

**DURHAM • CHAPEL HILL • CARRBORO  
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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DATE: August 11, 2021

TO: Pam Williams, Project Manager, NCDOT

FROM : DCHC MPO Board

SUBJECT: US 70 Access Study and Impact on U-5720

Dear Ms. Williams,

The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO), in conjunction with the City of Durham and Durham County, will be undertaking a study to look at access, multimodal accommodations, and connections in the US 70 corridor from the East End Connector to T.W. Alexander Drive. This study is being scoped to be complementary to the work being done by NCDOT project U-5720, and not in conflict with the project. However, while we do not feel that this study will affect the work that NCDOT is currently doing to determine the best alignment for the new roadway, there are other aspects that may be affected and necessitate an adjustment in NCDOT's project schedule. The DCHC MPO requests that those aspects of the project be delayed to provide time for our US 70 Access Study to be completed. We request and hope that NCDOT will be an important partner in this study.

NCDOT's project U-5720 was recently unfrozen after almost eighteen months of inactivity. Though we are aware that NCDOT has recently started working on the project again, particularly doing engineering work to determine which alignment, the "northern" or the "southern" route is most appropriate, the project schedule does not have it going into ROW until FY 2027, and construction is scheduled beyond FY 2029. It seems there isn't a definitive need to complete the planning process so quickly, and the five-plus year gap between planning and ROW presents an opportunity for additional study of the corridor. There are three main purposes for this study: 1) gaining a better understanding of the local street network upon completion of the project, 2) addressing multimodal considerations, and 3) ensuring appropriate public engagement.

As has been stated to NCDOT staff in the past (see attached letter dated November 30, 2018), there is concern about resulting local traffic patterns once the project is completed due to the fact that the current proposed design includes only one direct access point to US 70 (at an interchange at Miami Boulevard) between the East End Connector and Aviation Parkway Extension. This will result in limited access for existing businesses and neighborhoods, limited connectivity of the roadway network, and limited access to US 70 for Eastern Durham County. In addition, much of the US 70 corridor is majority minority, signifying the importance of fully understanding impacts on equitable transportation. This study will examine the effects on local traffic and potential opportunities for additional access to US 70 at a finer grain than has previously been completed and can help the design for the roadway by NCDOT engineers as it moves forward.

In the work already done for U-5720, connections for all modes of traffic across and along US 70 are not explicitly addressed, including multimodal connections shown in the 2045 MTP and the CTP Amendment #3. This US 70 Access Study will also look at multimodal connections and accommodations that will allow the corridor to be as efficient as possible for all users. This includes not only the bicycle and pedestrian facilities as shown in the MTP and CTP Amendment #3, but also transit accommodations. While there is not currently an emphasis on transit service in this corridor (there is one local GoDurham route that goes to Brier Creek), there are potential opportunities for transit improvements, along with an additional regional transit service to RDU or Raleigh, as a supplement to transit work done on NC 147 and I-40. Roadway connectivity is essential for

providing shorter and more direct trips for walking, biking, and transit, and the U-5720 project has not considered the effect of the project on these modes.

Concurrently with this study, the Durham City-County Planning Department is updating the Durham Comprehensive Plan. One of the key study areas in the development of the Comprehensive Plan, due to current and expected growth, is the Southeast Durham Focus Area, through which U-5720 passes. The Southeast Durham Focus Area study is well underway, and residents have identified transportation concerns as a high priority. Both the US 70 Access Study and the Comprehensive Plan's work on the Southeast Durham Focus Area will inform the U-5720 project on how best to address these issues.

The DCHC MPO, the City of Durham, and Durham County emphasize the need for equitable public engagement for all projects, and a large project such as U-5720 is no exception. As this is a very fast-growing area in the County and this project passes through two communities of concern on the northern end of the project, special attention will need to be made for engagement on this project. The DCHC MPO, the City, and the County believe the present level of engagement for U-5720 has not been sufficient, and this proposed MPO-led study can better engage the community using a unified, coherent process for a fast-growing corridor and not inordinately delay progress on U-5720.

MPO, City, and County staff welcome an opportunity to discuss these concerns, and how the US 70 Access Study can be incorporated into the design and schedule of U-5720. Please reach out to the project manager, Jacob Ford of DCHC MPO, at [Jacob.Ford@durhamnc.gov](mailto:Jacob.Ford@durhamnc.gov), to discuss these matters further.

Sincerely,

Wendy Jacobs  
Chair, DCHC MPO