Transportation Task Force
2/20/08 Meeting
Minutes

Members Present:

Jim Bensman	Charlie Jeter	Mayor John Woods
Andrew Grant	Mitch Abraham	Mayor Jill Swain
Brian Jenest	Gary Knox	
Chris Ahearn	Lawrence Kimbrough	
Mitch Abraham		

<u>Accidents on I-77 – four towns Police Chiefs</u>

Cornelius Police Chief Bence Hoyle explained that in March 2007 the Police Chiefs for Huntersville, Cornelius and Davidson began meeting for the purpose to identify mutual issues and possible solutions that would assist the communities individually and jointly in an effort to mitigate surface traffic when a collision occurs on I-77. Several meetings were held in an attempt to improve communication between the towns and other agencies and each of the chiefs were assigned a different component of the integrated traffic mitigation program.

Early on it was determined that there was need for a governing body to address the issues of traffic volume, land use/planning, and future NCDOT road improvements that the police departments have no control of.

A play book has been created that can be used to mitigate surface traffic depending on the location of a traffic accident on I-77 and its duration.

Chief Hoyle's was assigned communication issues between agencies and has implemented a process of dispatching an officer to any traffic congested scene, evaluate the congestion, and alert the other agencies that might be affected including Mooresville and Iredell County.

Davidson Police Chief Jeanne Miller explained that her component was to identify specific traffic scenarios and create a response effort "play book". The ability to respond is driven by community roads and the ability to connect. Using Exit 25 in Huntersville as an example, HPD would need 8-10 officers in order to manually control the intersection and during rush hour and/or gridlock a rotating shift would be necessary. The NCDOT play book was also reviewed to ensure that the detour information was accurately broadcasted to the public.

Although the four towns are connected and assumed to be one region the boundary line of Mecklenburg County and Iredell county are looked at as two separate districts by NCDOT and SHP (State Highway Patrol) which adds an additional layer of confusion and communication. The governmental entities need to collectively work together to re-evaluate the county line issues.

Mr. Kimbrough asked if the play book identifies an evacuation plan in event of a natural disaster. Creating a regional plan with legal jurisdiction may capture the attention of NCDOT and SHP when referring to the county lines issue. Chief Miller stated that they have not got to that point.

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Huntersville Police Chief Phil Potter explained that Huntersville PD did a pilot project that placed traffic units on the interstate. Although traffic seemed to slow down and there were no reported accidents during the project, some tax payers question the use of tax dollars on the interstate.

There are traffic grants available for full time officers dedicated to traffic and vehicles; however, grants for overtime on speed enforcement projects do not exist. Chief Potter suggested that political leadership assist the police departments with trying to obtain grant money for speed enforcement projects.

Mr. Jeter asked if HPD can issue tickets on the interstate. Chief Potter stated that citations can be issued within the town's jurisdiction and one mile beyond. During the pilot program approximately 40-50 citations were issued a month with speeds in excess of 85mph.

The Highway Patrol district headquarters for the area is located in Monroe; however, the new DMV office be built in Huntersville could be an opportunity for a new Highway Patrol post which would help increase their presence and visibility.

Mayor Swain asked if there were other alternatives to deter speeding (i.e. dummies in patrol cars, automated speed signs). Chief Potter stated that there are alternatives that do have an impact. Chief Miller stated that doubling the fine amount would also have an impact.

The focus for State Troopers has changed from interstate policing to community policing of secondary roads according to additional meetings that were held but could not be verified. Chief Potter stated that if that was in fact the case, then it was time to ask for additional help on the interstates. Mayor Knox stated that secondary roads that carry 3,500 cars a day have more Highway Patrol coverage because in rural counties they are the 911 responders.

Chief Potter stated that there has been discussion of having a cooperative enforcement schedule on I-77 to create a constant police presence between Exits 23 and 36. Mr. Jeter asked if the departments would cross jurisdictions. Chief Hoyle explained that each department would work the stretch of the interstate with in the town's jurisdiction. Chief Miller stated that it is important for the elected officials to acknowledge that the effort spent on the interstate is also working to keep the local town roads free of congestion.

