



Gaston County East-West Corridor Study

TIP Project Number U-3321

Issue 1 ? April 2003

NCDOT Studies the Garden Parkway

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is proposing to improve east-west travel between I-85 west of Gastonia in Gaston County and I-485/NC 160 in Mecklenburg County. As shown on the enclosed map, the project study area consists of the following general boundaries: I-85 to the north, the South Carolina State line to the south, the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport to the east, and the I-85 and US 29-74 junction to the west.

The Gaston County East-West Corridor is Project Number U-3321 in the NCDOT *Draft 2004-2010 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)*.

TIP Project U-3321 is one of two projects that make up the **project** locally known as "Garden Parkway". The proposed Garden Parkway is shown on the *Gaston Urban Area Thoroughfare Plan* as a future freeway from US 321 north of Gastonia, extending around the west side of Gastonia, across I-85, then south and east to I-485/NC 160 in Mecklenburg County.

TIP Project R-2608, which also is included in NCDOT *Draft 2004-2010 TIP*, is the other project included in the Gar-

den Parkway but not included in the Gaston County East-West Corridor Study.

The enclosed project study area map shows the corridor for the Garden Parkway as it appears on the *Gaston Urban Area Thoroughfare Plan*. This conceptual alignment is one of many to be studied. Neither the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) nor NCDOT have recommended an alignment at this time.

WHAT'S INSIDE.....

Interested in the Garden Parkway Study?

The project development, engineering, and environmental studies for a portion of the Garden Parkway are underway. In this first newsletter issue you will find information on the:

- *Project background, planning process, and need*
- *Public involvement opportunities*

STAY INFORMED AND GET INVOLVED!

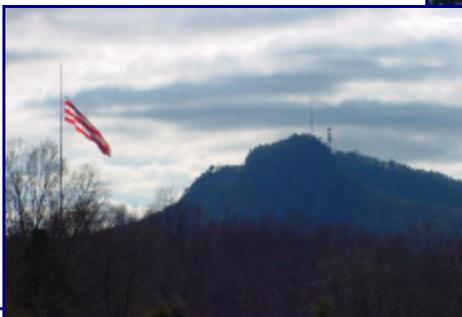
Previous Studies of the Garden Parkway

The Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the transportation planning partnership for the region, is responsible for setting transportation priorities. Recognizing the need for east-west travel improvements in the area, the MPO led an extensive effort to evaluate and develop a corridor for the Garden Parkway as part of the *Thoroughfare Plan* development process.

In 1996, a Citizens' Advisory Council was formed to provide recommendations to the Gaston Urban Area Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). This group, known as the US 321/74 Bypass Citizens' Committee, consisted of 40 Gaston County residents. From 1997 through 1999, this committee met monthly in an effort to select a corridor for the Garden Parkway. The Citizens' Committee recommended the corridor that was adopted for the Garden Parkway as part of the *Thoroughfare Plan* and appears on the enclosed map.

Current Funding

The project development, engineering, and environmental studies for the proposed project (TIP Project U-3321) are funded by \$550,000 in federal grants obtained by local congressional representatives and by matching funds from the NCDOT. In February of 2003, Congresswoman Sue Myrick obtained an additional \$750,000 in federal funding for the continuation of planning and environmental studies. The NCDOT, in cooperation with the FHWA, will administer federal and state funding for the proposed project.



Crowders Mountain



View of US 29-74



Charlotte-Douglas Int'l. Airport

Requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The project development, engineering, and environmental studies will be conducted in compliance with the procedures set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

NEPA is our nation's basic charter for protection of the environment. NEPA requires all federal agencies to consider the significant effects of their actions on the human and natural environments in their planning and decision-making processes, and to prepare a detailed statement documenting these considerations and the resulting recommendations. The NCDOT will prepare an Environmental Impact

Statement (EIS) for the proposed Gaston Parkway.

The EIS will identify the needs and purposes for the proposed project, study a wide range of alternatives, and evaluate the adverse and beneficial human and natural environmental impacts of all alternatives that meet the project's purpose and need. This detailed analysis will ultimately lead to the selection of a preferred alternative by the FHWA and NCDOT.

Input from citizens, elected officials, and agencies, as well as the Gaston Urban Area MPO, and other interested parties will be considered in the

selection of the preferred alternative.

The NCDOT recognizes the efforts of the Gaston Urban Area MPO and the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) in developing the corridor, and will evaluate this corridor in the alternatives. However, in accordance with NEPA, the NCDOT will evaluate and document the ability of other alternatives to meet the project's purposes and needs.

The NEPA Planning Process and Project Status

The project planning process for transportation projects subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) can be divided into the eight steps listed to the right.

Currently, the proposed project is in the beginning stages of **Step 2**.

The NCDOT is developing Land Suitability Mapping (part of Step 2) for the project study area. The Land Suitability Mapping will identify notable features that exist in the project study area, including, but not limited to, neighborhoods, rivers and streams, wetlands, community facilities, airports, federally protected species, historic properties, and hazardous waste sites. The NCDOT will use this mapping to develop preliminary alternatives.

