

MERIT CRITERIA FILE

Criteria #1 – Safety

This project will protect non-motorized travelers from safety risks and will meet the “Safer Roads” component of the National Roadway Safety Strategy. Currently, Meridian Brick trucks must use Long Street and other secondary roads to access I-85 North or South. Long Street provides challenges for pedestrians and bicyclists. The sidewalks are discontinuous in East Spencer, with wooden electric poles often placed in the middle, causing some pedestrians to leave the sidewalk and enter the road. The travel width of Long Street is 27 feet. There are no bike lanes and bicycles must share the travel lane with trucks and other vehicles.

From September 1, 2014, through August 31, 2024, there were 425 crashes on Long Street, including 3 fatal crashes. The total crash rate was 571.8 per 100 million vehicle miles and the fatal crash rate was 4.4 per 100 million vehicle miles.

For a facility less than 4 miles long with an annual ADT of 5,300, this is an excessive number. Crashes involved 13 pedestrians, 4 bicyclists and 17 moped crashes. The estimated cost of these crashes exceeded \$2 million. Construction of the interchange would reduce truck traffic on Long Street and allow area residents an additional option to access I-85 for jobs, goods and services. Reducing this traffic on Long Street would provide a safer, less congested facility for bicyclists and pedestrians.

According to the USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer, 13.7 percent of households in East Spencer do not own a motor vehicle. This would provide safer, less stressful access to goods and services for many residents. The benefits of the project stretch beyond Long Street. Allowing area residents and commercial vehicles to access I-85 more directly would also reduce traffic on I-85 interchanges to the north (towards Greensboro) and to the south (towards Charlotte). This is especially important for those traveling to Charlotte. US 52/Innes Street (SR 2200) has an even higher crash rate than Long Street, with 1,228 crashes over the same time period, including 4 fatal crashes and 232 total injury crashes.

A total of 23 crashes involved bicyclists or pedestrians. The overall crash rate is 1,848.32 per 100 million vehicle miles. Providing an alternative route will improve overall safety in the region. A crash analysis was also conducted for Correll Street/McCanless Road (SR 2114). Over the same time period as the other facilities, 25 crashes were reported. There were no fatal crashes and 9 injury crashes. The total crash rate was 256.90 per 100 million vehicle miles, which is substantially below the rates of the other area facilities.

Based on the Benefits/Cost Analysis, the total safety benefit of the project would be \$8,545,480 with a net present value of \$4,301,902.

Criteria #2 – Environmental Sustainability

The project will address the disproportionately negative impacts to the local community. Based on the USDOT’s Climate and Economic Justice Screening and Mapping Tool (CEJST), currently, the project area faces more Particulate Matter (PM) pollution, Toxic Release into the Air (toxicity-

weighted concentration) and Risk Management Protection facilities than the majority of the state. It should be noted that the East Spencer census tract ranks in the highest 89th percentile with regards to residents diagnosed with asthma.

According to Quiros et al., 2017, heavy-duty on-road vehicles account for 70 percent of all freight transport and 20 percent of transportation-sector greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the United States. The study found that 2013 diesel semi-trucks with a payload of 19.6 tons had an average CO2 emissions rate greater than 76 grams of CO2 per ton-mile traveled. The proposed interchange would reroute trucks exiting and entering the brick plant, therefore reducing which PM exposure to East Spencer residents. Based on data from the Town, Meridian Brick runs over 70 trucks down Long Street daily. Other vehicles would also use the proposed interchange.

Based on the enclosed Benefits/Cost Analysis, the safety benefits of this reduction in greenhouse gases would provide a total benefit of \$165,204,276, which for the purpose of this analysis is discounted to \$80,688,933.

Criteria #3 – Quality of Life

The project area includes one census tract, 37159050800, that is listed as both an AoPP and HDC. The census tract is listed as disadvantaged due to transportation barriers, low income, unemployment and the percentage of residents with less than a high school education. According to the ETC Explorer, census tract 37159050800 has high transportation burden costs.

