



# I-26 Connector Asheville NCDOT TIP Project I-2513

Issue No. 2

November, 2000

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Many developments have taken place concerning the I-26 Connector Project in Asheville since the initial public workshop held in April 1998. The interest in the project at that workshop led to more than twelve additional meetings with affected neighborhoods and business groups to explain the proposed project and find ways to reduce and/or mitigate the project impacts. Early this year, the City of Asheville requested that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) conduct a more comprehensive public involvement process for the project to allow other Asheville residents the opportunity to learn more about the project and to comment on the proposed project designs.

As a result of the City request, the I-26 Connector Community Coordinating Committee (CCC), consisting of local government, business groups and neighborhood association leaders, was formed to develop a more comprehensive public involvement process aimed at building community consensus for this major facility. The CCC organized two public meetings. The first, to inform the public of the project considerations, and the second, to provide an opportunity for the expression of opinions and ideas for the project. In June, an educational forum was held at UNC-A to educate interested citizens about the project. Many possibilities for project improvements were explained at this forum. In July, a two-day design forum was held at the Renaissance Hotel to encourage local citizens to suggest modifications to the proposed plans. Several new ideas and design concepts were proposed at this forum.

As a result of the comments received at the design forum, the CCC developed several key recommendations for the project. These recommendations were reviewed, approved and forwarded to NCDOT by the Asheville City Council and the Asheville Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). In an effort to expedite the project development, NCDOT has developed an initial response to these key recommendations. NCDOT will continue to consider these recommendations during the project development. Below are the key recommendations from the CCC listed in italics, followed by the NCDOT response to the City and MPO including suggestions for methods to address these recommendations:

### COMMUNITY COORDINATING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS WITH NCDOT RESPONSES

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the alternative alignment developed at the Design Forum receive serious study for inclusion in the project Environmental Impact Statement.

NCDOT has initiated an evaluation of the alternative alignment concept developed at the Design Forum. During the development of this concept, several alternatives have arisen that will be shared with the CCC for further consideration. In our efforts to expedite the project development, we must focus our evaluations; therefore, we will work with the community in an attempt to determine the most suitable alternative alignment(s) for serious study.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the NCDOT, FHWA and local citizens work together as a "Committee on Visual Design" to develop ideas for bridge design, signage, overpass design, landscaping and other aesthetic issues that reflect our community's character.

NCDOT is committed to working with the local citizens to develop ideas for aesthetic issues reflecting the community's character. It is our hope that the City and the CCC can help provide the local leadership necessary to organize a "Committee on Visual Design" to address these issues throughout the planning and design of the project.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the NCDOT and FHWA expedite the development of new and updated traffic models for use on the ultimate design of this project, including regional air quality modeling.

NCDOT is expediting the development of a new traffic model for the Asheville Urban Area. However, as these models often take years to develop as useful tools for project planning, the current model must continue to be the basis for the planning and design of this facility. The existing model will be updated with current land use data and traffic volumes to determine traffic projections for all the alternatives. In addition, NCDOT will attempt to constrain the updated model to show the effect of the completed project with four, six, and eight lanes on the rest of the road network in Asheville.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that

*the NCDOT and FHWA explore engineering and signage options to improve the north-to-east connection of eastbound I-26 traffic with I-40 in an easterly direction as part of this project or a simultaneous project. The specific concerns involve limiting commercial truck through-traffic on I-240 and on lesser-classified roadways proximate to residential areas.*

NCDOT will consider alignment and signage options to improve the connection from US 19-23 southbound (proposed I-26 eastbound) to I-40 eastbound that are available within the scope of the I-26 Connector project. To provide a new connection between these facilities is not considered to be part of the I-26 Connector project and will need to be considered by the Asheville Area MPO for addition to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Prohibiting commercial truck through traffic on I-240 cannot be achieved since this is a federal interstate route.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO reflecting the Committee's general consensus that the bicycle and pedestrian connectivity be restored to link neighborhoods and the river while simultaneously exploring traffic calming measures to reduce the vehicular impact on residential streets.

Working with the City of Asheville, NCDOT is currently developing several means to provide bicycle and pedestrian connectivity with the project. Project elements currently developed to restore this connectivity include: 1) plans to connect Amboy Road with the future greenway to Hominy Creek Park, 2) plans to reconnect Amboy Road with Brevard Road including reconnections with Fairfax and Virginia Avenues, 3) plans to provide the additional clearance at the State Street underpass requested by the City to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians, 4) plans to continue the Patton Avenue sidewalk from the Smoky Park Bridge westward to the Hazel Mill Road area, and 5) plans to reconnect to the existing Hazel Mill Road/Craven Street access to the French Broad River. These plans have been developed in close coordination with the City of Asheville. However, traffic calming measures on local streets to reduce vehicular impact on residential areas is principally the responsibility of the City. As these are locally sensitive issues, NCDOT will

continue to work with the City to achieve this recommendation.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the NCDOT and FHWA ensure that all interchange design is community sensitive. To achieve this end, it would be helpful to provide artist's renditions of feasible design alternatives for public review.

NCDOT is planning to provide renditions of feasible design alternatives in sensitive interchange areas for public review. NCDOT will continue to coordinate with the CCC to determine the alternatives and areas to be rendered.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the NCDOT and FHWA seriously examine safety issues in project construction and design including maintenance of traffic during construction and emergency access after construction.

NCDOT will seriously examine all safety issues in the project design including the maintenance of traffic during construction as well as emergency access after the project completion.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the NCDOT and FHWA release any unneeded right-of-way at the completion of this project to the City of Asheville to be zoned and used in accordance with a land use plan to be developed by the City in cooperation with the NCDOT.

Assuming some of the right-of-way is not needed after construction, NCDOT must follow NC General Statute 136-19 when dealing with right-of-way acquisition and disposition. This law generally prescribes, for any lands not needed for highway right-of-way, that NCDOT shall give first consideration to the former property owner. However, a great deal about how such property is disposed of is determined by the means under which it was acquired. The NCDOT Right-of-Way Disposal Committee makes determinations as to the disposition of NCDOT right-of-way.

***M***ake a strong recommendation to the City Council and MPO that the NCDOT and FHWA keep the I-26 Connector project on its current or, preferably, an expedited schedule.

Given the time needed to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, design the project, and acquire right of way, an expedited schedule is not possible. NCDOT is making every effort to keep the I-26 Connector project on its current completion date based on the 2002-2008 Draft Transportation Improvement Program. However, unless a decision is made on the preferred alternative early next year, the scheduled completion date will likely be delayed.

## NEXT STEP

Over the next several months, NCDOT will continue to work with the local community to develop the project. If new designs are found to be feasible for consideration in the project environmental impact analysis, they will be developed for future public presentation and review.

## COMMENTS

The NCDOT hopes that all interested citizens were able to attend the recent public forums to learn more about this important project and express any concerns. If you were not able to attend these forums and would like to express your concerns, and/or ask questions concerning the project please contact us at the telephone numbers or the mailing or email addresses listed on the back of this newsletter.

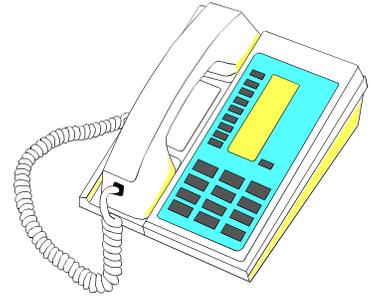
## COMING SOON

Look for the I-26 Connector website at "NCDOT Projects" on NCDOT's webpage [www.dot.state.nc.us](http://www.dot.state.nc.us)



## INFORMATION AND COMMENTS

**F**or more information about this project, or to express any comments or concerns, write to either TGS Engineers or the NCDOT at the addresses below. Please refer to Project I-2513 when writing about the proposed project. All comments and questions will be addressed as soon as possible.



Mr. Drew Joyner, P.E.  
Project Development and Environmental  
Analysis Branch  
N.C. Department of Transportation  
1548 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548  
1-919-733-3141  
djoyner@dot.state.nc.us

**PROJECT  
INFO-LINE  
1-919-319-8850**

### PROJECT MAILING LIST

Add your name to the mailing list  
by contacting:

Asheville Connector  
TGS Engineers  
Suite 141  
975 Walnut Street  
Cary, NC 27511

