

**GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY
POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Monday, October 16, 2023, 10:30 AM Meeting
Ocean Isle Beach Town Hall**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Hon. Bob Hellyer, Surfside Beach
Mr. Louis Morant [Mr. Bob Anderson]
Mr. Tony Cox, SCDOT Commissioner
Mr. Gary Loftus, Horry County
Rep. Lee Hewitt (Chairman)
Mr. Randall Thompson, Brunswick Co.
Hon. Debbie Smith Ocean Isle Beach
Hon. Dave Bounviri, Briarcliffe Acres
Hon. Barbara Jo Blain-Bellamy, Conway
Hon. Marilyn Hatley, North Myrtle Beach
Mr. Michael Chestnut [Ms. Janet Curry]
Hon. Brenda Bethune [Ms. Kelly Mezzapelle]
Mr. Johnny Gardner [Mr. Tyler Servant] (Vice
Chair)
Ms. Machael Peterson [Mr. Lyle Lee]
Rep. Tim McGinnis
Hon. Carol Jayroe [Sandra Yudice]
Mr. Marvin Keene [Darrell Eickhoff]

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Ms. Sarah Smith

STUDY TEAM/TCC MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Stacey Johnson, SCDOT
Mr. Mark Hoeweler
Ms. Holly Richardson
Mr. Chad Kimes, NCDOT
Mr. Kevin Blayton
Mr. Andy Markunas
Ms. Holly Richardson
Mr. Orlando Arteaga
Mr. Steve Gosnell
Mr. Adam Emrick
Mr. Scott Whittier
Mr. Justin Whiteside
Mr. Behshad Norowzi

Ms. Helen Bunch
Mr. Robert Waring
Mr. Bill Marley, FHWA
Ms. Caitlin Melvin, NCDOT
Ms. Elizabeth Tucker
Ms. Chelsea Cogliano
Mr. Tom Dobrydney
Mr. Preston Janco
Mr. Brian Piascik

OTHERS PRESENT

Mr. Jason Thompson
Mr. Charles Swenson
Mr. Clay Swenson
Ms. Jenny Humphreys
Mr. Mason Herndon, NCDOT
Mr. Charles Suggs
Mr. Al Jordan
Mr. Peter Gaytan

Adoption of the Agenda

Chairman Lee Hewitt called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM. It was noted that a quorum was present.

Chairman Hewitt called for a vote to adopt the meeting agenda with the removal of Section VI, Item A. **All members present voted in favor.**

Adoption of Minutes from July 28, 2023

The minutes from the July 28, 2023, GSATS Policy Committee meeting were presented for approval. Chairman Hewitt called for a vote to approve the minutes. **Mr. Bob Anderson moved to approve the minutes. Hon. Debbie Smith seconded. All members present voted in favor.**

Public Comment

Chairman Hewitt asked if there were any members of the public who signed up to address the committee during the public comment portion of the meeting. There were no members of the public who provided comments.

Projects Update (SCDOT)

Mr. Stacey Johnson, Assistant Program Manager with SCDOT, provided an update on the status of current and upcoming projects in the region. Of particular note are the following:

- **US 501 Southbound Widening** is wrapping up. The final surface of asphalt will be placed soon.
- **Tournament Blvd and McDowell Shortcut** is underway. Clearing and grubbing is currently taking place.
- **Riverwood Dr. and North Kings Hwy, Georgetown County** will let to construction in early 2024.
- **501 Corridor Widening from Gardner Lacy/Myrtle Ridge to SC 544** will let to construction in November 2023.
- **Murrells Inlet 2020 Sidewalk Path** will let to construction in November 2023
- **US 501 Realignment** will let to construction in early 2024.
- **US 701 Widening from 319 to SC-22** will let to construction in early 2024.
- Actively pursuing right-of-way acquisition on **US-17 Business intersections** projects in Garden City/Murrells Inlet.
- Actively pursuing right-of-way acquisition on the **Conway Perimeter** project and **Forestbrook Road Widening** project.
- **SC-9 in Loris, US 701 in Loris, and Fred Nash Blvd** are all currently under construction.

