



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** North Carolina Department of Transportation, State Transportation Improvement Program Unit

**From:** Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization Board

**Date:** February 11, 2015

**Subject:** DCHC MPO Board Comments on draft FY2016-2025 STIP

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### BACKGROUND

On December 4, 2014 the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) released the draft FY2016-2025 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Immediately following the release of the draft STIP, the NCDOT provided the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO a draft FY2016-2025 STIP Supplement that serves as the MPO's draft FY2016-2025 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

On January 5, 2015, the DCHC MPO Technical Committee (TC) convened a subcommittee to review and discuss the draft FY2016-2025 STIP Supplement and the development of the MPO's FY2016-2025 TIP. During the subcommittee meeting and in the days that followed, the subcommittee generated a list of comments and questions to discuss with the NCDOT during the Priority Review Meeting scheduled for February 11th, 2015.

The comments and questions presented in this Memorandum were reviewed and approved by the MPO TC and the MPO Board. The comments and questions were discussed with members of NCDOT during the February 11, 2015 Priority Review Meeting that was held in Durham.

### GENERAL COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

#### 1. Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) law

The DCHC MPO Board appreciates the NCDOT Division Offices for working collaboratively to understand and adhere to the new STI prioritization and scoring process. The DCHC MPO Board recognizes that NCDOT's collaboration was not required through STI, but feels that the collaborative scoring process led to a more effective draft TIP outcome.

The DCHC MPO Board does not necessarily agree that the STI process fully captured the priorities of the DCHC MPO. The DCHC MPO worked closely with NCDOT within the STI process but feels that improvements could be made to the STI process to better reflect the values and priorities of the DCHC MPO region. In the future, it is requested that the DCHC MPO be included in the discussions regarding projects in the Statewide Mobility Category to ensure better consistency with the goals of the DCHC MPO Board and consistency with other adopted long range plans for the DCHC MPO area.

## **2. Projects Programmed in the Developmental Program Years of the STIP**

The DCHC MPO expresses concern regarding how many priority projects are programmed for the Developmental Program Years of the STIP. It is understood that many of the priority projects are programmed for later years in the STIP because feasibility studies and/or the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents need to be completed. The DCHC MPO requests that NCDOT provide a schedule of feasibility studies and NEPA documents for these high priority projects so that the projects can move forward as soon as possible and avoid being subject to reprioritization.

## **3. Programming of Related Project Schedules**

The DCHC MPO emphasizes the importance of appropriately scheduling projects and phases of projects that are related to each other. Appropriate schedules should be communicated to the Transportation Planning Branch. For example, the S. Churton Street widening project (#U-5845) is currently and appropriately scheduled after the Orange Grove Extension project (#U-5848) and this schedule should remain. However, the Hillsborough Passenger Rail Station project (#P-5701) is scheduled before Orange Grove Extension project (#U-5848). The schedule for the Hillsborough Passenger Rail Station should be reviewed and potentially revised depending on whether station access is provided for in the scope for either project.

## **4. Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funding**

According to a recent review of the draft FY2016-2025 STIP, specifically performed by the Piedmont Triad Regional Council (PTRC), "\$53 million of bicycle and pedestrian projects have been programmed, of which \$5 million are leftover Safe Routes to School funds from SAFETEA-LU. If annual allotments of \$23 million/yr for Transportation Alternatives continue over the 2016-2025 time period from FHWA, it appears there will be a significant gap of over \$150 million of federal funds that could be prioritized and funded through different methods to fully leverage local match commitments on bicycle & pedestrian projects." (*Memo by Jesse Day, PTRC, dated December 16, 2014 is attached to this memo.*)

Related to the memo from PTRC, the NCDOT SPOT presentation dated July 2014 states, "NCDOT may program an estimated \$10 million of TAP funds on bike/ped projects per fiscal year."

The DCHC MPO requests clarification on the programming and availability of TAP funding. If all TAP funding was **not** programmed in the draft STIP, why was it not all programmed? If all TAP funding was **not** programmed in the draft STIP will additional TAP funding be programmed by NCDOT, or made available on a competitive basis?

## **5. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program Funding**

Similar to question #4 above, it is unclear how much SRTS funding was available to be programmed compared to what was actually programmed in the draft STIP, and if not all funding was programmed, what additional funding may be available. According to page six of the report released by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, *North Carolina Writing the Next Chapter of Its Transportation Legacy*, "Communities have become discouraged over the state's slow handling of the Safe Routes to

School program.” Are communities in North Carolina no longer considering SRTS funding for some projects? The DCHC MPO requests clarification on the programming strategy and availability of SRTS funding. (*The report is attached to this memo.*)

## **6. NCDOT’s Call for CMAQ Projects 2016-2017**

On October 12, 2011, the DCHC MPO TAC approved a list of CMAQ projects for FY 2016 and 2017 (see bulleted list below). This action was taken in response to a CMAQ call for projects initiated by NCDOT. Subsequently, the DCHC MPO received a letter from Ms. Terry C. Arellano, NCDOT Systems Planning Group, dated February 25, 2014, stating that NCDOT “has postponed programming additional CMAQ projects until Federal funding uncertainty can be addressed.” Since this correspondence, at the request of Durham and the DCHC MPO, NCDOT has agreed to amend the STIP to add one of the 2011 approved projects, the West Ellerbe Creek Trail. The amendment is scheduled for approval by the NC Board of Transportation in March 2015.

