



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR

JOEY R. HOPKINS  
SECRETARY

MEMO TO: Public Meeting Attendees

FROM: Kenneth McDowell

DATE: November 21, 2023

SUBJECT: Project R-5735 - Improve US 19/74/64/129 from the end of the four-lane divided section to US 19 Business (Hiwassee Street) in Cherokee County

**Public Meeting**

An in-person open-house public meeting was held at Tri-County Community College in Murphy on October 10, 2023. Fifty-three people attended the meeting in person, and the project website was visited more than 250 times. Fifty-six comments were received via the public meeting, website, email, and phone calls before the comment period closed on October 24, 2023.

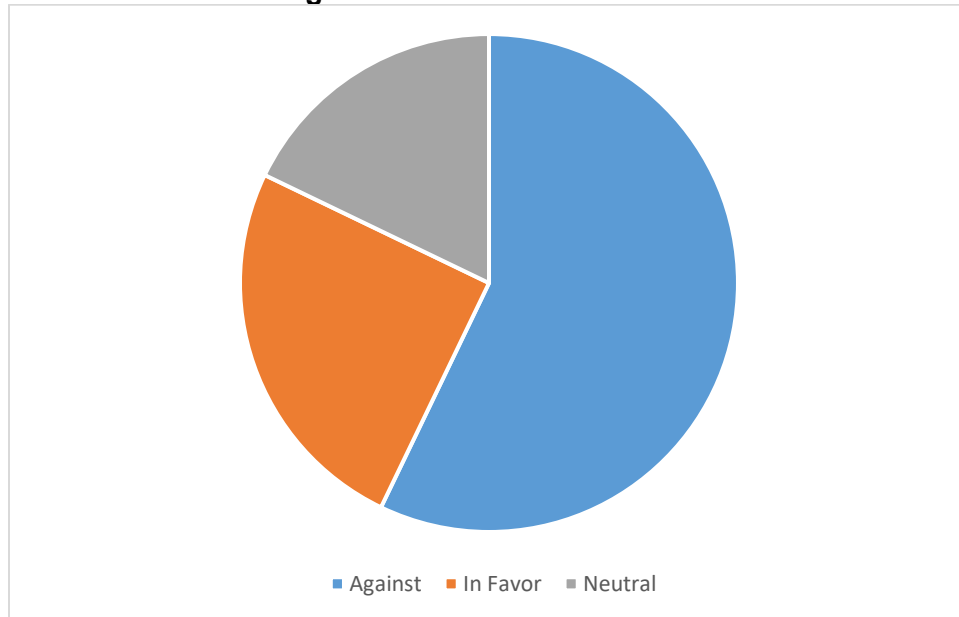
**Project Information**

A roundabout is proposed at the intersection of US 19/74/64/129, Marks Drive, Smith Hollow, and a new connection to Old Ranger Road. The purpose of this project is to improve safety for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists while calming and slowing traffic along the corridor.

**Summary of Comments**

Fifty-six comments were received at the public meeting or via website, email, and phone call. Thirty-two of the comments expressed concerns about or opposition to the proposed roundabout, 14 comments expressed support for a roundabout, and 10 comments were about topics other than the proposed roundabout (see Figure 1). In addition to comments in favor of or opposed to the proposed roundabout, comments were received on the following topics: other suggestions for corridor improvements, pedestrian safety, seniors and roundabouts, suggestions for other projects in the vicinity, and other individual topics.

**Figure 1: Comments Received**



## **Responses to Comments**

### **Comments in Favor of the Proposed Roundabout**

#### *Comment #1:*

Several comments were submitted in favor of the roundabout for the following reasons:

- a. The proposed roundabout would increase safety
- b. The proposed roundabout would slow traffic
- c. The proposed roundabout would serve as a U-turn facility allowing for a place to turn around after taking a right out of the businesses between McDonalds and the roundabout
- d. The proposed roundabout would accommodate large trucks
- e. The proposed roundabout would accommodate future traffic
- f. The proposed roundabout would keep traffic flowing
- g. The proposed roundabout would provide easy access to Old Ranger Road
- h. Some commenters were in favor of the roundabout without explanation

