

## Sweeten Creek Road (US 25A) Improvements Project STIP Project U-2801A

### Responses to Comments Received at Public Meeting #1 (November 2018)

#### Introduction

An open-house public meeting was held on Tuesday, November 13, 2018, at the Arden Presbyterian Church (2215 Hendersonville Road, Arden, NC) to provide the public with information about the proposed project to improve Sweeten Creek Road in Asheville, NC (STIP Project U-2801A). The meeting was advertised in the local paper and on the project website (<https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/sweeten-creek-road/>), and postcard announcements were delivered to US Postal Service routes along the project corridor (through Every Door Direct Mail) and mailed to approximately 300 non-resident property owners. The meeting was attended by 471 members of the public. A local officials meeting held earlier in the day was attended by 12 representatives of the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and National Park Service.

A handout provided background information about the need for the project, the proposed design, and the project schedule. Large maps of the proposed project were on display, and NCDOT and consultant staff were on hand to answer questions and listen to input from citizens. NCDOT Right of Way staff were also on hand to answer questions about the NCDOT right of way acquisition process. Meeting attendees were invited to provide written comments at the meeting, through mail or email, or online via the NCDOT project website. A total of 716 comments were submitted to NCDOT prior to the meeting, at the meeting, or during the public comment period.

Many comments indicated a preference for one of the widening alternatives (east-side or west-side) in one or more of the eight sections of the project. The preferences indicated by the public comments were as follows:

Section #	Description	Stated Preference For East-Side Widening	Stated Preference For West-Side Widening
1	Bridge over the Blue Ridge Southern Railroad to South of Cedar Lane	2	0
2	South of Cedar Lane to South of Windsor Drive	7	4
3	South of Windsor Drive to South of Mills Gap Road	1	36
4	South of Mills Gap Road to Wesley Drive	24	312
5	South of Wesley Drive to North of Hollybrook Drive	2	357
6	North of Hollybrook Drive to South of the Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge	6	2

Section #	Description	Stated Preference For East-Side Widening	Stated Preference For West-Side Widening
7	South of the Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge to North of Edgewood Drive	70	0
8	North of Edgewood Drive to North of Rock Hill Road	107	4

Due to the number of comments received, the project team assigned each comment to one or more of 10 general categories and summarized similar comments within each of the following categories:

- 1) Traffic
- 2) Design
- 3) Access
- 4) Bicycle/Pedestrian/Transit
- 5) Property Impacts
- 6) Environmental Impacts
- 7) Typical Section
- 8) Noise
- 9) Historic Properties
- 10) General/Other

Responses to these summarized comments are provided in this document below.

### **Traffic Comments**

- 1) *Statements of agreement that traffic is heavy along the project corridor.*

Comment noted.

- 2) *Can we just add turn lanes and not additional lanes?*

The traffic analysis conducted for this project included a “future no-build” scenario (for the year 2040), which modeled future traffic volumes on the existing road network. This analysis indicated that the entire corridor will be congested and over capacity if the roadway is not widened. Additionally, the predicted traffic volumes on Sweeten Creek Road are above the threshold for the capacity of a two-lane road and indicate the need for two through travel lanes in each direction as added by the project designs. A single through lane will not be adequate to carry the future traffic volumes even with the addition of turn lanes.

- 3) *Requests that traffic lights be sequenced through the project corridor.*

Sequencing traffic signals is standard practice along all NCDOT corridor projects. The Division Traffic engineer is responsible for overseeing traffic signal functionality. The signals on Sweeten Creek Road are included in the Asheville City Signal that is currently under

construction. This project is upgrading the signal cabinets and installing fiber communications to 274 traffic signals in and around Asheville. Once the cabinets and fiber are installed, this project will begin the signal optimization phase. Based on the contractor's current schedule, the optimization will start in Spring 2020.

- 4) *Request to improve the Hendersonville Road stop lights to address the purpose and need for this project.*

The future, projected traffic volumes on Sweeten Creek Road are above the threshold for the capacity of a two-lane road and indicate the need for two through travel lanes as added by the project designs. While the concern over the timing of the Hendersonville Road traffic signals has been noted, this solution does not address the purpose and need for this project as the problems being addressed encompass more than one intersection.

