To: Transportation Advisory Committee June 13, 2012

From: Lead Planning Agency (LPA)

Subject: Closing of Pickett Road in Orange County for the Hollow Rock Access Area

---

Summary

The Hollow Rock Access Area Master Plan recommends closing Pickett Road through the park to reduce conflicts between park uses and through vehicle traffic. The Orange County Board of County Commissioners will need to initiate the road closing procedure with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). The Durham City/County Planning staff conducted a meeting for residents in the vicinity of Pickett Road given the road closing impacts on Durham citizens. Approximately 55 people attended, and comments regarding the closing of Pickett Road received at the meeting were mixed. The primary concern of the attendees both in favor and opposed was the need for a traffic signal at the intersection of Randolph and Erwin Roads. City of Durham Transportation subsequently performed a traffic analysis in the area which determined that signal warrants were met at the intersections of Randolph Road and Erwin Road, and Kerley Road and Erwin Road.

The Durham City Council and Board of County Commissioners reviewed this issue and adopted a resolution of support for the road closing at their May 2, 2011 and May 16, 2011, respectively. At their March 9, 2011 meeting, TAC members asked that this issue be brought to the TAC for discussion and a vote at their April 13th meeting. The TCC reviewed this item and recommended that the TAC adopt a resolution in support of closing Pickett Road in Orange County, subject to several stipulations that included a traffic signal being installed at the intersection of Erwin Road and Randolph Road.

The TAC addressed this item at their August 8, 2011 meeting and asked that staff meet with citizens from the area affected by the road closing because several local residents spoke against the closing at that TAC meeting. On May 1, 2012, MPO staff conducted a drop-in meeting for citizens. Over seventy people attended the meeting and a strong majority of the comments opposed the road closing.

Recommendation

Earlier in this process, the Durham City Council and Durham Board of County Commissioners supported the closing of Pickett Road, and the TCC recommended that the TAC support that closing, as well. Since that time, the opinion of citizens who have expressed an opinion on the issue has shifted to oppose the road closing. In addition, there is no guarantee that devices can be installed to mitigate the expected shift of traffic from the unpaved portion of Pickett Road to Randolph Road. There is no funding for a traffic signal at the intersection of Erwin Road and Pickett Road, and traffic calming facilities cannot be installed on Randolph Road because it is a state maintained road.

TCC discussion identified benefits on both sides of this issue. Closing Pickett Road would enhance the user experience of the proposed Hollow Rock Preserve and help protect the investment in that park. On the other hand, keeping the road open would avoid diverting vehicle trips onto Randolph Road where citizens are already experiencing traffic delays and safety issues. The TCC chose to limit the evaluation of the proposed road closing to a transportation perspective using the MPO's Goals and Objectives, and not expand that evaluation to a broader policy view that includes park benefits, for example. As a result, the TCC recommends that the TAC oppose the proposed Pickett Road closing because the closing would reduce roadway connectivity and divert traffic into a residential neighborhood.

Attachments

- 8 – Memorandum
- 8A – Traffic counts and travel time maps, and Hollow Rock map (excerpt from Master Plan)
- 8B – Traffic Analysis Report
- 8C – Durham City Council and Durham BOCC approved resolutions, and MPO proposed resolution (from August 2011 TAC meeting)
- 8D – MPO resolution opposing closing of Pickett Road

Background

The Master Plan for the Hollow Rock Access Area was developed as a partnership between the City of Durham, Durham County, Orange County and the Town of Chapel Hill. The future parkland is bisected by Pickett Road, which the master plan recommended closing in Phase II of the park development to provide better pedestrian connectivity and allow for parking. It is understood that the road will be closed by placing a gate across the road on the Orange County section. Attachment 8A has a one-page map of the Master plan, and the following link is a copy of the Hollow Rock Park Master Plan Final Report:

http://www.rtpnet.org/newhope/preserve/Hollow%20Rock%20Park%20Master%20Plan%20report%20%28Final%209-23-09%29-2.pdf

The section of Pickett Road to be closed is designated as a minor thoroughfare on the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Urban Area Thoroughfare Plan. The DCHC MPO will complete a Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) within the next year that will supersede the 1991 Thoroughfare Plan. The road is currently unpaved west of the Trinity School and no improvements are proposed or funded.