### **Concerns About or Opposition to the Proposed Roundabout**

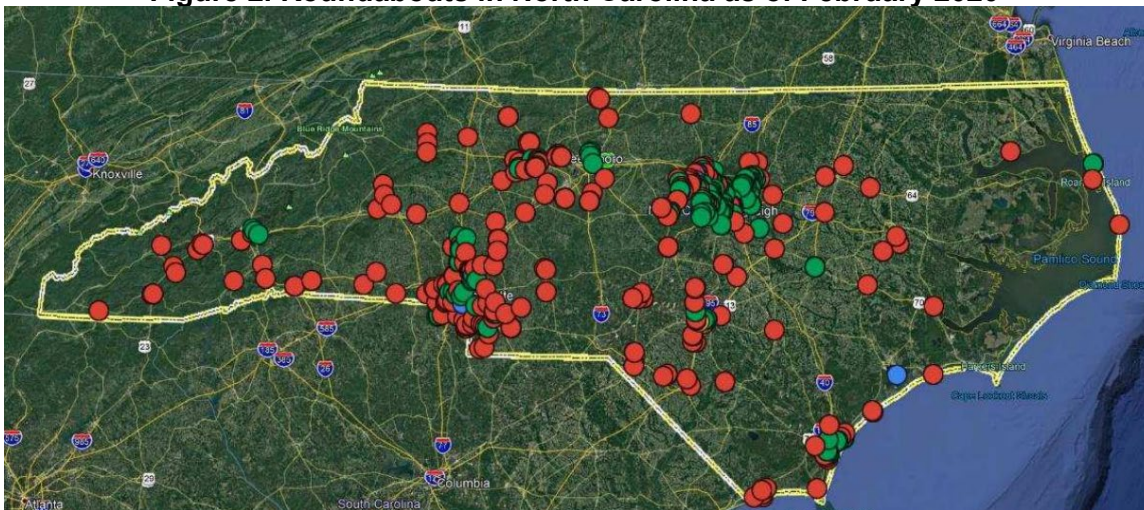
#### *Comment #2:*

Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed roundabout being confusing.

#### *Response:*

NCDOT has installed roundabouts throughout North Carolina (see Figure 2). North Carolina roundabouts are currently operating in a variety of communities from urban to rural and on roadways with speed limits varying from 25 miles per hour (mph) to 55 mph.

**Figure 2. Roundabouts in North Carolina as of February 2020<sup>1</sup>**



We acknowledge any new traffic patterns can be confusing to drivers. This particular roundabout is designed with clear lane markings and advanced signage to guide motorists and reduce any driver confusion.

To help drivers understand how to use a roundabout, Federal Highway Administration and NCDOT have developed videos and pamphlets to inform drivers on how to drive through a roundabout. These resources are available online at:

<https://highways.dot.gov/safety/intersection-safety/intersection-types/roundabouts> and <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/safety-mobility/roundabouts/Pages/default.aspx>.

**Comment #3:**

Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed roundabout being unsafe.

**Response:**

Roundabouts have proven to be safer than other types of controlled intersections (for example, stop signs or traffic signals). Nationally, roundabouts have reduced fatal and injury crashes by 82% relative to intersections with stop signs and by 78% relative to intersections with traffic signals.<sup>2</sup> Multilane roundabouts have reduced fatal and injury crashes by 68% relative to two-way, stop-controlled intersections and by 71% relative to intersections with traffic signals.<sup>3</sup> In NC, roundabouts have reduced crashes by 45%, crashes with fatalities and injuries by 76%, and head-on crashes by 75%.<sup>4</sup>

Roundabouts are safer than intersection with stop signs or traffic signals for three reasons:

<sup>1</sup> [https://ncsite.org/images/meeting/050520/2020\\_05\\_05\\_ncdot\\_roundabouts\\_ncsite.pdf](https://ncsite.org/images/meeting/050520/2020_05_05_ncdot_roundabouts_ncsite.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/proven-safety-countermeasures/roundabouts>

<sup>3</sup>

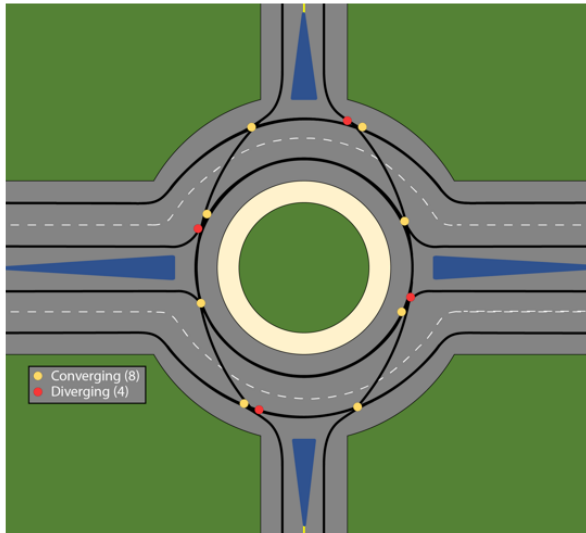
<https://www.trb.org/Publications/Blurbs/182939.aspx#:~:text=The%20TRB%20National%20Cooperative%20Highway%20Research%20Program%27s%20NCHRP,the%20research%20for%20and%20development%20of%20the%20guide.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/safety/TrafficSafetyResources/Roundabouts.pdf>