- 5) *Comments in favor of adding or retaining existing stop lights.*

NCDOT uses standard procedures to determine where traffic signals should be located. The placement of a traffic signal is based on traffic volumes in both the base (current) year and design year. The volumes must be high enough to meet the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) warrants before signalization of an intersection is considered. Signalized intersection locations must be a minimum of 600 feet from the closest signal and a minimum of 1000 feet from an interchange (e.g., interstate ramp).

More specifically, the NCDOT regional traffic staff is responsible for analyzing intersections to determine if MUTCD signal warrants are met on any STIP project. Base year and design year traffic volumes from the traffic forecast are used to interpolate between the base year and five years after the project let date (i.e., the date that construction begins). The regional traffic engineer uses the 8-hour traffic volume warrant and the 8th highest hour to determine whether a signal is warranted at any public road intersection along a project.

Formal recommendations on traffic signals for inclusion in the proposed project are made by NCDOT once both 25% design plans and traffic forecasts have been completed.

- 6) *Requests for stop lights at one or more of the following locations:*

- a. *Park Avenue*
- b. *Kensington Place*
- c. *Weston Road*
- d. *Ballantree Drive*
- e. *Windsor Park / Windsor Drive*
- f. *Hollybrook Drive*
- g. *Royal Pines neighborhood*

Please see response to Question #5 above. All potential traffic signal locations along this corridor will be analyzed and the selected locations will be identified in the preliminary designs that will be presented to the public in late Summer 2019.

7) *Requests for no additional traffic lights.*

Please see response to Question #5 above.

8) *Requests for intersection improvements at one or more of the following locations:*

- a. *Mills Gap Road and Sweeten Creek Road*
- b. *Rock Hill Road and Sweeten Creek Road*
- c. *Pensacola Avenue and Sweeten Creek Road*
- d. *Gerber Road and Sweeten Creek Road (with request to widen Gerber Road to 3-lanes)*

The roadway deficiencies being addressed by this project are systemwide and not specific to particular intersections. As such, improvements to particular intersections in lieu of the overall project will not sufficiently address this project's purpose and need, which is to alleviate motorized vehicle congestion along Sweeten Creek Road. However, improvements to particular intersections in conjunction with this project and the widening of Sweeten Creek Road are being considered and will be included as warranted.

9) *Requests for specific turn lanes or turning movements at one or more of the following locations:*

- a. *Right turn only out of Park Avenue, Ballantree Drive, and Hollybrook Drive*
- b. *Add a right turn only lane at Mills Gap Road*
- c. *Add double turn lanes from Gerber Road south to Mills Gap Road*
- d. *Right turn lane from Sweeten Creek Road onto Rathfarnham, Gerber, and Mill Creek roads*
- e. *Right turn lane from Sweeten Creek Road onto Wesley Drive*

Analysis of turning movement traffic volumes at these intersections will be included in the traffic capacity report for this project. These results will be used in the development of the preliminary designs shown at the next public meeting, currently planned for late summer 2019.

### **Design Comments**

1) *Concerns regarding the speed of the roadway, need to enforce speed limits, etc.*

The proposed design speed for this project is 50 mph while the proposed posted speed is 45 mph. The roadway speed and final design of the road are developed in conjunction with and made to complement each other. Enforcement concerns will be shared with the City of Asheville and Buncombe County.

2) *With these improvements, request to make Sweeten Creek Road 55 mph.*

The proposed design speed for this project is 50 mph while the proposed posted speed is 45 mph. The roadway speed and final design of the road are developed in conjunction with and made to complement each other. The proposed posted speed of 45 mph is also the current posted speed limit of the roadway, which was previously approved by the City of Asheville and NCDOT. Based on driver expectation for this road, design constraints of the horizontal and vertical curves, and attempts to minimize adjacent property impacts, the proposed design speed of 50 mph and posted speed limit of 45 mph have been determined acceptable for this project.

3) *Request to add curves to designs to control speed.*

Slight curves in the roadway have been included in the project design for the purpose of alternating the widening direction in order to minimize impacts to adjacent properties. Adding curves beyond those within the existing designs would result in an increase in impacts to properties along the corridor.

