway from I-40 to US 15-501 Business. After discussions, the board may choose to act or not to act or provide directions to staff.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

MPO Staff recommends the Board direct staff to present a planning proposal to reevaluate the project corridor to the Technical Committee and Policy Board at their respective August/September meetings. We want to consider how to overcome previous efforts' impasses and changes like the pandemic's impact on travel, updated land use patterns, and the I-40 widening in Orange County. Ultimately, the MPO would compare a project alternative with NCDOT's freeway conversion.

DCHC MPO VISION

The DCHC MPO and other local government and agency staff met with NCDOT in the second half of 2022 to discuss U-6067 improvements. As a result of those meetings, the DCHC MPO Director sent a letter to NCDOT to share MPO's transportation vision for that area, experiences while conducting the US 15-501 Corridor Study, and the status of US 15-501 in the MPO's long-range plan. The letter also requested that NCDOT include MPO and local government staff for input and comments as the alternative is developed. See the attached letter, dated February 23, 2023.

NCDOT EXPRESS DESIGN

The NCDOT consultant presented a conceptual design alternative to staff on May 30th to improve the roadway, bridges, interchange, and non-motorized facilities on US 15-501 from I-40 to US 15-501 Business. They requested initial feedback from staff by June 9th and final feedback by June 30th. The conceptual design alternative is part of the NCDOT express design program. DCHC MPO staff understand that the intent of the express design program is to create a design that is detailed enough to produce reliable cost information and accurate performance data for SPOT prioritization scoring (i.e., congestion, benefit-cost, freight, economic competitiveness, and safety). The express design data are intended for SPOT prioritization and this design/data is intended for Prioritization 7.0 (P7), which is to be submitted by NCDOT for potential selection for the FY 2026-2035 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Express design is not intended for the project development, environmental review and public input activities for TIP funded projects.

STAFF ASSESSMENT

Staff found many elements of the U-6067 conceptual design directly conflict with MPO and local plans for the area. The proposed design included a collector road that bisected North Carolina Heritage Area #511 (also called Cedar Terrace Bottoms) in the Eastowne development. While the proposal includes a multi-use path, it crosses unsignalized freeway ramps and a single-point diamond interchange (at Southwest Durham Drive) with multiple, unsignalized slip lanes. The design did not include the Patterson Place/Gateway connector road and bridge. At a minimum, the SPOT project description should address stakeholder's concerns and make sure that the department's Complete Streets policy repairs multimodal linkages.

CHAPEL HILL TOWN COUNCIL

Chapel Hill staff have prepared a Town Council agenda item to discuss the NCDOT express design. See the [attached memorandum](#).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The draft U-6067 express conceptual design is attached.
- US 15-501 is a statewide tier roadway. This designation means that the project will be evaluated in the SPOT prioritization process based solely on the quantitative score. The MPO and NCDOT do not award local input points for statewide tier projects.
- The MPO vision for the US 15-501 and the I-40/US 15-501 quadrant area can be found in multiple MPO plans:
 - 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) (2022) interactive highway and transit maps [HERE](#);
 - Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) (2017) interactive maps [HERE](#);
 - Southwest Durham/Southeast Chapel Hill Collector Street map [HERE](#).