Mayor Knox asked who would patrol the interstate between Exits 32 and 36.

Mooresville Police Chief John Crone explained that Mooresville does patrol that area. The most important issue is that the four towns will now have police presence within the 13 mile stretch of interstate that connects them. Chief Crone stated that he is a member of the Governor's Highway Safety Project Executive Committee. The committee was responsible for the installation of the median strip barricades that prevent cross over head on collisions; however, the barricades have eliminated the ability to use radar from the opposite direction.

The Town of Mooresville added seven new officers in 2007. The Highway Patrol added seven new officers in 2007 which is the same amount of new officers as Mooresville but the new highway patrol officers were hired for the entire State of North Carolina.

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Mayor Knox explained that two years ago the Safety Division of NCDOT was asked to do an assessment on the phenomena of traffic backups between Exits 18 and 36 but the assessment report has never been seen. Chief Miller stated that she had requested accident data from NCDOT between the exits and has not received it as well.

Mr. Bensman stated that the Chiefs needed to present a collaborative police project during the budget phase. Alternate routes should be thought through and properly posted in an effort to minimize the traffic congestion. Chief Hoyle stated that directing traffic is a key factor but it has not been perfected.

Chief Hoyle explained that accident prevention is the most important but in the event of an accident, quick clearance is critical. The I-95 Corridor Coalition Quick Clearance Committee did a federal study on how to clear an accident scene. The four towns are working together to localize the information and implement a process. The response group involves police, fire, medic, media, and the wrecker service. The categories of detection, verification, clean-up, and communication are being defined under each response group. The difficulty of defining the categories is the governing policies of each response group. Political support will be needed to iron out some defining issues.

Chief Miller explained that when considering the extension of smart signs from Exit 18 going north the cost per mile was projected to be in the millions because of the cost of running the fiber. Mr. Abraham stated that the fiber optics may already exist because of Time Warner and suggested working some type of deal with them.

Mayor Knox asked where the CLEAR training was done and if CPCC North Campus could handle facilitating the training. Chief Crone stated that cooperation and training needs to be done. Mayor Swain suggested contacting Beverly Dickson about the possibilities that CPCC might add and then hold a workshop involving all emergency entities. Chief Miller reminded everyone of the two counties and the cooperation at the county level that is also needed.

Mr. Bensman asked that the chiefs create a list of things needed by governing agencies (i.e. NCDOT, Highway Patrol) in order to gain support for funding.

Representative Thom Tillis suggested that the police define the "what" and the committee define the "how". He asked what the typical time line was for debris removal versus incident reporting. Chief Miller stated that the wrecker service generally cleans up the scene. Chief Crone stated that it usually takes about 30 minutes to clear the scene of glass and load up the vehicles. Rep. Tillis suggested following a procedure used in Florida where the wrecker service is paid with a tiered bonus plan passed by legislation. Mr. Jeter asked that the list be prioritized by importance. Mr. Grant suggested the list be compiled by March 5th.

Rep. Tillis stressed the importance of creating a list but encouraged that all emergency entities be recognized as stake holders and reconciling the different lists (i.e. Police, Fire, EMS, and State Police).

Mr. Kimbrough asked if reducing the speed limit to 55mph on I-77 from Exit 36 into Charlotte would reduce traffic accidents. Chief Miller stated that the lower speed limit would allow drivers more reaction time. Mr. Kimbrough asked who regulates the speed limit for the interstate. Chief Miller stated that it was either NCDOT or the State Federal Highway. Mr. Bensman stated that unless the speed limit is enforced it does not matter what the speed limit is. Mayor Woods stated that the region is now

more urban than the section of Statesville section that is 55mph and suggested that the speed limit be 55mph from I-40 through to Charlotte and the speed limit should be enforced.

Adjournment
6:43PM

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