Approximately 49.98 percent of the population in the tract is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. The median household income is \$41,387. The average household spends 22.41 percent of their income on transportation. The average household spends \$11,149 on transportation annually, and 23.08 percent of households in this tract spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

By converting the I-85 bridge into an interchange, the project will improve direct access to employment centers, goods and essential services, reducing travel times and transportation costs for residents. Ultimately, the project will promote equity by creating a more inclusive, accessible and affordable transportation network, enabling the residents of this underserved community to participate more fully in economic and social opportunities.

The project will enhance connectivity and eliminate transportation barriers to emergency care for workers in the area's brick plants and future industrial developments where dangerous conditions demand rapid access to medical services. The current lack of direct access to I-85 has already contributed to delays in emergency response, tragically highlighted by the death of a brick plant worker off McCanless Road. By improving connectivity, the interchange will reduce response times to critical facilities like Novant Health Urgent Care, ensuring faster, life-saving care for workers in high-risk industries.

This project is essential for protecting the health and safety of the local workforce. The project will reduce transportation and housing cost burdens by improving access to public and private investments that can spur greater commercial and mixed-income residential development near the corridor. Enhanced connectivity will attract new businesses and residential projects. By facilitating

more efficient transportation routes, the project will lower commuting costs for residents and create opportunities for affordable housing near employment centers, supporting a more integrated, cost-effective living environment for both current and future residents.

By connecting McCanless Road directly to I-85 via the interchange, the project will divert heavy truck traffic away from local streets, reducing congestion and improving safety for pedestrians in town. This redirection will enhance the walkability and accessibility of the area, making it easier for residents to navigate their community without relying on a car. As noted in the Safety criterion discussion, over 13 percent of the households in East Spencer do not own a vehicle. By creating safer, more pedestrian-friendly spaces, the project will encourage a thriving environment where individuals can live, work and play, supported by a range of transportation choices that allow for greater mobility and community engagement.

In addition to improving pedestrian accessibility, the project will also support the Salisbury microtransit system, as seen in the below map, increasing the viability of this alternative transportation method, and providing residents with more sustainable and accessible travel options within the community. The route shown is anticipated to be operational in July 2025.