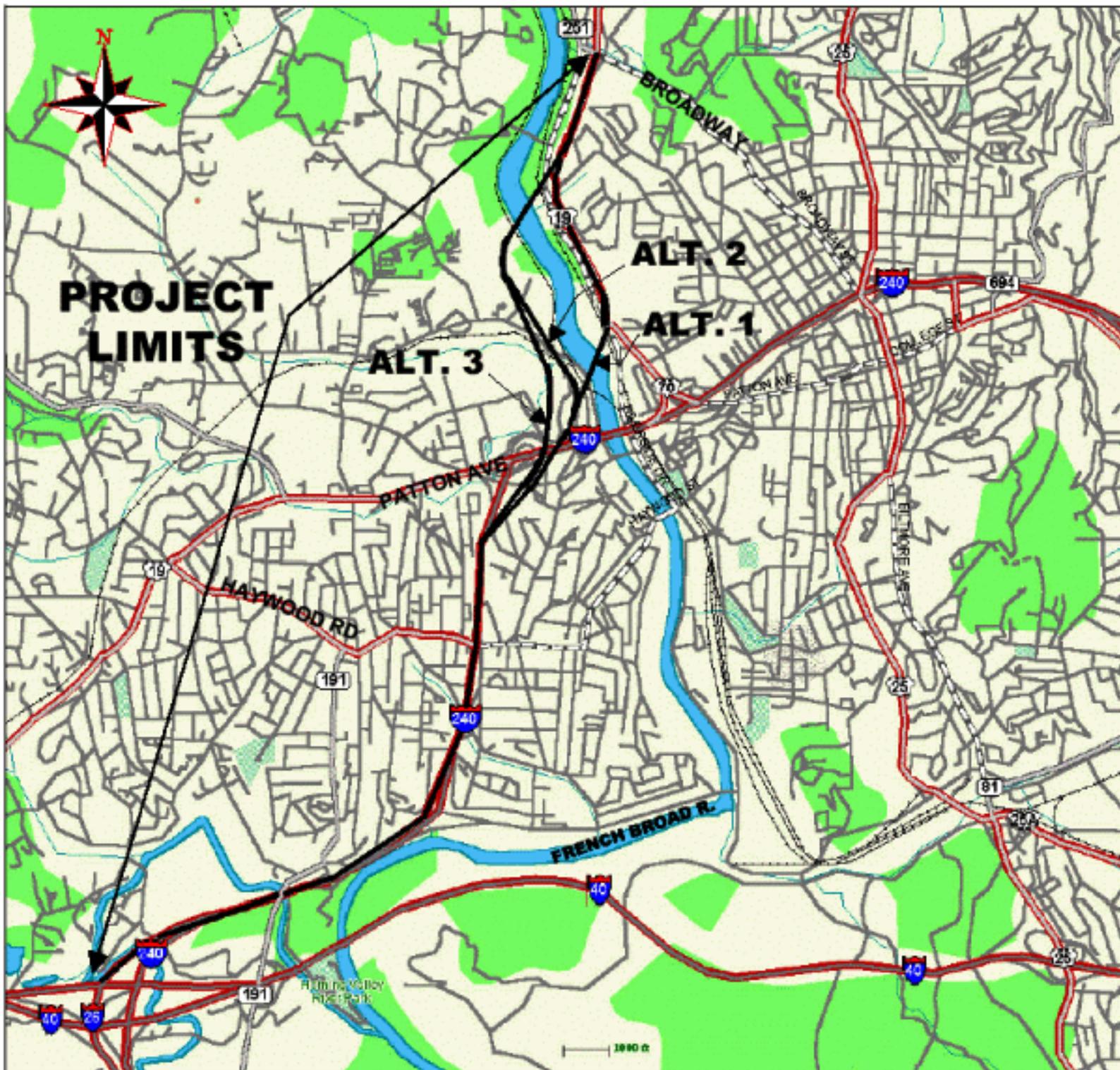
or

Mr. J. K. Burlison, P.E.  
TGS Engineers  
975 Walnut Street, Suite 141  
Cary, NC 27511  
1-919-319-8850  
kburlison@tgsengineers.com

**If you have questions concerning  
other transportation projects,  
please call our Customer Service  
Office toll free at 1-877-DOT-4YOU  
or check our website for more  
information at  
[www.dot.state.nc.us](http://www.dot.state.nc.us)**



**I-26 Connector Newsletter  
% TGS Engineers  
975 Walnut Street  
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Cary, NC 27511**



	<p>North Carolina Department of Transportation Project Development &amp; Environmental Analysis Branch</p>
<p><b>I-26 CONNECTOR</b> <b>ASHEVILLE, N.C.</b> from I-26 at I-40 to US 19-23-70 at Broadway <b>BUNCOMBE COUNTY</b> TIP No. I-2513</p>	
<p>May, 2000</p>	<p>Figure 1</p>