

Special Worksession

Present: Mayor Charles R. Worley, Presiding; Vice-Mayor R. Carl Mumpower; Councilwoman Terry M. Bellamy; Councilman Jan B. Davis; Councilman Joseph C. Dunn; Councilwoman Diana Hollis Jones; Councilman Brownie W. Newman; City Manager Gary W. Jackson; City Attorney Robert W. Oast Jr.; and City Clerk Magdalen Burleson

Mayor Worley announced that this special worksession is held to allow the N.C. Dept. of Transportation (NC DOT) representatives to discuss the recent CORSIM analysis studying the proposed traffic flow with 6 vs. 8 lanes on the I-26 Connector Project.

Ms. Debbie Barbour reviewed the steps of the project development process. She described that the process is very collaborative and the NC DOT does not totally control but a very few of the activities. They are in the process of preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and analyzing the alternatives. Every time they are asked to re-review or to re-analyze, they have to pause in the process and go into a redo loop. This, of course, adds time to the process and can eventually cause delays.

They currently anticipate that having the draft EIS document completed a year from now or October 2006. This will be a major project milestone. After the draft EIS is complete, they will hold a public hearing, gain input, review input and make a selection of an alternative. After the alternative selection, they will then have a more predictable schedule.

The traffic forecast is a major factor and a foundational component of their planning and design process. In the design of projects across the state, they are charged to ensure they deliver safe designs and designs that will adequately accommodate for traffic for a period of 20 years beyond the project opening.

Over the course of this project study, several traffic models have been developed for the Asheville region with the last model being developed in 2003. They have reviewed capacity analysis and have consistently concluded that 8 lanes are needed on I-240 from I-40 to Patton Avenue. The NC DOT is very confident in the various analysis work and the NC DOT is proceeding with 8 lanes as their studies have indicated.

Late last year, Mayor Worley requested that they review the capacity again by using CORSIM as an analysis tool. They have completed that study and it did not alter their recommendation to continue with 8 lanes.

Mr. Nathan Phillips, representing the N.C. Department of Transportation, reviewed with City Council the transportation decision-making process, topics of discussion, why perform traffic analysis, and level of service concepts. He then explained the different segments of a freeway and the highway capacity analysis, with is the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)'s standard and the most widely used and accepted traffic analysis procedures in the United States for many applications. He pointed out the different factors affecting speed and flow rates. He then reviewed with Council the 8 lane freeway analysis results and the 6 lane freeway analysis results. He explained about using the CORSIM as a tool, noting that as with any tool, the results must be evaluated and used with other knowledge. He reviewed the capacity analysis of (1) the Highway Capacity Standard, which is both NC DOT's Consultant and FHWA's analysis indicate 8 lanes are required to provide Level of Service D or better for the entire project (some sections will function adequately with 6 lanes); and (2) the CORSIM indicates some sections are identical whether 6 lane or 8 lane alternative is chosen, and it did not alter the NC DOT's previous recommendation of 8 lanes. In summary, based upon the CORSIM analysis and the additional

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evaluated criteria, the NC DOT has determined an 8 lane basic freeway facility is needed for the I-26 Connector under the Transportation Improvement Project I-2513A.

Mr. Don Voelker, Assistant Director of Administration of the FHWA, explained that the NC DOT has met the test of the FHWA policy. He said they stand by the NC DOT decision for 8 lanes and considers the issue to be closed.

Representatives of the NC DOT and the FHWA responded to various questions and comments from Council, some being, but are not limited to: is the CORSIM a more accurate tool than other models; is the CORSIM a state-of-the-art analysis and more accurate than the FHWA manual; does the CORSIM analysis determine the Level of Service; did you use Asheville data on the CORSIM analysis or assumptions; who pays for aesthetics; will the money be there when the project begins; how can we communicate support to the NC DOT to move forward; what is the timeline for the specific stages; will citizens be allowed to have

input at the design table; and why is the City's Traffic Engineer's interpretation of the CORSIM analysis different than the NC DOT's analysis.

Mayor Worley adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR