

# MORE I-74

Maximizing our Rural Economy



**MPDG FFY 2023 and 2024  
GRANT APPLICATION  
AUGUST 2023**





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## Project Description

### Project Overview

The **Maximizing Our Rural Economy on I-74 Project** (hereafter “the MORE I-74 Project”) offers an opportunity to improve surface transportation in a rural area of eastern North Carolina. The MORE I-74 Project is the outcome of a systematic and coordinated strategy to improve safety, regional and national economic vitality, and redundancy in eastern North Carolina by connecting a growing major east-west interstate. Improving this corridor, which has been identified as a State Strategic Transportation Corridor<sup>1</sup>, an Alternative Fuel Corridor<sup>2</sup>, and is a part of the Nation’s Strategic Highway Network<sup>3</sup> (STRAHNET), will not only improve safety and reliability in this area, but will also continue to strengthen the supply chain for North Carolina and beyond.



US 74, traveling northeast toward Hamlet

The MORE I-74 Project corridor begins where I-74 meets US 74 Business east of Hamlet in Richmond County (34.868920, -79.646579) and terminates where I-74 restarts and meets US 74 Business west of Laurinburg in Scotland County (34.789247, -79.505833). The Project proposes to upgrade 9.8 miles of US 74 to interstate standards, which will bridge the gap between existing sections of already designated Interstate 74. The proposed corridor will follow the existing alignment of US 74 until SR 1363 (Fred Carter Road), where a southerly bypass around Laurel Hill will begin. The southerly bypass ties back into the existing alignment of US 74 at SR 1267 (Devon Drive) and continues to follow the existing alignment until the eastern terminus of the project corridor. The project location is shown in **Figure 1** in the **Appendix**.

This project is currently programmed in the NCDOT 2024-2033 *State Transportation Improvement Program* (STIP) as Project No. I-6055 and is funded for preliminary engineering, which has begun. If awarded, the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) funding would be used to accelerate construction for this essential corridor.

Three components will upgrade the existing four-lane divided freeway to interstate standards. Mainline outside paved shoulders will be full depth, widened to 12-feet, and include rumble strips; mainline inside paved shoulders will be full depth, widened to 4-feet, and include rumble strips;

<sup>1</sup> North Carolina Strategic Transportation Corridors, [NCDOT: Strategic Transportation Corridors](#).

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Alternative Fuel Corridors [NCDOT: National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure \(NEVI\) Program](#)

<sup>3</sup> North Carolina Strategic Highway Network, [NorthCarolina.pdf \(army.mil\)](#)

and the roadway surface will be improved through milling the old pavement down to a subbase and applying a fill of new asphalt.

By strategically connecting existing segments of I-74 and bringing the existing MORE I-74 corridor to interstate standards, this project will provide much needed investment to economically uplift and bring system redundancy to underserved communities in south central North Carolina.

## Communities Along the MORE I-74 Corridor

The MORE I-74 Project is located in rural portions of North Carolina in the Piedmont and Coastal Plains regions of the state. The project traverses unincorporated portions of Richmond and Scotland Counties, such as Old Hundred Census Designated Place (CDP) and Laurel Hill CDP, and is flanked by incorporated municipalities of the City of Hamlet and the City of Laurinburg.

According to the US Census Bureau 2020 Urbanized Areas<sup>4</sup>, the project does not encounter any urbanized areas. The Project area is located within Census Tracts (CT) 9711, 105.02, and 106.1, shown in **Figure 2** in the **Appendix**, all of which are considered historically disadvantaged communities<sup>5</sup>, particularly for climate change, energy, and health, and are areas of persistent poverty<sup>6</sup>.