4) *Request to sign the road to not allow thru trucks.*

The NCDOT North Carolina Truck Network (<https://tinyurl.com/y9o83tk2>) categorizes Sweeten Creek Road as a route available to trucks with single trailers less than or equal to 53 feet. Under GS 20-115.1 (b) (see below), NCDOT may restrict certain motor vehicle combinations. However, there must be clear documentation that the route cannot be safely accommodated and that the route does not have sufficient capacity to handle the specified vehicle combination. At this time, and particularly once this roadway widening is complete, the Department sees no clear justification to prohibit through trucks from using this route.

**GS 20-115.1 (b)** Motor vehicle combinations consisting of a semitrailer of not more than 53 feet in length and a truck tractor may be operated on all primary highway routes of North Carolina provided the motor vehicle combination meets the requirements of this subsection. The Department may, at any time, prohibit motor vehicle combinations on portions of any route on the State highway system. If the Department prohibits a motor vehicle combination on any route, it shall submit a written report to the Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee within six months of the prohibition clearly documenting through traffic engineering studies that the operation of a motor vehicle combination on that route cannot be safely accommodated and that the route does not have sufficient capacity to handle the vehicle combination.

5) *Request to bury the utilities.*

The burying of utilities is generally considered a betterment (i.e., “Any upgrade of the utility facility being relocated made solely for the benefit of, and at the election of, the utility and not attributable to the highway construction” [NCDOT Utility Policy Manual, August 2014, NCDOT Utilities Unit]); therefore, this request would need to come from the City of Asheville and the

City would need to agree to share in the additional cost of this work. In addition, the associated utility companies would need to agree to accommodate the request.

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/municipalities/Utilities/UtilitiesDocuments/Utilities%20Policy%20Manual.pdf>

- 6) *Requests related to correcting existing drainage issues, including mention of specific problems in the Ballantree neighborhood.*

Hydraulic analysis and designs are a standard part of NCDOT projects. These hydraulic designs will be developed prior to construction and will ensure that the project does not result in additional drainage problems to adjacent properties.

- 7) *Requests to consider roundabouts at the major intersections.*

The required footprint for two-lane roundabouts at major intersections would result in greater impacts to the surrounding properties at these intersections; therefore, they are not being considered as part of this project.

- 8) *Request to add a gravel parking area near the Blue Ridge Parkway.*

This area is not a designated parking area. Additionally, the Blue Ridge Parkway has stated that they do not want any type of connection made between their roadway and Sweeten Creek Road. Therefore, this request is outside the scope of this project and cannot be accommodated.

- 9) *Request to minimize street lighting, in particular to protect the Blue Ridge Parkway from light pollution.*

Street lighting decisions will be handled by the City of Asheville. The project team has shared this request with the City.

- 10) *Request to protect the access road/distinctive entrance to the Windsor Park neighborhood.*

Attempts to minimize impacts to the surroundings areas are being made everywhere possible within the project designs. If impacts must occur, including impacts to signage, these will be addressed during the right of way acquisition phase of the project, currently scheduled to begin Fall 2020.

## Access Comments

- 1) *Requests for median breaks/turn lanes/U-turns generally or at one or more of the following locations:*
  - a. *Park Avenue*
  - b. *Givens Estates*
  - c. *Charlyn Drive*
  - d. *Carolina Day School fields*
  - e. *Ballantree Drive*
  - f. *Windsor Park / Windsor Drive*
  - g. *Cimarron / Edgewood Drive*
  - h. *Electronic Office (business entrance)*
  - i. *Kensington Place*
  - j. *Holiday Drive*
  - k. *Stockwood Road*
  - l. *Woodstream Lane*
  - m. *South of Blue Ridge Parkway (general) for U-turn*
  - n. *Hollybrook Drive*
  - o. *Arbor Terrace*

Median break locations will be determined during the next phase of the design process, based on traffic volumes, impacts to adjacent properties, and spacing between breaks. NCDOT's policy is that "all-movement" median crossovers, or median breaks that allow all legal traffic movements to occur, on divided roadways with posted speeds greater than 45 mph shall be at least 2,000 feet apart. This spacing may be reduced to a minimum of 1,200 feet for posted speeds of 45 mph and less. While this policy is for "all-movement" crossovers, it may not necessarily apply to "restricted-movement" median openings, such as directional leftovers where vehicles can turn left across the median but other traffic is restricted from making any other legal traffic movement.

Ultimately, NCDOT makes decision for these locations on a project by project basis and may allow variances to these distances included in their policy.

- 2) *Consider possible temporary access through Givens Estate during construction.*

Options for detouring traffic during construction will be investigated during the final design stage of the project.

