



Legislation Text

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TITLE:

Consultant Presentation on the NC 54 West Corridor Study

PURPOSE: The purpose of this agenda item is to receive a second presentation on the NC 54 West Corridor Study with additional information regarding the origins and destinations of existing and proposed trips, and related analysis.

DEPARTMENT: Planning

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INFORMATION: The purpose of this item is for the Board of Aldermen to receive a presentation from VHB the consultants engaged by the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) to conduct the NC 54 West Corridor Study, and to gain a better understanding of the findings and recommendations from the study and how they may be used to inform potential improvements within the corridor. A project website developed by VHB may be found at <http://www.nc54west.com/>.

Background

In the fall of 2013, Orange County submitted a prioritized list of projects to both DCHC MPO and TARPO (Triangle Area Rural Planning Area) for P3.0, which included a project to widen NC 54 from Orange Grove Road to Old Fayetteville Road from a two-lane undivided cross section to a four-lane divided cross section. The DCHC MPO chose not to put points on the project, due in part to Carrboro's lack of support for it. On a parallel track, NCDOT submitted a project to continue the widening of NC 54 from Orange Grove Road to NC 119 in Alamance County. While neither project was included in the 2016-2025 STIP, the corridor was identified as a Division 7 priority. In 2015, as part of the prioritization process for P4.0, Carrboro Board liaisons to the DCHC MPO Board submitted a memo clarifying the Town's position regarding the widening and requesting a corridor study be completed first to determine the purpose and need for the project (*Attachment B*). In the interim, the Town and County agreed to submit a series of intersection projects to address operational improvements as part of P4.0, at Old Fayetteville Road, Neville Road, Dodson's Crossroads and Orange Grove Road. The operational improvements were included in the 2018-2027 STIP as a single project for construction in FY2022, except for the intersection at Old Fayetteville Road which was placed in the developmental program with a target construction date of FY 2026, and subject to reprioritization for P5.0. Construction of the intersection improvements is not yet complete, so no determination has been made as to whether such improvements would be sufficient to address the left turn safety concerns identified in the corridor study.

On October 16, 2018, the Board received a presentation on the corridor study and associated report from Don Bryson, with VHB Consultants. (Agenda materials may be found here:

<https://carrboro.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3701785&GUID=4139DFC8-9A96-478E-9649-0BE3DDA1442B&Options=ID|Text|&Search=nc+54+west>.) As this initial report did not fully address the

questions in the 2015 memo, the consultants completed additional analysis, identified as Phase 2, to provide a better understanding of the existing and projected use of the corridor. A timeline describing the events which led to the Phase 2 Study and the next steps as they relate to implementation of the proposed widening project has been provided (*Attachment C*). The memo and figures which have been created by VHB for the Phase 2 study have been provided (*Attachments E and F*). A staff report has been prepared to facilitate the Board's review of the materials, assessing the underlying assumptions of the traffic forecast and identifying the extent to which this second phase of the corridor study addresses the points in the memo as well as the underlying question of the purpose and need for the project (*Attachment D*).

The updated Complete Streets policy allows for bike and pedestrian infrastructure in existing plans to be paid for, including right-of-way acquisition when needed, if part of a highway project. The NC 54 West Corridor Study may be able to be considered a plan for the purposes of the Complete Streets policy, FAQs are pending from NCDOT staff. NCDOT has continued to move forward with the project-widening NC 54 from Old Fayetteville to NC 119, and work on initial feasibility studies, one with and one without a sidepath are underway. Long-term maintenance for the side path would be the responsibility of the local jurisdictions, regardless of the initial construction costs. NCDOT has also begun NEPA studies.

VHB has also been engaged to conduct a safety study of NC 54 from Old Fayetteville Road east to South Columbia Street. While the two projects have been scoped separately, the use of a single consultant provides an opportunity to examine the interrelationship of the two studies. For example, the induced demand from widening NC 54 West would likely have a negative effect on proposed bike-ped improvements to the east, particularly on new infrastructure designed to facilitate crossings. This is an area where both projects may benefit from more analysis.

The additional analysis prepared in the second phase of the NC 54 West Corridor study provides more information relating to Town's initial questions but it does not get to the underlying question of why such a substantial project, bringing considerable impervious surface into a watershed area designated for low-density, non-commercial development, is warranted for an increase of approximately 2000 daily trips (which can be attributed to the widening) by 2045.

A resolution has been provided for the Board to receive the presentation and associated report. The Board may wish to request that work on the study continue until such time that all of the questions are sufficiently answered.

Four additional meetings on the NC 54 West Corridor Study have been scheduled.

- Public Drop-in Information Session at Carrboro Town Hall - October 24, 2019
- Town of Chapel Hill Town Council - October 30, 2019
- Orange County Board of County Commissioners - November 7, 2019
- DCHC MPO Board - November 13, 2019.

It is anticipated that the MPO Board will take action on the study at the November 13th meeting.

FISCAL & STAFF IMPACT: There is no impact associated with receiving the presentation and report; however, there are potential future fiscal impacts depending on the outcomes of the study and its adoption, proposals for improvements to the NC Hwy 54 corridor and selected cross section for moving forward, particularly with regard to the costs for construction and maintenance of a sidepath should that aspect of the project move forward.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Board of Aldermen consider the attached resolution (*Attachment A*), receiving the presentation and providing comments for submittal to the MPO Board or others.