

DURHAM • CHAPEL HILL • CARRBORO
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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February 23, 2023

Mr. Tracy Parrott, PE
 Deputy Division Engineer, Division 5
 North Carolina Department of Transportation
 2612 N. Duke Street
 Durham, NC 27704

RE: US 15-501 MODERNIZATION + I-40 INTERCHANGE TIP PROJECT U-6067

Dear Mr. Parrott:

The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) wants to share our vision and a synopsis of important public input we received while studying the I-40/US 15-501 interchange and the 15-501 corridor including intersections for Mt. Moriah Road and Southwest Durham Drive. The MPO understands that NCDOT initiated “express design” for the corridor, also known as TIP project U-6067.

The MPO sponsored a corridor study of US 15-501 that extended from the Eastgate Shopping Center in Chapel Hill to the US 15-501/University Drive intersection in Durham. The study objective was to coordinate land use and transportation planning then guide multi-modal transportation projects development for the MPO’s long range plans and capital programs. The study began in 2018 then pivoted away from fixed rail transit when the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project ended in 2019. In 2020, the MPO board did not approve the proposed final US 15-501 Corridor Study plan. Subsequent efforts to hire a consultant to modify the recommended design were not successful. The MPO will not move forward with additional project evaluation, instead concentrating resources on advocacy during the NCDOT express design process.

Public engagement results included several important issues we believe the feasibility and alternatives analysis for TIP project U-6067 should consider:

- **INTERCHANGE AT SWDD** -- The recommended plan included an interchange at Southwest Durham Drive, an at-grade intersection at Mt. Moriah Road, and a new road that connects the north and south sides of US 15-501 with a grade-separated crossing east of Southwest Durham Drive. This design matched previous and existing plans for this corridor segment. Property owners and managers from New Hope Commons and Patterson Place did not support the grade-separation at Mt. Moriah Road and the Southwest Durham Drive interchange, preferring at-grade intersections.
- **QUADRANT ROADS** -- The recommended plan proposed two (2) multi-modal quadrant roads connecting New Hope Commons and Eastowne (north of I-40 interchange) with Patterson Place and Gateway (south of I-40 interchange). This design matched previous and existing plans for this corridor segment. Local officials from the City of Durham, Durham County, and the Town of Chapel Hill did not agree on a location for the north connector road because of potential impacts to North Carolina Natural Heritage Area #511, also known as Cedar Terrace Bottoms. This moderately rated designated area includes both [managed \(by town of Chapel Hill\)](#) and unmanaged dry creek/Mt. Moriah bottomlands.
- **DDI, MULTIMODAL AND BUS LANES** – The recommended plan included a diverging-diamond intersection (DDI) at I-40. Local planners and the MPO do not support the DDI unless there are connector roads that provide safe, efficient

multi-modal access among the quadrants. In addition, the plan recommended bus-only lanes on the inside lanes of US 15-501, but the connection between the DDI and bus-only lanes is unresolved.

- **TRANSIT ACCESS** – The recommended plan assumed that transit buses would provide service by exiting US 15-501, circulating the developments, and re-entering US 15-501. There was support for bus stops or a bus station on US 15-501 to enable efficient express service, however this design was not accommodated in the recommendation.
- **LAND USE** – The recommended plan assumed that each quadrant at I-40 and US 15-501 will redevelop into higher density, mixed-use communities of office, commercial, retail, and residential land uses. The respective local governments and developers will build a local street grid network to accommodate future mixed-use development.

The MPO's long-range plans address transportation improvements in this corridor. In 2022, the MPO's 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) designated a modernization, or boulevard conversion, for this segment of US 15-501. The modernization designation supports non-motorized travel such as bicycling and walking, transit operations, and a high level of access. Modernization may include vehicle capacity improvements that do not add additional travel lanes, however it does not support interchanges at Mt. Moriah Road and Southwest Durham Drive, or other limited-access design features. The 2050 MTP includes a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system along this corridor and service improvements to the existing express transit service such as GoTriangle routes #400 and #405.

In 2017, the DCHC MPO and NCDOT adopted the MPO's Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The CTP designated the following roadway improvements for US 15-501: a freeway conversion of US 15-501; an interchange at Southwest Durham Drive; grade-separated crossings of US 15-501 at Mt. Moriah Road and the proposed connector road that will be east of Southwest Durham Drive; and connector roads between New Hope Commons and Eastowne Dr and between Patterson Place and Gateway. The CTP has a bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor from Mt. Moriah Road to the UNC Healthcare campus on Manning Drive in Chapel Hill. There is also a Patterson Place park-and-ride facility.

As the NCDOT develops alternatives for TIP U-6067, please include MPO and local government staff for input and comments. The DCHC MPO is committed to ensuring travel for all modes in the US 15-501 corridor. Bicyclists and pedestrians must be able to travel safely and efficiently among the I-40 interchange quadrants and along US 15-501. Bus service must have efficient access to the quadrants and US 15-501. We look forward to working with NCDOT on the transportation challenges in this corridor.

Sincerely,



Doug Plachcinski, AICP, CFM
Executive Director, DCHC MPO

cc: DCHC MPO Board
DCHC MPO Technical Committee (TC)