## Project Goals

The MORE I-74 Project prioritizes an infrastructure investment in a rural area which is key to connecting people and products across the state and beyond. Collectively, the MORE I-74 Project will focus on improving the following:

- Protect public safety by widening roadway shoulders, and enhancing visibility along travel lanes;
- Improve multimodal highway corridor connections to other major interstates (I-95), rail facilities (CSX Hamlet Terminal, Amtrak Hamlet Train Station, CSX Laurinburg Transload Facility), and ports (Port of Wilmington) to leverage multimodal opportunities that will revitalize highway, freight, and barge transportation and improve rural economies through improved access to urban and national markets;
- Strengthen the supply chain and promote the production and transportation of products created in America by providing a reliable and timely connection to existing and future major employment centers. These connections will help achieve the Administration's goal of fostering economic vitality in rural areas as part of the Investing in America agenda<sup>7</sup>;
- Provide redundancy on east-west movements across the state on a corridor identified by NCDOT's National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program as an Alternative Fuel Corridor (AFC);

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<sup>4</sup> US Census Bureau 2020 Urbanized Areas [Urban and Rural \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/urbanized-areas/)

<sup>5</sup> [Explore the map - Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool \(geoplatform.gov\)](https://www.geoplatform.gov/Climate-and-Economic-Justice-Screening-Tool)

<sup>6</sup> [Areas of Persistent Poverty & Historically Disadvantaged Communities | US Department of Transportation](https://www.transportation.gov/areas-of-persistent-poverty)

<sup>7</sup> [Investing In America | The White House](https://www.whitehouse.gov/investing-in-america/)

- Support a network of major transportation facilities and services that are responsible for moving high volumes of people and freight across regions of the state that must function at high levels of service in order to provide for the State’s economic well-being and the Department of Defense’s (DoD’s) domestic operations;
- Enhance the efficiency of vital hurricane evacuation routes and the communities they serve, and;
- Implement equitable solutions and reduce barriers to employment opportunities in compliance with NCDOT’s complete streets policy for historically disadvantaged communities, areas of persistent poverty, and environmental justice populations.

## Project History

To date, NCDOT, in corporation with local officials, has performed numerous studies along this portion of US 74 and beyond looking for ways to improve the corridor.

The *Scotland County Comprehensive Transportation Plan*<sup>8</sup> (CTP), adopted in October 2016, recommends upgrading US 74 to interstate standards from the Rockingham-Hamlet Bypass in Richmond County to existing I-74 in Robeson County. This CTP also includes recommendations for an interchange at Old Wire Road (SR 1319) and grade separations at Saint Johns Church Road (SR 1148) and at Laurel Hill Church Road (SR 1321).

From that, NCDOT completed a feasibility study (STIP No. FS-1708A<sup>9</sup>) in October 2017, which studied upgrading US 74 to interstate standards from east of Hamlet to east of Maxton in Richmond, Scotland, and Robeson Counties. The study included functional roadway designs for two potential alternatives and early environmental analyses to identify state and federally protected resources in the region and potential permits needed for this project. Since then, NCDOT has begun preliminary engineering on STIP Project No. I-6055, which is a segment of the corridor that was included in FS-1708A.

North Carolina’s *Strategic Transportation Corridors: Vision Plan*<sup>10</sup>, published in December 2020, developed recommendations for Strategic Transportation Corridors US 74, I-85, and I-485, which run from I-26 in Polk County to US 117 in Wilmington. The MORE I-74 Project satisfies the following areas for additional study identified by the plan:

- Complete high-capacity, high-speed improvements for improved route continuity, and;
- Install safety improvements on rural, uncontrolled access sections to address high crash sections or hot spots.

The *U.S. 74 Resiliency Study*<sup>11</sup> (January 2023) was conducted along a 190-mile stretch of US 74 from Wilmington the Charlotte, NC (including the MORE I-74 Project limits) over a 40-year

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<sup>8</sup> 2016 Scotland County Comprehensive Transportation Plan [15 Appendix I-ewt2 \(ncdot.gov\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> NCDOT Feasibility Study No. FS-1508A (US-74 Upgrade to Interstate Standards from East of Hamlet to East of Maxton), October 2017

[connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/FeasibilityStudiesDocuments/FS-1508A\\_Feasibility-Study\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/FeasibilityStudiesDocuments/FS-1508A_Feasibility-Study_Report_2017.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> NCDOT Strategic Transportation Corridor Master Plan [STC Master Plans Bundle 2 \(ncdot.gov\)](#)

planning period to simulate corridor growth and urbanization as well as future climate change influenced events including storms, sea level rise, and extreme heat. The study presents a list of objectives that were considered when developing the goals of the study, two of which the MORE I-74 Project satisfies, which are preserving continuity along corridors and fostering equity.

