

US 15-501 Corridor Study On-Hold

(Version 05/01/19)

This agenda item is to present the options for moving the US 15-501 Corridor Study forward given the recent suspension of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project (D-O LRT). The requested action is to choose an option for advancing the study. The GoTriangle Board and affected jurisdictions and counties recently voted to suspend the D-O LRT project. The MPO is currently conducting the US 15-501 Corridor Study (with the help of consultant WSP) and the future D-O LRT was to run along a significant portion of the Corridor and is an integral part of the Study's recommendations. The consultant's work on the Corridor Study is currently on hold because of the D-O LRT project suspension. The Study will proceed forward again when they receive instructions from the DCHC MPO on how to address the impact of the D-O LRT suspension.

It should be noted that although the DCHC MPO has taken the D-O LRT out of the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), the D-O LRT is still in the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). MPO staff recommends leaving this fixed-guideway corridor in the 2045 MTP to protect right-of-way that might be needed for any high-capacity transit system that would replace the D-O LRT.

Status of US 15-501 Corridor Study

The US 15-501 Corridor Study began in early 2018 to develop a new vision and blueprint for the corridor from Eastgate Plaza in Chapel Hill to University Drive in Durham. The effort has hosted an online public comment map, a corridor tour, two public workshops, pop-up events, and several other meetings to produce a community and travel profile, vision and goals, and a set of strategies (e.g., conceptual designs) to address the needs of the four corridor segments. The third and final public workshop was scheduled for May 16th to present the final analysis and functional designs of the final two strategies for the corridor. Feedback from this workshop, along with input from the Project Steering Committee, Technical Committee, and the MPO Board would inform the final recommendations for the corridor and implementation plan. Staff cancelled the May 16th workshop because of the uncertainties given the D-O LRT suspension. Approximately 80% of the project is completed in terms of budget and expected effort. The project Web site has all of the products and documents for the Study:

<http://www.reimagining15501.com/>

Some Important Points About the Study

Before presenting the possible ways to finish the Study, it is important to understand a few important points of the Study. Throughout the public input process for the Corridor Study, it has been clear that the respondents want a multimodal transportation system that supports not only through traffic but also access to existing and anticipated commercial, retail and residential development throughout the corridor. The Study has already produced a lot of good, thoughtful analysis and conceptual design work to support a transportation system that includes bicycle, pedestrian and transit transportation options.

Staff does not want to lose this important work that was based on the public input process and technical analysis, and that is relevant whether or not light rail transit ultimately serves the corridor.

At this time, it is unknown what type of transit technology, coverage or density might replace the D-O LRT in the US 15-501 corridor. However, staff believe that the corridor will need some type of high capacity transit to serve the expected higher, mixed use development densities in the corridor and the continued high number of vehicle trips that pass through the corridor. In that respect, much of the analysis and conceptual design work that has already been completed for development nodes such as Eastgate, Gateway, Patterson Place, New Hope Commons and South Square are still relevant because those nodes are expected to be high density, mixed use development even though the D-O LRT project has been terminated.

Finally, the segments on the two ends of the corridor would not have been directly affected by the D-O LRT. The planning that has been completed thus far for these end segments, which are approximately one-half of the entire corridor length, is still very much relevant. The MPO will want to ensure that this planning is completed.

Some Important Points About SPOT Prioritization

The SPOT 6.0 prioritization process for the FY2022-FY2031 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is in the beginning stages. The MPO must submit projects for scoring and prioritization consideration by September 2019 to be considered for funding in the FY2022-FY2031 TIP. Given the lag time between prioritization, initial funding and project construction, the MPO will unlikely be able to construct any new high capacity transit project (not including the Chapel Hill North-South BRT project) for about ten years if it misses the SPOT 6.0 deadline. The MPO could choose to submit a few BRT projects, for example, to SPOT 6.0 based on little or no market analysis. On the other hand, the MPO could try to get at least high level transit market and demand data from the US 15-501 Corridor Study to submit a few high capacity transit projects for that corridor. The latter projects would likely be more competitive in that they are based on solid data.

Other Related Projects

This section summarizes other transportation projects in the TIP that could be affected in the mid-term by the US 15-501 Corridor Study:

- US 15-501/Garrett Road interchange (U-5717); convert at-grade intersection to interchange; construction in FY 2020 through FY 2022 in draft FY2020-FY2029 STIP.
- US 15-501, from Ephesus Ch Rd to I-40; capacity improvements; construction in FY 2028 through post year in draft FY2020-FY2029 STIP.
- I-40, Mt Moriah and Southwest Durham Dr (U-6067); improve interchange and intersection area; construction in FY 2028 through post year in draft FY2020-FY2029 STIP.
- US 15-501/Ephesus Ch Rd (U-5550); intersection improvements; to be constructed by the Town of Chapel Hill.
- Bicycle, pedestrian and transit improvements on Old Durham-Chapel Hill Rd; under construction

Options to Complete the Study

A Technical Committee (TC) subcommittee will meet on Monday, May 6 to identify the options. Staff will present those options to the MPO Board at the May 8th Board meeting.