



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

JAMES H. TROGDON, III
SECRETARY

MEMO TO: Post Hearing Meeting Attendees

FROM: Theresa Ellerby, CPM
Project Management Unit

DATE: February 27, 2019

SUBJECT: Project: 34165.1.2 (I-2513) Buncombe County
F.A. Number NHF-26-1(53)
Asheville – I-240 & New Route from I-26 to US 19-23-70
I-26 Connector

Post Hearing Meeting

The post hearing meeting was held in the Structures Design conference room at 1:00pm on January 11, 2019, to discuss the comments received from the Design Public Hearing. The Design Public Hearing was held on December 4, 2018 at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel located at 31 Woodfin Street in Asheville. Approximately 450 people were in attendance, with a total of 466 comments received during the comment period, which ended on January 4, 2019. The responses provided in this summary are applicable at the time this memorandum was drafted; however, updated information will be included in the FEIS and ROD as it becomes available.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- The I-26 Connector project is an interstate freeway project that would connect I-26 in southwestern Asheville to US 19-23-70 in northwest Asheville and have a total length of approximately 7 miles.
- The project would extend I-26 from I-40 to US 19-23-70 and would allow for the eventual designation of I-26 from Charleston, South Carolina, to Johnston City, Tennessee, should a remaining section (TIP Project A-0010A) from the north end of this project to Mars Hill, North Carolina be completed.
- The project would upgrade and widen I-240 from I-40 to Patton Avenue and then cross the French Broad River as a new freeway to US 19-23-70 slightly south of the Broadway interchange.
- The project is needed to upgrade the interstate corridor to meet current design standards for the interstate system, improve system linkage by connecting I-26 south of Asheville with US 19-23-70, address traffic capacity problems along the existing I-

240 corridor (future I-26), and increase the remaining useful service of the Captain Jeff Bowen Bridges.

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF COMMENTS:

Comments Received

- 466 public comments received
- 155 in the form of standard language form letters

Comment Types

- Form Letters: 155
- Emails: 133
- Comment Forms: 85
- Contact Us website: 45
- Transcript: 17
- Individual Letters: 17
- Hotline Calls: 2

Comment Subjects:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| • Design: 304 | • Traffic: 20 |
| • Bicycle/Pedestrian:245 | • Access Concerns: 20 |
| • Community Impacts: 195 | • Project Costs: 18 |
| • Light/Air/Noise Pollution: 59 | • Impacts to Personal Property: 18 |
| • Project/Construction Schedule: 39 | • Business Impacts: 17 |
| • Safety: 31 | • Environmental Justice: 15 |
| • Environmental Impacts: 25 | • Construction Impacts: 8 |
| • Right-of-Way and Relocation: 22 | • Historic and Archaeological Resources: 6 |
| • Other: 22 | • Threatened and Endangered Species: 2 |
| • Alternative Choice: 22 | |

Special Interest Groups

Comments were received from the Aesthetics Advisory Committee, Asheville on Bikes, Citizens I-26 Connector Action (CICA), Council of Independent Business Owners, East West Asheville Neighborhood Association, WECAN, Montford Neighborhood Association, and Mountain True.

General Project Opinions

- 10 percent (49) expressed support for the project

- 23 percent (107) expressed opposition to the project
- 67 percent (310) expressed neutral opinions for the project, mostly suggesting design revisions to be made in various locations

GENERAL RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

Design

Comment Summary

Approximately 304 comments were received relating to design of the project, of which 155 comments were derived from a form letter. The form letter noted additional design revisions were still warranted to meet the community's vision. Several comments suggested specific design revisions, including:

- Number of lanes on I-240 in Section A, noting eight lanes were still shown in the public hearing maps
- Downgrading I-240 to a boulevard between eastern I-40 and Patton Avenue
- Utilizing design exceptions where possible in order to reduce the project footprint
- Reducing the number of lanes throughout the project, including the flyovers, I-240, Jeff Bowen Bridges, and Amboy Road
- Reducing shoulder widths throughout the project
- Reducing median widths throughout the project by utilizing concrete barriers
- Tightening the Haywood Road interchange
- Tightening the I-240/Patton Avenue interchange to the east of the Jeff Bowen Bridges
- Reducing the number of lanes on the split diamond interchange at Amboy Road and Brevard Road
- Incorporating the visions noted in the Sam Schwartz report
- Incorporating complete streets throughout the project
- Removing the flyover bridges and "stacking" I-26 traffic over the existing Jeff Bowen Bridges
- Utilizing the existing number of lanes and configuration of the Haywood Road Bridge
- Reducing the height of the flyover bridges
- Limiting the number of lanes on Riverside Drive to two lanes, with bicycle/pedestrian accommodations
- Reducing the speed limit throughout the project in order to reduce the footprint of the design

Response

- Number of lanes on I-240 in Section A, noting eight lanes were still shown in the public hearing maps

The typical section for I-240 in Section A includes six through lanes with auxiliary lanes between interchanges where necessary. This section only includes six basic freeway lanes.

- Reducing the number of lanes throughout the project, including the flyovers, I-240, Jeff Bowen Bridges, and Amboy Road

Lane configurations were determined by geometric constraints and traffic operations analyses, therefore, reducing the number of lanes throughout the project, including Amboy Road, the ramps of the split diamond interchange between Amboy Road and Brevard Road, the flyovers, I-240, and the Jeff Bowen Bridges is not feasible.

- Downgrading I-240 to a boulevard between eastern I-40 and Patton Avenue

Downgrading I-240 to a boulevard between eastern I-40 and Patton Avenue is outside of the purpose and need of the proposed project.

A double decker bridge was considered as part of the original ADC alternative. In order for geometries to work for the various interchanges, and to be designed to the same standards of the other Detailed Study Alternatives, the double decker bridge alternative was modified to what is now Alternative 4-B.

Furthermore, to construct an upper tier, Patton Avenue would need to be closed to traffic for the duration of construction. Construction costs would likely be extensive due to the highly specialized construction techniques required to implement this strategy and delays to the construction schedule would be extended substantially. Additionally, the existing westbound Patton Avenue bridge is listed on the SHPO National Register and this construction method would likely generate an adverse effect for this resource.

- Reducing shoulder widths throughout the project

Reducing shoulder widths throughout the project would trigger a design exception. Shoulder widths are currently designed in accordance with AASHTO and the NCDOT paved shoulder policy.

- Reducing median widths throughout the project by utilizing concrete barriers

Concrete barriers are utilized throughout Sections A and B in order to reduce median widths. Barriers are not needed in Section C due to the alternative selected, which is a bifurcated interchange configuration.

- Tightening the Haywood Road interchange

During the preliminary design process, multiple interchange configurations were studied in an effort to minimize the footprint at this location. These included an oval-about, the median u-turn diamond interchange, roundabouts at the ramp terminals, and a single point urban diamond interchange. Due to geometric constraints and the proximity of historic resources in the area, the proposed design was carried forward in an effort to minimize impacts to the project area.

- Tightening the I-240/Patton Avenue interchange to the east of the Jeff Bowen Bridges

During the preliminary design process, the project team investigated ways to tighten the horizontal curvature in the vicinity of the I-240/Patton Avenue interchange to the east of the Jeff Bowen Bridges. The current preliminary designs are using horizontal curves with the minimum allowable radius.

- Incorporating complete streets throughout the project

NCDOT is committed to Complete Streets improvements and has continued to coordinate efforts with the City of Asheville to incorporate these improvements into the project in compliance with design and cost-sharing guidelines.

- Reducing the height of the flyover bridges

During the preliminary design process, the heights of the flyover bridges were investigated in an effort to minimize impacts. Elevations are based on design criteria for minimum vertical clearances and minimum grades.

- Limiting the number of lanes on Riverside Drive to two lanes, with bicycle/pedestrian accommodations

NCDOT will continue to coordinate the typical section of Riverside Drive with the City of Asheville.

- Reducing the speed limit throughout the project in order to reduce the footprint of the design

The speed limit throughout the project has been minimized to meet existing speed limits of I-240 and design standards.

- Utilizing design exceptions where possible in order to reduce the project footprint

Through discussions with FHWA, it was noted FHWA has not adopted the 2018 AASHTO “A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets” at this time, therefore NCDOT is continuing to use the 2011 AASHTO “A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets” (Green Book) for the purposes of design standards. FHWA did not offer a timeline for when the new policy is expected to be adopted. NCDOT does not anticipate using any new standards for the I-26 Connector project at this time.

