

The US 64-NC 49 Corridor from Charlotte to Raleigh (NC 49/US 64) and Statesville to Raleigh (US 64) is today a patch work of roadway facility types ranging from a full control of access freeway to a two-lane, rural highway and everything in between. The corridor has evolved from a primarily rural, farm-to-market route to one that serves a variety of trip purposes; including long distance travelers, freight movement, commuters, and short-distance local trips. While congestion today primarily is isolated to the major urban areas along the corridor, continued development along and within the US 64-NC 49 Corridor, coupled with a constrained regional roadway network that offers few alternative routes, provides the ingredients for continued deterioration of travel conditions.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has recognized the limitations of continuing to widen the Interstates and constructing new roads to facilitate regional mobility and freight carrying capacity that often result in a great expense to the environment and urban structure. With the update to the state's Long-Range Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, NCDOT has a new emphasis on targeted mobility improvements. This policy, termed the Strategic Highways Corridor concept, was adopted by the North Carolina Board of Transportation (BOT) in September 2004. The policy promotes the need to improve, protect, and maximize the capacity of existing highways deemed critical to statewide mobility and regional connectivity. The Strategic Highway Corridor concept represents an opportunity for the NCDOT and stakeholders to consider long-term visions, decision-making consistency, land use partnerships, and overarching design/operational changes. The US 64-NC 49 Corridor is recognized by the NCDOT as a Strategic Highway Corridor with the potential to carry a significant volume of traffic (including truck traffic), to connect major activity centers, to connect existing and planned Interstate facilities, and to serve as an Interstate reliever.

Within this context, the NCDOT initiated a corridor study of the US 64-NC 49 Corridor in September 2003. The focus of the study, termed a Phase 1 Corridor Study, was on conducting a regional assessment of transportation needs and evaluating broad alternative roadway investment strategies to meet those needs. The principal products of the Phase 1 Study consist of:

- A Problem Statement. This document describes the need for improvements to the US 64-NC 49 Corridor, as they relate to the corridor's function as a Strategic Highway Corridor, and promotes the opportunity for early resource agency and stakeholder involvement on concerns regarding future improvements in the corridor. (Chapter 4)
- A Consensus-Based Vision. A vision for the US 64-NC 49 Corridor that will provide a long-term, directional goal, defining the major characteristics of a substantial financial investment and providing the means to build stakeholder support and commitment. (Chapter 8)
- A List of Land Use Policy Guidelines. These guidelines address land use/mobility issues and can be used to achieve a balance of land use and transportation in support of the corridor vision. (Chapter 9).



- Potential Corridor Preservation Methods. A description of probable corridor preservation methods that may be used to help control increasing project costs. (Chapter 10)

These four products, developed through a comprehensive assessment of the entire 200-mile corridor in a collaborative effort with corridor stakeholders, provide the foundation upon which future project development phases can build. Continuing beyond the Phase I Corridor Study, NCDOT will use these products to:

- Support the need for improvements to US 64 and NC 49 as they relate to the corridor's function as a Strategic Highway Corridor.
- Promote continued stakeholder involvement.
- Ensure that improvements are consistent with the overarching corridor vision in terms of design characteristics, operations, and esthetics.
- Work with local agencies to develop land use plans that are consistent with and support the corridor vision.
- Develop a corridor preservation plan specific to US 64 and NC 49.
- Serve as a preface and supporting documentation for improvement projects that enter the environmental document phase.