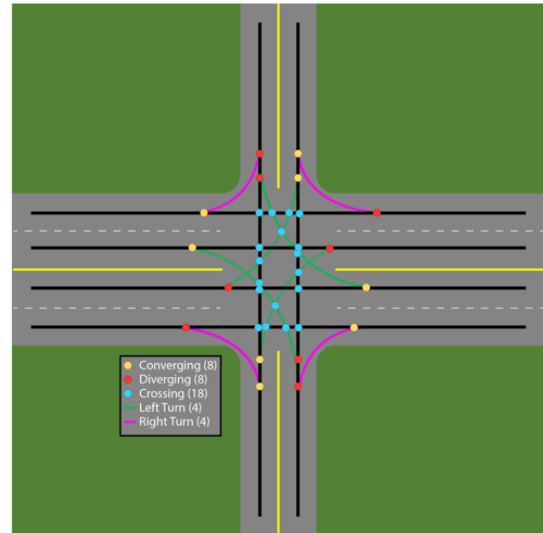
- Roundabouts have fewer conflict points or crash points than conventional intersections (Figure 3). Conflict (or crash) points are places where the projected path of one car could intersect the projected path of another car, causing a crash.

**Figure 3. Conflict Points<sup>5</sup>**

There are 12 conflict points in the proposed roundabout.



There are 34 conflict points a similar conventional intersection.



- Roundabouts eliminate crossing-type conflict points (shown as blue dots in Figure 3) where head-on and T-bone crashes occur.
- Roundabouts are designed for speeds of 15-25 mph.<sup>6</sup> Drivers must slow down when entering the proposed roundabout; therefore, any accidents that do occur in the roundabout would occur at lower speeds.

*Comment #4:*

Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed roundabout getting gridlocked.

*Response:*

Roundabouts are designed to keep traffic flowing efficiently through an intersection. Upon entering a roundabout, drivers yield to any vehicles or bicyclists already in the roundabout. Everyone using the roundabout moves in a counterclockwise direction, and those already in it do not yield to approaching vehicles.

In 2005, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety conducted a study on traffic flow at ten intersections that were suitable for a roundabout but where traffic signals were installed or modified instead. It was estimated that the use of roundabouts instead of traffic signals at these intersections would have reduced vehicle delays by 62-74 percent.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [https://ncsite.org/images/meeting/050520/2020\\_05\\_05\\_ncdot\\_roundabouts\\_ncsite.pdf](https://ncsite.org/images/meeting/050520/2020_05_05_ncdot_roundabouts_ncsite.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/2022-06/fhwasa14097.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.iihs.org/topics/roundabouts#traffic-flow-benefits>

*Comment #5:*

Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed roundabout being a waste of money.

*Response:*

The initial construction cost of a roundabout is more expensive than a traffic signal; however, maintenance and utility costs of a roundabout are less than a traffic signal over time.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a roundabout has lower user costs due to fewer severe and injury-causing crashes, fewer calls for emergency response, and less delay due to the clearing of accidents. The roundabout in Murphy is proposed to enhance safety and traffic flow at the intersection in the future.

*Comment #6:*

Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed roundabout because of the amount of construction that has already occurred in the area.

*Response:*

The purpose of NCDOT project R-5735 is to improve safety along the US 19/74/64/129 corridor. The proposed roundabout would continue the project's purpose of enhancing safety by reducing future accidents and lowering speeds at this intersection as described above under the comment about roundabout safety. Additional information about the safety of roundabouts is available in the response to Comment #3. Additionally, the construction that has occurred and is currently being completed will be able to accommodate future intersection improvements with little to no adjustments.

*Comment #7:*

Several comments expressed concerns that the proposed roundabout is unwarranted.

*Response:*

NCDOT designs roadways and intersections to address future traffic needs. Traffic along the US 19/74/64/129 corridor is expected to increase over the next twenty years from an estimated 19,000 vehicles per day in 2016 to 24,000 vehicles per day in 2040. The proposed roundabout was designed to handle traffic volumes projected for 2041.

The proposed roundabout will also help address today's traffic concerns by making egress easier from Smith Hollow/Marks Drive and by allowing drivers to turn right out of businesses between McDonalds and Zaxby's, travel through the roundabout, and return to Murphy.

*Comment #8:*

Several comments expressed concerns about trucks having difficulty with or getting stuck in roundabouts.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ncdot.gov/news/public-meetings/Documents/I-4729B\\_Roundabout\\_NC\\_brochure\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ncdot.gov/news/public-meetings/Documents/I-4729B_Roundabout_NC_brochure_2017.pdf)

*Response:*

The proposed roundabout follows the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Research Report 1043<sup>9</sup> guidelines and has been designed to accommodate two trucks with 53-foot trailers (Florida Interstate Semitrailers WB-62FL) at the same time. If needed, trucks may also use the concrete island (truck apron) to maneuver through the roundabout.

