



UPDATE

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

No.7 Summer 2001

NCDOT TO DELAY RELEASE OF DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR U.S. 321 IMPROVEMENTS IN BLOWING ROCK UNTIL 2002

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Delay will enable planners to fully evaluate all proposed alternatives and will give citizens more time to review document prior to the Public Hearing

Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet announced on July 11, 2001 that the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) will delay the release of the draft environmental impact statement for the U.S. 321 improvements in Blowing Rock until early 2002—with a public hearing in the summer of 2002. NCDOT had originally planned to release the statement later this summer. The delay is necessary to allow planners more time to fully evaluate all five construction alternatives as well as the no-build alternative and to give citizens more time to review the document prior to the public hearing.

“Improving U.S. 321 is not only important for western North Carolina, it is also vital for citizens across the state who travel through Blowing Rock,” said Tippet. “That’s why it’s crucial that the department be as thorough as possible during

“We are sensitive to the needs and concerns of all Blowing Rock residents as well as those motorists traveling through western North Carolina who use this corridor,” said Sam Erby, who represents Watauga County on the N.C. Board of Transportation. “Although we plan to release the draft environmental impact statement in early 2002, we will wait until early summer to hold the public hearing, thus giving residents ample time to review this document in advance.”

U.S. 321 is one of the intrastate routes identified for improvement by the Highway Trust Fund in 1989. The majority of this corridor is already improved to four lanes and the improvements in Blowing Rock will enable the state to complete this corridor. NCDOT began studies on US 321 in Blowing Rock in 1989. For more information about US 321 in Blowing Rock, citizens are encouraged to visit the project website at www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321 or call the information hotline at 1-800-263-2434.

the preparation of the draft environmental impact statement.”

The longer time frame will give citizens more time to review the draft environmental impact statement before the public hearing, which will be held in summer 2002 and will allow seasonal residents the opportunity to participate. The postponement is not expected to cause a delay in the project schedule.



Inside: ✓ Consulting Party Announcement

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CONSULTING PARTY ANNOUNCEMENT

Consulting Party Invitation

As part of the US 321 Improvements project, the project team will evaluate the effect the various alternatives will have on historic resources in the project area. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will include the names and locations of these historic resources, and it will describe where each of the project alternatives is situated with respect to the historic resources. Federal regulations provide an opportunity for those with economic, historic, or legal interest in historic resources in a project area to be a "consulting party" in the assessment of effects of a proposed project on

Historic Resources in the US 321 Project Area

those resources. The purpose of this invitation is to:

- Inform the public of the consulting party regulations;
- Specify the previously identified historic properties in the project area;
- Communicate who is eligible to be a consulting party;
- Explain the role of a consulting party;
- Announce to the local community the opportunity to request consulting party status; and how to do so.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) requires Federal agencies (in this case, the Federal Highway Administration) to consider the effects of their actions on historic properties. The 1966 Act also created the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), an independent agency, to address historic preservation issues. A major role of the ACHP is to provide comment to Federal agencies on the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. The ACHP also has developed regulations that set out the process by which a Federal agency implements Section 106. These regulations are outlined in 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 800 – Protection of Historic Properties and can be found online at the ACHP website: www.achp.gov/regs.html. The most recently amended regulations took effect on January 11, 2001.

With the concurrence of the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), the NCDOT and the FHWA have identified four historic resources in the US 321 project area. The resources were identified by architectural historians under contract to Parsons Brinckerhoff. The locations of these resources are identified on the map on page 3 of this newsletter. They are the:

- Green Park Historic District
- Green Park Inn (which is within the District)
- Bollinger-Hartley House
- Blue Ridge Parkway

The first three are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Parkway is eligible for listing on the National Register.

Who Are the Consulting Parties?

A cornerstone of the amended Section 106 process is for FHWA to identify the appropriate parties that should be involved in the process of identifying a proposed project's effects on historic properties and potential means of minimizing harm to those resources. This involvement is referred to as "consultation." According to the ACHP website: "Consultation is a dynamic good faith process of seeking, discussing and considering views," and "where feasible, seeking agreement...regarding matters in the Section 106 process."

The Section 106 regulations list the following as potential consulting parties:

- State or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
- Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations, as applicable
- Representatives of local governments



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- Applicants for Federal assistance, permits, licenses and other approvals
- Additional consulting parties

Federal regulations provide an opportunity for those with an economic, historic, or legal interest in historic resources in a project area to be a "consulting party" in the assessment of effects of a proposed project on those resources. Currently, planned consulting parties are the State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the NCDOT. The FHWA also plans to invite representatives of the Town of Blowing Rock, Watauga County, Caldwell County and representatives of North Carolina's Native Americans. The Concerned Citizens of Blowing Rock have asked to be an additional consulting party, and they have been granted this status. Others also may request to be invited by FHWA to participate as consulting parties.

The Role of a Consulting Party

During the review of the DEIS, all consulting parties will be given the opportunity to comment on the following related to historic resources:

- Whether any additional resources may exist in the project area.
- The correctness of effect determinations.
- The appropriateness of mitigation measures proposed and other measures that might be considered.

If the preferred alternative selected after the DEIS review process has an adverse effect on historic resources, all consulting parties will have an opportunity to provide comment during the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

The purpose of this phase of consultation is to seek ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects and to incorporate the results of that consultation into an MOA. The MOA sets out the measures agreed upon by the FHWA, the SHPO and consulting parties to resolve adverse effects. The MOA is a legally binding document that commits FHWA and others to ensure the project is carried out in accordance with its stipulations. During the development of an MOA, the FHWA expects the active participation to the consulting parties and may invite some or all to sign the agreement to indicate their concurrence with its terms. The MOA must be signed by FHWA, SHPO, and the ACHP in order to complete the Section 106 process and for the project to move forward.

Who Do I Contact About Becoming a Consulting Party?

The Federal Highway Administration would like to invite anyone with such an interest to be a consulting party for this project. If you would like to be considered as a consulting party, please submit a letter of interest to: Mr. Nicholas L. Graf, PE, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration – NC Division, 310 New Bern Avenue – Suite 410, Raleigh, NC 27601-1418.

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 or visit the project's website at www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321.

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 project phone number or e-mail address.

Information Line 1-800-263-2434

E-mail Address BlowingRock321@dot.state.nc.us

Website www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321



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