



TOWN OF CARRBORO

NORTH CAROLINA

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To: **DCHC MPO Board**

From: **Alderman Damon Seils and Mayor Lydia Lavelle,
MPO Board representatives from the Town of Carrboro**

Date: **August 12, 2015**

Subject: **Project H140374 - Proposed Improvements to NC 54 West**

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify the Town of Carrboro's position with regard to Project H140374 and to voice our support for an alternative way forward.

The proposal to widen NC 54 from the existing two-lane corridor to a four-lane median-divided roadway between Orange Grove Road and Old Fayetteville Road appears to rely primarily on an anticipated need for increased capacity from Alamance County into and out of southwest Orange County during peak hours. We understand the need for a data-driven process per the Strategic Transportation Investments Law and the likelihood that the NC 54 corridor will experience greater average daily traffic by 2040, despite relatively flat increases over the last several years. However, the lack of a detailed description of the conditions that led to the identification of a multilane section as a transportation improvement indicates that more work is needed to understand the best design for this important corridor. Without further analysis of travel choices affecting this route and, perhaps more important, the creation of travel mode choices, we believe the assumption that a four-lane divided roadway is the best design for NC 54 in this location is premature.

The Town of Carrboro urgently seeks to remove Project H140374 from SPOT 4.0 ranking at this time and from any similar list of projects, including one generated by the neighboring RPO, and to instead pursue a corridor study to address the following questions:

1. How would a four-lane median-divided roadway in this location align with NCDOT's and the Town of Carrboro's commitment to Complete Streets? How would bicyclists and pedestrians be accommodated?
2. What are and will be the origins and destinations of trips along the corridor?
3. What is the estimated number of new employees of UNC Chapel Hill and UNC Hospitals and of other existing, proposed, and expanded uses? Will parking be provided on-site at those destinations, or will travelers be expected to use park-and-ride lots to travel into and get around the downtown areas?
4. How will proposed transit service improvements along the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard portion of the North-South Corridor in Chapel Hill affect commuters traveling to UNC Chapel Hill

or UNC Hospitals from the west? Will these travelers be more likely to use the I-40 corridor rather than NC 54 to reach planned park-and-ride lots?

5. What proportion of UNC Hospital's employees who live in Alamance or western Orange Counties will commute to the UNC Health Care Hillsborough Campus rather than the main facility in Chapel Hill?
6. Likewise, will travelers heading east toward Raleigh/Durham use the I-40 corridor rather than the NC 54 corridor?

In addition to these questions, contextual information about the significant and longstanding historical, planning, and transportation-alternative interests in the area provides support for the need to study how best to maintain and improve mobility and access along NC 54. For example, the proposed widening is inconsistent with the Town of Carrboro's land use planning, including efforts to protect the University Lake and Cane Creek watersheds and associated low-density residential development, a multijurisdictional effort that involved Orange County and the Town of Chapel Hill. The Town of Carrboro's policies also establish that roads may be widened to accommodate bike lanes and sidewalks but not to provide additional lanes for automobiles. Moreover, in August 2014, the MPO Board unanimously agreed to not accept a donation of points for the scoring of Project H140374, given uncertainties about the appropriate scope of the project.

The Town of Carrboro's most active recreation facility, Hank Anderson III Community Park, is located on NC 54 within easy cycling distance of downtown and is an existing bicycle/pedestrian destination. Rural Orange County is a popular area for recreational cycling, and with communities such as Saxapahaw becoming increasingly popular destinations, the NC 54 corridor will remain an important route for cyclists. Will the proposed four-lane median-divided roadway support these uses? A different type of transportation improvement could increase cycling for commuting as well as recreation. The widening would likely also impact The Oaks National Register study list district and the Bingham School Inn, a National Register property and Local Landmark.

We believe it is premature to push Project H140374 through the scoring process without an analysis of these factors, which would speak to context and the appropriate design of road improvements. Therefore, the Town of Carrboro requests that the MPO Board support removal of Project H140374 from consideration of formal scoring until a corridor study is completed and that the MPO Board forward this request to the neighboring RPO and NCDOT.

