



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

JAMES B. HUNT JR.  
GOVERNOR

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DAVID MCCOY  
SECRETARY

July 20, 1999

Dear

On March 8 at a meeting held in Blowing Rock, former Secretary Norris Tolson, proposed that the US 321 project focus on an enhanced widening alternative. This was a good opportunity for staff to discuss the project and to listen to your interest and concerns. Our staff presented a video that provided updated information on the bypass alternatives and showed the enhanced widening alternative. We asked for comments on our proposal be submitted by May 10.

We received almost 200 responses to our enhanced widening proposal from citizens concerned about the future of Blowing Rock. The citizens included year-round residents, seasonal residents, property owners, visitors, and organizations.

Approximately half of the respondents favored the enhanced widening option. The other half preferred bypass alternative 4 that includes a tunnel underneath the Blue Ridge Parkway. Some of the opponents to the enhanced widening option suggested that nothing needed to be done to improve transportation mobility along US 321.

Based on the comments we received and discussions with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), we have decided that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will evaluate three alternatives in detail: the enhanced widening alternative, bypass alternative 1, and bypass alternative 4. Bypass alternatives 2 and 3 will not be studied further unless additional information supporting their continued consideration becomes available. Alternatives 2 and 3 will be documented in the DEIS with their current level of detail as alternatives evaluated but dropped from consideration. Alternative 4 has high cost, substantial natural resource and visual impacts. Alternative 4 will be evaluated in detail because it minimizes impacts to historic properties protected by United States Department of Transportation/FHWA regulations [Section 4(0)] and has public support. The

enhanced widening alternative and bypass alternative 4 take property from protected historic resources. Alternative bypass 1 avoids impacts to historic properties. Consequently, the FHWA is required by law to study this alternative in detail to determine if it is feasible and prudent.

The United States Department of Transportation/FHWA 4(f) regulation specifies that the Secretary of the USDOT may approve federal transportation projects which take historic or other resources protected under the regulation if there is **no** feasible and prudent alternative to such use, and the project includes all possible planning to minimize harm.

The enhanced widening alternative remains the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) preferred alternative and will be identified as such in the DEIS. However, the selection of an alternative for implementation will not be made until the impacts of each alternative, as well as comments on the DEIS and from the public hearing, have been fully evaluated. In addition the social, economic and environmental impacts of each alternative, along with opportunities to reduce community, natural resource, and other impacts, will be examined for all three alternatives. Should the Town of Blowing Rock, or any recognized citizen group desire to identify a preferred alternative, we would indicate in the DEIS their respective preferred alternatives.

The primary reasons noted by respondents for opposing the enhanced widening were the need to preserve Blowing Rock's village character, historic resource impacts, impacts to homes and businesses along the existing road, economic impacts, safety, fear the project would quickly become obsolete and increased traffic. These concerns were given high priority when we made our proposal. We remain convinced that a carefully crafted enhanced widening can address most of these concerns.

However, a federally acceptable alternative cannot be selected until a DEIS and a Draft 4(f) Statement are made available to the public and to regulatory agencies for comment and these comments have been evaluated. A public hearing will be held subsequent to the release of the DEIS. The final decision on a federally fundable selected route would be made by the FHWA based on the DEIS, an evaluation of all input received, development of additional studies if necessary, and a recommendation by the NCDOT.

Our offer to work with the Town of Blowing Rock to create a widening alternative that will be an asset to Blowing Rock remains open. We feel that we can develop a

project that addresses and relieves concerns that have been raised. We look forward to working with you and will keep you abreast of our progress.

Sincerely,

David  
McCoy

DM/ddk

cc: Sam Erby, Member, Board of Transportation  
David King, Deputy Secretary for Transportation  
Gene Cleckley, FHWA  
Nick Graf, FHWA

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