- 3) *How will left turns be accomplished with the new designs?*

Left turns will be accommodated through median breaks and U-turns along the project corridor. A diagram and further description of this concept can be seen in the PDF on the following NCDOT website: <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/safety-mobility/superstreets/Pages/default.aspx>.

The design concepts shown at the first public meeting (November 2018) did not show median breaks as their locations had not been decided yet. Decisions regarding the location of median breaks and U-turn bulbs will be presented at the next public meeting, currently planned for late summer 2019.

4) *Requests for stop lights at all U-turn (Michigan left) locations.*

The project's final design will dictate if U-turn signalization is warranted and will be based on MUTCD standards (see response to Traffic Question #5 above), sight distance, and turning radii to maximize safety and traffic operations.

5) *Changes in access will inconvenience people living along the project. Distance between left turns is too far.*

Due to the forecasted traffic volumes flowing through the project study area, the median and turn lanes will be located to maximize the safety of travelers using the corridor, enabling them to avoid turning left across oncoming traffic except at designated locations that are either controlled by a traffic signal or at a location with proper sight distance to allow for a U-turn. The locations of left turns and U-turns will be based on traffic volumes and capacity analyses, as well as a consideration for the maintenance of interconnectivity for the surrounding neighborhoods.

The project team recognizes that new travel patterns will cause a change for residents and other users of the Sweeten Creek Road corridor. While travel distances may increase slightly, there are many positive benefits that will be recognized; most notably, improvements to safety and mobility. Once the proposed improvements are complete, drivers should spend less time waiting to make turns to and from Sweeten Creek Road. They should also experience a less congested roadway since there will be an additional travel lane added in each direction, thereby increasing the traffic carrying capacity of the roadway. The project team is currently conducting a traffic analysis to determine travel time comparisons along Sweeten Creek based on the proposed designs. These results will be made available once complete.

6) *Access changes will impede emergency responders.*

The proposed changes in access are not anticipated to change emergency response times. Emergency vehicles (e.g., fire/rescue/EMS) are designed to be able to cross the raised median because the median curb will use "mountable curb and gutter" that allows emergency vehicles to drive over it safely without causing damage to the vehicle.



- 7) *Request for a frontage/collector road with “strategic” signal lights for access to subdivisions.*

The use of a frontage/collector road would result in a much wider footprint than is currently proposed and would therefore result in substantially greater impacts to adjacent properties, natural resources, and cultural resources along the corridor.

### **Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Transit Comments**

- 1) *Statement of support for multiuse path, bicycle lanes, and/or sidewalks.*

Comment noted.

- 2) *Statement of opposition for multiuse path, bicycle lanes, and/or sidewalks; or statement that only one or two of the three facilities are needed; or statement to reduce the widths of the facilities.*

The multi-use path and sidewalk were included in this project as a result of coordination with the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO) and a group of neighborhoods along Sweeten Creek Road that formed an association – the Sweeten Creek Association of Neighborhoods (SCAN).

The City of Asheville has adopted a Complete Streets Policy, which calls for all facilities to be designed and maintained with all users in mind. In addition, the FBRMPO has adopted the Urban/Suburban Avenue cross section from the North Carolina Complete Streets Planning and Design Guidelines for this corridor. This cross section includes sidewalks, recommended at 6 feet to 12 feet in width depending on local context. Bicycle lanes are also specified, at 4 feet to 6 feet wide, with 5 feet as the preferred width.

Within the STIP U-2801A study area, the Asheville in Motion Mobility Plan (2016) recommends 7-foot bike lanes with 3-foot striped buffers and vertical flex posts on both sides of the road, with a center turn lane or median. The plan also recommends sidewalks on both sides of Sweeten Creek Road with intersection improvements.

The Land of Sky Regional Council’s 2013 Blue Ridge Bike Plan identifies Sweeten Creek Road through the project study area as a Priority Corridor for Buncombe County. The plan recommends that bicycle lanes be included as part of the Sweeten Creek Road widening project (STIP U-2801A) as it is the only viable link planned for improvements to connect Biltmore Village to the Shiloh Community, South Asheville and Arden via an on-street facility, given the limitations along Hendersonville Road (US 25).

