



## **Annual Report July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009**

### **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 and Consumer Services
- 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**

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

#### **Goal 1 - Develop a comprehensive shared GIS database**

- Prioritized GIS data layers to support GIS Pilot Projects
- Continued work on GIS Pilots
  - Completed forensic on Crescent Road to quantify the potential benefits of using GIS earlier in the project development process. The study revealed that if the use of GIS had been extended in the project development process to the point of selecting an alternative, approximately \$ 400,000 savings would have been achieved. Also, there would have been a four to five month savings in time.
  - Continued work on the Carthage Bypass GIS Pilot. A field meeting was held to review wetlands and stream locations in the field versus those that were modeled. The results from the field meeting indicated that the modeled locations closely matched the field locations.
  - Initiated Lenoir County GIS Pilot: The North Carolina Board of Transportation provided a resolution in support of the Lenoir County GIS Pilot. NCDOT agreed to fund the update of specified GIS data layers in Lenoir County to support future long-range planning and STIP projects. Scoping was conducted with various agencies to verify the layers to be updated and the attributes of each layer. Work began on drafting a formal agreement between NCDOT and NCDENR-CGIA to update specified GIS data layers in Lenoir County. This agreement was subsequently executed in July 2009.

**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**

- Established an ILT Climate Change Working Group, which is planning a workshop in March 2010 in Raleigh on climate change adaptation strategies and initiatives. The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program (APNEP) will partner to host the conference.
- Received an FHWA Eco-Logical Grant to support the development of the NCOne Naturally Strategic Conservation Plan in December 2007. The development of the Plan is underway. Landscape Habitat Indicator Guilds have been completed for about two-thirds of the state. The cultural resources project is nearly complete. A pilot project has been selected in the Hickory area, and a comparison has begun of field work and the conservation planning tool assessments.
- Monitored progress of the Integration Implementation Team efforts and progress. The Integration Implementation Team members were formally established and work began on prioritizing the team's activities.

**Goal 3 - Improve the Merger 01 Process**

- Second annual report on Merger performance metrics completed
- As a result of the review of the Merger Performance measures, a NCDOT-FHWA team was established to review the Merger process and to recommend streamlining measures from the start of project planning study to Concurrence Point 4A. This team has developed some recommendations and made a presentation to Merger agency participants and the ILT. All have been asked to provide comments so an implementation plan can be developed.
- Continued piloting the use of a facilitator in the Merger Process
- Bridge Replacement Streamlining Workstream initiated with the mission of improving the efficiency of the environmental review process for low-impact bridge replacement projects. This interagency team has developed an action plan and will begin implementation of the streamlined process in late 2009.

**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, Commerce Liaison

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:  
Manly Wilder, Chief Deputy Secretary

NC Department of Transportation:  
Terry Gibson, State Highway Administrator  
Debbie Barbour, Director of Preconstruction

NC Wildlife Resources Commission:  
Mallory Martin, Chief Deputy Director

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:  
Pace Wilbur, Atlantic Branch Chief

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 Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service:  
Pete Benjamin, Field Supervisor