Design Exceptions are determined on a case by case basis and are normally justified and approved during the final design phase of the project. Approval authority for design exceptions depends upon the type of work and the highway system. In the case of this project, the Federal Highway Administration would be the approving authority. The FHWA has delegated this authority to the NCDOT, specifically the Roadway Design Unit.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations

Comment Summary

Approximately 245 comments were received regarding bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, of which 155 comments were included in a form letter. The form letter called for the reduction of vehicle lanes to include room for improved bicycle/pedestrian

infrastructure. Several comments noted the lack of bicycle/pedestrian features on the Design Public Hearing maps. General recommendations to incorporate NACTO design standards and standardized pavement markings were also received. The location of bicycle/pedestrian accommodations in relation to entrance/exit ramps was a topic of safety concern. The inclusion of traffic calming measures to benefit bicyclists/pedestrians, specifically on Haywood Road, was also noted as a way to increase safety. Additionally, several comments were received requesting bicycle/pedestrian accommodations be constructed and maintained before and during construction of the project, as opposed to after construction. Finally, the form letters and other comments identified several specific locations as areas to add facilities and/or connections to adjacent neighborhoods and communities.

Response

Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations shown on the 2018 Public Hearing maps are a part of the project designs and will be constructed as a part of the project. NCDOT is committed to Complete Streets improvements and has continued to coordinate efforts with the City of Asheville to incorporate these improvements into the project in compliance with design and cost-sharing guidelines. In areas where existing sidewalks are being disturbed, the designs show these sidewalks being replaced as a part of the proposed designs. In areas where the various plans propose future pedestrian accommodations, the designs have been developed to accommodate or not preclude these elements from being constructed by the various agencies.

In March 2016, NCDOT and the City of Asheville established the I-26 Connector Working Group, which initiated a series of meetings between members of the City of Asheville City Council, the Asheville Design Center, Buncombe County, FHWA, FBRMPO, NCDOT, and other stakeholders. The purpose of these working group meetings was to discuss methodologies for various technical aspects of the project, discuss FHWA and NCDOT policies that factor into designs of the various project alternatives, receive feedback from local officials and public citizens on various aspects of the project, discuss bicycle/pedestrian accommodations and betterment requests from the City of Asheville, among other topics. Initial discussions of additional bicycle and pedestrian accommodations originated in these meetings, and resulted in a list of betterments provided by the City of Asheville to NCDOT. NCDOT and the City of Asheville have agreed upon several areas where these additional facilities will be included as part of the project designs, and those that will require cost-sharing between NCDOT and the City. This coordination will continue throughout development of the project and into final design.

It is expected that incidental bicycle and pedestrian improvements will be included in the final design of the project, which will be coordinated with the City of Asheville, and will be designed using the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities.

The FEIS will include a discussion of existing and proposed facilities as part of the project, and demonstrate how their consistency with local and regional multi-modal plans.

During construction of the project, existing sidewalks and multi-use paths will remain accessible. Proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks, multi-use paths, shared bicycle lanes, etc. would be available for use as sections of the project are

completed. Due to grading activities and safety concerns, proposed facilities would not likely be constructed prior to roadway construction. However, construction phasing plans will be determined by the design build team.

Community Impacts/Environmental Justice Impacts

Comment Summary

Approximately 195 comments were received regarding community and/or environmental justice impacts accommodations, of which 155 comments were derived from a form letter. The form letter noted the project does not meet the community's vision for the future and additional design changes should occur, such as turning Patton Avenue into an urban, multi-use corridor and tightening up intersections throughout the project to reduce the amount of land used. Other comments received relating to community impacts noted the project was too large and did not fit within the context of Asheville. Additionally it was noted the project could create urban sprawl. Several requests were made to allow the City to develop the land underneath the flyover bridges as parks or for business development. Furthermore, comments requested the land along Patton Avenue be returned to the City for redevelopment.

Several comments received also discussed concern for the impacts to the Burton Street community, noting the community was impacted previously during construction of I-240. Additionally, comments regarding the lack of affordable housing for those that will be displaced within the Burton Street community were also received. Approximately 15 comments were received relating to Environmental Justice impacts.

Response

The project is being designed to address project future traffic capacity needs which include both local and regional growth in traffic, as well as the other identified needs in the purpose and need section of the FEIS. The scale of the project is appropriate to meet future traffic needs and to maintain adequate traffic operations. NCDOT will continue to further avoid and minimize impacts due to the project to the greatest extent practicable during final design and construction.

Regarding the development of land underneath the flyover bridges, in the past, agreements between the municipality and NCDOT have been in place to allow use if the use is a transportation use or a park. In some cases, such as underneath the Jeff Bowen Bridges, the City of Asheville is permitted access to the land through an encroachment agreement with the NCDOT. In this instance, the City would file for an encroachment to be approved after construction of the project.

As part of the I-2513 Community Impact Assessment Update (NCDOT 2018), an initial threshold screening and evaluation was conducted to determine the relative impact of the I-26 Connector Project on Environmental Justice populations. Through community screening, field studies, demographic research, and agency coordination and public engagement, it was concluded that no communities would experience a high burden, while only two communities would experience a moderate burden.

Burton Street neighborhood has been classified as an Environmental Justice population that has incurred recurring impacts. NCDOT, with the assistance of a subconsultant that specializes in environmental justice issues, is investigating ways to provide additional

mitigation opportunities to lessen the burden of the project on the Burton Street neighborhood. This is being addressed by the development of a community-driven Burton Street Neighborhood Plan, adopted by the City of Asheville on September 25, 2018. The plan includes a list of mitigation strategies to be implemented by NCDOT as part of the project. It has been estimated that affordable housing is available for those displaced within the project area, it is a goal of the Burton Street Neighborhood Plan to identify areas to improve the availability of these resources to Burton Street residents. The Burton Street Neighborhood Plan will be included in the FEIS.

Light/Air/Noise Pollution

Comment Summary

Approximately 59 comments were received regarding lighting, air, and noise impacts. Comments received related to air quality noted concerns from increased emissions due to increased traffic volumes. Comments received related to lighting and visual impacts requested an iconic bridge to be constructed as the new flyover bridges or to focus on improving the aesthetics of the Jeff Bowen Bridges. Incorporating aesthetic elements throughout the project was also identified in several comments as an important consideration to be incorporated. Additionally, the use of LED lights on the flyover bridges was suggested, as opposed to traditional lighting. Comments also requested 3D renderings of the project to better display the height of the bridges.

Comments related to noise expressed concerns from increased noise volumes to personal property and a decreased quality of life as a result. Several comments requested additional information regarding the noise analysis, the location of noise barriers throughout the study area, and the process of the noise analysis. Noise impacts during construction were also noted as a concern. Comments requested sound protection measures for Riverside Cemetery. Suggestions were given in several comments to include commitments in the RFP to incorporate “low noise” surface pavement specifications and prevent large trucks from engine braking, also known as “jake braking.” Several comments originated from the Montford community.

Response

One of the goals of local area plans highlighted in the DEIS and FEIS is to minimize air quality impacts. By providing free-flowing roadways, especially along the interstate, the air quality would be consistent with this goal, and would not exceed the air quality thresholds set forth under the Clean Air Act. The proposed project is located in an attainment area and is not anticipated to create any adverse effects on the air quality of this attainment area.

As previously noted, NCDOT is currently coordinating with the newly-formed Aesthetics Advisory Committee (AAC) to address aesthetic treatments that may be incorporated in the proposed project.

Proposed lighting is currently begin evaluated, and will include LED lighting that is focused towards the bridge to reduce impacts to the federally-endangered gray bat. NCDOT will participate in the discussions of the AAC throughout the final design and construction phases regarding lighting as well.

At the request of the public and the City of Asheville, NCDOT prepared a map of 360-degree photo simulations for the project, in addition to the project visualization shown at the Design Public Hearing. These photo simulations can assist in visualizing what the

proposed project might look like from various points of view throughout the study area. These can be viewed from the project website <https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/asheville-i-26-connector/Pages/photos-videos.aspx>.

Regarding noise impact concerns, a preliminary traffic noise analysis is currently underway, and the results are not yet available. The analysis is being updated due to the design revisions made to the preferred alternative, the availability of updated traffic data, and the publication of a new NCDOT Noise Policy. Once the analysis is complete, the report will be placed on the project website, and maps will be posted that show areas likely to get noise abatement based on that preliminary analysis. A newsletter will be mailed alerting people to the availability of those materials. During final design, a final design noise analysis will be performed; it is this analysis that will identify recommended noise wall locations. Residence and business property owners will be involved in making the final decisions on whether or not noise walls will be placed in areas that NCDOT has determined can be constructed as part of the project. Low noise surface pavement is not an abatement measure approved by FHWA. Therefore, NCDOT would not specify the use of a low noise surface pavement to be used for noise abatement; however, the NCDOT Division Office could include this type of specification in the RFP without classifying the pavement as a noise abatement measure. There is currently limited information regarding the lifespan of these pavement types. Pavement design will be investigated further during final design. Restrictions on the use of “jake braking” is enforced in some areas by local law enforcement, however, the request for sign installations would originate from the city.

Safety

Comment Summary

Approximately 31 comments were received regarding safety issues. Many comments related to safety specifically addressed bicycle/pedestrian safety. Others noted that removing access at Hanover Street from Haywood Road could increase crime in the surrounding residential area. There were also concerns regarding driver safety on the curved flyover bridges during times of rainfall, snowfall, and other inclement weather.

Response

The design of the preferred alternative is in accordance with AASHTO’s “A Policy on Design Standards – Interstate System” which states that “The highways of this system (Interstate System) must be designed to ensure safety, permanence, utility, and flexibility to provide for predicted traffic growth.” A goal for this project is to provide a safe facility that accommodates projected traffic. In the view of NCDOT and FHWA the design criteria for the proposed project is appropriate and any design revisions would need to adhere to these criteria. These criteria include the appropriate design standards for ensuring the facility is safe on bridges and flyovers during inclement weather. AASHTO has certain precautions that should be considered as final design is developed such as the levels of skid resistance on asphalt, minimization of snow melt and storage, visibility of fog, and other conditions encountered on bridges and flyovers in this area of the state.

Regarding the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians, the appropriate safety amenities have been included in the preliminary designs. All bicycle and pedestrian facilities will be designed according the North Carolina Complete Streets Policy and Design Guidelines,

AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, and the AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities. A primary goal of planning, designing, and creating complete streets is to make it possible for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders to all travel safely from their origins to their destinations.

Concerns regarding crime increases due to the proposed designs should be coordinated with local law enforcement.

Environmental Impacts (i.e. Loss of trees/vegetation)

Comment Summary

Approximately 25 comments were received relating to environmental impacts. Comments expressed concern over the loss of mature trees during construction (particularly at Community Baptist Church in the Burton Street Community and along Westover Drive in the Montford Community). Several comments requested mature trees that are impacted during construction be replaced, as well as vegetative buffers constructed in areas such as Riverside Drive, Riverside Cemetery, and Montford. Additional comments noted stability in the Montford area as a concern, requesting a study be undertaken to determine the negative effects of additional highway construction. Stormwater impacts due to increased impervious surface were also noted in several comments as a concern. It was suggested NCDOT coordinate with the City's Tree Commission, Stormwater Management Department, and Office of Sustainability.

Response

NCDOT will consider incorporating landscaping into the project design to minimize the loss of vegetation. NCDOT is currently coordinating with the newly-formed Aesthetics Advisory Committee (AAC) regarding various aspects of project aesthetics, including how to best incorporate some of the project features to be compatible with the surrounding natural environment. NCDOT will participate in the discussions of the AAC throughout the final design and construction phases.

In areas where removal of vegetation is necessary, it is understood this can negatively impact water quality due to project construction runoff. In accordance with the North Carolina Sedimentation and Pollution Control Act (15A NCAC 4B.0001.0027), an erosion and sedimentation control plan must be prepared for land disturbing activities that cover one or more acres to protect against runoff from a 10-year storm. Thus, prior to the start of project construction activities, an erosion and sedimentation control plan will be prepared in accordance with the NCDEQ publication Erosion and Sediment Control Planning and Design Manual (NCDNR 1993), and the NCDOT guidelines in Best Management Practices for Protection of Surface Waters (NCDOT 1997).

In August 2017, NCDOT requested the Geotechnical Unit to provide a subsurface investigation and inventory and preliminary geotechnical recommendation for the area near Montford. The recommendations were documented in a memo dated November 14, 2017 and did not determine unstable slopes during construction of the I-26 Connector.