## Broader Context of the Project

The MORE I-74 Project is part of a much larger program of state investments to improve the safety, capacity, and resiliency of the multi-modal transportation network in North Carolina. In addition, the upgrades contribute greatly to the overall economic vitality of the region by connecting centers of current and potential economic activity of statewide and national significance to other interstates, major freight hubs, and ports, into one efficient and resilient network.

### Tourism

Since 1965, the Rockingham Speedway and Entertainment Complex has hosted racing, thrill shows, music festivals, and more enticing tourists from all over North Carolina<sup>12</sup>. The MORE I-74 corridor is the main route to reach this local attraction.

In 2021, Rockingham speedway received \$10 million in COVID recovery grants from the state and spent another \$10 million on upgrades in hopes of hosting NASCAR races in 2024<sup>13</sup>. By providing upgrades to this portion of US 74, the State can continue to safely accommodate a major source of revenue for this region and effectively handle the growth that is anticipated to come.



Rockingham Speedway Entrance

### Major Employment Centers

NCDOT recognizes the importance of growing rural economies by improving highway corridors to strengthen not only the movement of goods and services, but the movement of people and improving their access to major employment centers.

The upgrade of the MORE I-74 Corridor provides direct access to key industrial sites within the region, including Bike Rock sports, Ritz-Craft Homes, RSI Home Products, and Laticrete, and makes the corridor an attractive area for other future public and private investments. These improvements align with the Administration's current American Jobs Plan<sup>14</sup> that aims to upgrade

<sup>12</sup> [History | Rockingham Speedway and Entertainment Complex \(rockingham-speedway.com\)](https://rockingham-speedway.com/history)

<sup>13</sup> [Could NASCAR return to Rockingham Speedway in 2024? | wfmynews2.com](https://wfmynews2.com/could-nascar-return-to-rockingham-speedway-in-2024/)

<sup>14</sup> [FACT SHEET: The American Jobs Plan | The White House](https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheet/the-american-jobs-plan/)

key infrastructure to create reliable and timely access to major employment centers, especially in historically disadvantaged and underserved communities.

## Strategic Transportation Corridors

The US 74 / Future I-74 Route is currently designated as a Strategic Transportation Corridor (STC) by NCDOT. The STC initiative is NCDOT's effort to:

- Preserve and maximize the mobility and connectivity on a core set of transportation corridors, and;
- Promote environmental stewardship through maximizing the use of existing facilities to the extent possible, and;
- Foster economic prosperity through the quick and efficient movement of people and goods.

The State's Strategic Transportation Corridors are the top corridors in the state that move large volumes of people and freight within North Carolina and to key national markets.<sup>15</sup> The goal of the program is to connect centers of economic activity of statewide and national significance and connects major freight hubs, ports, intermodal facilities, and highways, into one efficient and resilient network.

**Figure 3** in the **Appendix** illustrates the North Carolina Strategic Transportation Corridors. I-95 forms the main north-south spine, with Future I-87, Future I-42, and Future I-74 serving as key routes to the coast. This future network connects the Port of Morehead City, CCX, and the Port of Virginia in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia. The Future I-74 Corridor will traverse rural eastern North Carolina via US 74 between Charlotte and Wilmington. At numerous parts along the route, Future I-74 connects south to the South Carolina State line. When fully upgraded, this new interstate corridor will be an access-controlled connection between the Port of Wilmington, I-95, and western North Carolina.

## Strategic Highway Network

The MORE I-74 Project is also part of the Nation's Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), which is critical to the Department of Defense's (DoD's) domestic operations. The STRAHNET is a 62,791-mile system of roads deemed necessary for emergency mobilization and peacetime movement of heavy armor, fuel, ammunition, repair parts, food, and other commodities to support U.S. military operations. **Figure 4** in the **Appendix** illustrates the North Carolina Strategic Highway Network and associated military installations. As shown, the Future I-74 Corridor provides direct access for numerous National Guard Bases and provides an access-controlled connection between Fort Liberty (formerly Bragg) and the Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point (MOTSU).

