

## State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Project No. I-4729B

# Summary of Public Comments and Responses

An Open House Public Meeting was held May 22, 2018 at the Isothermal Community College Polk Center Auditorium. The meeting was attended by 106 people, including several public officials representing the Polk County Board of Commissioners, the Town of Columbus, and Polk County Public Schools. 35 comments were submitted during the 30-day comment period, with several people providing comments on multiple issues. The comments were reviewed by the NCDOT and consultant project team on July 2, 2018. The comments were categorized, and are summarized below. The responses from the project team to comments that warranted specific responses, are also provided below.

### General Comments/Statements of Opinion

Statement made in opposition to the project and/or that the project is not needed (4 comments)

Comments made in support of project (8 comments)

Comment made stating need for center turn lane from Open Road Coffee House toward Columbus (1 comment)

Statement of opinion that a four-lane bridge is not needed (3 comments)

Statement of opinion that bicycle & pedestrian accommodations are not necessary (3 comments)

Would like to see bicycle lanes included (2 comments)

If bicycle lanes are eliminated from the designs, the abandoned railroad tracks between Saluda and Landrum would offer good bicycle alternative (1)

Statement of opinion that sidewalks along just one side would be sufficient (5 comments)

Statement of opinion that single combined walking/bicycle lane would be sufficient (1 comment)

Comment made that project does not address access management (1 comment)

Statement of concern that designs limit the ability to adapt for a future NC108 widening, with no room for left turn lanes if roundabouts need to be converted to traffic signals (1 comment)

Statement of concern about existing maintenance of NC 108 (1 comment)

### Comments Requiring a Specific Responses

#### Specific Project Design Requests

Request that if sidewalks are eliminated from the designs on the north side, that the designs reposition the widening of the road for less impact on the south side of Hwy 108.

*Based on comments from the public and local officials, revisions will be made to the project designs to remove sidewalks on the north side of NC 108 west of I-26. However,*

*the removal of the sidewalks from the designs does not allow for the road alignment to be shifted, due to the need for the road alignment to tie in to the new bridge. Opportunities to minimize impacts will be explored during the final design process.*

Please consider adding a traffic signal and signalized pedestrian crosswalks at Weaver Street/Food Lion shopping center. The traffic signal will assist left turns onto NC 108 from the CVS and State Employees' Credit Union at Weaver Street. This left turn can be difficult due to the limited sight distance caused by the curve in NC 108 and the retaining wall at CVS. A new driveway could be added at Wendy's to allow for access and have those left turn movements at the signal as well. The signal would also assist left turns from the Food Lion shopping center and help avoid other conflict points between all the turns in and out of various driveways. There are currently no pedestrian crosswalks proposed for crossing NC 108 along the entire segment being improved. If a traffic signal is added, this would be the best spot to put them.

*A traffic signal warrant analysis will be conducted and used to evaluate the appropriateness of including a traffic signal and pedestrian crosswalk in the project designs at this location.*

### **Roundabout Design**

The circles are too small. Locals don't understand circles. Tractor trailer & horse trailers ride the curb on the current circle. A larger would separate entrances & exits to give vehicles more time to determine a safe merge.

*The radii of the new roundabout circles are larger than those of the existing circles.*

Water freezes on existing roundabouts.

*The new roundabouts will be designed to accommodate anticipated runoff.*

The new roundabouts should be designed as "true" roundabouts

*Designs were developed to minimize conflict points, while still accommodating existing and forecasted traffic.*

Two lanes are not needed.

*The roundabouts are designed as "modified" single lane roundabouts with free-flow access to I-26 and US 74 ramps.*

Design wider single lanes rather than two lanes.

*The roundabouts are designed as a "modified" single lane roundabouts with free-flow access to I-26 and US 74 ramps.*

Request that roundabout aprons be designed less steep than current to be more easily mounted by trailers.

*The new aprons included in the project designs have been developed according to design standards, which will allow trailers to safely maneuver through the roundabouts.*

Request better signage and/or education outreach (4)

*Development of new signage will be addressed as part of the final design process.*

### **Sidewalks and Crosswalk Designs and/or Bicycle Accommodations**

Request to extend sidewalk on south side of NC 108 to Polk County Library entrance (6 comments)

*NCDOT will investigate opportunities to extend the sidewalk to the Polk County Library entrance, either through an extension of the project limits for STIP I-4729B, or through another separate project.*

Propose to use the existing bridge for sidewalks and bicycles and/or build a separate ADA compliant pedestrian bridge (5 comments)

*Retaining the existing bridge for pedestrians and bicycles would introduce points of conflict for pedestrians having to travel across NC 108 to reach the sidewalks along the corridor. In addition, this would place responsibility for maintenance of an aging structure on the Town of Columbus.*

Request for pedestrian crosswalks with flashing lights at: Days Inn, hospital entrance, Exxon Station, CVS/McDonalds, Weaver Street

*An analysis will be conducted prior to final design to evaluate current and anticipated use and will be used to determine appropriate locations for pedestrian crosswalks and signals.*

### **Beechwood intersection /Open Road Coffee**

Realignment of where Beechwood intersects Hwy 108 should be examined to see if improvements can be made to the intersection (4 comments).

*Opportunities to modify the intersection alignment will be explored during the final design process.*

### **Project Need**

Need to evaluate the effect that the new I-26-US 74 ramps currently under construction (STIP Project No. I-4729A) will have on traffic, to see if the project is still needed (8 comments).

*Bridge No. 32 was built in 1966 and rehabbed in 2015. Based on its age, the bridge is functionally obsolete and needs to be replaced regardless of the effect that completion of STIP Project No. I-4729A will have on traffic.*

## **Business Impacts**

Concerns about impacts to businesses related to construction disruption/delay.

*Access to businesses will be maintained during construction.*

## **Impacts to Natural Resources (4)**

Request that trees eliminated during construction be replaced (general locations, and at entryway on courthouse side of the project)

*A portion of the project budget will be used to address replanting trees within the project area.*

Construction easements should be planned to minimize impacts to property owners through realignment or use of retaining walls instead of 2:1 slopes. My main concerns are the old growth hardwood trees, and the 12-14 endangered or threatened species in Polk County. Example would be the residence across from St. Luke's Hospital. The current old growth tree is within the current proposed construction easement.

*Opportunities to minimize impacts will be explored during the final design process.*

*Regarding threatened or endangered species, as of June 1, 2017, the United States Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) lists four federally protected species for Polk County. Surveys for these species were conducted within the project study area. Based on the June 2017 Natural Resources Technical Memorandum for the combined STIP Projects I-4729A and I-4729B, and the May 25, 2018 Survey Memorandum, the biological conclusion for all four species was that the project would have No Effect on the species.*

Concerns about impact of road construction and potential for rock and mudslides

*Best Management Practices and sedimentation control will be followed during construction to minimize impacts.*

## **Other Comments**

Four comments were received related to the adjacent STIP Project No. R-5838. Those comments were provided to the NCDOT Division 14 Project Manager for inclusion in the comment summary for that project.

One detailed comment was received related to the I-26/US 74 Improvements currently under construction under STIP Project No. I-4729A. The NCDOT Division 14 Project Manager provided a separate response.