

Project Description

The Town of East Spencer, North Carolina, in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), urgently requests \$25 million in Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) capital funds for the conversion of McCanless Road (SR 2114) from an underpass to an interchange on the I-85 corridor in Rowan County, North Carolina. The Developing an East Spencer Interchange for a Growth Nexus (DESIGN) project represents a crucial opportunity to address the long-term transportation and economic challenges facing the Town, which is both a Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) and an Area of Persistent Poverty (AoPP). East Spencer is located in the Concord, NC 2020 Census-designated Urban Area, although parts of the Town's Extraterritorial Jurisdiction are just outside the area. The location of the project is shown in *Figure 1*.

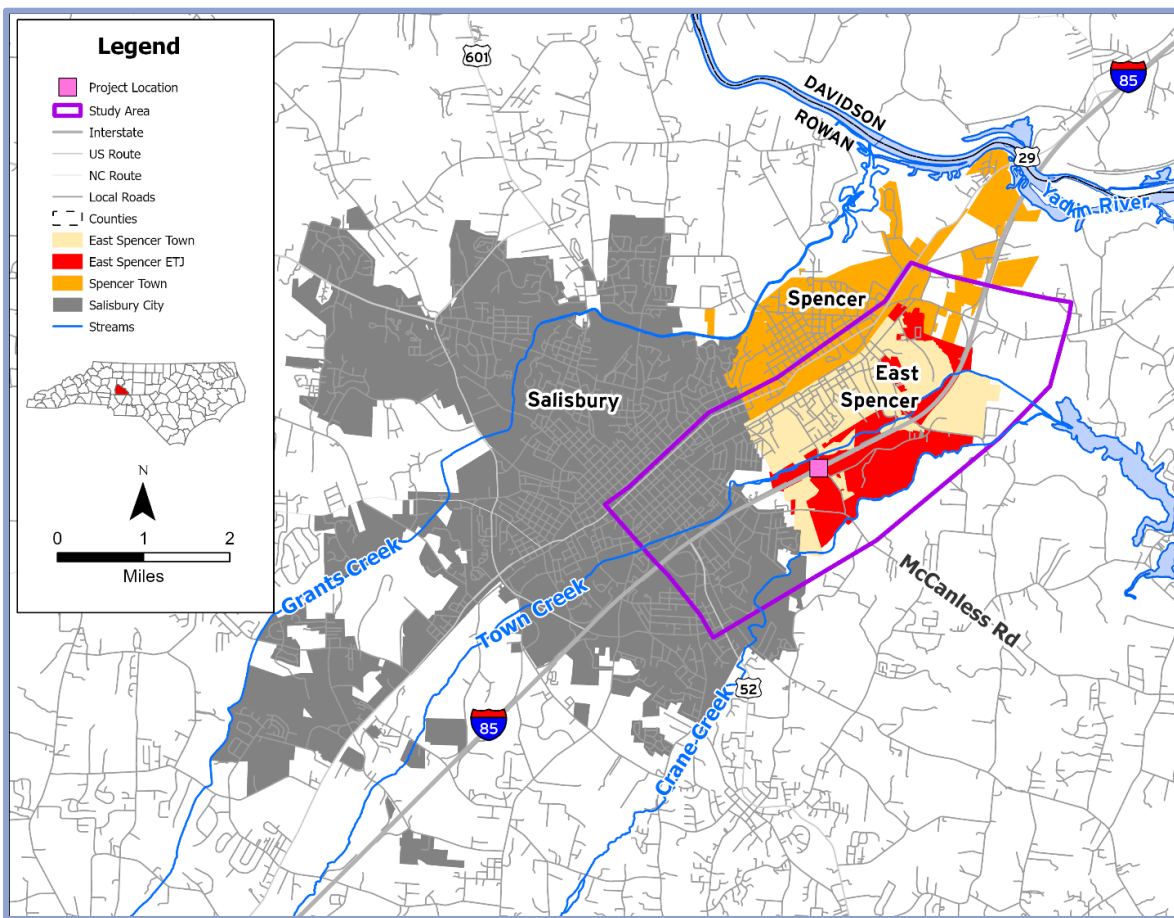


Figure 1: Project Location Map

The Town and NCDOT have progressed concepts for the proposed improvements. In 2023, NCDOT completed a Traffic Operations Analysis of the proposed interchange as well as potential design criteria and conceptual designs for two potential build alternatives, right-of-way (ROW), utility and construction cost estimates and an Interchange Access Report. These reports are included as supplemental materials at the project website:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/RAISE2025-EastSpencer/Pages/default.aspx>

Figure 2 shows the anticipated footprint for the project, with a conservative ROW assumption (largest potential footprint with areas of potential disturbance shown in red). The project would construct a Partial Cloverleaf Interchange at I-85 and SR 2114 with a standard intersection at the southbound ramp terminal. The design would retain the existing I-85 structure. Construction activities would generally be limited to developing ramps and merge lanes. The Town will administer the grant, and NCDOT will provide construction oversight and be responsible for the maintenance of the facility post-construction.