Chairman Hewitt asked the Committee if there were any questions for Mr. Johnson. Mr. Cox asked when the Fred Nash project would be complete. Mr. Johnson replied that it was expected to be completed by October 16, 2025. Mr. Cox asked when the Loris projects were expected to be completed. Mr. Johnson replied that SC-9 and US-701 were both expected to be completed on June 30, 2025.

Projects Update (NCDOT)

Chairman Hewitt invited Ms. Michelle Howes to present an update of NCDOT projects. Ms. Howes, the Corridor Development Engineer at NCDOT's Division 3 office, introduced herself and gave an update on the following projects:

- **Converting intersections to superstreets (RCIs) along US 17** is in the development phase. The scheduled let to construction date is July 15, 2025.
- The **intersection improvements along US 17, at Pea Landing and Thomasboro, and Hickman Road** are under construction. These projects are expected to be complete by the end of October 2023.
- The **bridge replacement over Caw Caw Swamp on SR 1300 (Ash-Little River Rd.)** is under construction. The structure, guard rail and final pavement were completed the first week of October 2023. All outstanding elements were completed by October 10, 2023, except for the pavement markings. The pavement marking subcontractor was scheduled to be on site October 16, 2023. Once complete, the road will be open to traffic.
- **US 17 from Red Bug Rd. to Royal Oak Road, North of Shallotte** is under construction. Signal pole foundation work, signage, and tubular markers at Royal Oak intersection are complete. The median island and storm drains at Red Bug are complete. The mast arm lead time may delay the completion date.
- **Realigning the intersection at NC 130 at Longwood Rd. and Waccamaw School Rd.** is under construction. The utility pre-construction meeting has been held and the work is scheduled to start mid-October 2023 with an estimated completion date of Spring 2024.
- The **Calabash Bridge Replacement** is under construction. Water and sewer borings, utility tie ins, clearing, and crane mobilization are complete. There is an all or nothing, \$750,000 incentive for the contractor to be complete by May 1, 2025.
- Survey work began in early October 2023 for the **Holden Beach Bike Lanes** project. Actual construction is to begin early December 2023, starting with grading and drainage structures. The main asphalt work associated with widening the bike lanes and for the overlay will begin in Spring 2024. The estimated completion date is May 27, 2024.
- The preconstruction meeting for the **Shallotte Rest Area Renovation** is set for October 26, 2023, with an estimated completion date by the Spring (2024).
- Punch list items remain for the **16 Sections of Secondary Roads** resurfacing contract. The next contract is set to begin once the first contract is completed.

MTP Adoption

Mr. Mark Hoeweler thanked everyone involved with the MTP planning process. Mr. Hoeweler gave a brief introduction of what a Metropolitan Transportation Plan consists of and explained

that this document needed to be approved by November 3rd to stay in compliance with FHWA. Mr. Hoeweler invited Ms. Jenny Humphreys with CDM Smith to conduct the MTP Presentation.

Ms. Humphreys introduced herself and then presented a slideshow. Ms. Humphreys gave an overview of the document and displayed the Appendices of the Plan to show the type of content within the Plan. Ms. Humphreys then gave an overview of the public involvement process and explained who was involved. She gave a summary of the Public Input Meeting #2 which consisted of 4 in-person meetings, a virtual meeting, and options to provide comments either through the mail or online. There were 40 total comments on the draft of the Plan. Ms. Humphreys gave a summary of the MTP comments that were received which included comments from SCDOT, FHWA-SC, NCDOT, Georgetown County, City of Myrtle Beach, GSATS Team, Atlantic Beach Town Council, and Brunswick County. Modifications of the project list included a few projects to be added from the City of Myrtle Beach and one project that was removed from Atlantic Beach. Ms. Humphreys then went on to explain the Congestion Management Process (CMP). She explained this is a sister document to the MTP. She explained that the goals and performance measures of the MTP are also folded into the CMP so they will align, which should streamline the approval of this document. Ms. Humphreys explained that the purpose of the CMP is to identify traffic corridors of significance to a region where congestion issues are recognized. She said the CMP will maintain a map of critical segments, estimate the observed and forecasted conditions on the corridors, and recommend performance measures to ensure mitigation of growth and improvement in those locations identified. Ms. Humphreys explained that the MTP and the CMP align with one another, and they should be complete within the next few weeks. The CMP will be submitted within the coming weeks.

