



No.5 Fall 2000

# UPDATE

US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement  
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina  
North Carolina Department of Transportation  
TIP No. R-2237C

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is in preparation. The focus of recent work was to refine the designs of the alternatives based on updated information and to gather detailed information about the area's social, economic, natural resource, and historic resource characteristics.

The design work involves:

- Taking into account geologic data gathered in 1998
- Adding recent and planned development
- Minimizing impacts and responding to issues raised by the public and government agencies
- Developing cost estimates that reflect the revised design of each alternative

Examples of design refinements are:

- Widening alternative - additional retaining walls, revised intersection and access improvements to accommodate new development, and landscape treatments
- Bypass alternatives - cut, fill, and retaining wall refinements that take advantage of more detailed mapping and geologic information, examination of the use of bridge structure and bifurcation (lanes at different grades), and re-vegetation potentials
- Construction management planning to minimize disruption of traffic and impacts of diverted traffic on residential

- Involved independent consultants to assess potential impacts and identify possible mitigation options for each of the alternatives. These consultants specialize in
  - construction management
  - blasting
  - landscape and urban design
  - economics and historic preservation
  - fog

We currently expect to release a DEIS for public review in the Spring of 2001. A public hearing will follow distribution of the DEIS. These schedules are tentative and could change if review of additional project information requires more studies than have been assumed at this point. The assessment of impacts will begin this Fall after the design work is essentially complete. The design will continue to be refined in response to impact assessment findings.

neighborhoods and local businesses

To prepare for the assessment of impacts the study team:

- Conducted additional fieldwork and research to update information

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**Inside:**

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**Bulletin Board**

**Visit Our Updated Website**

at

[www.doh.dot.state.nc.us/preconstruct/pe/blowingrock321](http://www.doh.dot.state.nc.us/preconstruct/pe/blowingrock321)

*On the website you'll find*

- *Past newsletters*
- *Announcements*
- *A slide presentation presenting the March 1999 video*
- *Project reports, including the 1997 Bypass Alternatives Report and the 1999 Purpose and Need Report*
- *Project photosimulations*
- *Project schedule and history*
- *Comment section*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: What is the purpose of the project?**

**A:** The primary purpose of the project is to:

- **Improve traffic flow on US 321 from Blackberry Road to US 221.** US 321 lacks the capacity to handle future traffic. Traffic is increasing on this already congested highway. As the permanent, summer and tourist populations in the Blowing Rock and Boone areas grow, so will the traffic congestion.
- **Reduce accidents on US 321 within Blowing Rock.** Accident rates along US 321 are substantially higher than the average accident rates for similar roads in North Carolina. Narrow lanes and poor sight distances, combined with turning vehicles at intersections and driveways, appear to explain the high levels of accidents on US 321 in Blowing Rock.

**Q: What is an Environmental Impact Statement?**

**Q: When will the Draft Environmental Impact Statement be completed?**

**A:** The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled to be complete in the Spring of 2001.



*View from Green Hill*

**Q: When will a final alternative be selected?**

**A:** An alternative for implementation will be selected several months after the completion and public review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Following a March 8, 1999 meeting

**A:** An environmental impact statement is a report prepared for proposed Federal and State projects that could have substantial adverse impacts on the environment. "Environment" includes both natural features and community features. The range of issues that will be addressed in the US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement were listed in the project's Summer 1995 newsletter, which is included on the project's web site.

Two EIS documents are prepared. The first is a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The DEIS discusses the range of alternatives considered for the proposed project. Following distribution of the DEIS, a public hearing is held. The public and local, state, and federal regulatory agencies are invited to submit comments during this period. After the comments are reviewed, a preferred alternative is selected and a Final Environmental Impact Statement is prepared.

with county officials and the Citizens Advisory Committee, NCDOT identified three alternatives for detailed study, the widening alternative and two bypass alternatives. These alternatives were described in the Fall 1999 newsletter, which is posted on the project internet site and can be obtained from Parsons Brinckerhoff. The widening alternative remains NCDOT's preferred alternative. However, all three alternatives will be evaluated in detail in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and any one of the three could be chosen as the preferred alternative following public review and comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.