*Comment #9:*

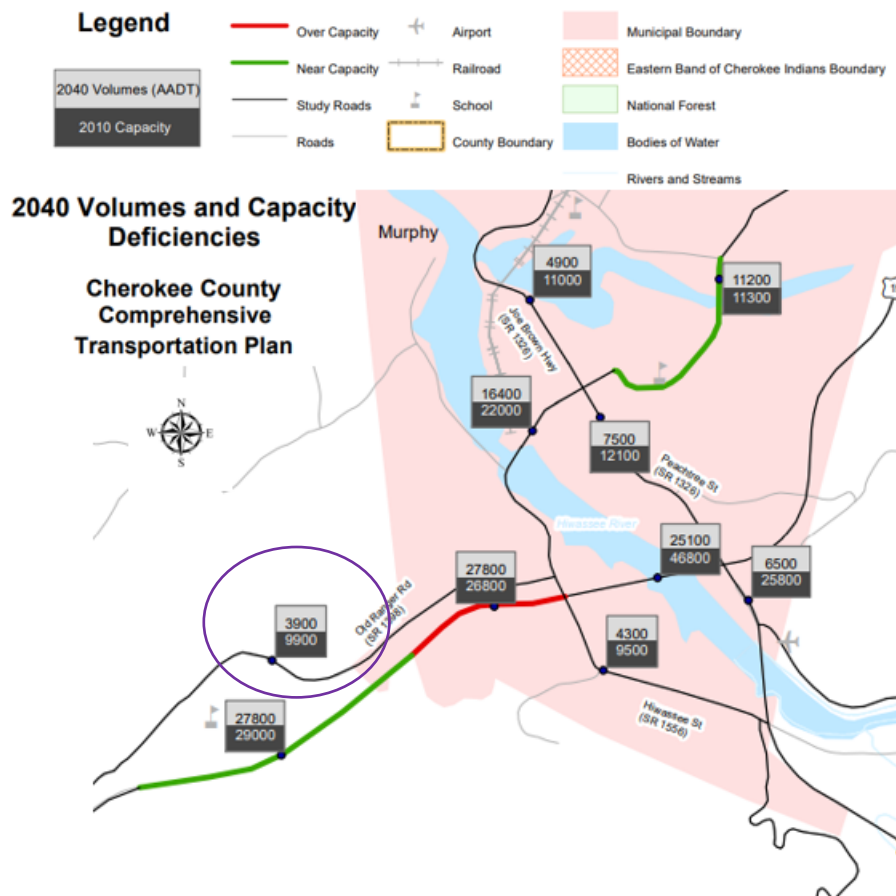
Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed project increasing traffic on Old Ranger Road.

*Response:*

In recent years, the amount of traffic on Old Ranger Road has been impacted by construction along US 19/74/64/129. After construction, traffic volumes are expected to return to levels closer to normal.

Traffic patterns can change over time, and traffic volumes on Old Ranger Road may increase in the future. Drivers may opt to use the new connector road, exit/enter the businesses along US 19/74/64/129 using their Old Ranger Road driveways, or use Old Ranger Road to travel to or from downtown Murphy. Old Ranger Road can accommodate additional traffic. The 2016 *Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan*<sup>10</sup> estimates the annual average daily traffic (AADT) on Old Ranger Road at 3,900 vehicles per day in 2040 and the capacity of Old Ranger Road to be 9,900 vehicles per day (Figure 4, circled in purple).

Figure 4. 2040 Traffic Volumes and Capacity<sup>11</sup>



*Comment #10:*

Several comments expressed concerns about the proposed roundabout causing slowdowns.

*Response:*

The proposed roundabout would slow down traffic on US 19/74/64/129 because drivers need to reduce their travel speed to navigate the roundabouts. Stakeholders have expressed concerns about speeding along this portion of US 19/74/64/129. Coming from the west, some drivers have difficulty adjusting to the 35-mph speed limit along this portion of the roadway. These drivers would need to reduce their speed to 15-25 mph through the roundabout.

One of the advantages of a roundabout is how traffic flows through the roundabout with minimal stopped time. Traffic may slow down to go through the roundabout, but the traffic keeps moving. This is true for all legs of the roundabout. Cars generally enter a roundabout sooner than they would an intersection with a traffic signal or a stop sign. At the roundabout proposed in Murphy, a vehicle is expected to enter the roundabout from Marks Drive/Smith Hollow in about half the time it would with a stop sign. Additional

<sup>11</sup> [https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/TPBCTP/Cherokee%20County/Cherokee\\_CTP\\_Final.pdf](https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/TPBCTP/Cherokee%20County/Cherokee_CTP_Final.pdf)

information about traffic flow in a roundabout is available in the response to Comment #4.

