

Meeting Minutes
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Transportation Advisory Committee
Date: October 29, 2008

Members Present:

Lanny Wilson, Chairman, NCBOT
Nancy Pritchett, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Bill Sue, Brunswick County
Tommy Wallace, Town of Leland
Mac Montgomery, Town of Kure Beach
Bill Kopp, New Hanover County
Laura Padgett, City of Wilmington
Bill Saffo, City of Wilmington
Bill Blair, Town of Wrightsville Beach
Alan Gilbert, Town of Carolina Beach

Staff Present:

Mike Kozlosky, Senior Transportation Planner
Anthony Prinz, Transportation Planner
Joshuah Mello, Transportation Planner

1. Call to Order

Mr. Wilson called the meeting to order at 4:10 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes

The motion to approve the minutes from the September 24th meeting carried unanimously.

3. Public Comment Period

Mr. Gay Castleberry addressed members regarding the College Road and Oleander Intersection improvements. He said he would like to ask NCDOT to seriously reconsider some of the impacts of the project and represent them more clearly within the feasibility study. He told members the history of one-way traffic in Wilmington has worked at Dawson and Wooster Streets and he would like to know why the one-way alternative was not considered for this intersection.

Mr. Andy Koeppel told members he believes the extension of Independence Boulevard to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard could relieve some of the traffic congestion at the intersection of College Road and Oleander Drive. He said he would like to see a study done on the possible impact extending Independence Boulevard might have on the traffic at College/Oleander intersection.

Mr. Alvin Rogers told members in January of 2007 the Department of Transportation looked at improvements to Kerr Avenue to make it five-lanes from Randal Parkway to Oleander Drive to the tune of \$12 million. The intersection where Kerr Avenue comes into Peachtree Avenue is part of the problem. Even with the quadrant alternative, Peachtree Avenue is still going to be a problem. Traffic is backed up from the Peachtree Avenue light into the Oleander Drive intersection. He said if you were to go with the one-way alternative, he would question if there would be a need for the light at Peachtree Avenue. He would also request the TAC consider having a public forum televised on the quadrant alternative.

Mr. Terrial Morrison told members the north and south traffic in this town is primarily with I-40 and it acts as a funnel into College Road. That funnel continues to get smaller until you hit Shipyard Boulevard. Beyond there it is fairly open. As you are coming in from the north, most of the traffic is heading for the hospital area. If they could use the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway down Independence Boulevard to Shipyard Boulevard and then back to the hospital you would be surprised how much traffic would disappear off College Road. He said he agrees with Mr. Koeppel that another access through town would be beneficial.

Mr. Kopp asked Mr. Koeppel to once again tell the members what he would like to recommend regarding the Independence Boulevard expansion.

Mr. Koeppel said he feels we need to prioritize the extension of Independence Boulevard to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway. If we were to extend Independence Boulevard to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway, that will help relieve some of the congestion from College Road and Oleander Drive. Mr. Kopp asked if he was suggesting that we suspend work at the intersection of College Road and Oleander Drive until we know what we are going to do with the Independence Boulevard extension. Mr. Koeppel said yes, we need the information on the possible impact that the extension might have on the traffic at College/Oleander intersection. He suggested members table the revision at that intersection and prioritize the Independence Boulevard extension.

4. Presentation – Rail Program Update: Conference Call with Mr. Pat Simmons

Wilmington Multi-Modal Right of Way Acquisition: Mr. Pat Simmons, Director of the NCDOT Rail Division, began by updating members on the Wilmington Multi-Modal Station right-of-way acquisition. He stated that NCDOT and the City of Wilmington have to acquire the property that is between 3rd and 4th Streets and between Campbell and Hanover Streets. They now own the property outright. The Department expects to release the notice to proceed in putting together a 15% plan that will involve the City, WAVE Transit and the NCDOT Department of Public Transportation and the Rail Division. That is a schematic that is looking at everything on the property that will permit transit to set up a transit/transfer center and offices facilities in the near term and still add rail in a subsequent phase. It should be completed by early July of 2009.

