Transportation Task Force
1/9/08 Meeting
Minutes

Members Present:

Randy Kincaid, Chairman	Karen Floyd, Secretary	Mayor Swain, Huntersville
Mitch Abraham	Chris Ahearn	Mayor Tarte, Cornelius
Jim Bensman	Carroll Gray	Mayor Woods, Davidson
Brian Jenest	Charlie Jeter	
Andrew Grant, Ex. Director		

Widening I-77 – Bill Coxe, Town of Huntersville

Mr. Coxe gave a summary on the creation of I-77 *(Attachment 1)*. Roadway planning is a 20-25 year forecast and in 1990, it was projected that by 2010 there would be a need for 8 lanes on I-77. The Interstate links Charlotte to Ohio. The NCTIP (Transportation Improvement Plan) is the State's seven year document which programs the transportation money. In 1996, the NCTIP included project I-3311 to widen I-77 from I-85 to I-485 and then in 1998, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act added an earmark to widen I-77 from I-85 to Sam Furr Road with a total cost estimate of approximately $83M. Congress directs the funding of an earmark to the State on how the funding will be spent. When the Environmental Assessment document was created, it called for 8 lanes on I-77 from I-85 to I-485 and 6 lanes up to Hwy. 73 (Sam Furr Road) with a cost estimate of over $100M. TIP's are updated every two years. In 2001, another TIP was created to convert Langtree Road bridge (Exit 33) into an interchange and widen Brawley School Road with an I-77 interchange. The widening of I-77 from I-85 to I-485 was completed in 2005 and the northbound general purpose lane from I-485 to Exit 23 was completed in 2006.

Interest was sparked by the Governor and Secretary of Transportation on the use of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, which provides travel by more people without changing the vehicle capacity. A Categorical Exclusion (CE) environmental document was done to support taking two inside median general purpose lanes and converting them to HOV lanes along with modifications at the I-85 interchange to allow for a southbound HOV bypass.

The following are eight specific TIP projects, descriptions, and cost estimates associated:

TIP Project #	Project Description	Cost Estimate
I-3311A	Widen I-77 from I-85 to I-485	$68,200,000
I-3311B	Widen I-77 from I-485 to NC73	$33,700,000
I-3311C	NB/SB I-77 HOV lanes from NC 16 to 5th Street	$29,000,000
I-3311D	I-77 NB general purpose lane from I-485 to Exit 23	$ 5,995,000
I-3311E	Widen I-77 from I-85 to Brookshire Freeway	$16,000,000
I-4410	Upgrade Exit 33	
I-4733	Rebuild Exit 28	$33,500,000
I-4750	Widen I-77 from NC73 to I-40	$525,800,000

DRAFT

A feasibility study known as "Fast Lanes" includes I-77. More information can be found at www.fastlanes.org. *The study will determine the technical, financial and institutional feasibility of dedicating lanes on major highways in the Charlotte region for active traffic management.* It is expected to be completed by summer 2008.

Mr. Coxe provided a traffic count comparison shown between I-77 interchanges. The LRTP has anticipation for funding of widening I77.

Average Daily Traffic Counts								
I-77 Interchanges	**1990**	**1992**	**1994**	**1997**	**2000**	**2002**	**2004**	**2006**
Exit 23 and Exit 28	43,700	52,700						
Exit 23 and Exit 25 (new)			59,500	81,000	80,000	81,000	86,000	88,000
Exit 25 and Exit 28			56,700	76,500	77,000	77,000	82,000	87,000
Exit 28 and Exit 30	47,100	51,900	56,200	74,800	79,000	79,000	85,000	91,000
Exit 30 and Exit 33	43,200	No info	51,500	68,900	73,000	73,000	77,000	84,000
Exit 33 and Exit 36	No info	No info	No info	No info	53,000	53,000	57,000	60,000
Exit 36 – North	No info	No info	No info	No info	48,000	48,000	46,000	53,000

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) anticipates funding for the widening of I-77. A study was conducted called the I-77 Sub Area Study (I-85 to NC150).

The study recommended the following:

- 4 general purpose lanes in each direction,
- 2 HOV lanes located in the center of I-77,
- the shoulders to be strengthened in order to operate buses on them,
- no additional general purpose interchanges other than those listed in the 2002 TIP,
- add interchanges for bus connection in and out of HOV lanes for buses,
- land metering
- necessity for transit in the corridor (rail and bus),
- creating land use patterns is important

There has been suggestion of using the shoulder lanes of I-77 and I-485 during peak hours, however, more research needs to occur and an environmental document would need to be done if it's feasible. This concept would help for a short period of time at minimal cost. Ultimately it comes down to funding and the States seven year programming document (NCTIP) states how the money is intended to be spent.

The widening of I-77 is a must long term and the further apart the interchanges the better for traffic management. Mayor Swain stated that during the air quality meeting the group learned that the balance of traffic congestion and vehicle speed affects air quality. Mr. Coxe confirmed that the optimum speed is between 40-45mph.