Right-of-way/Relocations

Comment Summary

Approximately 22 comments were received related to the right-of-way and relocation process. It was noted the amount of time for relocation was not enough time for residents

and businesses to adequately prepare. As noted above under Community Impacts, several comments were received requesting NCDOT and the City of Asheville to work together to redevelop the property along Patton Avenue for mixed-use. Additionally, comments were received requesting the project footprint be reduced as much as possible to minimize impacts to residences and businesses. Several comments were received with questions regarding specific impacts to personal property. Specific comments received to date with regard to impacts to personal property have been responded to as received.

Response

NCDOT will investigate ways to further minimize impacts as much as possible during final design. Section 4.1.2.3 of the DEIS references the Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan, which emphasizes the need for affordable housing, as well as the need for improvements that will aid in community development. The plan notes the lack of housing supply is prevalent across the entire region (Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties) and across all income levels. The trend indicating the need for affordable housing seems to be driven by social and community influences including neighborhood redevelopment and gentrification and is likely to continue regardless of the I-26 Connector Project.

Comments with specific requests to be contacted regarding impacts to their personal property have been responded to as received.

Regarding the redevelopment of the land to the east of the Jeff Bowen Bridges along Patton Avenue, the City of Asheville will need to coordinate with the NCDOT Right-of-way branch regarding the right-of-way disposal process.

After the final design has been approved, the proposed right-of-way limits will be staked in the ground. Affected property owners will be contacted by a Right-of-Way agent to arrange a meeting and discuss the next steps. The minimum time required for NCDOT to provide notification to impacted property owners regarding relocations is 90 days.

Alternative Choice

Comment Summary

Approximately 22 comments were received suggesting alternative choices to the preferred alternative. Alternatives suggested included:

- Tunneling under the French Broad River as opposed to constructing flyover bridges.
- Creating a bypass around Asheville, as opposed to through Asheville.
- Investigating the future of roadways considering the introduction of autonomous vehicles and electric cars.
- Investing in mass transit options.
- Designing bridges to include light rail, bus rapid transit, or bus on shoulder.
- Constructing park and ride lots.

Response

- Tunneling under the French Broad River as opposed to constructing flyover bridges.

NCDOT was requested to investigate the feasibility of constructing a tunnel in Section B under the French Broad River. A Tunnel Feasibility Evaluation Memorandum investigated the feasibility of a subsurface passage of the French Broad River by I-26 and the I-240 connection ramps in Section B. The full memorandum is included in Appendix A of the FEIS. Several major challenges were found with this option and it was determined not to be feasible. These challenges are discussed further in the FEIS.

- Creating a bypass around Asheville, as opposed to through Asheville.

The evaluation of a bypass alternative was evaluated in the Phase I Environmental Analysis and is included in Section 2.5.3.1 of the DEIS. It was determined that a bypass alternative would not meet the purpose and need for the proposed project and was eliminated from further study.

- Investing in mass transit options.

Mass transit alternatives were studied as a part of the alternatives evaluation process. The use of BRT along the freeway corridors within the project study area would not provide substantial benefit as the freeways are radial routes and the routes would likely need to run along the arterials to serve the urban core of Asheville.

- Investigating the future of roadways considering the introduction of autonomous vehicles and electric cars.

While autonomous and electric cars have been introduced to the highways, currently, there is not enough research to forecast the potential impact these vehicles will have on traffic volumes extending to the design year of the project, which is 2040. At this time, autonomous vehicles are not taken into consideration prompting changes to the current preliminary design.

- Designing bridges to include light rail, bus rapid transit, or bus on shoulder.

Constructing HOT or BOS lanes would likely increase the project footprint due to the need to still accommodate “free” lanes of traffic. It was determined mass transit alternatives would not meet the project purposes related to system linkage along the I-26 Corridor. Therefore, mass transit measures implemented alone were not considered reasonable and feasible for this project. Additional discussion is included in Section 2.4 of the FEIS.

- Constructing park and ride lots.

Adding Park and Ride facilities are outside of the scope of this project. The City of Asheville’s May 2018 Transit Master Plan proposes several areas where potential park and ride options could be located, as well as their plans for updating the current transit network.

Traffic

Comment Summary

Approximately 20 comments were received concerning traffic. Many proponents noted the project would alleviate traffic congestion along I-26. Acton Circle was identified as an area of concern due to traffic volumes from Monte Vista Road.

