



## **Annual Report July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010**

### **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. Mobility, however, 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**

Continued work on GIS Pilots to demonstrate the benefits and value of having GIS data layers for decision-making early in the project development process

- Lenoir County GIS Pilot: NCDOT and the Center for Geographic Information Analysis (CGIA) entered into a reimbursement agreement to update 31 GIS data layers in Lenoir County to support ongoing studies in the region and to facilitate efficient transportation decision-making for local, regional, and state planners. Fourteen of the 31 data layers have been completed to date. Lessons learned from this pilot are being documented as the pilot progresses so that the ILT can make informed recommendations for future GIS initiatives. CGIA has been awarded a grant to pilot an automated return on investment (ROI) tool. This ROI tool will be applied at the end of the Lenoir GIS project to help quantify the benefits and costs associated with the use of GIS data.
- Carthage By-Pass GIS Pilot: The actual Carthage transportation project was deferred due to a lack of public support for the overall project; however, the portion of the project that involved the use of GIS data to identify issues of importance was completed. The use of GIS data to identify and assess major issues of significance helped to complete the project’s NEPA documentation (an Environmental Assessment) 16 months earlier than is typical for a project such as Carthage. In addition, this pilot

produced a cooperative effort whereby scientists from NCDOT and NCDENR developed a LIDAR-based model for the project area that predicts the existence of wetlands and streams. The Carthage Pilot allowed for the model to be developed, applied, and then field-verified. The model has been shared with and reviewed by experts from wetland and water quality permitting agencies, who have been supportive and encouraged by the model's preliminary results. Wetland and stream modeling will also be done within the Lenoir County Pilot so that the predictive model's effectiveness and validity can continued to be assessed

- All historic National Register properties and districts are mapped throughout the state. Efforts are on-going to map Study List properties, Determinations of Eligibility, and Local Properties.

**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**

- On March 2-3, 2010, the ILT and its partners hosted a Climate Change Adaptation Workshop, *Planning for NC's Future: Ask the Climate Question*. As a carry-over from the Workshop, the ILT's Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) continued to collaborate to develop a state climate strategy to address the affects of climate change. The CCWG has developed a partnership with the Renaissance Computing Institute to develop this strategy, largely through funding from NOAA. The development of the integrated climate strategy is state-led and federally supported.
- The ILT continued to monitor the work of the Integration Implementation Team, who is working to better link the long-range transportation planning process with the transportation project development process with the purpose of streamlining project delivery and improved decision-making. The Purpose and Need Team has completed their work and developed a training program that will be piloted in November 2010.

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

- The ILT continued to monitor performance of the Merger process.
- Work continued on the Transportation Streamlining Initiative. This work yielded draft guidance for implementing new approaches to project initiation and interagency scoping. Pilot projects for testing these new approaches are being identified with the goal of piloting initiation and scoping during Fall 2010 and into Spring 2011. Training, education, and communication efforts regarding the pilots and implementation are on-going.
- A Low Impact Bridge Replacement Workstream was initiated with the mission of improving the efficiency of the environmental review process for low-impact bridge replacement projects. A process has been developed and agreed upon by stakeholders and guidelines have been established. The process is currently being tested on NCDOT Division bridge replacement projects. Monitoring of the process is in place to review results.

### **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  
Pete Sandbeck, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

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 (Co-Chair)

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 (Co-Chair)  
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