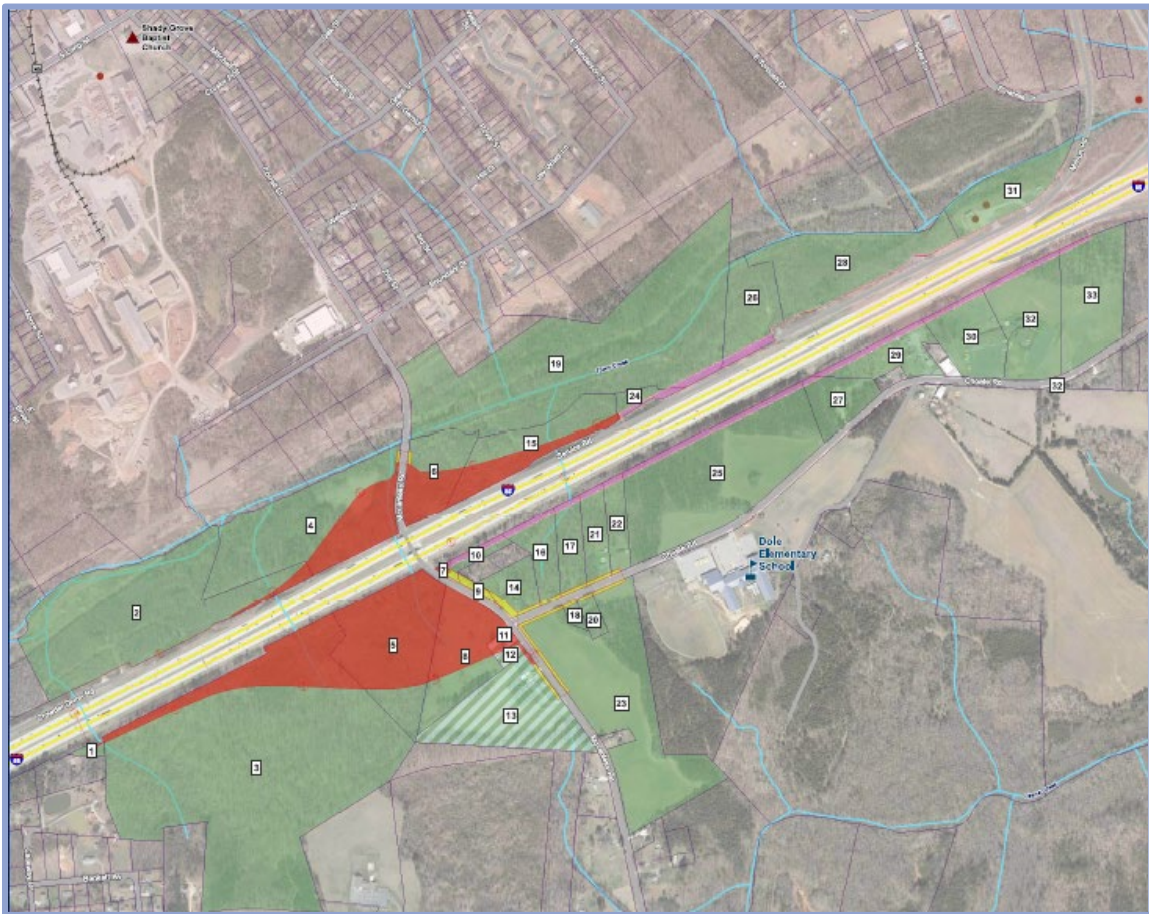


Figure 2: Approximate Footprint of Project

This project is a key to addressing East Spencer’s long-term transportation barriers. The Town is historically predominantly African American. Like many similar towns, East Spencer was largely cut off from nearby communities. A 1962 NCDOT network map (*Figure 3*) shows the isolation the Town faced. Cut off to the west by the railroad (*Figure 4*), to the east by Town Creek, and without a connection to Bringle Ferry Road to the south, the Town relied on Long Street and at-grade railroad crossings at E. 11th Street and E. Jefferson Street to access Salisbury and Spencer, respectively. E. Jefferson Street was grade separated in 1973, but no additional connections have been developed.

This lack of connection remains an issue and has severely impeded the ability of the Town to grow. In 1962, Salisbury had a population of 21,297, Spencer had a population of 2,904 and East Spencer had a population of 2,171. Based on [2024 population estimates](#), Salisbury has a current population of 36,559, Spencer has a population of 3,094 and East Spencer has a population of 1,619.