Access to the Port of Wilmington and the North Carolina International Terminal: Mr. Simmons told members the NCDOT Rail Division has been working with the State Ports Authority (SPA) encouraging additional use and expansion of shipping at their existing port in Wilmington, as well as the progression of the new North Carolina International Terminal (NCIT) project. Earlier this year, the board authorized a grant to the SPA to partner with them and CSXT Transportation that connect the port with the outside world on a project that would remove any clearance restrictions between the Port of Wilmington west to Hamlet and Charlotte in order to accommodate double-stack intermodal rail operations. They have also been working at pricing competitive intermodal rail services. Even with the facilities, it's still a matter of cost to anyone importing goods through the port at Wilmington and to distribute goods elsewhere in the country. The rail division has been working with CSXT in getting a cost proposal to restore regular intermodal rail service to the POW that will be competitive with services to the ports on the east coast. CSXT came forward with an initiative called the National Gateway. The web site nationalgateway.org contains more information about that initiative and information on the Carolina's Corridor. CSXT is trying to position their company to take advantage of the increase in goods being shipped to the east coast ports of entry with the expansion of the Panama Canal. The SPA is working with the Core of Engineers and Congress to secure funds to complete a "reconnaissance" analysis of dredging the Cape Fear River to accommodate shipping to the NCIT. If that analysis is positive, the SPA will then initiate work on a large-scale environmental impact document that would include things like dredging, the new terminal development, and then road and rail access under the National Environmental Policy Act. They will need to do a full scale study analysis on all means of access to the port later in the process.

Mr. Sue told Mr. Simmons that TAC passed a resolution supporting the Ports requested feasibility study at last months meeting and included text requesting that the study integrate the findings from the transportation improvements feasibility study with a rail feasibility study. Mr. Sue said that citizens in Brunswick County are concerned about truck traffic being generated from the terminal and would like to see goods transported by rail. They are also concerned because the current rail system that runs from the industrial park down to Southport goes over the major dam for Boiling Springs Lakes. They have spent millions of dollars because of sink-holes in the area. Their economic development staff has

presented an alternate route that would use the current federal government right-of-way to accommodate both rail and an express way that would bypass those residential areas. Mr. Sue asked if Mr. Simmons was aware of that. Mr. Simmons said he was not. He stated that right now the port is looking at a more basic question; is it feasible and does it make economic-sense, from the Core of Engineers prospective, for them to dredge the river and build an international terminal there at all.

State Rail Plan Update: Mr. Simmons told members their division is focusing on the State Rail Plan. They are working through developing an objective basis to evaluate intermodal, freight and passenger projects and rank-order for funding. The Draft Executive Summary will be presented to the Transit, Ferry and Rail Committee of the Board of Transportation at their November 5th meeting. The summary will be available for public review and comment after that meeting.

State Issues:

Mr. Simmons told members the 21st Century Transportation Committee will be giving their recommendations to the 2009 Session of the General Assembly.

The House Select Committee on a Comprehensive Rail Service Plan for North Carolina will be reviewing the State Rail Plan Update. They will develop legislation to address preservation of rail rights-of-way for presentation to the 2009 session of legislature.

Mr. Simmons said earlier this year the General Assembly adopted legislation that authorized their Department to enter into public-private partnerships. In order to do that, they will need to develop a set of procurement policies to follow to consider the kind of public-private partnerships. The policies and procedures developed will be reviewed by the Board of Transportation at their December meeting.

Federal Issues:

Public Law-110-432 - Thanks to the Wilmington MPO and other cities, counties, economic development interests and all chambers of commerce organizations around the state that made recommendation to Congress for a federal-state partnership to fund development of rail projects. Earlier this year, Congress authorized a bill that reauthorizes rail safety and funding for Amtrak over the next 5-years. They also authorizes \$1.5 billion in 80/20 grants to states for improvements and expansion to intercity passenger rail services and \$1.4 billion in 80/20 grants to states for development of high speed rail over the next 5-years.