Chairman Hewitt asked the Policy Committee if they had any questions for Ms. Humphreys. Mr. Cox asked what project from Atlantic Beach was removed from the projects in the MTP. Ms. Humphreys replied that it was an unpaved alley near their Town Hall and that the Town requested it to be removed from the list.

Chairman Hewitt called for a vote to adopt the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. **Mr. Bob Anderson moved to adopt the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Hon. Debbie Smith seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor.**

TIP Update

Mr. Hoeweler gave an introduction of what a TIP consists of. Item A was removed from the discussion with the adoption of the agenda. Mr. Hoeweler gave an update on the TIP. The following summary for each Item is listed below.

- b) **SC 22 Extension:** SC 22 Extension project is the new name for the Southern Evacuation Lifeline (SELL) project. Mr. Anderson asked why the name of the project was changed. Mr. Hoeweler replied that the word "evacuation" cannot be a primary reason of a Purpose and Need Statement for a project and that certain permitting agencies did not like that "Evacuation" was in the name.

- c) **Tournament Blvd and McDowell Shortcut Rd:** There has been a cost increase for the Tournament Blvd & McDowell Shortcut Rd. project. The cost of construction went up and is now a little over \$13M.
- d) **West of the Waterway Parkway:** The City of North Myrtle Beach has requested this project to be removed from the TIP. This will require a public hearing and public comment.
- e) **FTA 5307 & 5339:** New budget numbers that have been received. They have been added to the TIP for information.
- f) **Safety Project: US 17N @ 67th N:** Dollar amounts have been filled in on the TIP. This project is funded by SCDOTs safety program.

There were no questions for Mr. Hoeweler. Chairman Hewitt called for a vote to approve the TIP. **Mr. Bob Anderson moved to approve the TIP. Mr. Cox seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor.**

Carolina Bay Parkway Extension

Mr. Hoeweler explained there has been new information regarding the Carolina Bays Parkway project which included a \$22M dollar earmark for the project. He stated the federal money needed to be reflected in the line items of the TIP. He explained that money has been moved around to incorporate the \$22M into the project. Mr. Hoeweler verified with Mr. Johnson that this was a federal earmark of \$22M. Mr. Johnson agreed. Mr. Hoeweler moved on to discuss Priority Numbers 17-22, which were new projects. He explained that they were listed in order and that the funding levels were not listed yet, but that it would be coming in the future. The only project that was not listed in the TIP was a bridge project in North Myrtle Beach because it had a cost of \$50M and could not be fit into the budget. Mr. Anderson asked if that was the bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway. Mr. Hoeweler deferred the question to Mr. Kevin Blayton, Public Works Director of North Myrtle Beach. Mr. Blayton replied that it was a replacement for the swing bridge at Barefoot and said that the project cost is now up to \$80M. Mr. Hoeweler went on to say that there was a balance of over \$66M of carry over in 2032, but that this number does not include the cost of the new projects (Priority 17-22) which will be deducted from the \$66M. Lastly, Mr. Hoeweler explained for information purposes he put \$2M per year in the budget for safety projects from 2025-2032 and \$5M per year for intersection improvement projects from 2026-2032. He reiterated this was for information only but that it would be discussed again later.

Mr. Hoeweler invited Chad Kimes, NCDOT Division 3 Engineer, to introduce himself and his staff. A presentation was displayed. Mr. Kimes informed the Committee that Carolina Bays Parkway was a top priority of his team. Mr. Kimes showed PowerPoint slides on the scoring process and the future funding for Carolina Bays Parkway. Mr. Kimes showed a chart that showed the Carolina Bays project score of 62.71 in the P6 cycle and that a score for the project in P7.0 would be finalized by Spring 2024. Mr. Kimes said NCDOT is looking to reduce costs by reducing interchanges to superstreets, reducing ROW acquisition, and submitting projects into smaller pieces.

