

Workshop Meeting Minutes
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Transportation Advisory Committee
Date: November 26, 2012

Members Present:

Laura Padgett, Chair, City of Wilmington
Dean Lambeth, Vice-Chair, Town of Kure Beach
Pat Batleman, Town of Leland
Bill Sisson, Town of Wrightsville Beach
Jonathan Barfield, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Earl Sheridan, City of Wilmington
Brian Berger, New Hanover County
Trip Sloan, NC Board of Transportation
David Williams, Pender County

Staff Present:

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director
Tara Murphy, Associate Transportation Planner
Suraiya Rashid, Associate Transportation Planner
Bill McDow, Staff Engineer

1. Call to Order

Ms Padgett called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM.

2. Public Comment Period

Mr. Michael Beckle addressed members regarding the geology of the area with regard to building a major structure crossing the Cape Fear River. He noted that it was very important for the state to look at the area's topography to make sure they would not be adversely affecting the aquifers and potentially create sinkholes.

4. Crossing over the Cape Fear River

Mr. Bobby Lewis, NCDOT Chief of Staff's gave a presentation on the Crossing over the Cape Fear River and the status of the project to date. The presentation agenda included information on the Environmental Document, the purpose and need for the project, the alternatives that are currently being looked at and the challenges associated with the project.

Mr. Lewis told the member that the Environmental Document will examine several options. Those options include no-build, replacement of the existing Cape Fear Memorial Bridge with a high rise structure or a new moveable structure. It will also examine crossing to the south of the port, and a tunnel option. He noted that the environmental document is currently at a standstill. He told members if the TAC were to support moving forward with the document, a record of decision could be complete by the fourth quarter of 2015 and after funding is secured, the estimated construction time would be five years.

Mr. Lewis discussed the purpose and need for the project and showed a video of the travel volumes currently experienced on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, as well as, the forecasted volume for 2035. He noted that capacity of the current structure at Level-of-Service E is 56,000 vehicles per day. In 2035, volume is forecasted to be 103,000 vehicles per day.

Mr. Lewis told members the Environmental Document will study several alternatives. It will be able to look at every one of the scenarios and try to predict what traffic volume will be in a certain design year and how it will affect other systems. He noted that a new location bridge will require four lanes (2 in each direction) to carry 2035 traffic volumes. The high cost for the project is driven by the shipping channel span requirements for a bridge. Upgrade to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge will require a 8 to 10 lane facility and it would come down at 5th Street.

Ms. Padgett asked DOT staff to describe what has to be done on both the east and west sides of the river to upgrade the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge to an 8-lane facility. Mr. Kozlosky noted that the work has already started on the widening the existing 17/74/76 interchange in Brunswick County. Improvements will also need to be made on US 421 through to the Port. He noted that the improvements would create significant impacts to historic structures, businesses and homes. Those types of issues are taken into consideration as part of the Environmental Document. That location will also have some wetland impacts around the bridge touchdown point.

Dr. Sheridan asked if members would be able to see that data as it is developed. Mr. Lewis said that as the environment process moves forward, there will be public hearings and public input where that information is shared with the public following decision points along the way.

Mr. Barfield asked what would be the impact to the citizens living along 5th Street and the costs involved for that location. Mr. Lewis said that there would be impacts and it would depend on the type of transition into the current infrastructure. He told members the cost for right-of-way to upgrade the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge will likely be more than construction when trying to tie into 5th Street. He said he encouraged members to support continuing work on the Environmental Document. The Department needs that information to go forward so that they have answers to all those questions. Ms. Padgett asked when the Environmental Document was paused. Mr. Lewis told members it was paused in 2010. Ms. Padgett said she was expecting to see the information at this workshop that was compiled in the four years before the study was paused. She stated that TAC members need to see that information to help make the decision on how best to support getting people across the Cape Fear River.

Mr. Barfield asked, in relation to a skyway bridge, what is the difference in cost between replacing the bridge now to 8-lanes versus the skyway. He noted that it seems like we are trying to accommodate growth that is taking place in Brunswick County; but, the greatest impact on people will happen in New Hanover County. He would not like to have citizens here adversely affected by growth taking place across the river. He suggested that we should find a way to lessen that impact by finding an area that doesn't have as many people in it with homes that have relocated and historic structures torn down. He told members upgrade to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge will have too great of an impact on the citizens in New Hanover County. Mr. Lewis stated in a rough-comparison estimate, the cost for a new crossing would be about \$650 million in comparison to about \$450 million for just the construction.

Mr. Sloan told members until we have the final Environmental Document in hand, we won't have all the facts and information in hand to make a decision. The best thing we could do is to move forward to complete the Environmental Document so that we can have the answers and information needed to sit down and talk about what the community thinks is the best option for the future.

Mr. Lewis reminded members that the data from the Environmental Document will lead to a conclusion on the best route for construction and he would encourage them to support continuing the Environmental Document to see where the conclusion and the data will lead.

Mr. Sisson asked that the merger team members remember to look at plans from the various communities for their economic development and take that into consideration when making their determination. Ms. Batleman noted that the City of Wilmington has a Tier II Redevelopment Plan which encompasses Dawson and Wooster Streets and the surrounding area and is sure they desire that information to be considered. She said the Town of Leland is also growing. They don't want to see their town split in half and the northern alignment is not something the Town of Leland can work with.

Mr. Lewis reviewed the challenges for the project. They include consideration for the growth taking place in New Hanover and Brunswick County, along with environmental consideration. Other challenges include identifying the optimal transportation solution that has consensus support and funding for the project. Mr. Lewis told members that he would recommend continuing the Environmental Document. He suggested that the MPO also form a small work group to ensure the study and the alternatives meet local expectation. He told members he feels the most successful plan we can have is a local plan.

Mr. Kozlosky told members staff will bring a resolution requesting NCDOT to restart the Environmental Document process to the next TAC meeting.

5. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 AM

Respectfully submitted
Mike Kozlosky
Executive Director
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

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