To: All NCDOT Traffic Monitoring Data Customers
From: Kerry Morrow, Traffic Survey Supervisor
Date: December 8, 2021
Subject: Characteristics of 2020 Annual Average Daily Traffic Estimate

Purpose

To provide transparency on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected North Carolina 2020 traffic monitoring collection efforts and generation of Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) data sets.

Key points

- **Data Collection**: Traffic monitoring data was collected at substantially fewer sites in 2020 than in a typical collection year, after adjustments to the standard data collection effort at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Data Analysis**: Traffic patterns were significantly impacted, which necessitated a non-standard methodology for analyzing the data. The methodology developed for generating 2020 AADTs is consistent with methods used by other agencies.
- **End of Year Process**: The methods used generate reasonable travel estimates for all of 2020 at the county and statewide level.

Short-term Collection Details

- Data collection was suspended from early March until May.
- Adjusted collection efforts to collect a sample of stations across the entire state to have a measure of travel changes in all areas.
- Counts were collected at ~5,000 stations on non-interstate routes.
- All interstate routes had sample counts collected along each corridor.
- Classification data was collected as originally scheduled.

Continued on next page

Continuous Data Summary

- All continuous count stations experienced a drop in AADT in 2020, ranging from -1% to -33%.
- Interstates experienced a higher drop than non-interstates.
- Urban areas experienced a higher drop than rural areas.

Analysis Details

- **Short-Term Counts**: A percent change model was used to estimate 2020 AADTs, based on the ratio of 2020 count to 2019 AADT applied to all stations. Both interstate and non-interstate models used the percent change methodology, with minor variations.
- **Truck Percentages**: There was a moderate drop (about 10%) in truck travel at the start of the pandemic, with a quick recovery to near 2019 levels. Estimated change in truck travel was based on the 2019 to 2020 trend in North Carolina Motor Fuel Use data and AADT percent change.
- **Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)**: VMT was generated using the standard estimation procedure based on the 2020 AADT estimates for all routes above functionally classified local. Functionally classified local route VMT values were estimated at the county level, based on 2019 to 2020 change factors using all non-interstate stations.

Action

Traffic monitoring data customers should use the 2020 data set with knowledge that 2020 was a year of highly irregular traffic patterns, understanding that AADT values were largely estimated. Counts from this year represent a reasonable characterization of North Carolina travel but may not be appropriate for long-range data projections.

Contact

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https://www.sog.unc.edu/courses/lela-201-top-10-primer-transportation-planning-north-carolina

LELA 101: Top 10 Primer on Transportation Planning in North Carolina

- **Online**

January 21, 2022

This is an online course offered via Zoom at 10am-11:15am.

From potholes to bike lanes, our transportation networks affect the quality of life in all our communities. Have you ever wondered how and when the planning for our state's highway network takes place? As a local elected official, do you know the best way to inject your community's transportation needs into the statewide planning process?

To many local officials the State's planning processes for building our paved infrastructure can seem like a true enigma. The NC Department of Transportation provides opportunities for local input through a network of planning organizations across the state; these organizations provide local governments a way to provide input into comprehensive plans for our State-administered highway system.

In this Top 10 Primer, participants will learn about the Department of Transportation structure, funding, and planning processes. The roles of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) will be explained and anticipated future statewide transportation needs will be explored.

This quick-moving interactive free virtual workshop will provide our audience a basic understanding of the policies that affect statewide transportation priorities and the avenues for making your voices heard. Some of the questions that will be answered include:

- What is the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)? the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Plan (MTIP)? the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP)?
- Where can I influence the decisions?
- What is the NCDOT Complete Streets Policy?
- What are "locally administered projects"?
- How is NC planning for future needs and changes in vehicle design technology?

Our Instructor for this Top 10 Primer is Amna Cameron, Deputy Director of the Office of Strategic Initiatives and Program Support in the NC Department of Transportation.

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The US Is Gently Discouraging States From Building New Highways

A memo issued Thursday urges states to fix roads before constructing new ones, and to consider climate-friendly projects like bike lanes.

