



Annual Report July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007

Background

The quality of life for the citizens of North Carolina, both urban and rural, is heavily dependent on transportation. Highways provide the overwhelming proportion of that transportation. Our transportation system also provides our country with an advantage in the world marketplace, as the transportation cost in the US, compared to gross domestic product, is lower than most countries. Again, highways move the major share of commodities within this country. There is consensus among the Interagency Leadership Team that the transportation system should be planned hand-in-hand with economic development and the protection and enhancement of our State's cultural and natural resources. These resources are also extremely important to the quality of life in North Carolina.

Various stakeholders at the national and State levels are concerned with highway project development processes and timing. The public process that this country enjoys often leads to concerns and issues that can become polarized and lead to indecision or lengthy studies in the project delivery process. Our State is growing in population, jobs, leisure activities, and travel demand. Our State must increase transportation system capacity through expanded transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, better operations of the current highway system, and expansion of highways. But mobility must be accomplished in a manner which is compatible with and minimizes impacts to the natural and human environment.

The leaders in the following group represent agencies that are integrally involved in the planning, development, and implementation of North Carolina's highway and transportation system.

- North Carolina Department of Transportation
- North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources
- North Carolina Department of Commerce
- North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
- United States Army Corps of Engineers – Wilmington District
- United States Department of Commerce - National Marine Fisheries Service
- United States Department of Transportation -- Federal Highway Administration
- United States Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service

This group came together because it believes that it is essential, and possible, to develop future transportation projects in a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders and preserves the scenic, historic, natural environment, and community values while efficiently meeting the mobility, economic, and safety needs of our citizens.

Mission

The mission of the Interagency Leadership Team is to develop and implement an interagency leadership plan for North Carolina to balance successfully mobility, natural and cultural resource protection, community values, and economic vitality at the confluence of our missions.

Goals

The Interagency Leadership Team has identified the top concerns and issues facing transportation, the environment and the economy in North Carolina. The Interagency Leadership Team has three goals:

Goal 1 - Develop a shared, comprehensive GIS database

A geographic information system (GIS) is a decision support tool, which displays many types of data onto a digital map for easy and efficient analysis and comparison purposes. The GIS data necessary for decision making in the transportation planning realm is either out of date, does not exist at all, and/or does not provide full statewide coverage. The result is that many agencies must initiate surveys, mapping, and studies to document and compile information regarding various resources and assets for planning and project analysis. An up-to-date, reliable, and comprehensive GIS has the potential to provide agencies a more efficient mechanism for data gathering and analysis.

Goal 2 - Partner with local governments and other stakeholders to integrate local land use and long-range transportation planning as well as applicable environmental and economic planning initiatives to meet mobility, economic, and environmental goals

Local land use planning can be used to achieve shared economic development and environmental goals when land use plans, transportation plans, and environmental conservation plans and objectives are integrated and relatable. Generally, land use, environmental, and transportation planning have not been consistently, jointly considered and integrated at the local government level. Since there is little or no coordination, the transportation agency often has to forecast the land use effects associated with transportation projects. Studies are required to forecast such effects and they can be very lengthy and costly. To improve this, state and federal government agencies can take a leadership role in integrating land use planning and long-range mobility planning by (1) providing easier access to land use data, economic development plans, transportation planning, and environmental data (GOAL 1); (2) enhancing land use planning to achieve shared economic development and environmental goals; and (3) considering short-term

and long-term human and natural environmental impacts in the long-range Comprehensive Transportation Planning process.

Goal 3 - Improve the Merger 01 process

In an effort to streamline the project development and permitting process and to improve interagency coordination for state transportation projects, the NC Department of Transportation, US Army Corps of Engineers, and Federal Highway Administration signed an interagency agreement. The agreement provided procedures for merging NEPA and Section 404. Known formally as the "Section 404/NEPA Interagency Merger Process", the name was revised to the "Merger 01 Process", reflecting revisions that were made to the process in 2001. The Merger 01 Process was formed to accomplish two objectives: (1) to develop quality permit applications and issue environmental permits that support the timely delivery of the transportation program while minimizing disruption to the natural and human environment; and (2) to improve the work-flow effectiveness and efficiency of permit application development, coordination and issuance process.

The Merger 01 Process is an exemplary program, recognized nationally as an innovative approach to state and federal cooperation in transportation improvement and environmental protection. The process is regularly monitored and reviewed to improve its efficiency.