Response

In the I-2513 2040 Build Alternative capacity analysis, Acton Circle N at US 19-23-74A (Smokey Park Highway) was converted to allow all entering movements, but eastbound was converted to a right-out only configuration. Traffic attempting to make a left turn onto northbound US 19-23-74A (Smokey Park Highway), or go eastbound through onto the I-40 eastbound onramp was rerouted to Acton Circle S, approximately 0.40 mile south of Acton Circle N. However, Acton Circle S was outside of the original study area, and was not included in the I-2513 traffic forecast, and so the impact of this rerouted traffic was not studied.

An adjacent project, I-4759 (I-40 at SR 1228) included both Acton Circle N and Acton Circle S in its traffic forecast. Therefore, the decision was made to analyze the traffic volume impacts at Acton Circle S from the modifications made by the I-2513 traffic capacity analysis. The recommended lane changes that improve operations at this intersection will be added to the final design and shall be considered a commitment in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Other intersections located outside of the project study area will be prioritized and studied separately.

Access Concerns

Comment Summary

Approximately 20 comments were received related to concerns about access changes. Specific locations noted in the comments include:

- Haywood Road and Michigan Avenue – suggestions to add a stoplight due to changes in access at adjacent roads
- Improved access behind Westgate Mall
- Concerns regarding the proposed closure of Bruce Road
- Concerns regarding removal of on-street parking along Haywood Road, specifically in front of the B&B Pharmacy

Response

At a meeting with the Asheville Primary School on August 16, 2018, the school requested a pedestrian signal in the vicinity of Haywood and Argyle Lane. Additionally, the City discussed investigating this pedestrian crossing as well as other signal improvements on Haywood with safety funding and not as a part of this project.

- Haywood Road and Michigan Avenue – suggestions to add a stoplight due to changes in access at adjacent roads

The new design will be removing exiting I-26 traffic from Hanover Street, which is expected to result in lower traffic volumes in the vicinity of Michigan Avenue and Hawyood Road. While outside of the scope of the I-2513 project, NCDOT will consider making Hanover Street a “T” end street to help ease turning movements.

- Improved access behind Westgate Mall

NCDOT is aware of the issues associated with truck access in this area and is currently reviewing potential options to improve access. These additional access changes will be included in final design.

- Concerns regarding the proposed closure of Bruce Road

Bruce Road will be closed as a result of the proposed improvements at Smokey Park Highway. Traffic will be rerouted to Monte Vista Road and Acton Circle. An additional benefit of the Bruce Road closure is the removal of a railroad crossing.

- Concerns regarding removal of on-street parking along Haywood Road, specifically in front of the B&B Pharmacy

NCDOT is committed to investigating design measures which minimize impacts along Haywood Road in an effort to replace on-street parking. NCDOT will also coordinate with the City to investigate the possibility of opening the space between parking lots to allow for additional parking.

Cost

Comment Summary

Approximately 18 comments were received noting the cost of the project as a concern. Comments related to this topic were both in favor and against the project. Those in favor of the project noted the process has taken too long and costs have inflated substantially. Comments opposed to the project noted the project is too costly and not warranted for the community. It was also noted that as opposed to allocating the funds to constructing the project, they should be allocated to maintenance of the existing facilities.

Response

The right-of-way, construction, and utility relocation costs presented at the Design Public Hearing are based on the preliminary design plans. The project has been included in the FBRMPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan for several years as a fiscally constrained project.

The funds allocated for the project are to be used specifically for the proposed project. NCDOT maintenance funds are allocated from a separate source within NCDOT and cannot be transferred.

Business Impacts

Comment Summary

Approximately 17 comments were received regarding concerns over business and economic impacts. Several comments in regards to specific business impacts were received and were responded to as received. As noted in the section regarding access concerns, businesses along Haywood Road expressed concern due to the loss of on-street parking. Comments related to tourism impacts were also received, noting the scale of the project would deter tourists. Proponents of the project noted the project is needed to accommodate increased traffic volumes from tourists. Additionally, comments were received requesting the project footprint be reduced as much as possible to minimize impacts to businesses.

Response

NCDOT is committed to minimizing impacts to the number of business relocations due to the proposed project. The preliminary designs for the preferred alternative were refined to further take into consideration feasible engineering, safety, economics, public well-being, and the least amount of injury and inconvenience to the public. NCDOT will

continue to look for other opportunities to further avoid and minimize relocations due to the project to the greatest extent practicable during final design.