As such, the Asheville City Council passed a resolution in April 2018 on the recommended roadway cross section for Sweeten Creek Road which included a sidewalk and multi-use path physically separated from the road rather than having bicycle lanes next to the outside travel lanes on both sides of the road. The SCAN community’s Unified Plan (April 2018) also

recommended a multi-use path on one side of the road and a sidewalk on the other side to safely connect neighborhoods along Sweeten Creek Road.

The widths of the proposed multi-use path and sidewalk facilities included in the current designs are based on design standards established by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), NCDOT, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- 3) *Inclusion of multiuse path, bicycle lanes, and/or sidewalks is not worth the cost of impacting adjacent properties.*

Please see the above response. Additionally, note that whether or not sidewalks are constructed, a berm (within which the sidewalks can be constructed) is still required to accommodate the curb and gutter drainage system, as well as the potential for utility relocations. Therefore, the inclusion of sidewalks does not result in additional impacts to surrounding properties.

- 4) *Requests related to the location of the multiuse path, bicycle lanes, and/or sidewalks, including:*
- a. Sidewalks on west side at Rock Hill Road
  - b. Provide access to Blue Ridge Parkway
  - c. Keep multiuse path entirely on one side of road
  - d. Requests for multiuse path to be on either east or west side of roadway

The addition of sidewalks on Rock Hill Road, outside the Sweeten Creek Road corridor, is beyond the scope of this project. However, the City of Asheville has identified Rock Hill Road as a needed linkage in their bicycle plan and will look to include additional sidewalks in this location when funding is available.

The National Park Service has indicated that, at this time, they do not want, and therefore, do not plan to provide access to the Blue Ridge Parkway from Sweeten Creek Road.

Based on comments and coordination with the City of Asheville, the multiuse path will be located entirely along the west side of Sweeten Creek Road. The goal of this decision is to minimize property impacts north of Mills Gap Road and provide direct greenway/bicycle/pedestrian access to Jake Rusher Park. Pedestrian crosswalks will be provided at the signalized intersections to allow for pedestrians to access the multi-use path from the proposed sidewalk on the east side of Sweeten Creek Road.

- 5) *Concerns about pedestrian crossing safety/ease/access. Please add pedestrian crosswalks with signals, including requests for specific crossings at subdivisions.*

Pedestrian crosswalks will be provided at the signalized intersections and additional crosswalk locations will be considered during the design stage and in coordination with the City of Asheville and the NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Division. Crosswalk locations will be presented at the next public meeting currently planned for late summer 2019.

- 6) *Requests related to sidewalk connectivity:*
  - a. *Connect to sidewalk at Gerber Road*
  - b. *Sidewalk from Forest Lake development to proposed sidewalk*
  - c. *Connection to Hendersonville Road*

Requests for sidewalks outside the project corridor are not within the scope of this project and cannot be accommodated as part of STIP U-2801A. These requests, however, have been communicated to the City of Asheville for review. Gerber Road and Rock Hill Road to the intersection of Forest Lake Drive have been previously identified by the City as needed linkages in their bicycle and pedestrian plans.

- 7) *Request to consider light rail in lieu of the widening project.*

This proposal does not meet the purpose and need for the project.

- 8) *Request for bus service along Sweeten Creek Road and, in particular, a bus stop in front of Givens Estate*

Bus service in Asheville is provided by Asheville Redefines Transit (ART). Suggestions and requests for changes or additions in bus routes should be referred to their staff ([https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/transit/contact\\_staff.htm](https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/transit/contact_staff.htm)).

### **Property Impact Comments**

- 1) *Statements of opposition to loss of property or relocation due to project. The project has property impacts on too many residents and/or businesses.*

Efforts will be made to minimize residential property and business impacts during the design process. The “Areas of Potential Impact” that were shown at the November 2018 public meetings represented larger than needed areas due to the limited survey information available at this stage in the design process and the lack of preliminary design information developed so far. As work on the preliminary designs progress, more detailed information about property impacts will be presented at the next public meeting currently planned for late summer 2019.

During the final design stage of the project that follows the completion of the environmental document, more detailed survey information will be available, and it will be used to further reduce the needed right of way and associated easements, thereby, minimizing impacts to residential and business properties.