The other projects approved in 2011 are not in the current STIP or the draft FY2016-25 STIP. Derry Schmidt, NCDOT Systems Planning Group, told DCHC MPO staff in December that “in the next couple of weeks, we will begin a process to schedule the previously-submitted CMAQ proposals for funding in FY 2016 & 2017.”

The MPO requests any additional updates that may be available for the CMAQ funded projects listed below. While several of the projects remain a priority, other projects may need to be reconsidered due to changed conditions or priorities. **The MPO requests the following:**

1. That NCDOT hold a new Call for Projects or provide the MPO an opportunity to review the previous proposals and re-submit CMAQ project priorities for the MPO area.
2. That NCDOT provide clarification regarding the amount of CMAQ funding that is available to be programmed. Are the CMAQ funding estimates used in 2011 still accurate?

### **The FY 2016 and 2017 CMAQ projects approved in 2011 are:**

- Triangle Travel Demand Management Program – continuation of CMAQ funding for the MPO’s share of this regional program administered by TJCOG
- West Durham Station Pedestrian Enhancements – sidewalk planning, R/W, and construction on Georgia Ave. (Club Blvd. to Hillsborough St.), Green St. (Carolina Ave. to Oakland Ave.), Oakland Ave. (Club Blvd. to Hillsborough St.) to increase access to proposed West Durham commuter rail and light rail stations
- Durham Station Pedestrian Enhancements – sidewalk planning, R/W, and construction on Pettigrew St. (Blackwell St. to Mangum St.) and Morehead Ave. (Duke St. to Blackwell St.) to increase access to proposed downtown Durham commuter rail and light rail stations
- Carrboro Downtown Multi-use Path – trail planning, R/W, and construction connecting Greensboro and Lloyd streets (within 3 mile bike-shed of UNC Hospitals Station)
- Durham Alston Avenue Station Pedestrian Enhancements – sidewalk planning, R/W, and construction on Pettigrew St. (Fayetteville St. to Driver St.) to increase access to proposed Alston Avenue commuter rail and light rail stations
- Durham Area Transit Authority – purchase of two replacement buses
- Chapel Hill Transit – purchase of two replacement buses

## **SPECIFIC PROJECT-RELATED COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS**

### **Division 8**

#### **SR 1008 Mt. Carmel Church Road (#EB-5738) & SR 1532 Manns Chapel Road (#EB-5739)**

The DCHC MPO requests guidance regarding the role of local governments in administering these two projects. The DCHC MPO requests confirmation of project costs including costs for right-of-way acquisition for these two projects from the NCDOT Program Development Branch. Are the project costs shown in the draft STIP final costs or estimated costs? These projects are programmed for construction within the first five years of the draft STIP. How soon after the adoption of the STIP will local governments be expected to pay the local match?

If the county contracts with NCDOT for program management, what is the process/cost to contract with NCDOT for right-of-way acquisition? Both Chatham County and the DCHC MPO are very interested in the process and timing of agreements and contracts.

### **Division 7**

#### **Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (#TE-5205)**

The total project cost submitted through SPOT was \$1.8 billion, however the total project cost shown in the draft STIP is \$977,986,000. Why is only \$443,003,000 shown in the Post Year Unfunded category, and not the total remaining project cost? The DCHC MPO strongly recommends the programming for the construction phase be thoroughly reviewed with the DCHC MPO and Triangle Transit to ensure that the construction schedules for the part of the project in REG A and the part of the project in REG B reflect a rational construction schedule for the project. REG A is defined as, "UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Durham County Line." REG B is defined as, "Orange County Line to NC 55 (Alston Avenue) in Durham."

#### **US 70 Bypass Bridge (#B-4962)**

The area around the US 70 Bridge is a crucial connection for the Mountains-to-Sea Trail and for connecting to the Eno River State Park. As bridge design begins, coordination with the efforts to extend the Mountains to Sea Trail is needed. Specific comments on this project were sent to Ms. Brenna Poole, NDOT PDEA Branch from the Orange County Planning & Inspections Department in a letter dated October 27, 2009. It is requested that these comments be reviewed before design of the bridge begins.