*Traffic on US 321, looking west from the Country Club Drive area*

## TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS

Over the past few months, the US 321 study team has focused on historic resource issues, roadway design enhancement, and the economic impacts of the project. As agreed during the early phases of the current project, the study team has been expanded to include a public involvement and historic resources specialist, landscape architects, an economist, and construction, blasting, and fog experts.

**Pete Pointner**, a planner and architect, is a noted public involvement and historic resources specialist. He joined the study team to identify opportunities to better inform and involve the public. In February, Pete attended a meeting with representatives of the State Historic Preservation Office to discuss potential impacts to historic resources, and to identify possible mitigation measures to address these impacts. He also met with representatives of the Blowing Rock Historical Society to listen to their views of the project. Pete's findings and recommendations are being incorporated into design considerations for the three alternatives.

Landscape architects **Greg Hoer** and **Molly Davis** were added to the team to recommend landscape architectural design treatments for the three alternatives under consideration. In February, Greg and Molly met with NCDOT staff to discuss landscape planting and re-vegetation design criteria. Greg and Molly also met in Blowing Rock with representatives of the National Park Service to discuss issues related to the Blue Ridge Parkway viewshed, members of the Blowing Rock Country Club Board of Directors, and representatives of the Blowing Rock Historical Society.

**Ira Hirschman**, an economist, joined the study team to evaluate the potential economic impacts of the project, specifically to the businesses along the existing US 321 bypass. Ira is a noted international expert in evaluating economic impacts of transportation projects on local

Three construction experts also were added to the team. They soon will be visiting Blowing Rock. **James Ruddell** of Parsons Brinckerhoff Construction Services will lead the construction team, which includes **Ralph Trapani** and **Gordon Revey**. Ralph was the design and construction manager for I-70 through Glenwood Canyon and corridor manager for improvements to SH 82 from Glenwood Springs to Aspen, Colorado. Gordon Revey, of GEOTEK, is a specialist from Colorado in blasting design, training, and risk management. This team will develop approaches to minimizing construction disturbance for all alternatives.

Finally, **David Bare** of Golder Associates Inc. was added to the team to assess the occurrences of low visibility and dense fog within the project area. David is an environmental scientist with domestic and international experience and has provided Parsons Brinckerhoff with similar visibility studies for various interstate transportation projects.



*Landscape architects Molly Davis and Greg Hoer review potential design options on US 321*

economies. In March, Ira visited Blowing Rock to conduct interviews with business owners along the existing US 321 bypass, as well as interviews with local realtors. Ira's findings will be included in the impact analysis section of the DEIS.

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

### Feel Free to Contact the Study Team

If you have any questions or wish to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please call John Page or Reggie Scales on our toll-free project information line, 1-800-263-2434. You may also write the study team at:

Ms. Missy Dickens  
PE Project Development and Environmental  
Analysis Branch  
NC Department of Transportation  
1548 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548

or

Mr. John Page, Project Manager  
Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.  
909 Aviation Parkway, Suite 1500  
Morrisville, NC 27560

You also can e-mail your comments to [BlowingRock321@dot.state.nc.us](mailto:BlowingRock321@dot.state.nc.us) or visit the project's website at [www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321](http://www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321). All e-mail sent to the project address is delivered directly to the computer on John Page's desk. If e-mail is ever returned as undeliverable, please call John or Reggie.

Community groups and other stakeholders can arrange a small group meeting with the study team. Smaller groups can combine with other smaller groups to hold a joint meeting. The organization(s) sponsoring each meeting will be responsible for arranging a meeting site and notifying participants.

This newsletter is being sent to those who have requested to be on the mailing list in the past, as well as all property owners within 500 feet of the centerline of each of the proposed corridor alternatives. If you are not on this list, but would like to be, please contact John Page or Reggie Scales at the phone number or e-mail address above.

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**Information Line 1-800-263-2434**

**E-mail Address [BlowingRock321@mail.dot.state.nc.us](mailto:BlowingRock321@mail.dot.state.nc.us)**

**Website [www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321](http://www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321)**



**Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.**

909 Aviation Parkway, Suite 1500

Morrisville, NC 27560