Mr. Simmons suggested visiting their website at www.bytrain.org or www.sehsr.org if they would like any more information.

5. Old Business

None

6. New Business

a. Resolution recognizing the career of Mr. Joe Blair

Mr. Kozlosky told members Mr. Blair started his career in 1969. He has been with NCDOT 39 years, 21 of them here at Division 3. Mr. Sue made the motion to recognize Mr. Blair for his dedication to the Wilmington MPO. Ms. Padgett seconded the motion and it carried unanimously. Mr. Wilson asked that Mr. Blair be invited to next months meeting so that we can provide him with a copy of the resolution.

b. Resolution supporting amendments to the Functional Classification Map

Mr. Shane York with NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch told members he is asking for support for adoption of the functional classification map changes proposed by NCDOT and Federal Highway Administration. Mr. Kopp made the motion to support the amendments to the Functional Classification Map as recommended. Mr. Padgett seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

c. Resolution supporting “Getting Connected’s” efforts in New Hanover County

Mr. Kozlosky told members this resolution is requesting NCDOT consider the use of Bicycle and Pedestrian funds to improve the bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the Middle Sound Loop/Ogden Elementary School area. He said we are asking that state, local or federal dollars be considered for these projects. The issue of funding and maintenance will need to be resolved. Mr. Kopp said he recognizes that the county is going to have to start being involved in this type project. Ms. Pritchett said they would need more information to take to the County Commissioner for consideration. Mr. Kozlosky suggested changing the title to request NCDOT and the county consider working cooperatively to fund and implement bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the Middle Sound Loop/Ogden Elementary School area. Mr. Kopp made the motion with the changes stated by Mr. Kozlosky. Mr. Sue seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

d. Resolution supporting the Town of Carolina Beach’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Planning Grant

Mr. Kozlosky told members NCDOT has initiated a call for funding for municipalities throughout the state to create bicycle and pedestrian plans. They have identified funding in 2009 for this initiative. Mr. Kopp made a motion to support the Town of Carolina Beach, Kure Beach and Navassa’s grant request. Mr. Sue seconded the motion and it carried unanimously

7. Discussion

a. Televising Transportation Advisory Committee Meetings

Mr. Kopp told member he had discussed televising the TAC meeting with Mr. Mark Boyd. Mr. Boyd told members it could be done. Ms. Pritchett asked if the members want the meetings televised? She told members she was concerned about the public holding this board accountable for projects being completed by a certain date without understanding what’s involved in the process. She suggested if this board has a particularly interesting presentation, it could be televised. Ms. Padgett suggested tabling this item for discussion at a later date. Everyone agreed.

b. Dow Road Corridor Study

Mr. Kozlosky told members staff has received a revised scope of work. The cost is approximately \$90,000 for a new study to evaluate capacity and future interconnectivity locations for collector streets along the Dow Road corridor between Snows Cut Bridge and K Avenue. Staff would recommend delaying this study until we are better able to determine the state of the economy before spending these funds.

Mr. Gilbert told members Lake Park Boulevard is at capacity and it is a poor experience for commuters and pedestrians. Carolina Beach would like this to go forward. There are safety issues on Dow Road and it is not getting any better. This project has been on the TIP for since at least 1983.

Mr. Kozlosky said in looking at the budget, staff would recommend the project be delayed and possibly go out for a new RFQ and look at other firms. The estimate from Wilbur Smith is high and plus we are experiencing a financial downturn. We are not sure how DOTs funding or the federal legislation for the 2007 Energy Bill will impact us. He told member he would like to suggest waiting for six-months.

Mr. Gilbert suggested going for a new RFQ to see if we can get a better estimate right now so we might take advantage of the current economic downturn.

Mr. Montgomery said he agrees with Mr. Gilbert. Right now the economy has many firms hungry for work. He believes we could get a better price in today’s market. He told members he thinks Dow Road needs work from a maintenance point of view. He told members his

council's higher priority is to alleviate some of the congestion once travelers leave Pleasure Island.