- 2) *Why can't Sweeten Creek Road be widened symmetrically to reduce overall impacts (e.g., why do you have to widen to the east or to the west)?*

*Symmetrical widening would likely cause substantial impacts to properties, and other resources, on both sides of the road and would ultimately result in more residential and business relocations. The project has been divided into 8 sections. Widening to the east and to the west is*

*being considered for each section to develop a “best fit” alternative that minimizes overall impacts to the extent practicable. Minimizing and balancing impacts to residences, neighborhoods, businesses, churches, parks, streams, wetlands, conservation easements, and the Blue Ridge Southern Railway must all be considered as part of the NEPA planning process.*

3) *Requests for retaining walls to minimize property impacts.*

The use of retaining walls will be evaluated during the design process and implemented where possible and appropriate.

4) *Concerns about impacts to specific religious or commercial properties:*

- a. Biltmore Church of God*
- b. New Hope Church*
- c. Arden First Baptist Church*
- d. Rocky’s Chicken*
- e. Beehive Coffee*
- f. Electronic Office*
- g. Sweeten Creek Plaza businesses*
- h. Sweeten Creek Automotive*
- i. Ventas*

Efforts will be made to minimize property impacts during the design process. More detailed information about property impacts will be presented at the next public meeting currently planned for late summer 2019.

## **Environmental Comments**

1) *Requests to preserve wetlands, streams, and/or trees.*

A federal environmental document is currently being prepared for this project that will review the potential environmental impacts of the work to be performed along Sweeten Creek Road. This document includes, but is not limited to, the analysis of threatened and endangered species and their habitat, watershed critical areas, high quality waters, outstanding resource waters, hazardous materials, FEMA floodplains and hazard mitigation, noise pollution, farmland soils, and wetland and stream identification and preservation. Coordination with US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, US Forest Service, among others, is involved in the development of this document.

Multiple state and federal regulations will provide safeguards for water quality throughout the project. In addition to Clean Water Act mitigation requirements for stream and wetland impacts (if needed), NCDOT has a stormwater program to protect and improve water quality while fulfilling NCDOT’s mission of providing and supporting a safe and integrated transportation system that enhances the state. Details can be found online at:  
<https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/hydro/Pages/Highway-Stormwater-Program.aspx>.

During project construction, NCDOT will minimize construction related impacts by implementing erosion and sediment control measures on construction sites to prevent soil movement/loss in the first place, enhance project aesthetics, reduce complaints, and most importantly, eliminate appreciable damage to off-site receiving channels, properties, and natural resources.

- 2) *Concerns about the ability of wildlife to cross the corridor. Requests to add a wildlife crossing in the vicinity of Four Mile Branch.*

NCDOT is coordinating with the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission (NC WRC) and NC State University on wildlife movement patterns in this area. Fourmile Branch has been identified as one location for the potential inclusion of a wildlife crossing (specifically, to accommodate bears). Discussions are ongoing with landowners whose properties include portions of Fourmile Branch, near Sweeten Creek Road, to determine the viability of constructing a wildlife crossing here. Additional meetings will be scheduled with the project's Merger Team and NC WRC over the next several months to finalize the determination of the viability of a wildlife crossing at Fourmile Branch.

- 3) *Concerns additional traffic will cause air quality impacts.*

An air quality analysis will be conducted as part of the environmental review for this project. With continued growth in the Asheville region, additional traffic is anticipated whether or not the proposed improvements on Sweeten Creek Road are completed. This project is anticipated to reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility, which should provide an overall benefit to air quality.

### **Typical Section Comments**

- 1) *Concerns regarding the width of the proposed median or opposition to the median entirely.*

There are significant constraints within the project corridor, including existing residences and businesses, intersecting streets, historic properties, a railroad corridor, and streams and wetlands. Due to the large number of constraints, the designs are being developed with the goal of minimizing impacts. As part of this minimization effort, the proposed median was reduced from the standard 23-feet to 17.5-feet. Median widths are evaluated based on the surrounding land use, access needs, project purpose and need, as well as other factors. NCDOT determined the roadway typical section for this project in coordination with the City of Asheville, which passed a resolution requesting the currently proposed typical section.

