

October 30, 2019

Leta Huntsinger,  
Manager, Transportation Systems Planning, WSP  
Consultant to Durham–Chapel Hill–Carrboro MPO

Dear Ms. Huntsinger,

Thank you for hosting the public workshop “Reimagining 15-501” corridor workshop on October 17, 2019.

First a few comments on the format and the process:

(1) We are aware the MPO has adopted a timetable for coming up with an updated Master Plan early next year. However, it seems like an inefficient process to take input on plans that do not take into account existing land use plans in Chapel Hill. Further, the Town of Chapel Hill is undergoing a land use planning process to adopt a future Land Use Map. Presenting transportation options before the Town has determined its future land use plans is backwards, wasteful of money and time, and won’t yield a satisfactory project.

(2) A number of us from Chapel Hill appreciated seeing the large overhead views of the corridor laid out on the display tables. Thank you. However, it took a bit of searching to find this material at <https://www.reimagining15501.com/library> in order to confirm the observations we made during the workshop. Please make these maps easier to find from the Project “home” page.

(3) We are wondering why there was no presentation of the highlights of the proposed options for the corridor redesign — just displays listing the “options” with little detail. The lack of a formal presentation made it difficult to understand the true differences between the three options on display or to learn from questions as the attendees hear the answers. Many of the planners present seemed to have little knowledge about the display boards nearest Chapel Hill.

Now for some substantive comments relating to the three alternatives:

(1) All 3 options shown for the 15-501 intersection at I-40 propose a “North Quadrant” road directly through a North Carolina Natural Heritage Area treasured by Chapel Hill residents. A recent official assessment by a Natural Heritage Program expert rated this tract “worthy of preservation in its natural condition, through whatever means are feasible.” Further, the tract adjoins conservation lands owned by the Town of Chapel Hill and acquired with Clean Water Trust monies and is connected to Durham County lands and a larger network of conserved lands. Such a road would bisect the area and destroy the significant biodiversity of this forest, which is one of the best examples of an old dry mesic oak- hickory forest east of the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina.

Thus, we recommend that the proposed North Quadrant road over I-40 (that would connect New Hope Commons shopping center and Walmart with Eastowne) and runs through the Natural Heritage Area be removed from consideration.

(2) In earlier meetings the Chapel Hill Town Council and citizens who attended the information meetings expressed their dislike of super streets which require massive amounts of concrete and greatly favor through traffic over neighborhood streets, pedestrians and cyclists. Yet every alternative option uses them. We recommend that the engineers come back with options that do not employ super streets or add additional streets and highways.

(3) Alternatives #1 and #2 only focus on roads and do not employ a public transit component. Chapel Hill must be given time to develop its goals for 15-501 before options are brought forward again. Alternative #3 is the only one that can be seriously considered because it has a bus rapid transit component, but this plan has serious flaws.

(4) Given the number of new businesses along Segment 1, it seems likely that these options will not be supported as they would present barriers to all the businesses and neighborhoods on either side. These plans do not take into account the new Eastowne Medical campus or the new design work for the entrance to Wegmans. In fact, it is impossible to make a left turn from the Wegmans entrance.

(5) The MPO alternatives do not take into account the present uses or the likely future uses of the corridor. We already know some areas of office and retail, but the majority use is very much residential. Does the DOT know that the Town has recently approved over 1600 new residences along this corridor as part of the Blue Hill District alone?

(6) We do not recommend the diamond configuration used at I-40/15-501 in these plans as they are notoriously bad for bicyclists and are counter intuitive for drivers. See definition of the “diamond configuration” below.\*

(7) We would like to see the super street intersection at Sage Road (by Lowes) be reconsidered as a high capacity roundabout as shown at several intersections in the South Gate area of Durham after the split of 15-501 heading to I-85, Chapel Hill Blvd and Martin Luther King Blvd. A roundabout at Sage and Fordham would be a good way to handle the odd intersection that exists there today where Old Durham Road also complicates things.

(8) There is insufficient resolution in the map images to fully understand the proposed revision to the merge of Franklin St with Fordham (15-501). The funneling of 4 lanes of traffic into just 2 lanes is a major bottleneck already today for traffic leaving Chapel Hill heading for I-40.

(9) We are interested that the Durham end of 15-501 employs roundabouts and streets designed to slow traffic. We will recommend to the Town of Chapel Hill that they feature this approach in their land use discussions in the 15-501 area; we think these

transportation solutions may fit better with the intended uses already built into segment one.

These alternatives are not ready for consideration by decision makers. Before the MPO weighs in with alternatives, more work is needed. MPO plans must include the new UNC Health campus and the high-volume Wegmans access. But this is only a start. Chapel Hill needs to figure out what it wants from DOT and the MPO and put more time and thought into its land use goals and objectives, following the demise of the light rail. The newly commissioned TIA for the UNC Health campus will inform future MPO recommendations.

We recommend that the MPO get up to date on what is already planned and await the results of the Chapel Hill land use plan before pressing ahead with proposed solutions. What appears on these MPO plans seems to be the result of piecing together various STIP elements, rather than a practical thoughtful plan. Please revise your schedule to allow for this to be accomplished.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Concerned Chapel Hill residents,

Charles Humble  
Fred Lampe  
Julie McClintock

*And these additional signers:*

Richard (Pete) Andrews  
Richard Chady  
Sylvia Clements  
Deborah and Arthur Finn  
Lindsay Garrison  
Ed Harrison  
Tom Henkel  
Bruce Henschel  
Livy Ludington  
John N. Morris  
Dan Sissors  
David Tuttle  
Neva Whybark

\*\*NCDOT Diamond Interchange Visualization  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD-0QnUILOQ>