*Comment #11:*

Several comments expressed concerns that the roundabout would make egress from Smith Hollow more difficult.

*Response:*

In general, roundabouts allow drivers to enter an intersection sooner than they would at an intersection with a stop sign. NCDOT conducted traffic analyses for the proposed roundabout and an intersection with a stop sign on Smith Hollow. The analyses showed that, in 2041, average peak-hour (rush-hour) delays were reduced by about half with a roundabout.

*Comment #12:*

Several comments expressed opposition to the proposed roundabout without explanation.

*Response:*

The roundabout design, as well as the addition and location of the connector road, was developed in coordination with the County Commissioners and in response to the removal of plans for an EMS station located off of Mark's Drive. NCDOT proposes this roundabout to improve safety for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. This roundabout would also help reduce potential backups on the stop-controlled side streets at this intersection because a driver generally enters the roundabout more quickly than if waiting at a traffic signal. This roundabout was designed to accommodate semitrucks, which may use the concrete island – called the truck apron – to help drivers maneuver around the roundabout. More information about roundabouts is available at <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/safety-mobility/roundabouts/Pages/default.aspx>

Suggestions for Other Corridor Improvements

*Comment #13:*

Several comments suggested that raised medians be installed along US 19/74/64/129 between the end of the divided section through Hiwassee Street. One comment also suggested the addition of right-turn-only lanes into businesses between McDonalds and Arby's.

*Response:*

The installation of raised medians was studied and presented as an alternative at the Public Meeting in 2016. This alternative was not selected as the preferred alternative because local officials and other stakeholders preferred a painted median.

NCDOT has examined the traffic volumes turning into businesses between McDonalds and Arby's. Right-turn-only lanes are not warranted based on traffic volumes and



NCDOT policy. NCDOT does not install right-turn-only lanes where they are not warranted due to increased risk and liability for the Department.

*Comment #14:*

Several comments requested an increased police presence to enforce traffic laws.

*Response:*

NCDOT Division of Highways is not an enforcement agency. Law enforcement responsibilities are under the jurisdiction of municipal police departments, county sheriff's office, and state highway patrol.

The proposed roundabout does have the advantage of slowing traffic along the US 19/74/64/129 corridor. Although the speed limit along the corridor is 35 mph, drivers must slow down to 15-25 mph to navigate the roundabout.

*Comment #15:*

Several comments suggested a traffic light in lieu of the proposed roundabout.

*Response:*

This project has evolved over time. After the 2016 public meeting, Cherokee County planned to build an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) station off of Marks Drive. Cherokee County Commissioners requested an emergency pre-empted traffic signal for this intersection to facilitate safe and timely egress for first responders. When Cherokee County changed their plans and decided not to build the EMS station at this location, NCDOT assessed whether a traffic signal would be warranted at this intersection and found that the traffic signal was no longer warranted based on the current and projected future traffic volumes per NCDOT policy. NCDOT does not install traffic signals at intersections where they are not warranted due to increased risk and liability for the Department; therefore, the traffic signal was removed from the current construction plans.

At the 2016 public meeting, stakeholders expressed concerns about the ability to safely make safe left turns along the US 19/74/64/129 corridor. To address these concerns, a roundabout is proposed at the intersection of US 19/74/64/129, Marks Drive/Smith Hollow, and the new connector road. A roundabout would allow for easier, safer ingress and egress for vehicles on side streets than no signal or a stop-controlled intersection. Cars generally enter a roundabout sooner than they would an intersection with a traffic signal or stop signs. At the roundabout proposed in Murphy, a car is expected to enter the roundabout from Marks Drive/Smith Hollow in about half the time it would with a stop sign. Additional information about safety and traffic flow in roundabouts is available in the responses to Comments #3 and #4, respectively.