Since the approval of the DEIS and the selection of the LEDPA, preliminary designs have been refined based on updated traffic studies and public and resource agency comments on the 2015 DEIS, with minimization to residences and businesses. Various design changes were the result of periodic meetings with the City of Asheville, local organizations, adjacent neighborhoods, and historic property owners in order to better understand concerns and to obtain input on how the project could be refined to better fit within the context of Asheville while meeting local and regional needs.

Construction Impacts

Comment Summary

Approximately eight comments were received related to construction impacts. These included concerns about the length of time it would take to construct this project, noting that there are additional projects to the north and south that will likely be under construction at the same time. It was requested phasing occur to assuage several consecutive years of construction throughout the I-26 Corridor. Other concerns were related to the design build process discussed at the Public Hearing. Comments assumed this process would allow the contractor the freedom to continue to change the designs without additional public involvement. As mentioned in the bicycle/pedestrian section, comments also requested bicycle/pedestrian accommodations before and during the construction process, as opposed to constructing them after the roadway improvements.

Response

NCDOT will make every effort possible to continue coordination with the local municipalities the FBRMPO throughout the final design and construction of the project.

The design-build process allows NCDOT to hire a team of designers and contractors that are responsible for the design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of the project. The team may begin construction on one portion of the project while they finish the design and right-of-way acquisition for another section. This typically results in faster completion. Additional benefits to a design-build project may include innovative solutions that save time, money, and/or reduce impacts and quicker resolution to problems that arise during design and construction. The process may provide additional alternatives or modification to the existing alternative which in turn may reduce costs or impacts. It is important to note, while the opportunity for flexibility in the design is present, the “green sheet” located at the beginning of the FEIS and included in the ROD identifies a list of commitments the design build team must adhere to. Impacts disclosed in the FEIS will not be increased without additional coordination with the agencies and the public. It is the goal of the final design and design build team to minimize impacts.

Other

Comment Summary

Other comments received noted the validity of the logical termini in regards to the projects located to the north and south of the I-26 Connector. It was also noted the environmental document should be prioritized. One comment suggested a health study to be completed for the project.

Response

The project segmentation referred to is in regards to three projects along I-26 and Future I-26 in western North Carolina:

- *NCDOT STIP Project I-4400/I-4700: Additional lanes on I-26 south of Asheville*
- *NCDOT STIP Project I-2513: I-26 Connector*
- *NCDOT STIP Project A-0010A: Upgrade US 19/23 to Interstate Standards*

FHWA and NCDOT have closely coordinated project decisions with the local, state, and federal resource agencies and continue to do so as each project progresses. While these projects are closely related, the project limits were established so that each has logical termini and independent utility. System-to-system (or interstate-to-interstate) interchanges are often used to identify project limits, or logical termini, which is the case for these projects. Given major decisions for these projects are coordinated, they are represented separately and analyzed as such due to their different purposes and needs, which allow for a more detailed look to be taken along each segment.

NCDOT typically considers health-related effects of transportation during its long-range planning efforts. Health may be considered during project design as well as during the NEPA review process. Several public health considerations, including access to goods and public services, noise, air quality, and safety, have been addressed in the DEIS and the FEIS and are important considerations that would continue to guide project development.

Cc: Post Hearing Meeting attendees (*attended by phone)

Felix Davila – FHWA
Derrick Weaver – NCDOT EPU
Theresa Ellerby – NCDOT PMU
Kevin Moore – NCDOT PMU
Xiudong Han – NCDOT RDU
Brenda Moore – NCDOT RDU
Douglas Kretchman – NCDOT RDU
Tatia White – NCDOT RDU
Missy Pair – NCDOT Noise
Jamille Robbins – NCDOT PICSViz
Greg Hall – NCDOT Roadway Lighting
Kevin Fischer – NCDOT SMU
Joe Hummer – NCDOT Traffic Management
Steve Cannon – NCDOT Division 13*
Chase Carver – NCDOT Division 13*
Randy McKinney – NCDOT Division 13*
Brendan Merrithew – NCDOT Division 13*
Simone Robinson – Public Participation Partners*
Neil Dean – AECOM
Drew Joyner – AECOM
Chris Lucia – AECOM*
Celia Miars – AECOM
Joanna Rocco – AECOM
Eric Spalding – AECOM