#### **Jones Creek Greenway (#C-5181)**

The DCHC MPO requests guidance on any opportunities that may exist to increase the amount of funding for this project. Are TAP, SRTS, or CMAQ (State or MPO) funds available?

### **Orange County Bicycle Route 1 (#EB-5721)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the funding for this project be reprogrammed for earlier years in the STIP. It is funded with SRTS funding and is currently scheduled for PE in FY2021 and Construction in FY2022. The DCHC MPO and the Town of Chapel Hill do not understand why SRTS funding would be programmed for FY2021 of the STIP if there is an unobligated balance of SRST funding available today. If the project is managed locally, could it be scheduled earlier?

### **Morgan Creek Greenway (#EL-4828)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the funding for this project be programmed for FY2016 in the STIP. NCDOT is aware of the additional engineering work related to the creek crossings that is causing the delays in the project. The DCHC MPO requests clarification on NCDOT's approach to project phasing related to allocation of funding and how or when funding would be shifted between phases of a project.

### **I-40 Widening (#I-3306)**

The DCHC MPO requests clarification on the scope of improvements proposed in this project. The DCHC MPO requests confirmation that the requested interchange improvements at NC 86 are included as part of the project. The DCHC MPO also requests an explanation for why right-of-way is scheduled for 2023 if the CE will be completed in 2016. The DCHC MPO is concerned that the NEPA document could expire prior to 2023 and requests that the right-of-way and mitigation phases be scheduled during the first five years of the STIP.

### **I-40 Pavement Rehabilitation (#I-5822)**

The DCHC MPO requests that this project be coordinated with I-3306 to avoid duplicative paving and repaving costs.

### **South Greensboro Street (#U-4726 DX)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the funding for this sidewalk project be programmed as PE in FY2016- and Construction in FY2017 in the STIP. Currently, the schedule is PE in FY2015 and Construction in FY2016.

### **US 15/501 (Fordham Boulevard) (#U-5304)**

Break D of this project is described as NC 54 (Raleigh Road) Interchange Improvements. However, Break A of the NC 54 project (#U-5774) is the NC 54 and US 15/501 interchange upgrade. The DCHC MPO requests clarification for the costs of the NC 54 and US 15/501 interchange. Are the costs of the NC 54 and US 15/501 interchange included in both projects and therefore duplicated? There continues to be a need for further evaluation of the impacts a superstreet would have on this area.

### **SR 1009 South Churton Street (#U-5845)**

This project calls for the widening of S. Churton Street at the interchange with I-85 (exit 164). The Town of Hillsborough had previously been advised that I-85 widening project needed to be scheduled first and that the interchange improvement could not be constructed independently. Has there been a change of opinion on this or is there some other way that the interchange improvement will be incorporated into the widening project?

### **SR 1772 Greensboro Street (#U-5846)**

Are there local match requirements or other local requirements for this project? Will NCDOT design and manage this project? The DCHC MPO requests more details on the scope of this project. It is described as a roundabout at the Greensboro Street and Estes Drive intersection and additional details are requested.

### **SR 1010 West Franklin Street/East Main Street (#U-5847)**

Are there local match requirements or other local requirements for this project? Will NCDOT design and manage this project? The DCHC MPO requests more details on the scope of this project. The project description states “Merritt Mill Road/Brewer Lane intersection improvements in Chapel Hill and Carrboro” and additional details are requested.

### **Orange Grove Road Extension (#U-5848)**

In addition to overlapping with U-5845, this project overlaps with P-5701. The timing and scope of all three projects are connected and needs to be considered in the scheduling of these projects. Additionally, there is a small project the town and county have identified at the intersections of Eno Mountain Road and Mayo Streets with Orange Grove Road that would ideally be added to this project scope. This is an off-set intersection that cannot accommodate signalization in its current configuration. The town and county have funded and completed some preliminary investigation to identify a realignment. Any ability to pursue the realignment further and discuss this project scope would be greatly appreciated.

### **Norfolk Southern H Line (train station) (#P-5701)**

The DCHC MPO requests details on the exact scope of work for this project. This project relates directly to #U-5848 (Orange Grove Road extension). These projects may overlap or create the opportunity to shift costs to different sources as the extension of Orange Grove Road is intended to provide access to the train station. It is the intent and desire of the Town of Hillsborough to go *under* the railroad due to site topography. This concept has been shared with the North Carolina Railroad Company on multiple occasions.

### **Chapel Hill Transit Project (#TA-4726)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the project description to be changed from articulated to regular buses.