Microtransit Service Zone Route 3

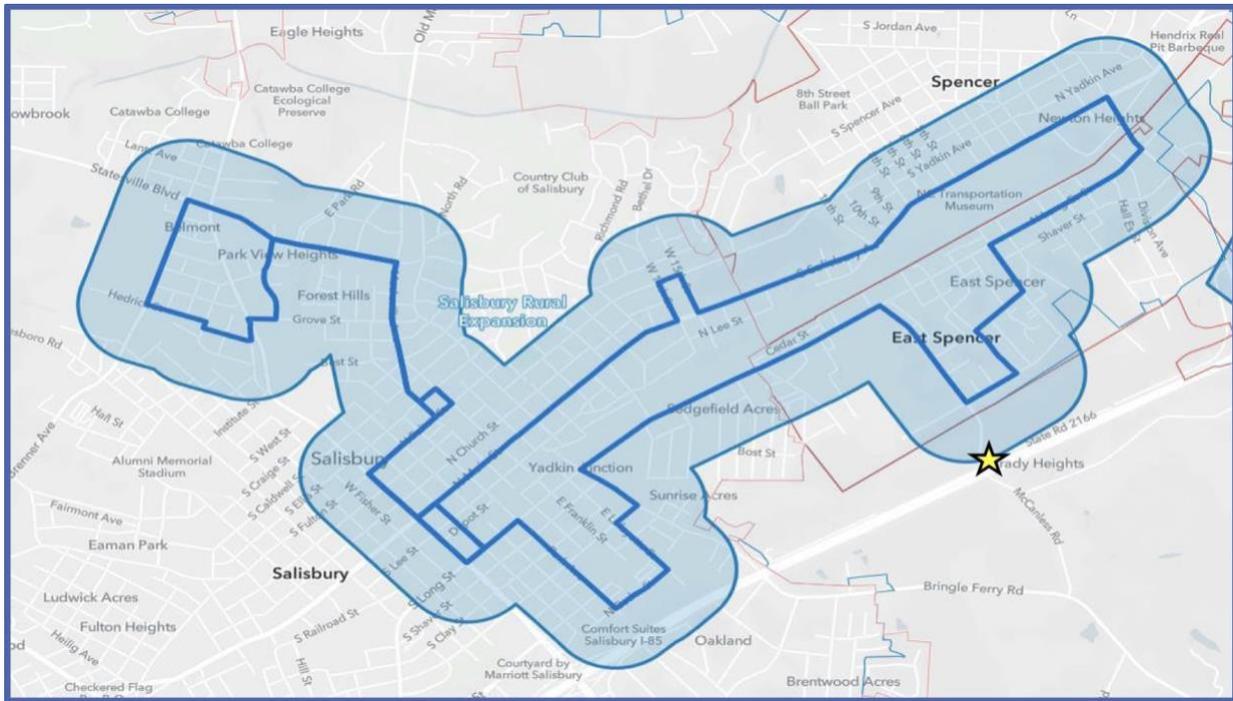


Figure 4

Criteria #4 – Mobility and Community Connectivity

By providing more direct access to I-85, the project will directly increase intermodal freight movement and will provide opportunities to attract commercial development that will be critical to

the Town's long-term financial stability. East Spencer is faced with transportation barriers. To the northwest, the CSX railroad tracks isolate the Town from the Town of Spencer, except for one railroad crossing at Jefferson Street on the northern edge of the Town limits. I-85, a valuable network that would connect the Town to rest of the state and southeast region, slices through the edge of East Spencer, with no facilities that would allow traffic to flow into downtown.

According to the EPA CEJST, East Spencer ranks in the 90th percentile of communities experiencing transportation barriers. According to the ETC Explorer, 13.70 percent of households do not own a vehicle. The estimated drive times to facilities are:

- Adult Education Opportunities – 34 minutes
- Grocery Stores – 5 minutes
- Medical Facilities – 6 minutes
- Parks – 4 minutes.

As a focal point in East Spencer, the proposed project would connect the Town with two major interstates, I-85 and I-40, two national freight corridors carrying local traffic, commuters, tourists and freight. Currently, trucks exiting the brick plant must travel 2.5 miles to get to I-85 South and travel 3 miles to get to I-85 North. Both routes rely heavily on Long Street, a two-lane minor arterial road, which also serves as the main road for residents and visitors of East Spencer. The proposed interchange at McCanless Road would divert truck traffic from travelling through almost the entire limits of the Town using the communities main travel artery. In doing so, safety and mobility for motorists would improve as well as connection to local community facilities.

An in-depth analysis of 2050 Future Year No-Build results underscores the urgent need for the interchange on SR 2114 and the I-85 corridor to enhance traffic operations. The projected data reveal significant congestion and queueing, driven by escalating traffic volumes and new developments that are intensifying demand for transportation connectivity. By implementing the proposed interchange design, we can effectively reroute traffic and alleviate these bottlenecks, ultimately ensuring that the project operates efficiently for all users.

The build alternative is not merely a solution but rather a transformative opportunity for the East Spencer community. It is expected to provide essential capacity enhancements, significantly improving traffic flow compared to the 2050 No-Build scenario. In fact, the total intersection delay for all intersections along the project corridor is projected to decrease during both AM and PM peak periods under the Build scenario. While the intersection of McCanless Road at I-85 sees a slight increase in delay during the PM peak, overall improvements across other intersections will more than compensate, fostering a smoother traffic experience.

As highlighted in Table 1 below, the build alternative promises to reduce total delays during the peak hour time periods by at least 14% while enhancing average speeds compared to the 2050 No-Build scenario. This infrastructure upgrade is not just about traffic flow; it is a vital investment in the future of East Spencer.

Table 1: Network MOE Comparison

Year/Scenario	Vehicle Hours Traveled (VHT)		Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)		Average Speed (mph)		Total Delay	
	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
2022 Base Year No-Build	592.9	773.9	33,762.20	39,417.10	63.5	62.4	106.5	203.8
2050 Future Year No-Build	985.5	1,345.30	52,210.70	60,051.60	60.9	60.6	221.8	474.1
2050 Future Year Build	948.4	1,299.80	52,091.80	60,059.90	61.5	61.2	191.3	430.9
2022 Base Year Build	613.2	766.7	33,993.90	39,728.20	62.8	62.2	123.7	190.4

From a practical perspective, the project will reduce vehicle hours traveled, providing a total benefit of \$90,403,933 in travel time savings and a \$55,566,303 benefit in operational savings for a total benefit of \$146,279,326 (net present value of \$67,213,310).

