

9/13/17

Dear DCHC-MPO,

In looking at recommendations for NCDOT projects, I am always both amazed and disappointed at how many of the big ticket projects involve either widening road lane widths or adding lanes of traffic. The presumption seems to be that the best way to deal with motor vehicle traffic congestion is by adding more road capacity. Even when bike infrastructure is being proposed, there often has to be an element that adds capacity for motor vehicles. While more capacity relieves congestion temporarily, it also attracts more vehicles. [Studies](#) have shown that more lanes do not alleviate congestion in the long run (see also, [Induced Demand](#)). Nor is there data showing that adding lanes of traffic to an existing road makes that road safer. In fact, I read [one study](#) that said adding a lane of traffic is associated with a 17% increase in fatal and injury crashes.

Knowing that adding more traffic lanes as a solution to congestion doesn't work and adds more traffic, it is reasonable to conclude that **NCDOT's goal must be to have more cars on the road.**

If more cars is NOT the goal being sought by the NCDOT, if increased crashes and poorer air quality are not the goal, then adding lanes of traffic to existing roadways to accommodate cars should NEVER score higher than improvements that do the opposite.

NCDOT's Mission, according to its website, is: *Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina.* It says nothing about one mode of travel being more important than another. However, by having a system that scores highly when adding travel lanes not specifically designated for public transit, it seems to be giving cars an advantage over other modes of transport, thereby promoting their use. Would not the mission of the NCDOT be easier to achieve if there were fewer cars on the roads?

When the scoring system scores a lane on an interstate that temporarily cuts a motorist's travel time by a few minutes with a higher number of points and more funding than a project that makes it easier and safer for children and their parents to walk to school, for commuters to bike or bus to work, and for those who do NOT want to be beholden to cars to have other safe choices made available to them, then that system must be changed.

Another problem with this model and the allocation of funds is that NCDOT already has over 80,000 miles of roadways it must maintain. It currently spends over a quarter of its budget, (\$1.35 billion) on maintenance. The maintenance of these roads is important but it is also costly to the taxpayers. Adding more lanes will only add to the burden of road maintenance. Almost half of the NCDOT \$4.8 billion dollar budget is spent on construction. Only 7.3% is spent on "other modes" of transportation facilities that includes aviation, public transit, rail, and bike. A paltry \$700,000 is spent on bike projects. And, unless I am mistaken, there is no money at all in the budget for standalone pedestrian safety projects although the phrase "everyone is a pedestrian" is often used when discussing road safety.

There has to be a way to change this paradigm. We should be working to reduce our dependency on cars, and as many of you know, young adults are not buying cars at the rate their parents did. They want other choices. Maybe the only additional travel lanes built should be dedicated public transit lanes. Maybe instead of widening rural roads (which will increase speeds), the lane widths should remain the same and bike lanes or wide shoulders should be added. Imagine how much could be accomplished if even \$30 million of those \$2.3 billion construction dollars were diverted to bike lanes.

Trusting (or hoping) that this situation might be as frustrating for you, the members of the DCHC MPO looking at new projects, as it is for those of us who are increasingly looking for safe, clean, and efficient alternatives to driving, I ask that you consider requesting as a group that NCDOT reevaluate its current allocation of construction dollars and increase its budget for alternate forms of transport so that our roads can truly begin to become more environmentally sensitive, and we can truly work toward the State's purported goal to become a Vision Zero state. This will never be achieved with a scoring system that favors wider lanes or more car lanes.

Thank you for your time,

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