Key Accomplishments

Over the past state fiscal year (July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007), the Interagency Leadership Team has shared information about the Interagency Leadership Team and its goals to:

- NC Board of Transportation
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Sustainable Sandhills
- NC Ports Authority
- Regional Land Use Advisory Commission
- NC Turnpike Authority
- AASHTO Standing Committee on Environment

The following summarizes progress made toward each one of the Interagency Leadership Team's goals:

Goal 1 - Develop a comprehensive shared GIS database

- Presentation on GIS Business case was made at the NCMPO Conference in Charlotte Oct. 25-27, 2006
- Received 5 letters of support from MPOs, 12 from RPOs, and 2 from environmental conservation groups, as well as a resolution of support from the NC Board of Transportation
- Requested \$8 million per year for 2007-08 and 2008-09 from the Office of State Budget and Management and the Governor's Office for the development of high priority GIS data layers, as referenced in the ILT's GIS Business Case

Goal 2- Partner with local governments and other stakeholders to integrate local land use and long-range transportation planning as well as applicable environmental and economic planning initiatives to meet mobility, economic, and environmental goals

- Monitored the development of the Comprehensive Transportation Planning Process in Brunswick County and participated in joint actions which encourage comprehensive planning in this rapidly developing county
- Completed the conceptual development and implementation of the Comprehensive Transportation Planning Process and its integration with the Project Development Process
- Began development of a procedures manual that outlines the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) process, Integration Process, and the NEPA process.
 - Completed six regional outreach meetings on the CTP process; held three regional feedback sessions on Integration linkages.
 - Held a workshop in July 2006 between the ILT and Metropolitan Planning Organizations on the implementation of SAFETEA-LU in the Comprehensive Transportation Planning Process.
 - Conducted an MPO/ILT/FHWA workshop in March 2007 to (1) communicate and educate resource agency staff on integrated planning initiatives and concepts (ILT Goal 2, CTP/Integration Project, SAFETEA-LU requirements, and Transportation Planning 101) and (2) discuss possible approaches for coordination between resource agency strategic planning (DENR Conservation Planning) and long-range transportation planning.
 - Began development of Stakeholder Involvement Toolkit

Goal 3 - Improve the Merger 01 Process

- Developed performance measures for the Merger 01 Process.
- Completed the development of curriculum for Merger 01 training and delivered this training to approximately 55 executives and 180 staff who are involved in the Merger 01 Process.
- Recommended changes within the Merger 01 Process to comply with SAFETEA-LU Section 6002 requirements. Specifically:
 - Clarified that the primary and partnering agencies identified in the Merger 01 Memorandum of Understanding are considered “Participating” in accordance with Section 6002. The MPOs and RPOs or tribal entities would need to be specifically invited to participate in the Merger 01 Process.
 - Included opportunities for public involvement and input prior to development of a project purpose and need statement

Future

The team will continue to meet to ensure that the strategies agreed upon are being implemented by the different work groups and that the strategies are generating the desired goals. The team will also identify and address new areas for improvement and avenues to discuss policies, regulations and laws that affect the agencies. The team will keep track of new initiatives started at the different agencies that may impact the other members or duplicate efforts already underway at the statewide level.

ILT Participants

NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs:
David McLeod, Assistant Commissioner

NC Department of Commerce:
Libby Smith, Policy Director

NC Department of Cultural Resources:
Dr. Jeff Crow, Deputy Secretary, Archives and History
Dr. David Brook, Director, Division of Historical Resources

NC Department of the Environment and Natural Resources:
Bill Laxton, Chief Deputy Secretary
Robin Smith, Assistant Secretary for the Environment

NC Department of Transportation:
Bill Rosser, State Highway Administrator
Debbie Barbour, Director of Preconstruction

NC Wildlife Resources Commission:
Shannon Deaton, Habitat Conservation Program Manager

United States Army Corps of Engineers – Wilmington District:
Ken Jolly, Chief, Regulatory Division
Scott McLendon, Team Leader, NCDOT

United States Department of Commerce - National Marine Fisheries Service:
Ron Sechler, Fishery Biologist

United States Department of Transportation -- Federal Highway Administration
John Sullivan, Division Administrator
Don Voelker, Assistant Division Administrator

United States Environmental Protection Agency:
Heinz Mueller, Chief, NEPA Office
Linda Rimer, Liaison to North Carolina

United States Fish and Wildlife Service:
Pete Benjamin, Field Supervisor