The unpaved portion of Pickett Road, and Erwin Road and Randolph Road are outside the limits of the City of Durham and therefore are state maintained. The NCDOT policy prohibits the installation of traffic calming facilities such as speed humps. The NCDOT does not own the right-of-way for the unpaved section of Picket Road, and so apparently maintains the road through an implied easement.

The portion of Pickett Road proposed for closure is entirely within Orange County. In order to close the road, the State Board of Transportation must vote to remove it from the State system, and a street closing petition must be approved by the Orange County Board of Commissioners. While the street closing is not within Durham's jurisdiction, Orange County has requested that the Durham City Council and Durham County Board of Commissioners adopt resolutions of support to be forwarded to Orange County.

In June of 2010, Durham Planning staff organized and conducted a community meeting to receive public input about the potential closure of Pickett Road. Approximately 55 people attended and comments voiced by the attendees at the meeting itself were generally mixed. The most frequent comment from both supporters and opponents was that a traffic light was needed at the intersection of Erwin Road and Randolph Road. The Durham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) wrote a letter requesting that the road alignment continue to be open to bicycle and pedestrian access in the event of a closing to vehicle traffic.

In the fall of 2010, the City Transportation Department performed a traffic analysis at three intersections in the vicinity of Pickett Road: Erwin Road at Randolph Road, Erwin Road at Kerley Road, and Pickett Road at Randolph Road. The study concluded that the first two intersections already meet signal warrants based on travel delays, regardless of whether or not Pickett Road is closed. The intersection of Pickett Road and Randolph Road does not meet signal warrants in either case. Due to insufficient space, traffic signals cannot be placed at both the Erwin/Randolph and the Erwin/Kerley intersections. As a result, the

study recommends that a roundabout be placed at the Erwin/Kerley intersection instead. Attachment 8B is a copy of the Traffic Report.

The results of this study and the traffic signal warrant information has been forwarded to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). Installation of a traffic signal or roundabout at these intersections would be at the discretion of the NCDOT.

It should be noted that even if Pickett Road is closed, the former roadway will serve as a driveway for Hollow Rock Access Area. Thus, any safety issues at this intersection would continue, but there would likely be reduced exposure because the driveway would attract fewer trips.

The TCC reviewed the proposed Picket Road closing at their March 23rd meeting and had the following issues:

1. Clarity on who receives ownership of ceded right-of-way, and if it is the adjacent property owners, how will bicycle and pedestrian access be maintained on private property.
2. How will automobiles and maintenance vehicles turn around on the closed end of the Durham side?
3. NCDOT has experienced lots of dumping (refrigerators, trash, etc.) at dead end roads. Who will be responsible for clean up?
4. NCDOT might prefer that part of the Durham County portion be closed and that the gate be located further east in the Durham side to reduce the incidence of dumping, i.e., the closely located houses and school will discourage dumping.
5. The park master plan shows vehicular access to the park from both Erwin and Pickett Road. Will the proposed closing of the road provide / allow for what is shown on the master plan?
6. What portion of the unpaved portion of Pickett is actually being proposed to be closed?
7. There are limited connectivity between Erwin Road and Pickett Road in this area. Can the closing be accomplished in such a way that the unpaved section of Pickett would remain available as an emergency connection (for instance, if a tree fell across Randolph Road in a hurricane)?

The TCC recommended closing Pickett Road subject to several contingencies including the installation of a traffic signal at the Erwin Road and Randolph Road intersection. The TAC addressed this item at their August 8, 2011 meeting and asked that staff meet with citizens from the area affected by the road closing because several local residents spoke against the closing at that TAC meeting. After gathering additional data, the MPO staff conducted a drop-in meeting for citizens on May 1, 2012. Over seventy people attended the meeting and a strong majority of the comments were against the road closing.