Criteria #5 – Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity

The project would promote wealth building for area residents, create good-paying jobs and promote long-term economic growth and broader economic and fiscal benefits. The I-85 corridor has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth and industrial development in the Southeast. Traditionally known for supporting a robust manufacturing base, this corridor has evolved into a dynamic hub that now integrates both legacy industries and emerging sectors. As a result, the I-85 corridor is positioning itself as a key contributor to the region's competitiveness in the global marketplace, fostering innovation, economic diversification and sustainable growth.

The continued development along this corridor is expected to further enhance the Southeast's economic resilience, creating high-quality jobs and attracting international investment. According to the Rowan Campaign for Economic Prosperity 2025-2029, Rowan County is experiencing a significant surge in industrial development along the I-85 corridor, attracting major national and international corporations. Notable recent projects include Macy's 1.4 million-square-foot fulfillment center and Chewy's 700,000-square-foot distribution center. With over 15 million square feet of industrial space under development, the region is well poised for further growth.

Crow Holdings is developing a state-of-the-art 710,600-square-foot facility, reflecting confidence in Rowan County's strategic location, pro-business environment and skilled labor force. These investments are part of a broader economic boom along the corridor, which connects key metropolitan areas in the Southeast. As shown in Figure 4, the project would provide East Spencer residents and commercial facilities with easy access to Charlotte, Greensboro and Winston-Salem.