An aerial view of Interstate 45 in Houston. With a new policy, the federal government is trying to limit sprawl. PHOTOGRAPH: TRONG NGUYEN/GETTY IMAGES

HIGHWAYS ARE NOT great for the planet. Their smooth, wide, inviting lanes have helped make transportation the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the US, responsible for 29 percent of the total. With prodding from the Biden administration, major US automakers have pledged that 40 percent of their sales will be powered by plugs, not gas, by 2030. But even if the country hits that target, highways will still enable and encourage sprawl, and more emissions.

Which is why environmentalists were frustrated when the $1.3 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill passed this year. In the end, the legislation mostly preserved the status quo, allocating 80 percent of transportation funding to highways and 20 percent to transit. Some of that money will be distributed through competitive grants, meaning the US Transportation Department will play a role—more than in past years—in deciding which projects are funded. In those cases, the department can choose to prioritize climate-friendly builds where it wishes.

But most of the transportation funding will be distributed over the next five years to states, based on population. Then state and local officials will decide what to do with it. They can use some of the money to adapt to or prevent climate change—or not. The federal government, in other words, is not always the boss of federal money. If the goal is to reduce climate effects, "it's not a strategic approach," says Beth Osborne, a former DOT official who is now the director of Transportation for America.

Now, the Biden administration is trying to put a light thumb on the scale, for road safety and for the planet. In a memo to staff published Thursday, Federal Highway Administration deputy administrator Stephanie Pollack directed her staff to encourage state and local governments to consider fixing existing roads before building new ones. The agency is urging state officials to consider strengthening non-highways, like service roads or bridges, that are in tough shape. They'll also gently remind state and local officials that climate-friendly projects, like bike lanes and walking paths, need less stringent environmental review than new roads and bridges. The new policy will apply to $350 billion in federal highway funding.

Local officials generally prefer building new stuff, to show off at ribbon cuttings, rather than maintaining old stuff. Want to cut a ribbon soonest? A bike lane might be your best bet, the feds say.

The administration has to ask, rather than require, local governments to prioritize climate change because Congress passed up opportunities to do otherwise while putting together the infrastructure bill. The House version of the legislation, which lawmakers passed in the summer, included provisions that would have forced states accepting funding to fix highways before building new ones or expanding them. It would have required states that produce more greenhouse gas emissions to dedicate more money to reducing them. And it would have forced funding recipients to show how their projects contributed to climate resilience. The Senate nixed all that.

The DOT's gentle, "have you thought about this?" approach to climate-friendly and safe road infrastructure may feel toothless. But states that have experimented with similar approaches say it's helpful. In Colorado, Governor Jared Polis has urged the state DOT to emphasize people-friendly—rather than builder-friendly—infrastructure projects. More than half of the state's transportation money goes toward "state of good repair" projects, like filling potholes, fixing bridges and viaducts, and adding shoulders to rural roads for safety, says Shoshana Lew, executive director of Colorado's DOT. Prioritizing safety and climate effects "forces the conversation to be more rounded," says Lew. "It makes you think really hard about whether the project is worth it, and what the implications will be." As a result of Colorado's approach, she says, an expansion project on Interstate 70 will include a new van shuttle system that could grow bigger with demand.

On Thursday, the Colorado Transportation Commission took the approach a step further, passing a new rule requiring the state DOT and local planning organizations to evaluate transportation projects' possible effects on climate emissions, and divert the money to other places if they're determined to be too high. Some communities have argued they really do need new highways and highway expansions, and they worry the rule will curtail their access to jobs and businesses in places that have long been car-centric.

Back in DC, the Biden administration has found other ways to challenge the country's building impulses. The Federal Highway Administration last week proposed a rule that would create a new way for local planning organizations to

measure and report driving-related greenhouse gas emissions, to help them make better decisions. The agency has also held up a Houston highway expansion as it investigates complaints that the project would disproportionately displace homes and businesses largely owned by Black people. That suggests the administration has managed to spark conversation about the effects of highway construction on the communities that surround them, and on the planet. The question will be whether talk will delay action—and whether it's too late for America's most climate-vulnerable places.

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Aarian Marshall writes about autonomous vehicles, transportation policy, urban planning, and everyone's favorite topic: How to destroy traffic. (You can't, really.) She's an aspiring bike commuter and New Yorker going soft on San Francisco, where she's based. Before WIRED, Marshall wrote for The Atlantic's CityLab, GOOD, and Agri-Pulse, an agriculture... Read more

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