In the interim, some additional data has been gathered to inform the discussion, including:

- In January 2012, the traffic counts for the roads in the Picket Road area were taken again and the results were similar to those counts from October 2009. Attachment 8A includes the new traffic counts.
- A travel time study was conducted showing that the travel time from Chapel Hill to Trinity School would increase 1 ½ minutes if motorists used Randolph Road instead of the unpaved section of Pickett Road. Attachment 8A presents the findings of the travel time study.
- A crash analysis of the Erwin Road and Pickett Road intersection shows only one crash in the last ten years (2/28/2002 through 2/28/2012), and there were no fatalities or injuries in that crash.

- The Durham Fire Department (DFD) does not believe the road closing will affect their response time, but will affect the mutual aid response received from the New Hope Volunteer Fire Department (VFD).
- The New Hope VFD states that the closure will not pose any real problems but a slight delay in response time.
- The Durham County Sherriff's Department did not see any issue with their emergency response time.
- The NCDOT Division 5 office is aware that the Erwin Road and Kerley Road intersection and the Erwin Road and Randolph Road intersection meet signal warrants but does not currently have a funding source for a traffic signal. The DCHC MPO has eligible funding for traffic signals but the project would have to compete against other MPO priorities and needs.
- The NCDOT recently completed landscaping work at the intersection of Erwin Road and Pickett Road that improved the sight distance for Pickett Road motorists. However, it is fair to say that the sight distance conditions at that intersection are still not ideal.
- The NCDOT does not have any precedent or procedure to delay an approved road closing until some other action is completed such as a traffic signal installation.
- There have been delays in getting Phase I funding commitments for the Hollow Rock Access Area. The master plan recommends that Pickett Road be closed for Phase II.

Issues and Analysis

The closing of Pickett Road could have an impact on Durham residents, particularly those who live on Randolph Road. However, leaving the road open could undermine the public and private investment in the Hollow Rock Access Area.

The City of Durham Comprehensive Plan, chapter 8, calls for a "continuous and comprehensible street network" and the unified development ordinance rates new developments on a connectivity ratio. The proposed street closing runs counter to the connectivity objectives of the Plan.

The subject section of Pickett Road had 610 daily trips in 2012, compared to 4,082 on Randolph Road. It is reasonable to assume that many of the Pickett Road trips would be diverted to Randolph Road, as the closest alternative route, and Randolph Road has enough excess capacity to handle these trips. However, many local residents state that the long queues at the Erwin Road and Pickett Road intersections pose a safety hazard and the intersection study shows that the Erwin Road intersection meets warrants for a traffic signal based on traffic delays. The diverted traffic would exacerbate the existing intersection delays.

The provision of a traffic signal at the intersection of Randolph Road and Erwin Road would address present circulation problems at that location and could help alleviate the impacts of the additional traffic. While a roundabout is warranted by current conditions at the intersection of Kerley Road and Erwin Road, that location would be less impacted by the closure of Pickett Road and could be cost prohibitive. The NCDOT does not currently have funding to install the traffic signal and there doesn't appear to be a mechanism to guarantee the installation of a signal if Pickett Road is closed.

In June 2010, the Durham City/County Planning Department conducted a community meeting and opinions were mixed on the proposed road closing. At the MPO community meeting in May 2012, opinion had decidedly shifted and a strong majority of participants opposed the proposed closing.

At the May 2012 TCC meeting, some members believed that taking a position on the road closing was not an MPO matter because it involved broad policy issues that were seemingly outside the realm of the

MPO, i.e., weighing the park benefits of eliminating cut through traffic and of creating roadside parking against the costs of diverting traffic to the Randolph Road neighborhood. There was a consensus that if the MPO is to take a position, then consideration should be limited to transportation technical matters.

The TCC also discussed the possibility of not closing Pickett Road and having Orange County, or another entity, take over road maintenance from the NCDOT. This maintenance change would allow traffic calming measures to be installed on the unpaved portion of Pickett Road to support safety for park users.

If Pickett Road is closed, the TCC believes that the MPO should recommend that the Orange Board of County Commissioners not begin the road closing process until a traffic signal is installed at the Erwin Road and Randolph Road intersection. The MPO and NCDOT will want to ensure that private vehicles have an adequate facility for turning around at the end of the state maintained section of the roadway, and that official vehicles can pass through in case of an emergency. In addition, the MPO will want to ensure that bicyclists and pedestrians are able to go around the gate and continue using the road alignment for through access.