



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

JAMES B. HUNT JR.
GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 25201, RALEIGH, N.C. 27611-5201

October 13, 1998

E. NORRIS TOLSON
SECRETARY

MEMORANDUM TO: Donald R. Morton, P. E.
Deputy Highway Administrator – Preconstruction

FROM: David G. Modlin, Jr., Ph.D., P. E.
Head of Feasibility Studies

SUBJECT: NC 16, Blue Ridge Parkway to US 221 in
Jefferson, Ashe County, Federal-Aid
Project STP-16(1), State Project 8.1710902,
TIP Project R-2100

This project involves the improvement of NC 16 in Ashe County and generally involves widening the existing roadway two (2) feet on each side, improving the shoulders, and adding guard rail with a short section of three-lane curb and gutter (40 feet face-to-face of curbs) through Glendale Springs proper. An Environmental Assessment was approved by the Federal Highway Administration on June 12, 1990. A Design Public Hearing was held on May 14, 1992. A Finding of No Significant was approved by the Federal Highway Administration on November 27, 1995. At your request, I made a trip to Ashe County on October 7, 1998, to reinvestigate the feasibility of this approved project, a portion of which is currently under construction.

I spent several hours visiting and talking with local residents relative to the proposed improvements to NC 16 under R-2100. Most of this time was spent in the Glendale Springs General Store owned by Mr. Howard Barnes. I talked at length with Mr. Barnes and his customers concerning the wishes of the local residents. Everyone, without exception, with whom I spoke could not understand why the project had been "put on hold to restudy the feasibility when we had already purchased over half the right of way and had begun construction on the northern section."



A fifth-generation resident, Mr. Jim Dancy, volunteered to ride the project with me and explain nuances along the project that might escape casual observation. He pointed out each and every parcel, named the owner and elaborated on the status of the right of way claim. In one instance, we have purchased right of way and moved a home back on the remaining portion of the owner's land. In viewing the portion of the project already under construction, I did not detect any obtrusive cuts or fills nor any significant impacts associated with minor relocations to improve the horizontal alignment. For the most part, where the project parallels the South Fork of the New River, there is open/developed land between the existing road and the river. Best management practices should prevent any detrimental impacts to the river.

Mr. Jeff Miller, Ashe County Manager, called the day after my visit to inquire about the project. He could not understand why we were again looking at the feasibility of an approved project, part of which is under construction. We had a good conversation as I explained the purpose of my visit and what I expected to report to you. He expressed his desire that the project continue along an implementation path as soon as practicable.

My observations were that the pavement along NC 16 from NC 163 to Jefferson was in poorer condition than that along the NC 163 routing suggested by the delegation that visited Secretary Tolson. I was able to drive approximately 40 miles per hour along NC 16 and between 50 and 55 miles per hour along NC 163. This suggests that the horizontal and vertical alignment along NC 16 is to a lesser standard than that along NC 163.

We have shifted the alignment away from the church property in Glendale Springs proper and no impact is anticipated to that property. The cut bank on the inside of the curve at the church is approximately 4 feet and no rock is showing. If we had to shave it back a little I can see no great harm.

I asked repeatedly concerning the trip making characteristics of those using NC 16. Without exception, local residents said that NC 163 was not a substitute route for NC 16 traffic. The NC 163 routing is approximately 10 percent longer than the NC 16 routing. NC 16 is functionally classified as a Minor Arterial in the Statewide Functional Classification System.

There is considerable local sentiment that a handful of "foreigners" with money can have more influence than local residents who have been seeking the planned improvements to NC 16 for years. This feeling is one that is routinely seen in the western counties -- locals wanting a better road to carry on the business of daily life versus those who have found a bit of Americana and want to keep it that way.

I could find no reason not to continue with the minor widening of NC 16 and the three-laning of a short section within Glendale Springs. The existing pavement is narrower than our standard pavement, the shoulders are not adequate and much of the section is lacking adequate guard rail. NC 16 is classified as a Minor Arterial and the proposed improvements are consistent with that functional classification.

Attached, I would offer Wade Hoke's letter to David Conner which I suggest expresses the same opinion that I hold in this matter. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to call me.

David W. Conner

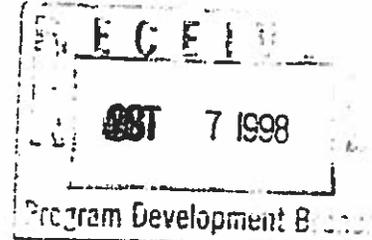


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September 28, 1998



MEMORANDUM TO: David W. Conner
Feasibility Studies Unit
Program Development Branch

FROM: W.E. Hoke 
Division Engineer

SUBJECT: Feasibility Study for Improvements to NC 16 from NC 163 to
Jefferson (Project R-2100)

A planning study and environmental assessment was approved on June 14, 1990 for this project. A combined public hearing was held on May 14, 1992 and the finding of no significant impact was approved on November 27, 1995.

The location and design approval was given to the project on December 15, 1995. Right of Way has been acquired for the northern one-third of the project from Jefferson to the New River and this project is now under construction. Right of Way for the southern one-third of the project from the Wilkes County line to north of SR 1158 is well under way with many parcels having been acquired. It is quite remarkable to me that after all of this planning, over approximately a period of 9 years, we are now doing a feasibility study to determine whether the project is worthwhile. Long and arduous discussions were held with The Blue Ridge Parkway in order to resolve improvement of NC 16 adjacent to the parkway. Any change to shift the improvement to NC 163 would involve major changes to the intersection of NC 163 and NC 16 and would have major affects on the Blue Ridge Parkway. I would anticipate that negotiations with the parkway would have to start all over again.

NC 163 has fair to good horizontal alignment and fair to poor vertical alignment from NC 16 to US 221 in Beaver Creek. NC 163 is generally a good minor collector highway and is not in need of any general improvement. NC 163 serves as an access for the West Jefferson, Beaver Creek area from the southern part of Ashe County;

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however, this does not replace the function that NC 16 serves as a major thoroughfare through the county.

Project R-2100 would improve NC 16 from the Wilkes County to Jefferson, a sister project R- 2207 in Wilkes County will improve NC 16 from the Ashe County line to US 421 near Wilkesboro. The Ashe County public officials have placed a high priority on improving NC 16 from Jefferson to the Virginia Line thereby creating a improved high standard two-lane road from US 421 in Wilkes County through Ashe County to US 58 in Virginia. This road is extremely important to the economic development to the region and particularly Ashe County.

Improvement of NC 163 from NC 16 to US 221 would in no way reduce the need for improvement of NC 16 as a major thoroughfare through the county.

WEH:mb

cc: Sam Erby, Jr.
Len Sanderson, P.E.