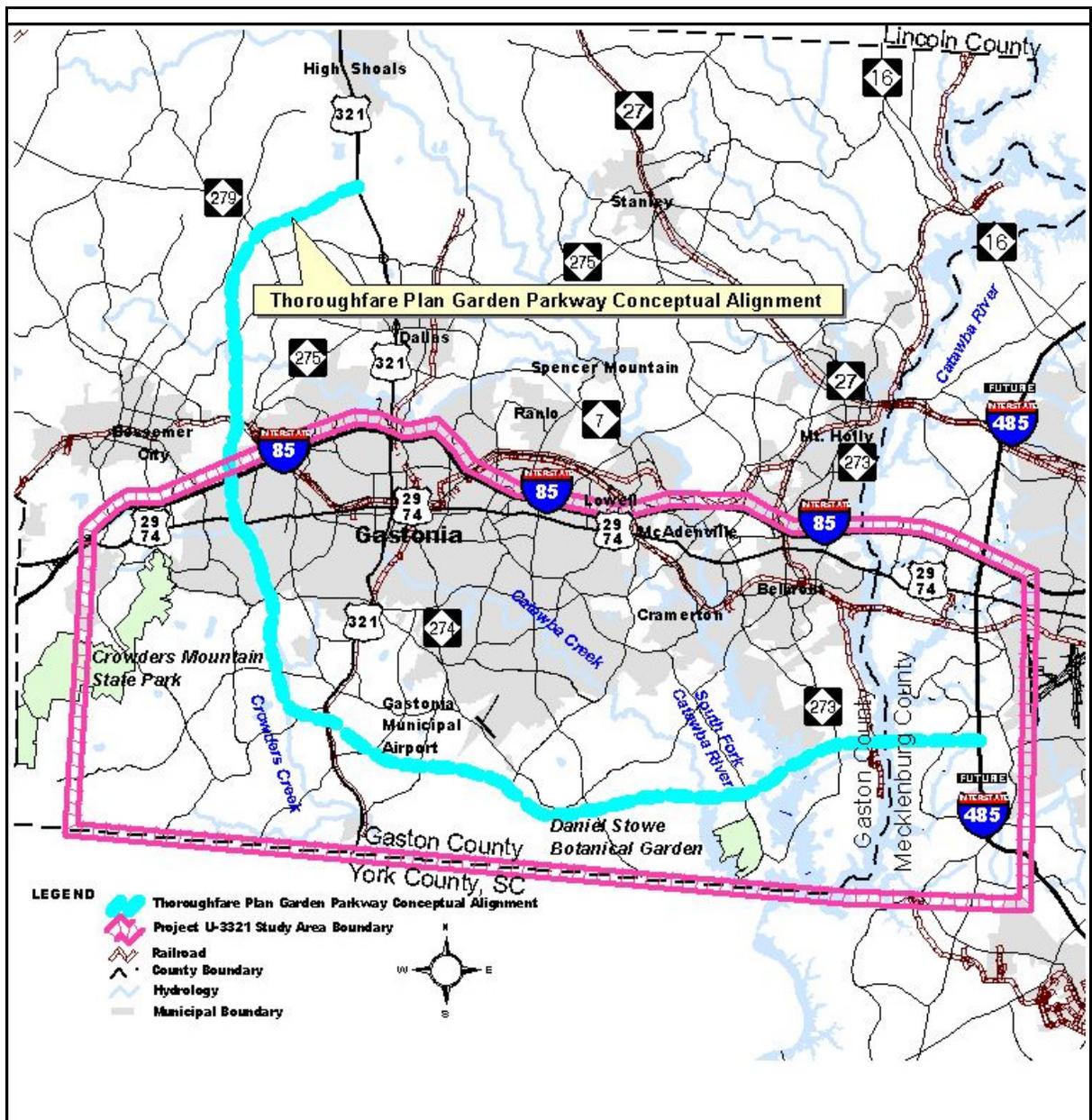
Results from Step 1—The Project Need

Transportation needs for southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County were identified in **Step 1** of the eight step NEPA planning process. These are listed below.

- *Improve mobility, access and connectivity in southern Gaston County and between southern Gaston County and Mecklenburg County*
- *Reduce congestion and improve traffic flow on the sections of I-85, US 29-74 and US 321 in the project study area; improve high-speed, safe regional travel service along the US 29-74 intrastate corridor; and generally improve safety and reduce above average accident rates in the project study area*

THE 8-STEP PLANNING PROCESS

1. Data Collection, Identify Existing Deficiencies, Define Study Area, Statement of Purpose and Need
2. **Land Suitability Mapping, Citizens' Informational Workshop, Identify Preliminary Alternatives, Select Alternatives for Detailed Study**
3. Engineering Studies, Environmental Analysis, Second Citizens' Informational Workshop
4. Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)
5. Corridor /Design Public Hearing
6. Review comments on DEIS (Step 4) and transcript from Corridor Public Hearing (Step 5), Select Preferred Alternative
7. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision (ROD)
8. Design Public Hearing



Public Involvement Opportunities

Implementation of a Public Involvement Program is an integral part of the NEPA process. The Program ensures citizens, elected officials, and other interested parties are informed and afforded the opportunity to be involved in the transportation decision-making. The Program will include Citizens Informational Workshops and Public Hearings. Newsletters such as this one and press releases will announce the workshops and hearings and provide project updates.

In addition, informal small group meetings with elected officials, public agencies, civic organizations, and interested citizens will be held upon request.

The first Citizens' Informational Workshop is scheduled for the Summer of 2003. The purpose of this workshop will be to introduce local citizens to the project and solicit input/comments on potential alternatives.





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For More Information

If you have questions or comments about the proposed project, want to be added to the project mailing list and receive future newsletters, or to request a presentation to or meeting with you or your group, please contact the Consultant Project Manager.

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NEWSLETTER

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