Mr. Sue suggested that Carolina and Kure Beach Councils be involved in determining the scope for the project. Mr. Gilbert agreed.

Ms. Padgett made a motion for staff to put forward another RFQ and see if we can get a better price. Mr. Sue seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

8. Project Updates

a. Market Street Corridor Study

Mr. Kozlosky told members the first public information workshop was held October 7th - 9th. Staff has developed ideas for possible improvements and ways to integrate transportation and land use planning along the section of the Market Street Corridor between Colonial Drive and Gordon Road. The next meetings will be held October 28th – 30th and will focus on the section of Market Street from Gordon Road to the New Hanover/Pender County line. Staff will have information available at that meeting for the entire corridor.

b. Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)

Mr. Mello told members the CAC has been reviewing other Long Range Transportation Plans around the country and have been working on developing a public involvement plan and a schedule for the plan process. The next meeting will be held December 17th.

c. Bike/Pedestrian Committee

Mr. Mello told members the bike/ped committee is also working on the Long Range Transportation Plan. They have also been very involved with Safe Routes to School. They bought bike map holders for the 35 WAVE transit buses with their own money. They also have secured \$5,000 in funding from NCDOT to help pay for the second printing of the bicycle maps.

d. NCDOT Project Update

attached

Mr. Sue asked for an update on R-3601 – widening the causeway between Leland and Wilmington. Mr. Wilson told members they expect to have the environmental assessment by October 2009 and begin construction in 2012.

Mr. Kopp told members he would like to suggest bringing a resolution requesting that the funding for South College and Oleander Intersection project be redirected to the extension of Independence Boulevard from Randal Parkway to Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway to the next meeting. Ms. Padgett said she agreed with that if it can be done. Mr. Wilson told members the issue is that there are other projects in Division 3 - Onslow County, Sampson County and Brunswick County. The \$100,000 million that was taken out of the TIP for these six counties that make up Division 3, was taken so projects in New Hanover County were not put on hold. The agreement was that if there was any delay on these projects, then the money would first go back to the area that had their projects delayed. Some of these projects had documents that were ready to go. Mr. Wilson stated that members need to understand what they're asking for by doing that.

Mr. Sue told members there was another thing that could be considered. The commissioners from Columbus, Pender, New Hanover and Brunswick Counties along with Representatives from the Wilmington City Council established the number one priority for the region is the Wilmington Bypass – now known as I-140. That project is ready to go now. Mr. Wilson told members that project would probably have the biggest impact on reducing traffic in all of New Hanover County.

They have the permit in hand and are acquiring the right-of-way for that project right now. The only thing preventing the last section from being built right now is money. Mr. Kopp asked how much money has been allocated to the South College and Oleander Intersection project. Mr. Wilson said it is \$39,000 million and that would pay for half of getting the bypass completed.

Ms. Padgett suggested staff bring back information on what it would cost in time and dollars to move the Independence Boulevard Extension and the cost and time involved to move forward with the bypass. Mr. Wilson told members if we had the funds available, the project could be let.

Mr. Sue made the motion to redirect the funding intended for the College and Oleander Intersection project to the number-one regional project which is I-140 Wilmington Bypass. Mr. Kopp seconded the motion. Mr. Wilson called for the vote on the motion to move the Oleander Drive money at that project that's been allocated in the TIP to the Wilmington Bypass to complete that section from US 74/76 back to US 17 for construction. The vote carried unanimously.

Mr. Wilson suggest that at the next meeting we need to come back with motion as to go back and study other alternatives for Oleander Drive and see if there is anything that could be done for the intersection.

9. Announcements

- a. **Market Street Corridor Study Public Workshop- October 28th & 30th**
- b. **Wilmington Bike/Pedestrian Committee meeting- November 13th**

10. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:06 pm

Respectfully submitted

Mike Kozlosky
Executive Director
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization