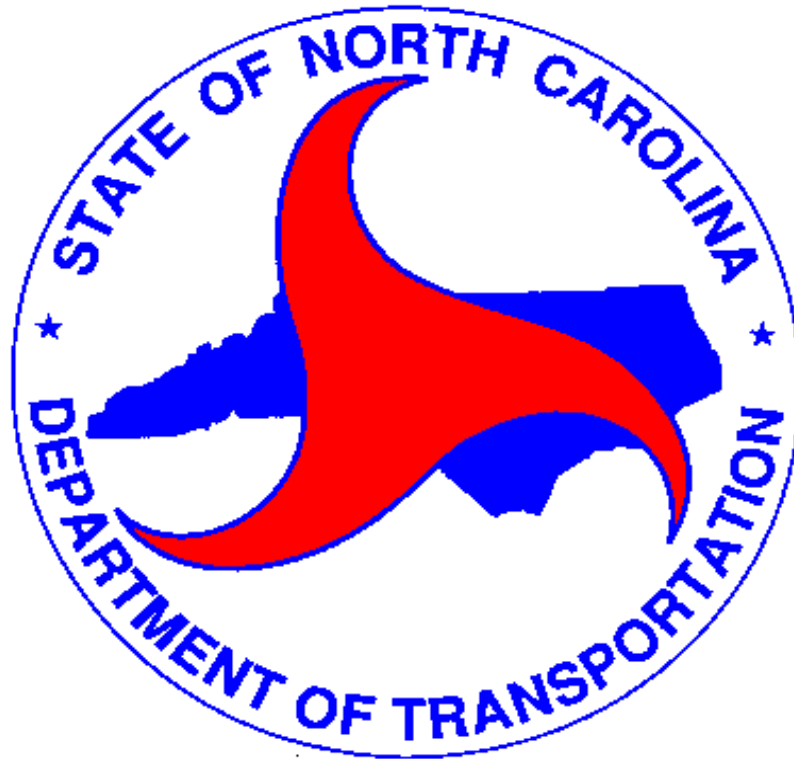


North Carolina Department of Transportation
Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch



Citizens Informational Workshop

**I-85, from I-485 to NC 73
Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties**

October 30, 2007

TIP PROJECT I-3803 B

CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP
Proposed Improvements to I-85
Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties
TIP Number I-3803 B

PURPOSE OF THE CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP

The purpose of this workshop is to involve the public in the project development process and to present the alternates under consideration for the proposed widening of Interstate 85. Public involvement is an integral part of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's project development process. The concerns of citizens and interest groups are considered during project development studies. Often, additional project alternatives are studied or recommended alternatives are changed based on comments received from the public and/or local officials.

NCDOT realizes individuals living close to a proposed project want to be informed of the possible effects of the project on their homes and businesses. However, exact information may not be available at this stage of the project development process. For example, design work is necessary before the actual right of way limits can be established. This type of detailed information will be available at a later date. The purpose of this workshop is to receive your comments *before* final design decisions are made.

Written comments on this project may be left with NCDOT representatives at the workshop or mailed to the address below. If additional information is needed or you would like to submit comments after the workshop, please address requests and comments to:

Write: Dr. Gregory Thorpe, Manager
Attention: Wilson Stroud, Project Planning Engineer
Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1548 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-1548

Call: Wilson Stroud, Project Planning Engineer
(919) 733-7844 x 310

Email: wstroud@dot.state.nc.us

THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Planning and environmental studies for federally funded highway projects are conducted in order to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The type of document published following the planning study depends on the magnitude of the project and its expected environmental impact. NCDOT is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project.

The Environmental Assessment will discuss the purpose and need for the proposed improvements, evaluate alternatives, and analyze the project's impact on both the human and natural environment. The document will address the following areas of concern:

Efficiency and safety of travel	Wildlife and plant communities
Neighborhoods and communities	Water quality
Relocation of homes and businesses	Floodplains and streams
Economy of project area	Farmland
Land use plans	Archaeological sites
Historic properties	Hazardous materials
Wetlands	Traffic noise
Endangered species	Air quality

Following the completion of the EA, NCDOT will conduct a Public Hearing to review the proposed project design.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS

SCOPING LETTER - Published in the NC Environmental Bulletin. This letter notifies agencies and groups on the State Clearinghouse mailing list that a project study has been initiated and solicits comments from them.

CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP – Informal meeting with the public. NCDOT staff conducts these workshops to speak one-on-one with citizens about projects. Comment sheets are provided for citizens to write down their questions, comments, and concerns. The number of workshops scheduled for a project depends on the scope and anticipated impact of the project.

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION – Copies of environmental documents are submitted to the State Clearinghouse for distribution and a notice is published in the NC Environmental Bulletin. Upon request, NCDOT will provide copies of the document to the public. Copies are available for public viewing at NCDOT Raleigh and Division offices, the State Clearinghouse office, local government offices, including the local council of government office, and local public libraries.

PUBLIC HEARING – One or more formal public hearings are held and public comments are recorded. Format typically involves a short presentation followed by an opportunity for citizens to comment.

CITIZEN LETTER– Citizens are encouraged to write NCDOT and provide information and express concerns regarding proposed improvements at anytime during the process. Correspondence from citizens and interest groups is considered during the course of planning study and is included in the project file.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

TIP Project I-3803 B proposes widening I-85 from I-485 just north of Charlotte in Mecklenburg County to NC 73 near Concord and Kannapolis in Cabarrus County. Interchange improvements and auxiliary lanes are also being considered, as well as the relocation of Pitts School Road, which intersects Poplar Tent Road in close proximity to I-85. The project is 7.2 miles in length.

It is anticipated I-85 will be widened to an eight-lane divided facility with a 22-foot median and a concrete median barrier, similar to the segment of I-85 south of the project. Although this widening will be performed primarily within the existing 68-foot grassed median, some widening to the outside of the existing northbound and southbound pavements may be required.

The need for auxiliary lanes along the project will be considered. Such lanes would be constructed to the outside of the eight “through” lanes to accommodate merging and diverging traffic. Areas of special interest with regard to auxiliary lanes are (1) between the I-485 and Concord Mills Boulevard/Speedway Boulevard interchanges and (2) between the Kannapolis Parkway/George Liles Parkway and NC 73 interchanges, due to the close spacing of those interchanges.

It is anticipated the existing bridges at Concord Mills Boulevard/Speedway Boulevard and Kannapolis Parkway/George Liles Parkway will be retained as part of the project. It is anticipated the remaining bridges, with the exception of the Mallard Creek Road bridge, will be replaced. The Mallard Creek Road bridge is expected to be replaced as part of TIP Project R-2123 CE, which calls for revising the I-485/I-85 interchange. The possibility of constructing the proposed new bridges at Poplar Tent Road and NC 73 with sufficient length to accommodate future HOV or HOT lanes will be considered.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed project is to increase capacity on I-85 for local and regional traffic, thereby improving traffic flow and mobility and reducing congestion.

This segment of I-85 is a heavily-congested freeway that serves both interstate and regional traffic. Traffic volumes in 2006 ranged from 111,000 vehicles per day (vpd) just south of I-485 to 88,000 vpd just north of NC 73. Traffic volumes in the design year (2030) are anticipated to range from 186,200 vpd just north of I-485 to 168,400 vpd just north of Kannapolis Parkway/George Liles Parkway. The existing traffic volumes already exceed the capacity of the existing highway, and operating conditions will continue to deteriorate if no improvements are made.