Comments about Pedestrian Safety

*Comment #16:*

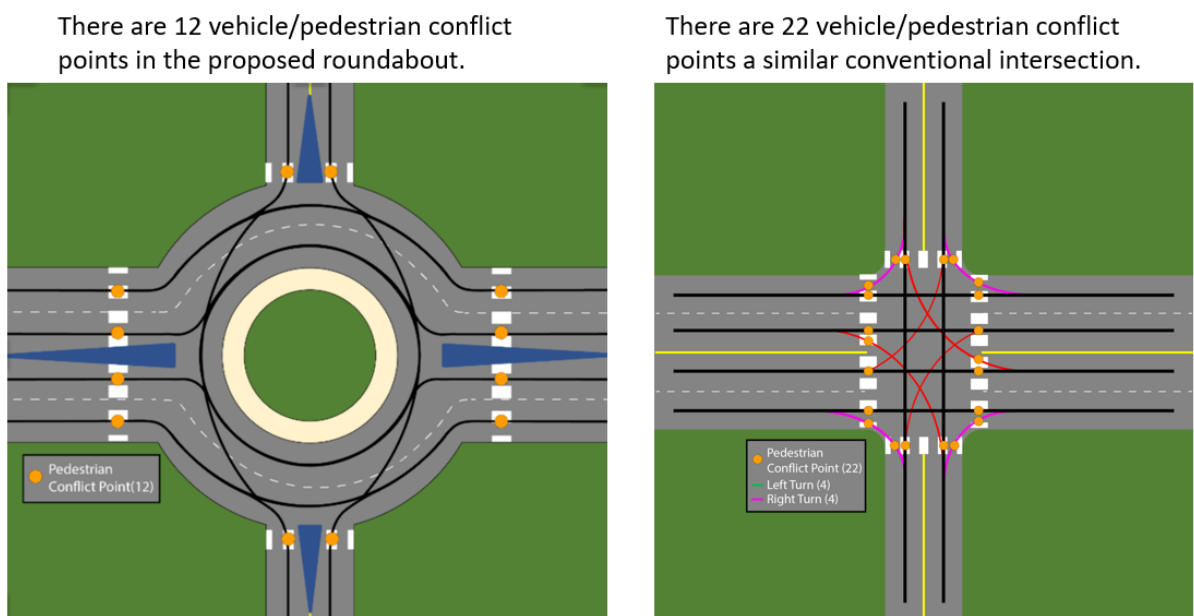
Some commenters expressed concern about the safety of roundabouts for pedestrians.

*Response:*

Roundabouts are designed to improve safety for all users, including pedestrians. Pedestrians are safer because roundabouts offer:

- Fewer vehicle/pedestrian conflict points - Roundabouts have fewer vehicle/pedestrian conflict points or crash points than conventional intersections. Conflict (or crash) points are places where the projected path of a vehicle could intersect the projected path of a pedestrian, causing a crash. Figure 5, below, shows compares a roundabout similar to the proposed roundabout on US 19/74/64/129 with a similar conventional intersection. The roundabout proposed in Murphy would have 12 vehicle/pedestrian conflict points A two-way, stop-controlled intersection at the same location would have 16 conflict points (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Vehicle/Pedestrian Conflict Points<sup>12</sup>**



- Lower vehicle speeds – Vehicles must slow down when entering a roundabout. Lower speeds result in better yielding rates and reduced vehicle stopping distance. When accidents do occur at lower speeds, they are less severe and have a lower risk of collision injury or fatality.
- Pedestrian refuge in medians – The raised islands leading into the roundabout, known as splitter islands, provide refuge for pedestrians. Instead of trying to cross all of the lanes on a street at the same time, pedestrians can cross half of the street when it is safe and stop on the splitter island to wait for a safe opening to cross the other half of the street.<sup>13</sup>
- Flashing beacons to assist with pedestrian crossings – NCDOT Division 14 proposes to install rectangular rapid-flashing beacons (RRFB) at the proposed roundabout in Murphy to assist pedestrians in safely crossing the road. When a pedestrian approaches the intersection, he or she would push a button and wait for the beacons to start flashing and drivers to yield. The beacons attract drivers' attention to the pedestrian intending to use crosswalk, indicating that the driver

<sup>12</sup> New York Department of Transportation

<sup>13</sup> <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/roundabouts/fhwas15016.pdf>

should yield the right of way. Additional information about how RRFBs work is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT6E3scnXWA>. Driver yield rates vary by location, but RRFBs can reduce pedestrian crashes by 47%.<sup>14</sup>

*Comment #17:*

Other commenters noted the need to pedestrian accommodations across US 19/74/64/129 in this area and suggested including crosswalks on the south side of the proposed roundabout and sidewalks along the side of the roadway in front of the Waffle House.

*Response:*

Currently, the project does propose sidewalks along US 19/74/64/129 in front of the Waffle House; therefore, a crosswalk was not proposed on the south side of the roundabout because it would not connect to anything. NCDOT will review the possibility of including crosswalks on the south side of the roundabout. If crosswalks are not included on this leg of the roundabout at this time, designs allow for them to be added in the future.

### Comments about Seniors and Roundabouts

*Comment #18:*

A commenter expressed concerns about seniors and their ability to navigate roundabouts.