Mr. Coxe explained that by utilizing the HOV lanes, it teaches people to change their behavior. There are several ways to manage the HOV lanes in order to keep it at a certain capacity; time restraints, vehicle occupancy limits, and pricing. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the user has a consistent experience when using the HOV lanes. Mayor Swain asked if our region is beneath capacity in the HOV

DRAFT

lane. Mr. Coxe stated the HOV lane capacity is below but it's alright as it ensures the stability of that lane.

Mr. Coxe explained that optimizing an interchange is critical. The Town of Huntersville is going to study the reconfiguration of Exit 25 to better optimize the interchange. In the Sub Area Plan it recommends ramp metering which uses a signal at the end of the ramp and main line sensors that monitor traffic gaps that help the main line operate.

Mr. Coxe stated that another option to promote transit is to have bus lanes that do not directly compete with traffic by creating ramps in/out of the HOV lanes up to existing bridges specifically designed for buses and emergency access vehicles.

Mayor Kincaid summarized with Mr. Coxe that by adding one lane in each direction, morning rush hour traffic on I-77 could handle an additional 2,000 cars per hour at a cost estimate of $54M or $37M without HOV lanes. To widen from Exit 25 to 33 the cost estimate would $143M. Mr. Coxe explained that cost estimate was a rough estimate at best as there is no cost associated with crossing the lake. Mayor Tarte asked if all 8 lanes would be done over the lake or if just portions. Mr. Coxe stated that part of the planning process has not yet been done.

Mr. Coxe was asked by Mayor Tarte and Mr. Grant to explain how a TIP is changed, how a congressional earmarks works, as well as, how MUMPO-Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization and integrates with the Towns. Mr. Coxe explained that federal law states that if a metropolitan center city has a population of 50,000 or more must establish a Transportation Advisory Committee or Metropolitan Planning Organization in order to receive any federal money. MPO's under federal law have two powers; 1-can tell the State no on spending federal money on State projects, 2-control over MPO direct allocation money, of which the State can say yes or no to. A long range transportation plan has to be adopted and updated. In the LTRP, the MPO is required to produce developed forecasts for the future based on population, revenue, projects. A project list is adopted, updated every two years, and then sent to the State as the "wish list". The bottom line is that the State and the MPO have to collaborate because it is required by the Federal Government.

Mr. Gray asked about the State's equity formula for projects. Mr. Coxe explained that the formula used for distribution has a good and bad side. The good side is that every two years there will be money allocated. The bad news is that the formula is not thought to be equitable.

The TIP is adopted by the Board of Transportation every two years but can be amended at any point. The MPO must agree with TIP. The reality of a congressional earmark is that there is no new money and the MPO then has a tough decision to make by deciding what project has money taken away. An earmark by congress is project specific and it does not allow for the money to be spent any other way. The MPO can override the congressional earmark but those amounts will the come off the top of the State allocation funded by the Federal Government.

Mr. Bensman asked how much money is allocated to our region per year. Mr. Coxe stated approximately $60M but Mr. Jenest clarified it to be $90M.

Mr. Bensman asked why the MPO is opposed to the interchange at Westmoreland. Mr. Coxe stated that the MPO had not specified its position for that interchange and the LRTP has a list of 200 plus projects. The MPO ranked that project last but the Town Board requested it be placed in the LRTP.

DRAFT

Mr. Jenest stated that North Mecklenburg has very few votes compared to Charlotte. Mr. Jeter asked how the MUMPO votes are calculated. Mr. Coxe explained that the calculation is based on population, small towns get 1 vote (Cornelius, Davidson), Huntersville has 2 votes, Mecklenburg County has 6, and Charlotte has 16. Mr. Jeter then asked if there was anything prohibits the towns from raising their own money to fund road improvements. Mr. Coxe stated that the MPO can keep a project of regional significance from being constructed regardless of the funding. Mr. Coxe stated that the MPO dictates funding sources; however, the State Board of Transportation can pick any project listed to be added to the TIP. The TIP list can be found on the NCDOT website www.ncdot.gov link Projects and Studies – Division 10. Ms. Ahearn asked when Mooresville would have the next opportunity to participate in MUMPO. Mr. Coxe stated the year 2010.

Mayor Woods asked if the widening of I-77 should be considered high priority due to heavy congestion and lack of money. Mr. Coxe stated said "no". Mayor Tarte stated that in a questionnaire he posed for the Planning Workshop, the top two questionnaire answers were; to secure additional funding from NCDOT and widen I-77. Mayor Swain stated that spending everything on the widening of I-77 it will not solve the community traffic issues. One cannot be done without fixing the other.

Mr. Bensman suggested the towns put together a long range infrastructure plan that will have the most impact. Create a map to show what can be done together and what should be done to get the biggest result.

Mr. Grant suggested that improvements made to the surrounding corridors (ex. NC73, NC16, NC150) could create a workable network when grid lock occurs on I-77.

Mayor Kincaid stated time was up and the meeting was adjourned.

Adjournment
6:54PM

DRAFT