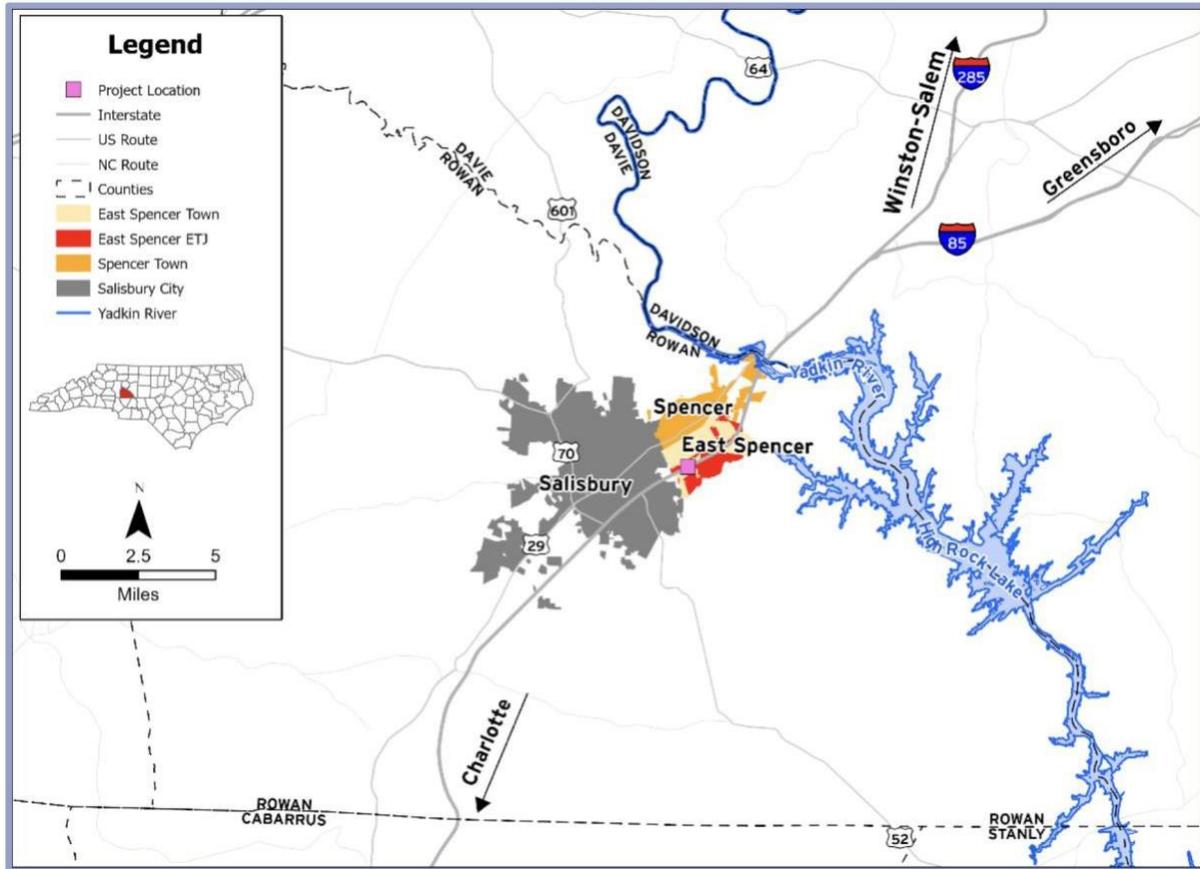


Figure 5

The I-85 corridor, while inland, is strategically connected to global supply chains through inland ports located in Charlotte and Spartanburg. These ports facilitate access to major shipping channels via the ports of Charleston, Savannah and Wilmington. The corridor's development not only enhances local economies but also contributes to the broader economic landscape of the United States.

By converting the I-85 bridge into an interchange, the project will improve direct access to employment centers, goods and essential services, reducing travel times and transportation costs for residents. While economic development is not currently included as a quantifiable benefit, previous studies show the benefit of the DESIGN project. According to a 2022 report by the US Chamber of Commerce, “On average, a new (distribution center) DC employing 3,000 workers resulted in 5,111 total new jobs in an MSA including those 3,000 at the new DC and sustained those new jobs over a 20-year period. Importantly, for every job created directly by a new DC, there are an additional 0.7 jobs created in the MSA.” The report states that the average DC creates over 5,100 jobs, increases personal income by \$500 million and grows wages by \$360 million.

The project will reduce transportation and housing cost burdens by improving access to public and private investments that can spur greater commercial and mixed-income residential development near the corridor. Enhanced connectivity will attract new businesses and residential projects. By facilitating more efficient transportation routes, the project will lower commuting costs for residents

and create opportunities for affordable housing near employment centers, supporting a more integrated, cost-effective living environment for both current and future residents.

Criteria #6 – State of Good Repair

The project will meaningfully advance the State of Good Repair for transportation infrastructure by reducing existing maintenance burdens, creating durable new assets, and improving the long-term resiliency of the regional network. By providing a new interchange on I-85, the project will divert a significant share of heavy truck and commuter traffic away from Long Street and other local roads in East Spencer. These facilities currently experience wear that exceeds what they were designed to accommodate, resulting in frequent resurfacing needs, pavement deterioration, and safety concerns. Redirecting traffic to a purpose-built interchange will slow the rate of degradation on Town-maintained streets, extending pavement life cycles and reducing annual maintenance costs for the community.

The project also introduces new, modern infrastructure that will be incorporated into the statewide asset management system. Once constructed, the interchange will be transferred to NCDOT and become part of the I-85 mainline system, ensuring it is maintained to interstate standards. NCDOT’s established maintenance programs, performance-based management practices, and substantial funding capacity provide a high level of assurance that the new infrastructure will remain in a State of Good Repair for decades. In FY2026, NCDOT budgeted \$2.189 billion for maintenance and ultimately invested \$2.882 billion, demonstrating both the availability of resources and the agency’s commitment to preserving critical transportation assets.

In addition to the direct benefits to the interstate system, the project strengthens the overall condition of the local network by addressing existing vulnerabilities in an underserved community. East Spencer has historically faced challenges maintaining its transportation assets due to limited fiscal capacity. By reducing strain on local roads and catalyzing new economic development, the project is expected to increase the Town’s revenue base over time. This growth will enable East Spencer to reinvest in its own infrastructure, improving the condition of sidewalks, local streets, and other community facilities that currently lack sufficient funding for long-term upkeep.

