



January 11, 2017

Secretary of Transportation Jim Trogden
 N.C. Department of Transportation
 1501 Mail Service Center
 Raleigh, NC 27699-1501

Dear Secretary Trogden:

At the December 14 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 by NCDOT show that about 160 cyclists use this stretch of Old 86 each day, with higher numbers on weekends. Ms. Perry stated that this section of Old NC 86 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 south of the intersection.

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

- (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 in order to improve conditions for bicyclists.

It is noted that 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 would appear 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."

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.

There is a long-identified need for bicycle lanes along this section of Old NC 86. The DCHC MPO Board has long advocated for providing bicycle lanes or wider shoulders to accommodate bicyclists as part of resurfacing projects. However, the MPO Board also recognizes that providing bicycle lanes or wider shoulders oftentimes involves 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.

Ms. Perry stated that recent repaving on Old NC 86 did not significantly increase the width of the pavement and has actually worsened conditions for bicyclists. She showed photos of the roadside condition 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 submitted a project to add bike lanes on Old NC 86 from Farmhouse Road to Homestead Road (B150435) for inclusion in the 2018-2027 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). However, under the P4.0 evaluation criteria, the project did not score well, despite strong local support and the high number of cyclists using this stretch of road daily.

It has been suggested that DCHC MPO could allocate STP-DA or CMAQ funds toward bike lane construction to this section of Old NC 86. However, even if this were to occur, it is unclear who would manage the project, since the roadway is outside municipal limits and counties in North Carolina traditionally have not managed highway construction.

Request # 2: The DCHC MPO requests information on alternative strategies for providing bike lanes on Old NC 86, since the project does not appear to be a good fit under the existing routine resurfacing, SPOT, and local project management funding options.

The DCHC MPO Board looks forward to working with you. 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