### **Chapel Hill Transit Bus Rapid Transit (#U-5119A)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the second phase of the BRT project be programmed into the STIP. Near the end of 2015 the North-South Corridor Study will be completed and a potential Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) will be recommended by the Chapel Hill Transit Partners and then further adopted by the Town of Chapel Hill and the DCHC MPO. The next steps in the planning process would be to forward this LPA to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for acceptance into the Small Starts Project Development Program and for environmental work to proceed on the LPA. This work would be the second phase of the project of ultimately designing and constructing a Bus Rapid Transit project in the North-South Corridor. ***The second phase would include the environmental work and engineering, with a total cost estimate of about \$3.5-\$4million.*** Work and the associated costs for implementing the project would include the following major task items.

- In 2016 – submission of a Small Starts Project Development Application to the FTA at the cost of \$20,000
- In 2016 – starting and completing an Environmental Assessment under Federal NEPA rules with the expected outcome of a signed Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by the FTA at the cost of \$550,000 to \$700,000 depending on the level of transportation analysis and Cultural Resource Analysis
- In 2016 and until the project is constructed (assume 2020) – annual required planning and FTA submittals including the update of Small Starts documentation and required documents including (but not limited to) Project Management Plan, Public Involvement Plan, BRT Comprehensive Operations Analysis, BRT Fleet Management Plan, Basis of Design, and Work Breakdown Structure at the cost of \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually
- In 2017 and 2018 – initiation and completion of engineering (preliminary and final) at the cost of \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million depending on the LPA cross-section

## **Division 5**

### **NC 54 (#U-5774)**

The DCHC MPO requests additional time to review the impacts of converting the existing at-grade intersection of NC 54 and Barbee Chapel Road to a grade separated interchange before expressing support for this improvement. There is concern that this project would impact transit service in the project area.

### **Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (#TE-5205)**

The total project cost submitted through SPOT was \$1.8 billion, however the total project cost shown in the draft STIP is \$977,986,000. Why is only \$443,003,000 shown in the Post Year Unfunded category, and not the total remaining project cost? The DCHC MPO strongly recommends the programming for the construction phase be thoroughly reviewed with the DCHC MPO and Triangle Transit to ensure that the construction schedules for the part of the project in REG A and the part of the project in REG B reflect a rational construction schedule for the project. REG A is defined as, "UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Durham County Line." REG B is defined as, "Orange County Line to NC 55 (Alston Avenue) in Durham."

### **LaSalle Street (#EB-5703)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this sidewalk project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019. Currently, the schedule is PE in FY2016 and Construction in FY2017.

### **Raynor Street (#EB-5704)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this sidewalk project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019. Currently, the schedule is PE in FY2016 and Construction in FY2017.

### **NC 54 (#EB-5708)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this sidewalk project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019. Currently, the schedule is PE in FY2017 and Construction in FY2018.

### **US 501 Bypass (North Duke Street) (#EB-5715)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this sidewalk project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019. Currently, the schedule is PE in FY2019 and Construction in FY2020.

### **Bryant Bridge Trail (#EB-5720)**

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this trail project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019. Currently, the schedule is PE in FY2019 and Construction in FY2020.

### **US 70 Glenwood Avenue (#U-5518 from page 5 of CAMPO draft STIP)**

This project is currently located in Wake County but in the future the US 70 and SR 3067 TW Alexander Drive intersection may be located in an area that is annexed by the City of Durham. REG B of this



project is the conversion of the at-grade intersection to an interchange with cost participation by the City of Durham. Would cost participation by the City of Durham result in a bonus allocation or some kind of reimbursement through STI? If it would result in a bonus allocation, which jurisdiction would receive the bonus allocation? When would the bonus allocation be received and what is the process and related timeline for applying it to a future project?

### **Woodcroft Parkway Extension (#U-5823)**

The existing portion of Woodcroft Parkway is classified as a Collector. Would the extension also be classified as a Collector? If the extension project is classified as a Collector, would it be eligible for federal funding? Would the extension project be a state-maintained roadway or a locally-maintained roadway? Given that this extension would attract traffic away from a highly congested Major roadway, i.e., NC 751, can federal funding be used for the extension? If not, what other options (if any) exist for using federal funds to fund the extension project?

### **Acquisition of rail corridors for use as bicycle and pedestrian trails, Durham (Previous STIP #EL-4999)**

The DCHC MPO requests a determination on whether the Federal HP earmark would be considered competitive or discretionary and therefore exempt from STI prioritization. If the earmark is exempt from STI prioritization, the DCHC MPO requests that it be reprogrammed in the draft STIP. It is understood that #EL-4999 was removed from the FY2012-FY2018 STIP because after several years of on-going negotiations for right-of-way acquisition, a cost could not be agreed upon by all parties and there was no longer county or statewide interest in the new project extents that were limited to downtown Durham. This project has remained a priority for the residents and City of Durham. The City of Durham was recently awarded 2014 TIGER VI planning grant funds to develop a Duke Belt Line Trail Master Plan for the approximately two-mile inactive rail corridor in downtown Durham.