The project’s design also incorporates modern engineering standards that enhance durability, reduce lifecycle costs, and improve resilience to weather events and long-term climate stressors. These features—combined with NCDOT’s stewardship—ensure that the interchange will not only be built to a high standard but will remain in good condition through proactive maintenance, systematic inspections, and timely rehabilitation.

Overall, the DESIGN project supports a comprehensive State of Good Repair strategy by reducing existing maintenance liabilities, creating new infrastructure with a clear long-term maintenance plan, and strengthening the financial and operational capacity of an underserved community to care for its own transportation assets.

Criteria #7 – Partnership and Collaboration

The project will be driven by the partnership of the Town of East Spencer, Rowan County, Cabarrus-

Rowan MPO, and NCDOT. In addition, during project development, the Town will follow USDOT's Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making Guide. Public Involvement practices will include:

- Title VI compliance.
- Community Participation Plan.
- LEP Outreach that follows the US Department of Justice LEP Guidance.
- The project is included in the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Long-Range Transportation Plan and will be included in the NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).
- Public engagement activities including a project website, public meetings and small group discussions.

As a result of the robust collaboration among the project partners, the project has been adopted in several planning documents. The project is listed on the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as project #H190956 and is also in the Cabarrus-Rowan MPO *Comprehensive Transportation Plan*, as amended March 26, 2019. The need for the interchange project is addressed in the local *Land Use Plan Areas East of I-85 Rowan County*, adopted by the Rowan County Board of Commissioners in 2012.

Most importantly, 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) acquisition, utility and construction cost estimates and an Interchange Access Report, which is attached to this application and can be found on the project website at <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/BUILD2026-EastSpencer/Pages/default.aspx>.

In addition to its core partners, the project has received broad community and institutional support from the Rowan Chamber of Commerce, Rowan Economic Development Council, the City of Salisbury, the Towns of Spencer, Granite Quarry, China Grove, Rockwell, and Faith, and the North Carolina Department of Transportation, reflecting strong local, regional, and state-level prioritization and backing for this project.

Criteria #8 – Innovation

The Town of East Spencer is adopting an aggressive and innovative financing plan for the project. As part of its proposed funding portfolio, the Town of East Spencer has begun discussions in December 2025 to file a Letter of Interest with DOT's Build America Bureau for a \$5 million TIFIA direct loan instrument.

The Town's approach is highly innovative because it leverages the TIFIA program, a tool typically reserved for multi-billion dollar metropolitan projects, to empower a small, historically underserved community. By pursuing a \$5 million TIFIA direct loan, the Town is utilizing federal credit assistance to secure low-interest, long-term financing that would otherwise be inaccessible through traditional municipal lending markets.

This strategy allows the Town to maintain fiscal stability while accelerating the delivery of critical infrastructure, effectively "punching above its weight" to address decades of systemic disinvestment. This financing plan is groundbreaking in its integration of diverse funding streams that blend federal, state, and local resources into a cohesive portfolio. Rather than relying solely on standard grant cycles, which can be unpredictable and competitive, East Spencer is creating a scalable financial model that pairs the TIFIA loan with other strategic investments. This proactive stance reduces the overall cost of capital and ensures that the project remains resilient against inflationary pressures, setting a new precedent for how rural and small urban areas can navigate complex requirements to fund transformative transportation hubs. Finally, the innovation lies in the project's economic multiplier effect, where the financing plan is treated as a catalyst for community-wide revitalization rather than just a road construction budget.

By securing the TIFIA instrument, the Town will demonstrate institutional capacity and creditworthiness to private investors, signaling that East Spencer is open for sustainable development. This financial foresight ensures that the interchange does more than move vehicles; it creates a self-sustaining economic engine that will generate the future tax revenue necessary to service the debt while simultaneously improving the quality of life for its residents.

Conclusion

The Town of East Spencer thanks USDOT for its consideration of the Town of East Spencer I-85/SR2114 Interchange Construction Project. The project provides an excellent return on USDOT's investment (the BCA is over 3) even without including the economic benefits that the project will enable in terms of increased commercial revenue, employment, and overall community amenities. We are available to answer any questions about the project.

Supplemental materials can be found on the project's website: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/BUILD2026-EastSpencer/Pages/default.aspx>.