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<sup>15</sup> North Carolina Strategic Transportation Corridors, [NCDOT: Strategic Transportation Corridors](#)



# Appendix

**Figure 1: MORE I-74 Vicinity Map**

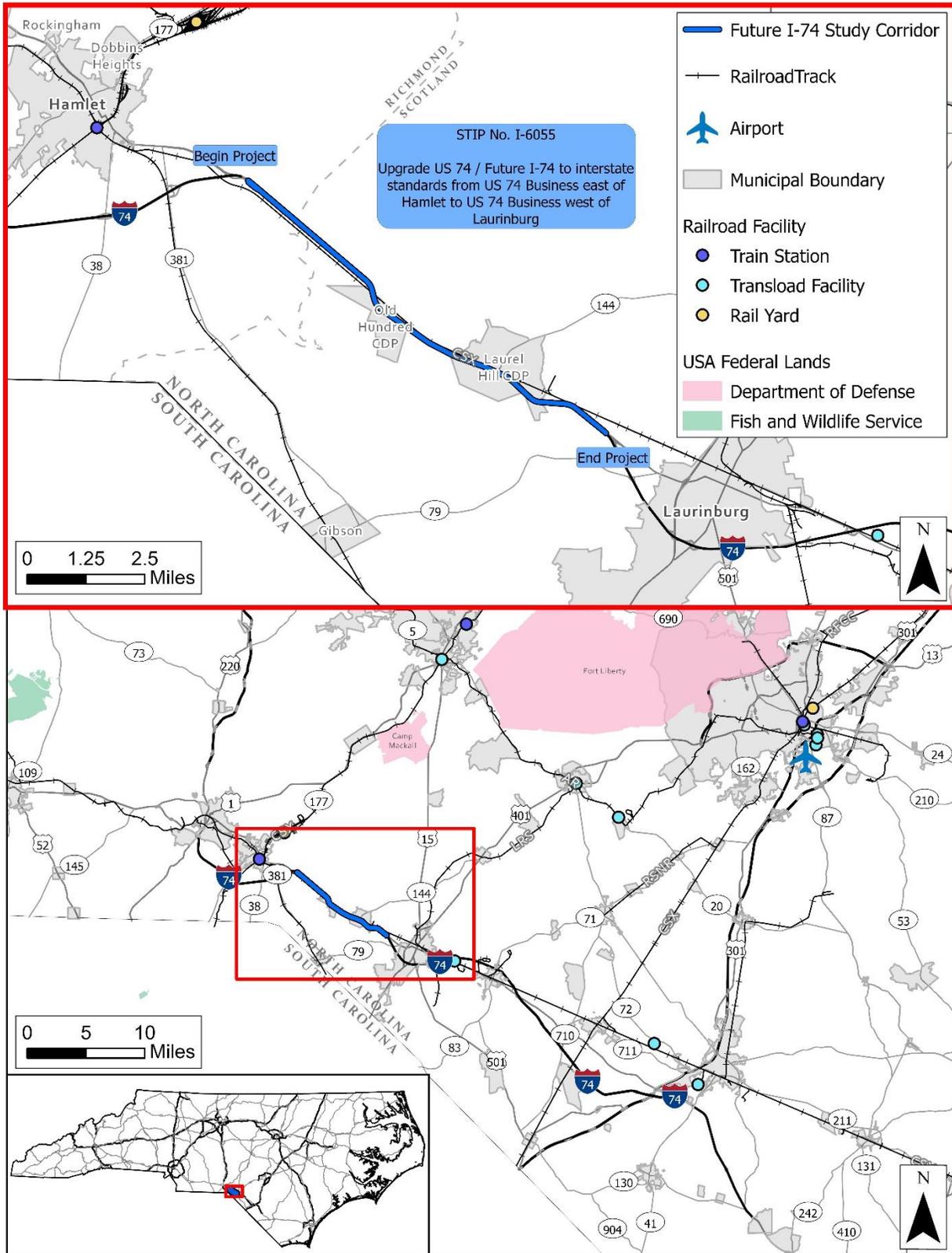




Figure 3: Strategic Transportation Corridors in North Carolina

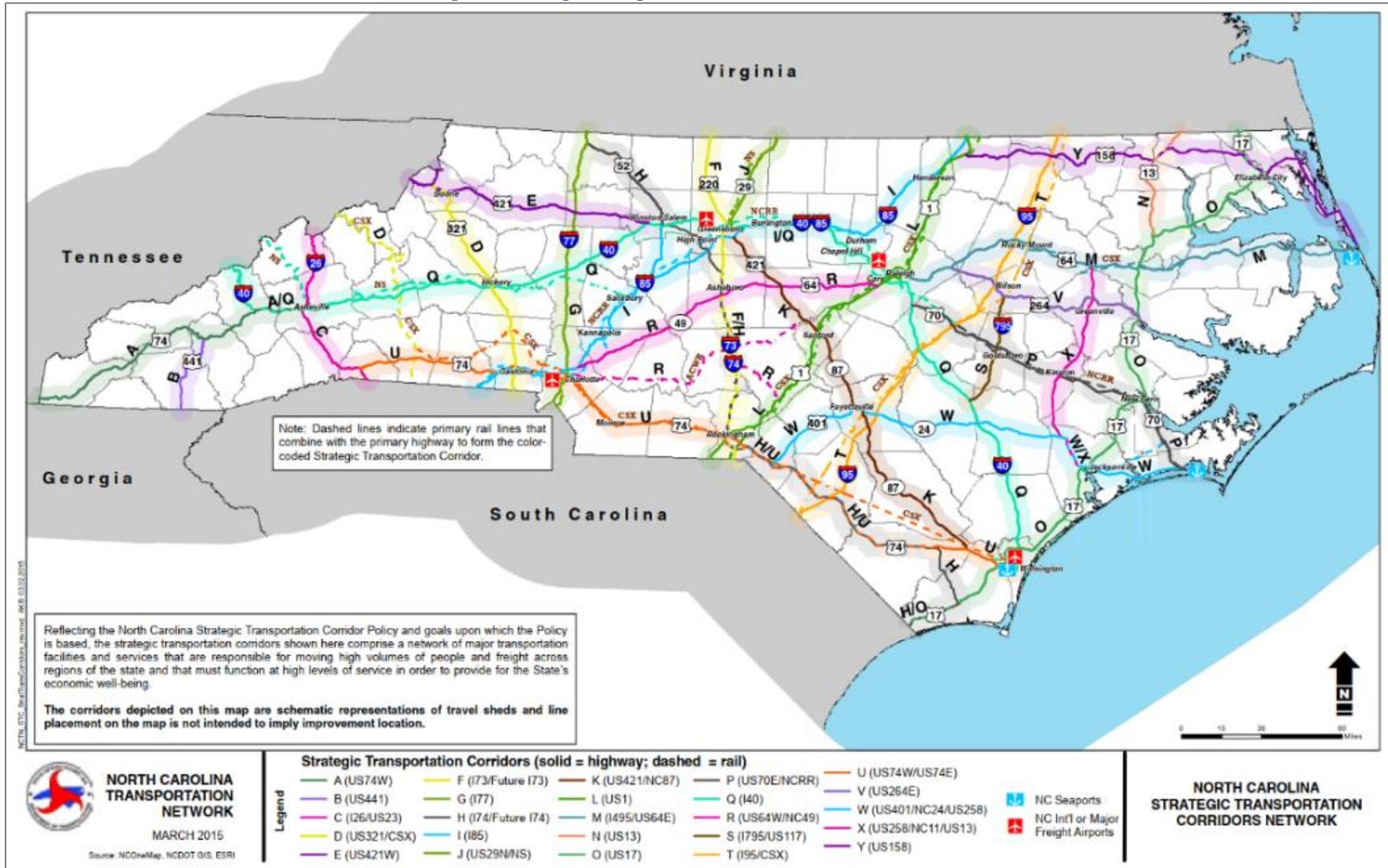