*Response:*

All drivers have difficulties responding to complex traffic patterns, such as traditional intersections, and judging left-turn gaps in traffic. These difficulties are exacerbated for seniors. Compared to younger adults, older drivers take more time to assess situations, make decisions, and take actions. About 40% of senior-involved car crashes occur at intersections.<sup>15 16</sup>

Roundabouts can help older drivers navigate traffic patterns more safely. Roundabouts eliminate left-turns and the decisions that go with them. Traffic in roundabouts travels counterclockwise, allowing a driver entering the roundabout to focus on traffic coming from a single direction and the pedestrians in front of them. Roundabouts operate at lower speeds, giving older drivers more time to understand, judge, and act on the movements of other vehicles and pedestrians around them.

### Comments Suggesting Other Projects

*Comment #19:*

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<sup>14</sup> [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/step/docs/TechSheet\\_RRFB\\_508compliant.pdf](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/step/docs/TechSheet_RRFB_508compliant.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/janfeb-2007/older-drivers-crossroads#:~:text=The%20analysts'%20conclusion%3A%20Roundabouts%20appear,especially%20significant%20given%20their%20frailty.>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2014/Livability%20Fact%20Sheets/AARPLivabilityFactSheet-Modern-Roundabouts-33116.pdf>

Several comments identified other portions of the road network that needed improvement. Suggestions ranged from new project ideas to maintenance suggestions.

*Response:*

The funds allocated for the R-5735 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. If NCDOT Division 14 did not spend the money allocated to project R-5735, the funds would return to the NCDOT's general fund to be reallocated to projects selected through the State Transportation Improvement Program.

One of the potential projects specially suggested by commenters was improvements at the intersection of NC 60 and US 74/64. NCDOT agrees that improvements are needed at this intersection and has plans to solicit contractors to improve this intersection with Reduced Conflict Intersection (RCI) improvements in early 2024. Construction is expected to start in May or June of 2024. Additional information about RCI improvements is available at: <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/safety-mobility/reduced-conflict-intersections/Pages/default.aspx>

Another commenter noted flooding issues near Marvin Raper bridge. NCDOT Division 14 maintenance forces have recently performed improvements to the shoulder and ditches in this area to improve the situation.

A commenter reported reduced sight distances at the post office on NC 60 due to weeds and the position of the existing guardrail. In response to this comment, NCDOT Division 14 maintenance forces have corrected the vegetation issues. The Division is investigating alternative options for the guardrail to maintain safety and improve sight distances.

Several commenters noted poor sight distances at the intersection of Old Ranger Road and Cardinal Road. NCDOT has investigated the issues at this intersection and is working with adjacent property owners to regrade nearby slopes and improve sight distances.

*Comment #20:*

A commenter requested improvements to the intersection at McDonalds.

*Response:*

Two intersections are located in the vicinity of the McDonalds. Both intersections were recently improved.

At the intersection of US 19/74/64/129 and Hiwassee Street, concrete islands were added to direct traffic and improve flow.

A continuous green T, seagull, or Florida-T intersection was constructed at the intersection of Old Ranger Road and Hiwassee Street. The intersection allows traffic on Hiwassee Street to flow past Old Ranger Road without stopping. A left-turn lane is present for northbound traffic on Hiwassee Street turning onto Old Ranger Road. The unique feature of this intersection is a lane on Hiwassee Street dedicated to receiving left-turn traffic off of Old Ranger Road. Compared to an intersection with a stop sign or traffic signal, this dedicated lane reduces the time a driver must wait for a sufficient gap

in traffic to complete a left turn. At an intersection with stop sign, a driver turning left must wait for a sufficient, simultaneous gap in north- and southbound traffic on Hiwassee Street as well as in the traffic turning left on Old Ranger Road. At a seagull intersection, the driver only needs to wait for a sufficient, simultaneous gap in left-turning and southbound traffic. Additional information about seagull intersections is available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PkFYZjdesk>

### Other Comments

Several comments did not fit easily into the categories above. Division 14 addressed some of the comments that were related to individual properties by reaching out directly to the commenter. The remaining comments are addressed below.

#### *Comment #21:*

One commenter noted that the speed limit signs along the corridor were removed during construction and not reinstalled.

#### *Response:*

Signs are typically removed during construction by the contractor. The contractor will reinstall speed limit signs, as well as other signs included in the contract, along the corridor. Your comment has been transmitted to the District Engineer and the Division Construction Engineer.

#### *Comment #22:*

Several commenters suggested easy-to-understand lane markings, clear signage, or a newspaper article to help drivers understand how to use a roundabout.

#### *Response:*

Clear, easy-to-understand signs and lane markings will be included in this project. A newspaper article in the Cherokee Scout is an excellent idea.

#### *Comment #23:*

A commenter noted that the traffic flow models should be updated and reflect weekend traffic.

#### *Response:*

Traffic estimates are routinely updated when development occurs. NCDOT designs roadways to accommodate traffic on an average day in the design year. For this roundabout the design year is 2041. Special events or seasonal traffic changes are not included in design plans.