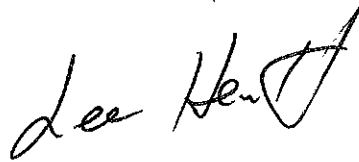
Mr. Kimes invited Mr. Mason Herndon, NCDOT Division 3 PDEA Engineer, to present on the project. Mr. Herndon went on to present the remaining slides in the presentation. Mr. Herndon explained that seven alternatives were drafted into the EIS for the project. He showed a map of the alternatives. Mr. Herndon explained the changes since Spring 2020 which included combining two interchanges into one interchange to avoid Indigo Farms and be more in line with an interchange proposed on Alternative 2. He also said that wetland delineation and federally listed threatened and endangered species surveys were completed and that the FHWA reviewed the draft EIS (DEIS) in May 2022 and March 2023. Herndon noted one of FHWA's comments on the DEIS was to seek an affordable solution since NC does not have any funding for the project. He said NCDOT resubmitted the DEIS to FHWA on October 13, 2023, and explained that since the project is over \$100M they are required to have a financial plan. Mr. Herndon showed and discussed financially constrained solutions including a phased approach to help identify or secure funds for smaller sections. The two logical termini of Phase I that Mr. Herndon discussed were at the SC/NC line or extending it through NC to Ash Little River Road. He showed a map of FCIA (Fiscally Constrained Interim Alternative) 1, which is from SC 31 in Horry County to Ash Little River Road in Brunswick County. Herndon said this would be Phase I of the project and both FCIA's are in line with Alternative 4 which is NCDOT's preferred alternative. He showed a map of Segment 1 of Alternative 4 where it crosses into North Carolina to Ash Little River Road and would require improvements to be made along Hickman Road and Ash Little River Road to get traffic to 904 until Phase II is built. He showed FCIA 2 where it would stop at SC 111. Herndon said NCDOT is hoping to go with FCIA 1 and if they can get a commitment for right of way funds, they feel they can satisfy FHWA's need and then they can get a financial plan for the rest of the final EIS (FEIS). He said FHWA will not sign the FEIS until these things are resolved but NCDOT is hoping FHWA will sign the DEIS. Mr. Herndon said the DEIS may be signed in early 2024 and that they anticipate public hearings in Spring 2024, with one hearing in each state.

Chairman Hewitt asked the committee if they had questions for Mr. Herndon. Mr. Tyler Servant asked how soon after would NCDOT have a permit in hand, once they had the FEIS signed. Mr. Herndon said it would be hard to say without knowing where the funding is coming from. Mr. Kimes said he was confident they would have right of way funding for the FCIA 1 option. Hon. Walt Eccard asked Mr. Herndon how confident he was with saying the public hearings for the project will be in early 2024. Mr. Herndon said he was fairly confident that FHWA would sign the DEIS and then NCDOT can get back to their scheduled timeline. Mr. Eccard asked another question about when they would meet again for the FEIS. Mr. Herndon responded with late 2024 to early 2025. Mr. Randall Thompson asked for clarification on the alternatives. Mr. Herndon clarified that Alternative 4 was selected as the preferred alternative that would be completed in sections. Mr. Thompson expressed his concern for the traffic flow in the area. Mr. Herndon said NCDOT will explore all options for traffic counts and have recommendations with improvements for Hickman Road and Ash Little River Road.

Chairman Hewitt asked if anyone in the audience/public had questions. Mr. Clay Swenson approached the podium and introduced himself. He asked why South Carolina is so much ahead of North Carolina in funding. Rep. Frank Iler approached the podium and responded to Mr. Swenson. Rep. Iler stated NC had a different system than SC. He said the project needs to be

done in segments and that this helps with funding. He went on to say that connectivity projects across states generally score less than projects within the same state. Rep. Iler informed the attendees that money is not as easy to come by in North Carolina and Brunswick County because they don't have a sales tax like South Carolina does for funding.

Chairman Hewitt addressed the Committee for any other business to discuss. **Chairman Hewitt adjourned the meeting at 11:45 am.**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lee Hewitt". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page.