

US 15-501 Corridor Study – Follow-On

Board Directive

At their November meeting, the DCHC MPO Board directed staff to develop a proposal to finish the US 15-501 Corridor Study. The Board stated that the Study's proposed transportation system for the Chapel Hill segment and the I-40/US 15-501 quadrant area did not meet the newly adopted Goals and Objectives of the DCHC MPO and the interests of several people who provided comments to the Board concerning the final Study. In summary, the design of the Chapel Hill segment favored vehicle travel over that of bicyclists and pedestrians, and the sole interchange proposed for the quadrant area provided inadequate access to the Patterson Place and New Hope Commons developments. This document outlines the staff proposal to finish the US 15-501 Corridor Study.

Process

1. Create Stakeholder groups – The MPO will identify two stakeholder groups: one for the Chapel Hill segment; and, one for the I-40/US 15-501 quadrant area. There are two groups because the issues and expected membership of each group will be fairly distinct. For example, a Chapel Hill group member is unlikely to have much interest in the roadway grade separation issues of the quadrant area, and vice-versa. The MPO will use the Study contact list, which includes anyone who has participated in the US 15-501 Corridor Study by attending public workshops, submitting comments, etc., to request membership for each stakeholder group. Local staff and elected officials may participate in stakeholder groups. The MPO will not limit membership of the stakeholder group unless a very compelling reason arises to do so.
2. Identify Transportation Needs – The stakeholder groups will participate in a facilitated meeting to identify the transportation needs that are not met by the current US 15-501 Corridor Study. There will be one meeting for each stakeholder group. The product will be a simple and specific lists of the unmet needs, and might include maps and conceptual designs.
3. Develop Solutions – The stakeholder groups will participate in one, or more, facilitated meetings to identify proposed solutions to the unmet transportation needs. The meeting format, e.g., charrette, will be determined when the MPO knows more about the number of participants, identified needs, and capabilities of the technical support. The product will be text, maps, conceptual designs, drawings, or anything else that is needed to convey the ideas of the stakeholder group.
4. Conduct Public Input – The transportation needs and proposed solutions for the Chapel Hill segment and the I-40/US 15-501 quadrant area will be published for public comment. The public will be encouraged to comment on the proposed solutions and directly address the DCHC MPO Board at a public hearing. This public input process will be limited to the issues in the Chapel Hill segment and I-40/US 15-501 quadrant area – not the entire study corridor.

5. Incorporate in Final Report – The approved solutions will be incorporated in to the final US 15-501 Corridor Study report, summary report, and conceptual design.

Support

Consultant – The MPO will employ a consultant to lead the meetings, provide transportation technical and design support at the meetings, develop proposed solutions, and depict the graphs and conceptual design of the approved solutions for the final report. The consultant will be chosen from among firms that are known for their creative bicycle, pedestrian, and transit planning solutions, or could possibly be an entity such as NACTO (National Association of City Transportation Officials), Smart Growth America, etc.

MPO Staff – Staff will organize the stakeholder groups, execute meeting logistics, conduct the public input and hearing process, and edit text for the final reports.

Other Things to Know

Consultant and budget – MPO staff is currently identifying potential consultants, drafting a project scope, and identifying the budget. Once a consultant is identified, staff will use the consultant's expertise to further develop the details for the type of meetings to be conducted, the meeting products, and the method to incorporate the solutions into the final US 15-501 Corridor Study.

Timeline and Coordination – Although there is no urgency to finish the US 15-501 Corridor Study, it would be advantageous to approve the Study by mid-year. That timeline would allow the Study to incorporate projects and policies from the Durham County and Orange County transit plans, and produce projects for the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The MPO will have a detailed timeline once a consultant is hired.

DCHC MPO Board – Staff will provide the project status as needed to the DCHC MPO Board meeting.

Virtual meetings – At this time, no one knows when public agencies will begin conducting in-person meetings in the post-pandemic era. Thus, it is best to assume that this effort will conduct virtual meetings.