#### *Comment #24:*

One commenter asked how a roundabout is cleared after an accident and how long an accident would back up the highway.

#### *Response:*

Roundabout lanes are 16 feet wide, which is wider than 12- to 14-foot travel lanes on US 19/74/64/129. The wider lanes of the roundabout give drivers more room to maneuver around an accident. If necessary, drivers may also use the 18.5-foot truck apron (the concrete section in the center of the roundabout) to pass stopped vehicles.

Crashes in a roundabout are typically less severe than other types of accidents, allowing for easier cleanup/clearing. Accidents will be cleared like any other accident.

*Comment #25:*

Several commenters expressed concern that the public was not consulted about the proposed roundabout until the public meeting was announced.

*Response:*

NCDOT's project planning policy is collaborative. NCDOT works with its planning partners to develop a comprehensive transportation plan for each county. These plans identify major transportation needs and long-term solutions for the next 25-30 years. The Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan<sup>17</sup> was developed in 2013 as a collaboration between Cherokee County, Town of Murphy, Town of Andrews, NCDOT, and the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization. The public also participated in the plan's development through drop-in meetings and public hearings. This plan serves as a long-term blueprint for multimodal transportation improvements in Cherokee County.

The implementation of the transportation improvements identified in the comprehensive transportation plan starts at the local level. Local transportation planners from Cherokee County, Town of Murphy, or Town of Andrews evaluate potential projects and submit priority projects to the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization for evaluation in conjunction with projects submitted by Graham, Clay, Swain, Macon, and Jackson counties and their municipalities. The regional priority projects are submitted to NCDOT for prioritization with other projects on a state level through the Strategic Transportation Prioritization (SPOT) process as prescribed by the Strategic Transportation Investments law. The SPOT process identifies the highest priority projects for funding as part of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and it all started with local input.

Once a project enters the STIP, project planners coordinate with local officials and planning staff to better understand the transportation needs of the area and the proposed project. The public is an essential stakeholder and is engaged in the planning process through public meetings, open houses, websites, and press releases.

Public input is a crucial part of project-specific decisions, but it is only one of many factors weighed in any decision. Other factors such as safety concerns or traffic volumes must be considered and, in some cases, may shift the scales towards a less popular option.

The roundabout on US 19/74/64/129 was proposed as part of STIP project R-5735 to improve safety and mobility along the corridor. When the project was brought to the first public meeting in 2016, the connector road to Old Ranger Road was not proposed. Stop signs were proposed on Marks Drive and Smith Hollow. When Cherokee County proposed to build an EMS station on Smith Hollow, the project evolved to include the

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<sup>17</sup> [https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/CTP-Details.aspx?study\\_id=Cherokee+County](https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/CTP-Details.aspx?study_id=Cherokee+County)

connector road and a signal at the four-way intersection to facilitate first responder egress. When Cherokee County decided against building the EMS station on Smith Hollow, the installation of a traffic signal at this location was no longer warranted, but concerns about safety along the corridor remained. NCDOT conducted a traffic analysis in 2022 and recommended a roundabout at this intersection to slow traffic, keep traffic flowing, and improve safety. NCDOT performed analyses, developed designs, and brought the roundabout concept to the public for feedback in 2023.

*Comment #26:*

Some commenters questioned why NCDOT purchased a parcel near the intersection of Smith Hollow and US 19/74/64/129 before the public meeting.

*Response:*

The right of way process can and often does extend into the construction phase of a project. Construction revisions can also create a need to revisit already settled claims. The parcel at the intersection of Smith Hollow and US 19/74/64/129 was purchased to accommodate the replacement of a failing sewer trunk line for the Town of Murphy as part of the current, ongoing R-5735 construction project. The entire parcel was acquired to provide room for the relocation of a portion of the connecting line from Smith Hollow and for the bore-and-jack operation needed to replace the portion of the line that is under US 19/74/64/129.

**Next Steps**

NCDOT Division 14 is planning to pause the proposed roundabout project after the utilities are relocated and the final designs are complete. The new connector road will be opened with a stop sign. Division 14 will submit the roundabout to the SPOT prioritization process as an independent project. A summary of how a project progresses through the SPOT process to become a project in the STIP is included in the response to Comment #25. If the roundabout becomes a STIP project, the roundabout project will restart.

Over the next year, Division 14 is planning to monitor conditions at the intersection of US 19/74/64/129, Smith Hollow/Marks Dr, and the new connector road. If safety concerns arise, Division will reevaluate the need to construct a roundabout or other safety measure at this location using its budget for safety improvements.

NCDOT considers project development to be a collaborative process involving the Department and local stakeholders. The Division is developing a Public Involvement Plan to better engage the public in safety and maintenance projects and will follow this plan going forward.