



Annual Report July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008

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 Agriculture
- 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, 2007 through June 30, 2008), 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/RULAC/BRAC
- NC Geographic Coordinating Council
- NC Office of State Budget and Management
- Governor's Office

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

Goal 1 - Develop a comprehensive shared GIS database

- *Worked to secure funding*
 - Met with the Office of State Budget and Management to provide information about the need, benefits and cost of developing this Shared, comprehensive GIS. The ILT's business case was referenced in a Legislative Study Report on GIS that was prepared by the Office of State Budget and Management.
 - Briefed the NC Geographic Information Coordinating Council on the ILT's strategy for the budget expansion request and to solicit their support
 - Submitted funding request via expansion budget requests to Governor's Office and State Legislature (requested ~ \$2 million for each of first two years, which was 25% of the previous year's request). Request didn't make it through the Legislature.

- Re-prioritized data layers (93) for a reduced request for funding
- *Continued coordination between agencies on GIS protocols*
 - Began developing standards for GIS data collected now and in the future
 - GIS User Group met to assess protocols (data content standards) for collecting data and developed costs associated with implementing data content standards and identify gaps
- *Began GIS Pilots*
 - Engaged Merger Management Team to provide oversight on GIS Pilot Projects.
 - Began GIS Pilot for the Carthage Bypass
 - Conducted a project specific review (Crescent Road) to determine the potential time and cost savings that expanded use of GIS may yield

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

- *Began discussions on integrating climate change into comprehensive planning activities*
 - Worked with a select local area to explore how long range plans should address Climate Change
 - Established a climate change committee of the ILT to develop recommendations on how to integrate climate change in to the ILT's goals and activities during the next ILT Strategic Plan update. Committee also developed survey of climate change impacts on ILT agencies.
- *Supported the development of comprehensive planning efforts*
 - Developed an understanding of the Strategic Habitat Conservation Program and the Carolina Coastal Watershed Project and how this fits with the Eco-Logical grant that the ILT supported and is monitoring. These programs also emphasize landscape modeling, which supports ILT Goal 1.
 - Received briefing on RLUAC/Sustainable Sandhills and provided briefing on Comprehensive Transportation Planning Process to the Transportation Committee in this planning area
 - Put accountability mechanism in place by Sustainable Sandhills on the use of grant money provided by NCDOT for the development of GIS data layers to support comprehensive planning in the region. \$110,000 was provided from NCDOT to Mid-Carolina Council of Governments to develop GIS layers in an eleven-county area. These data layers are intended to be used in the development of a Comprehensive Transportation Plan in the region.
 - Received an FHWA Eco-Logical Grant to support the development of the NC Strategic Conservation Plan in December 2007 and began implementation
 - Monitored progress of interagency team working on Integration Linkage of Problem Statement to Purpose and Need
 - Monitored progress of Brunswick County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (benefits, lessons learned)
 - Received briefing on interagency initiatives to address surplus mitigation assets
 - Tracked implementation of the CTP/Integration Initiative

Goal 3 - Improve the Merger 01 Process

- Reviewed Merger Performance Measures for 2002 – 2007 and determined that overall performance is improving
- Piloted the use of a facilitator in the Merger Process
- Merger Management Team successfully resolved elevated issues for 2 projects
- Continue to identify areas to improve and streamline the Merger process

In addition to the above accomplishments, the ILT also updated its Strategic Plan. In support of the planning process, the ILT heard a presentation from PBJ&S on the General Assembly's Study on Transportation Project Delivery to understand the recommendations and how those fit in with the ILT's goals and received a briefing on NCDOT Organizational Assessment and Transformation to understand how proposed changes at NCDOT might support progress on goals.

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
Edward Parker, 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