In addition, medians provide the following safety and environmental benefits when compared to a 5-lane undivided roadway:

- Medians allow a refuge area for pedestrians
- Medians reduce emissions by reducing stop and go traffic

- Medians reduce headlight glare from opposing traffic by providing greater separation between oncoming traffic
- Median sections require less pavement than 5-lane sections which results in less runoff from the roadway
- Medians allow more room for landscaping which provides a more attractive corridor

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has identified that medians can provide the following safety benefits:

- They may reduce pedestrian crashes by 46 percent and motor vehicle crashes by up to 39 percent.
- They may decrease delays (by greater than 30 percent) for motorists.
- They allow pedestrians a safe place to stop at the mid-point of the roadway before crossing the remaining distance.
- They enhance the visibility of pedestrian crossings.
- They can reduce the speed of vehicles approaching pedestrian crossings.
- They can be used for access management for vehicles (allowing only right-in/right-out turning movements).
- They provide space for supplemental signage on multi-lane roadways.

For more information on FHWA's corridor access management policy and how it pertains to safety and economic development, please see the following websites:

- [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/other\\_topics/corridor/](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/other_topics/corridor/)
- [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/fhwa\\_sa\\_12\\_011.cfm](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/fhwa_sa_12_011.cfm)

2) *Request for center turn lane instead of median/3-lane roadway with center turn lane.*

The proposed 4-lane median divided roadway, as opposed to a 2-lane or 3-lane typical section, is supported by the traffic analysis conducted for this project. This analysis, which analyzed forecasted future year (2040) traffic volumes, indicated that the entire corridor will be congested and over capacity if the roadway is not widened. Additionally, the forecasted traffic volumes on Sweeten Creek Road exceed the threshold for the capacity of a two-lane road and indicate the need for two through travel lanes, as proposed by the current project designs. A single through lane in each direction would not be able to sufficiently carry the forecasted future traffic volumes, even with the inclusion of a center turn lane.

NCDOT has included a median in the current project designs, as opposed to a center turn lane, in coordination with the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, and French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO). The use of a median is meant to control vehicular access along the corridor, thereby improving safety for both vehicles and pedestrians, and supporting intended travel speeds.

3) *Request for 5-lane roadway with center turn lane.*

See response to Question #2 above.

- 4) *Request for median to be grass and not concrete.*

Generally, the raised median will be grass. In areas where the median is reduced to accommodate a left-turn lane, the median will be concrete.

- 5) *Request for trees in the median.*

Additional landscaping, beyond the provided grassed median, may be coordinated with the City of Asheville, upon their request. Additional landscaping is handled through a cost-sharing agreement with the City and County that is required to be executed prior to beginning construction of the project.

The request for trees in the median has been communicated to City and County staff.

- 6) *Request to plant a line of trees/vegetation on the east side of Sweeten Creek Road.*

See response to Question #5 above.

- 7) *Concern about added impacts associated with median and on-going maintenance cost for grass median.*

Comment noted.

### **Noise Comments**

- 1) *Concerns about additional traffic noise for residential properties.*

NCDOT is completing a traffic noise study as part of the preconstruction analysis of this project. This report will address these concerns. Results will be shared with the public when they become available.

- 2) *Requests for consideration of noise barriers.*

NCDOT is completing a traffic noise study as part of the preconstruction analysis of this project. This report will address these concerns and determine the feasibility and necessity of noise barriers throughout the corridor. Results will be shared with the public when they become available.

## **Historic Comments**

- 1) *Protect historic properties, including the Givens Estate.*

NCDOT is coordinating with the State Historic Preservation Office (NC-HPO) regarding this project under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), which requires that federal agencies consider the effects of their actions on historic resources. The Section 106 regulations address the identification of historic properties, assessment of adverse effects, and resolution of adverse effects.

In November 2017, NCDOT completed a study that identified six resources that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and protected under Section 106. This information was used in the development of the preliminary design concepts for the project, with the goal of avoiding or minimizing impacts on historic resources. Once refined designs are completed, the project team will meet with NC-HPO to determine the effects of the project and discuss mitigation for adverse effects, if necessary.

## **General/Other Comments**

- 1) *Concerns regarding the duration of the construction phase of the project.*

Comment noted.

- 2) *Concern about the extensive costs associated with the project.*

Comment noted.

- 3) *General statement in favor of project.*

Comment noted.

- 4) *General statement in opposition to project.*

Comment noted.

- 5) *Statement agreeing with need for project.*

Comment noted.

- 6) *Request to add a new connector road between Hendersonville Road and Sweeten Creek Road, in the area between Rock Hill Road and Gerber Road.*

This request is outside the scope of this project and would need to be evaluated as a separate project.