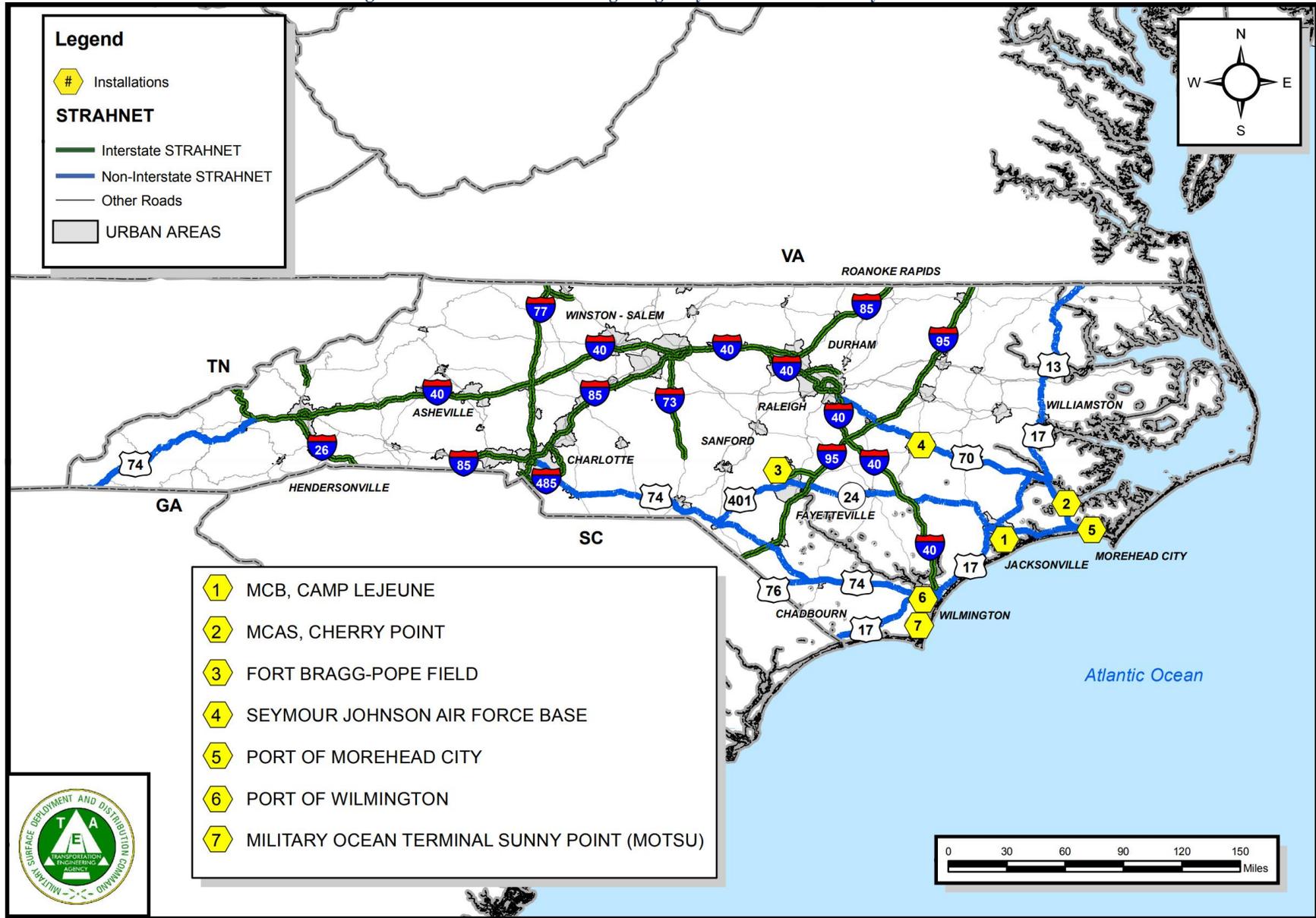


Figure 4: North Carolina's Strategic Highway Network and Military Installations



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