During the three-year period from May 2002 to April 2005, 688 crashes were recorded on I-85 within the project limits. Rear-end crashes accounted for 51 % of those crashes, while run-off-road crashes accounted for 24 % and sideswipe crashes accounted for 14 %. These crashes were distributed fairly evenly along the length of the project, although there was a greater concentration in the vicinity of the I-485 interchange. These crashes were primarily the result of the heavy stop and go traffic during peak travel times. Four fatal crashes were reported during the study period. It should be noted that the widening of the adjacent segment of I-85 to the south (TIP Project

I-3803 A) took place during much of the crash study period. A new crash analysis will be performed within the next few months so that conditions since I-3803 A was completed can be evaluated. A comparison of the crash rates along the project with the statewide rates for comparable routes shows that the crash rates along the project, with the exception of the fatal crash rate, are below the statewide rates (see Table 1).

Rate	Number of crashes	Crashes per 100 mvm	Statewide rate
Total	688	100.15	133.44
Fatal	4	0.58	0.50
Non-fatal	218	31.15	41.82
Night	150	21.84	32.59
Wet	117	17.03	31.12

EXISTING CONDITIONS

I-85 is a seven-lane divided facility (three northbound lanes and four southbound lanes) with a 22-foot median and a concrete median barrier from I-485 to Concord Mills Boulevard/Speedway Boulevard. From Concord Mills Boulevard/Speedway Boulevard to NC 73, I-85 is a 4-lane divided facility with a 68-foot grassed median.

The posted speed limit is 65 mph throughout the project. The existing right of way width varies from 290 to 340 feet. Access to I-85 is fully controlled and is limited to the five interchanges within the project study area: I-485 (Charlotte Outer Loop), Concord Mills Boulevard/Speedway Boulevard (SR 2894), Poplar Tent Road (SR 1394), Kannapolis Parkway/George Liles Parkway (SR 1430), and NC 73 (Davidson Highway). Mallard Creek Road (SR 2467) crosses I-85 just north of I-485, but no interchange is provided at that crossing. Bridges also span the following streams within the project limits: Rocky River (just north of Concord Mills Boulevard/Speedway Boulevard), Coddle Creek (just south of Kannapolis Parkway/George Liles Parkway), and Irish Buffalo Creek (north of NC 73). Information regarding these bridges is presented below in Table 2.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The proposed improvements to I-485 will result in impacts to both the human and natural environments. Detailed planned studies and surveys are being conducted by field personnel to determine the extent of those impacts. Several known areas of concern are discussed below.

Natural Environment

- The project is located within the Yadkin River basin. There is a potential for impacts to perennial streams and jurisdictional wetlands within the project limits associated with Stony Creek, Rocky River, Coddle Creek, Afton Run, and Irish Buffalo Creek.

Table 2 – Existing bridge inventory

Bridge Number	County	Facility Carried	Feature Crossed	Year Built	Sufficiency Rating
119	Mecklenburg	I-485	I-85	1968	95
311	Mecklenburg	Mallard Creek Road (SR 2467)	I-85	1967	80
348	Cabarrus	Concord Mills Blvd/Speedway Blvd (SR 2894)	I-85	1996	89
18	Cabarrus	I-85 NB lanes	Rocky River	1968	93
11	Cabarrus	I-85 SB lanes	Rocky River	1968	94.1
51	Cabarrus	Poplar Tent Road (SR 1394)	I-85	1968	87
55	Cabarrus	I-85 NB lanes	Coddle Creek	1968	81.6
58	Cabarrus	I-85 SB lanes	Coddle Creek	1968	95.2
84	Cabarrus	Kannapolis Pkwy/George Liles Pkwy (SR 1430)	I-85	2001	96.6
63	Cabarrus	NC 73 (Davidson Highway)	I-85	1968	88
86	Cabarrus	I-85 NB lanes	Irish Buffalo Creek	1968	92
88	Cabarrus	I-85 SB lanes	Irish Buffalo Creek	1968	94.3

- The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists four threatened and endangered species in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties (see Table 3 below). Potential impacts to those species will be addressed during project planning and design.