- 7) *Request to widen other roads instead of Sweeten Creek Road or shorten the length of the Sweeten Creek widening limits to be from Mills Gap Road south to Hendersonville Road.*

This would not meet the purpose and need for the project (see above answers).

- 8) *Request to maintain the residential “feel” of the community along the roadway.*

Comment noted.

- 9) *Request to accelerate the project schedule.*

Comment noted.

- 10) *Deter use of Sweeten Creek Road by non-residents and devise a plan that services the needs of the people who live along the roadway.*

Sweeten Creek Road is classified as a minor arterial by NCDOT and FHWA. Minor arterials provide service for trips of moderate length and offer connectivity to the higher arterial system (e.g., US 25/Hendersonville Road). In urban settings, they provide intra-community continuity, while in rural settings, they provide relatively high overall travel speeds, with minimum interference to through movement. Therefore, Sweeten Creek is not a roadway on which it would be appropriate to restrict use by any type of user.

- 11) *Use the Sweeten Creek project funds to complete the I-26/I-40 Connector project.*

NCDOT’s Transportation Planning Division (TPD) conducted a “traffic model sensitivity analysis” in June 2018 that took into consideration the proposed I-26 widening (STIP Project I-4400/I-4700) and how that project would affect the model volumes along Sweeten Creek Road. This analysis indicated a 10-14% drop in the 2040 projected model volumes on Sweeten Creek Road between the 8-lane and 6-lane alternatives of the I-26 widening project.

The Sweeten Creek Road (STIP Project U-2801A) traffic capacity analysis, completed and approved by NCDOT in December 2018, determined that if the traffic forecast for U-2801A were updated to include the 8-lane alternative planned under I-4400/4700 (I-26 widening), the projected 2040 volumes on Sweeten Creek Road can be expected to decrease from the original estimate in a similar manner to TPD’s model sensitivity analysis. However, these decreased traffic volumes are still expected to be high enough to exceed the traffic carrying capacity of a two-lane roadway. Additionally, TPD’s analysis indicates that the majority of the traffic on Sweeten Creek Road primarily consists of local traffic and not through trips (i.e., trips through the entire corridor from begin to end).

Finally, TPD is working on an updated traffic forecast for the I-26 widening project, which is expected to be completed in the next few months. As part of this updated forecast, TPD is looking at the parallel roadways in the vicinity to determine what, if any, impacts the I-26

project will have. This includes NC 191 and US 25 (STIP Projects U-3403, R-2588, and U-2801A). According to the draft updated traffic volumes, which used the 2010 FBRMPO Travel Demand Model, (v1.2, adopted on September 27, 2018), the difference between the Future Year No-Build (FY NB) scenario and the Future Year Build (FY B) scenario for Sweeten Creek Rd was 10-15%. The 2040 FYB scenario in this traffic forecast assume that I-26 will be widened to an eight-lane interstate facility from I-40 (Exit 31) to US 25 (Exit 44) and to a six-lane interstate facility from US 25 (Exit 44) to US 25 (Exit 54).

Recent TPD research, specific to North Carolina, that is based on the Highway Capacity Manual's (HCM) methodology for determining the capacity of roadways for planning purposes has shown that the traffic carrying capacity of a 2-lane mountain roadway is approximately 12,000-15,000 vehicles per day (VPD). This value increase to 25,000-30,000 VPD for a 4-lane mountain roadway. The original 2017 traffic forecast for U-2801A shows Future Year No-Build (2040) traffic volumes in the range of 17,100-26,000 VPD, which exceeds the capacity of a 2-lane mountain roadway.

While there may be some adjustments to the recommended improvements to Sweeten Creek Road resulting from capacity analysis using traffic volumes from an updated forecast, NCDOT anticipates that these adjustments would be minor and have little effect on the overall four-lane median divided roadway design currently proposed.

- 12) Project will be obsolete when completed; requests to think "outside the box" in terms of modes of transportation.

Comment noted.

- 13) *Request to add fencing to protect neighborhood.*

Fencing is typically only used on projects with full control of access. Full control of access is experienced primarily on highways in which entry to the roadway is only permitted at designated interchanges using ramps. As this corridor experiences no control of access, meaning intersections and private driveways are all accessible from this roadway, fencing is not applicable.

- 14) *Request that construction should not occur during peak hours.*

Comment noted.