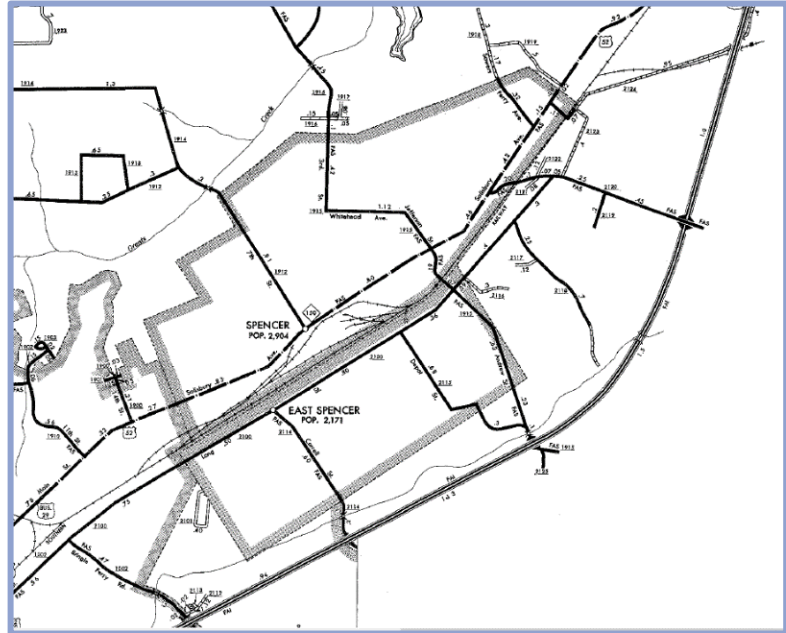


Figure 3: 1962 NCDOT Map of Spencer Area



Figure 4: Railroad Avenue and Tracks Limiting Access Between East Spencer and Spencer

Within its storied history, the Town of East Spencer has endured several changes that have impacted the community. During the 1960s, the Town had several businesses that supported the community. An ABC store, Oglesby Cleaners, Kirk’s General Store and an ice plant were just a few of the businesses that provided necessary and affordable services to community residents. By 1969, these businesses were closed and shuttered. One of the primary reasons the businesses failed was an overall lack of access. For the next 40 years following 1969, the Town had five (5) general stores (Johnson – 1970, Lash – 1972, Massey – 1978, Ms. Hadley’s - 1985, Lloyds – 1997), all of which closed. The only hotel (Paradise Inn) in the Town closed in 1979. The loss of jobs and subsequent decline in population caused the Town to lose Crowder’s Restaurant in 1993 and No Name Cafe in the early 2000s. The Crowder’s Restaurant site has been used several times by various food entrepreneurs to establish a bonified restaurant for the community, most recently as Hamm’s Café (813 Long St), but all have failed.



Figure 5: Abandoned Business Along Long Street

Long Street in East Spencer shows both the effects of its transportation disadvantage as well as the resilience of its residents. Long Street at the Innes Street intersection exists as a three-lane roadway with turn lanes and sidewalks on either side of the facility. Powerlines are located outside the sidewalk boundaries. North of Park Street, the facility narrows to two lanes, and

powerlines are placed in the middle of the now discontinuous sidewalks, providing barriers to pedestrians, especially those in wheelchairs. The sidewalks are sometimes on the northbound side of the facility and sometimes on the south side, and in some areas, are non-existent.

Long Street provides visible testimony of the community’s struggles. Storefronts bear the names of long-abandoned businesses. On many parts of the street, steps arise from the sidewalks to now-vacant lots. Generations of dreams have failed due to a lack of opportunity.



Figure 6: Vacant Lot Along Long Street

In the mid-2010s, the Town was having difficulty collecting the funds needed to provide essential governmental services. There was significant speculation that the Town would cease to exist. However, the current East Spencer administration has worked to reestablish stability and the trust of Town residents. The Town now has a younger population than many of the neighboring communities, and they are focusing their energies on the future. The former Hamm's Café recently reopened as a Mexican restaurant.

The DESIGN project will enable East Spencer to address many of its long-term challenges. Town residents will benefit from more direct access to I-85. This access will reduce traffic on Long Street, reduce demand on the aging facility and make bicycle and pedestrian use less problematic. Providing an economical access point to I-85 will open up the East Spencer Extraterritorial Jurisdiction to sustainable light industrial development. This assessment is not conjecture; there are currently 15 million square feet of industrial space under development along the I-85 corridor, highlighting the opportunities improved access will provide. In addition, with interchange funding in place, the Town can pursue electronic vehicle charging stations and improved bicycle and pedestrian access through the project area, improving access to both employment opportunities and Hanford-Dole Elementary School. This grant represents an opportunity to transform East Spencer and break the cycle of disinvestment, and open pathways to economic prosperity for its residents.



Figure 7: Hanford-Dole Elementary School Rock Art