Table 3 – Threatened and Endangered Species – Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties

Common Name	Counties	Endangered (E) or Threatened (T)
Carolina heelsplitter	Mecklenburg, Cabarrus	E
Michaux's sumac	Mecklenburg	E
Schweinitz's sunflower	Mecklenburg, Cabarrus	E
Smooth coneflower	Mecklenburg	E

Human Environment

- Greenway corridors within the project study area include Rocky River and Coddle Creek.
- A bicycle facility is planned along Poplar Tent Road.
- Traffic noise studies will be performed to determine if noise walls are warranted. Potential noise wall locations include residential areas near the Kannapolis Parkway/George Liles interchange and near Irish Buffalo Creek.
- Two properties within the project study area have been determined, through consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer, to be eligible for listing in the National Register of

Historic Places: Popular Tent Presbyterian Church, located on Poplar Tent Road east of I-85; and the Blake House, located on Trinity Church Road west of I-85.

PROJECT SCHEDULE AND COSTS

Currently, NCDOT is scheduled to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project by July 2008. A public hearing, during which a more detailed design will be presented, will be held approximately four to six months after the completion of the EA. The final environmental document (anticipated to be a Finding of No Significant Impact, or FONSI) is scheduled for completion by July 2009. Right of way acquisition for the project is scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2010, and construction is scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2011. Please note these schedules are subject to the availability of sufficient highway funding. As noted below in Table 4, the estimated project cost is \$242,353,000, including \$200,000 for right of way acquisition and \$242,153,000 for construction.

Table 4 - NCDOT 2007-2013 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TIP Project I-3803 B Schedule and Cost		
PROJECT STAGE	SCHEDULE	ESTIMATED COSTS
RIGHT OF WAY	Fiscal Year 2010	\$200,000
CONSTRUCTION	Fiscal Year 2011	\$242,153,000
Total project cost		\$242,353,000

OTHER TIP PROJECTS IN THE AREA

- R-2123 CE** Revise I-485/I-85 interchange, Mecklenburg County
 - Planning/Design In Progress
 - Construction Fiscal Year 2013

- R-2248 E** Charlotte Western Outer Loop (I-485), from east of NC 115 (Old Statesville Road) to I-85 North, Mecklenburg County
 - Right of way Fiscal Year 2010
 - Construction Fiscal Year 2013

- U-3415** Poplar Tent Road (SR 1394), from Derita Road (SR 1445) to US 29-601 Bypass, Cabarrus County
 - Right of way Fiscal Year 2013 (Part A, from Derita Road to George Liles Parkway)
 - Construction Unfunded

U-4910 Derita Road (SR 1445), from Poplar Tent Road (SR 1394) to Concord Mills Boulevard (SR 2894), Cabarrus County; project to be administered by the City of Concord

Right of Way	Fiscal Year 2008
Construction	Fiscal Year 2010

B-4449 Poplar Tent Road (SR 1394), replace bridge number 2 over Coddle Creek, Cabarrus County

Right of way	Fiscal Year 2007
Construction	Fiscal Year 2008

I-3802 I-85, from NC 73 in Cabarrus County to US 29-601 Connector in Rowan County, Cabarrus and Rowan Counties

Planning/Design	In Progress
Right of way	Fiscal Year 2012
Construction	Unfunded

JWS

**Citizens Informational Workshop
Comment Sheet (Continued)
I-3803 B**

Was the project adequately explained to you? Yes _____ No _____

Were NCDOT representatives understandable and clear in their explanations?
Yes _____ No _____ Further comments: _____

Were NCDOT representatives courteous and helpful? Yes _____ No _____

Were display maps and handouts easy to read and understand? Yes _____ No _____

How might we better present proposed projects and address citizens' concerns in future informational workshops?

How did you hear about this meeting today?

Based on the information available, were all substantial questions answered?
Yes _____ No _____

What was the most helpful aspect about the workshop today? What was the least helpful?

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THE WORKSHOP.
YOUR COMMENTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS.