

STIP Project No. A-0009

Project Team Meeting No. 2

Date: March 17, 2016

Place/Time: Stantec office, Raleigh, 9:00am

Attendees: Karen Compton, USFS
Cynthia Van Der Wiele, USEPA
Mitch Batuzich, FHWA
Brian Burch, NCDOT Division 14
Kevin Moore, NCDOT Roadway Design Unit
Tom Smith, ARC
Mike Edwards, Graham County
Jacob Nelms, Graham County
Keith Eller, Graham County
Pam Cook, NCDOT Transp. Planning Branch
Renee Gledhill-Earley, SHPO
Amy Sackaroff, Stantec
Paul Koch, Stantec
Amy Chapman, NCDEQ

Monte Matthews, USACE
Loretta Beckwith, USACE
Marella Buncick, USFWS
Marla Chambers, NCWRC
Stacy Oberhausen, NCDOT PDEA
Donna Dancausse, FHWA

Via telephone:
Rose Bauguess, Southwestern RPO
Sarah Thompson, Southwestern RPO
Kevin Barnett, NCDWR
Tracy Walter, NCDOT PDEA
Denise Nelson, NPS

Distribution: Attendees
Janet Duffey, TVA
Morgan Sommerville, AT Conservancy/NPS
Nathan Adima, NCDOT Roadway Design Unit
Diane Wilson, NCDOT Public Involvement
Ryan Sherby, Southwestern RPO
Eric Oosahwee-Voss, UKB
Adam Wachacha, EBCI
Sheila Bird, Cherokee Nation
Keith Eller, Graham County
Randy Wiggins, Cherokee County
CB McKinnon, Cherokee County
Paul Worley, Cherokee County

The A-0009 project team met on March 17, 2016 with the objective to resolve pending questions associated with the ARC/ADHS; establish a shared understanding of the preliminary study area, needs, and purpose; and, assess the team's readiness to move forward into design workshops. The following bullets summarize the discussion and decisions resulting from this meeting:

Project FTP/Archive Site: Amy Sackaroff gave an overview of the project ftp site and its file structure.

ARC/ADHS: Tom Smith reviewed the ADHS FAQ's, clarifying that the ARC recognizes the need to be flexible, practical, and performance-based in what it will accept as an ADHS project and confirming that there are potential improvements to US 129, NC 143, and NC 28 that would be eligible for ADHS funds. The following items were also discussed under this topic:

- **50 mph average travel speed:** this is defined as the average speed between the project's major termini; although this has not been formalized, the major termini are likely to be the four-lane section east of Andrews and the four-lane section on NC 28.

- Design exceptions: It was clarified that the ADHS 50 mph average travel speed does not mean that the project will be held to a strict 50 mph standard. There may be locations where the design does not meet the criteria for a 50 mph speed limit. See FHWA's Flexibility in Highway Design: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/publications/flexibility/flexibility.pdf> (also saved to project ftp site). Team expressed need to understand how much flexibility there is with respect to design. Tom Smith stated that the goal is to find balanced solutions.
- Local access road funding: it was noted that Local Access Road Funding would not be used for Corridor K improvements but could be used on spur or other adjacent projects.
- NEPA termini: same termini as used in ADHS terminology.
- Project type: Tom Smith confirmed that Corridor K needs can be addressed by improving local existing roads; the ARC will participate throughout this process to ensure that the project that eventually results from the planning process is acceptable.
- Corridor K completion: "complete" will be determined by the ARC, FHWA, and NCDOT by defining an acceptable project as being complete as a result of the current planning/NEPA process.
- Corridor K designation: Corridor K is a federal designation that does not change but once the project is considered complete, it is no longer eligible for additional ADHS funding.
- Timing and availability of funding: ADHS funds are not earmark funds that can be repurposed (per new FAST Act provisions) but future legislation could change its status; this issue highlights the urgency to move forward.

Project Development and Decision-Making Process: Mitch Batuzich reviewed the process flow chart and team structure.

- Alternatives evaluation: it was noted that the alternatives report could include costs associated with waste generation and that the team would ultimately decide which categories will be evaluated in the alternatives report.
- Public involvement: Team resolved to hold the first public involvement event (originally planned to occur as part of the alternatives screening) after preliminary alternatives report is finalized. This change was primarily due to the large number of public meetings recently held in the area for the regional study and the CTP. It was agreed that a newsletter would be provided in the interim to update the public on the project. [The team will review public comments provided in the Regional Vision and CTP Appendix I to ensure public sentiment is being considered during the development and screening of potential design options.]
- Timeframe: The goal of today's meeting is to reach consensus on #1-3 in the process. Anticipate design workshops in the summer; definitely in 2016.
- Meeting locations: Team is agreeable to meeting at Stantec but also see importance of holding meetings in western NC.

- Team structure: NCDOT, FHWA stressed the importance of continuity. It was noted that the role of the leadership team would primarily be related to providing input on funding and other high-level questions.

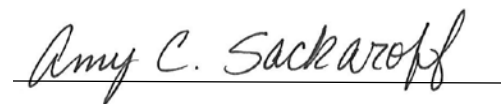
Draft Purpose and Need Statement/Preliminary Study Area: The group collectively edited the language describing project needs, project purpose, and measures of effectiveness. See revised draft statement (attached). During this discussion, it was noted that traffic studies should evaluate whether trucks on US 19-74 would reroute to an improved route through Graham County. The topic of the Nantahala Gorge was discussed and it was agreed that the intent of the A-0009 project is not to improve US 19-74 through the gorge. The group also agreed to start the design workshops using the "larger" preliminary study area, which was examined during the meeting.

Next Steps: The meeting progressed into a discussion of next steps and data needs for the upcoming alternative design workshops. It was agreed that the project team would be provided with a list of current data to help determine additional data needs.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS:

- Prepare data list (Stantec)
- Update preliminary draft purpose and need statement and provide to project team (Stantec)
- Develop workshop approach and timeline (NCDOT, FHWA, ARC, Stantec)
- Schedule next team meeting (NCDOT, all)

CORRECTIONS & OMISSIONS: This summary is the writer's interpretation of the discussions that took place during the meeting. If there are any additions and/or corrections please inform the author within the next seven days.



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cc: File

A-0009 Project Team Structure

NEPA/404 Merger is a collaborative decision-making process to avoid and/or minimize impacts to the human and natural environment while meeting the safety and mobility of the traveling public.

It is apparent that the A-0009 project will require collaboration with a wide range of representatives with varying levels of participation as the project progresses. The project team structure was developed to include all stakeholders and streamline logistics. The primary signatory agencies (FHWA, USACE, NCWRC and NCDOT) developed the A-0009 Project Team Structure to better define the groups that will be used in the development of this project.

“**Project Team**” will define the group that is responsible for developing the project. This group includes the NEPA/404 Merger Team signatories, tribal and local representatives, ARC, Stantec, and a facilitator. Project Team members are strongly encouraged to attend meetings on-site.

“**Stakeholder Leadership**” is comprised of executive management and senior level management. This group draws on their expertise to provide direction and troubleshoot programmatic and policy-level issues that arise during the development of A-0009.

“**Subject Matter Experts**” are those whose skills and technical expertise will be needed at various phases of the project. Participation, and the duration of that participation, evolves and changes as dictated by the needs of the project.”

A-0009 Project Team Structure

Stakeholder Leadership

NCDOT: Ed Green, Mike Holder
Rodger Rochelle
FHWA: John Sullivan
USACE: Scott McLendon
USEPA: Chris Militscher
USFS: Allen Nicholas
USFWS: Janet Mizzi
UKB: Eric Oosahwee-Voss
EBCI: Adam Wachacha
Cherokee Nation: Sheila Bird
NPS: Denise Nelson
WRC: David Cox
DEQ: Amy Chapman
DNCR: Ramona Bartos
ARC: Tom Smith, Olivia Collier
Graham Co.: Mike Edwards, Jacob Nelms,
Keith Eller
Southwestern Commission: Ryan Sherby

Project Team and Merger Team*

*USACE: Lori Beckwith, Monte Matthews
*USEPA: Cynthia Van Der Wiele
*USFWS: Marella Buncick
*USFS: Karen Compton
*NPS: Denise Nelson
*TVA: Janet Duffy
*DNCR: Renee Gledhill-Earley
*DEQ/DWR: Kevin Barnett
*WRC: Marla Chambers
UKB: Eric Oosahwee-Voss
EBCI: Adam Wachacha
Cherokee Nation: Sheila Bird
*RPO: Ryan Sherby, Rose Bauguess
Graham Co: Mike Edwards, Jacob Nelms, Keith Eller
Cherokee Co: Randy Wiggins, CB McKinnon,
Paul Worley
*NCDOT: Tracy Walter, Stacy Oberhausen
Kevin Moore, Nathan Adima, Brian Burch
*FHWA: Mitch Batuzich
ARC: Tom Smith
Stantec Consulting: Amy Sackaroff, Paul Koch
Facilitator: Donna Dancausse

** Indicates Merger Team signatory party. There is one concurrence signature per organization.*

Subject Matter Experts

Pam Cook (Long Range Planning)
Diane Wilson (Public Involvement)
Carla Dagnino (Env. Coord. & Permitting)
Matt Wilkerson (Archaeology)
Mary Pope Furr (Historic Architecture)
Bill Zerman (Hydraulics)
Jody Kuhne (Geotechnical)
Doug Calhoun (Structures Management)
Van Argabright (Programming)
Mark Davis (Division Environmental Supr)
Greg Smith (Traffic Noise & Air Quality)
Neil Medlin (Biological Surveys)
Harrison Marshall (Community Studies)
Brian Murphy (Traffic Safety)
Jim Dunlop (Traffic Analysis)
Brian Wert (Traffic Forecasting)
Morgan Sommerville (AT Conservancy)
Russell Townsend (EBCI THPO)
Tyler Howe (EBCI THPO)

**Others as needed*

A-0009 Process Document v3

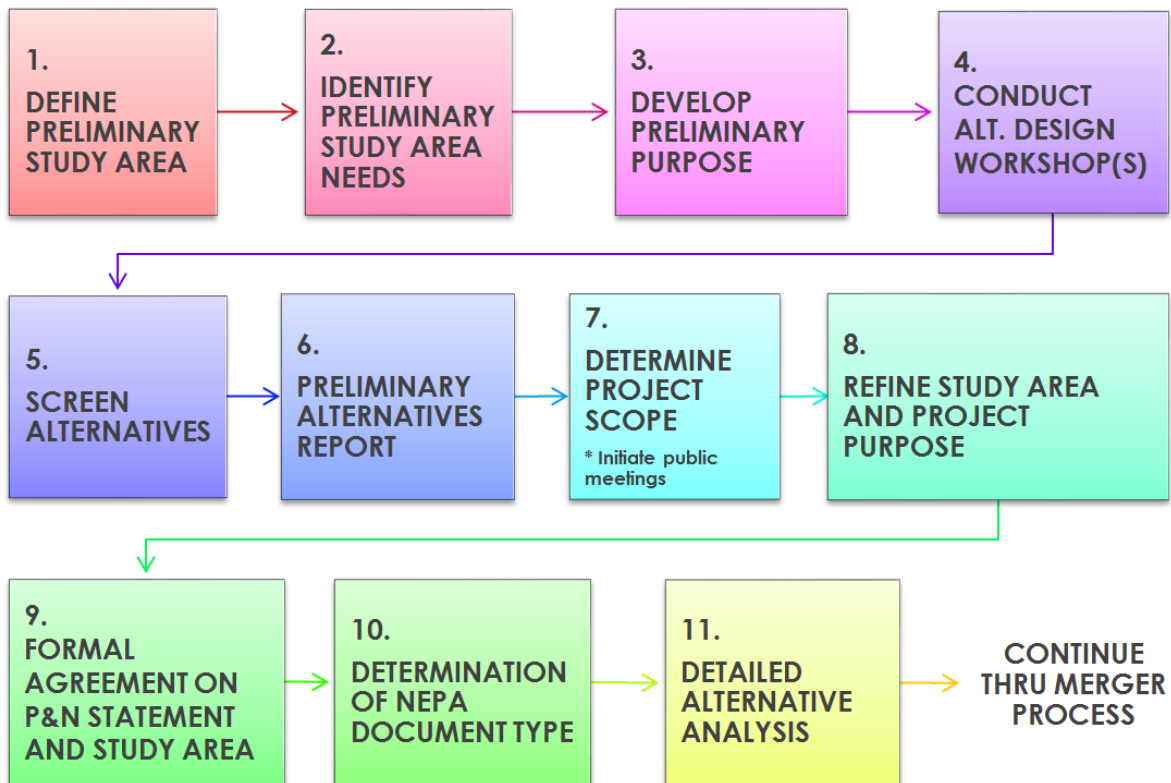
March 31, 2016

Overview: The purpose of this document is to identify and define the next major steps in the A-0009 decision-making process. This initial draft approach is a jumping-off point being presented to the team for review and comment with the ultimate goal of reaching consensus on how to move forward.

Because we are taking a fresh look at "the project," its details are unclear at this time. As such, these details will be the result of early planning efforts. This draft approach was developed with that in mind and with the intent to create a study process that is centered on engagement and meaningful collaboration, while still aligning with the NEPA/404 Merger process and all other applicable regulations. It is important to note that the process is subject to change as the team moves forward.

The steps below would be best characterized as "pre-Merger" rather than a usual part of the Merger Process.¹ They were developed in recognition of the extra planning efforts needed to bridge the distance between the project's identification in Graham County's CTPs and definition of the project's scope. These steps were also developed in recognition of the recommendations contained in the 2011 U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution's report, notably: "An atmosphere of exploration will need to be created in the interagency meetings so that preliminary ideas can be expressed freely..." The proposed approach incorporates this recommendation by including an iterative process that allows for the exploration and subsequent refinement of the project scope within the bounds of this "pre-Merger" process.

Definition of Terms: It is apparent that this effort will require collaboration with a wide range of representatives with varying levels of participation as the project progresses. NCDOT and FHWA developed a separate Project Team Structure to better define the terms that will be used to define coordination efforts.



¹ NEPA and NCDOT Merger Process Flow: <http://www.ncdot.gov/projects/us64improvements/download/mergerprocessflow.pdf>

PROCESS:

1. DEFINE PRELIMINARY STUDY AREA

The project team will develop a preliminary study area large enough to examine a range of potential design options between Graham and Cherokee Counties.

2. IDENTIFY PRELIMINARY STUDY AREA NEEDS

The project team will build on the discussion initiated at the 9/30-10/1 meeting to identify the transportation needs of Graham and Cherokee Counties. This effort will include the identification of hot spots with notable roadway deficiencies. Local input will be sought to identify hot spots as experienced by residents. At this time, the project team will also identify any additional data needed for subsequent steps in the process.

3. DEVELOP PRELIMINARY PURPOSE

The team will agree on a high level project purpose based on the transportation needs of Graham and Cherokee Counties.

4. CONDUCT ALTERNATIVES DESIGN WORKSHOP(S)

The project team, with local input, will participate in one or more alternative design workshops to brainstorm potential design options to meet the transportation needs of Graham and Cherokee Counties. The project team will discuss alignments, typical sections, and other features such as passing lanes. This may involve multiple iterations to generate design concepts that can be developed into preliminary alternatives.

5. SCREEN ALTERNATIVES

The project team will develop screening criteria for the potential design options and evaluate the alternatives developed during the design workshops. The project team will meet to review the results of the screening process and to identify preliminary study alternatives.

6. PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES REPORT

NCDOT and FHWA will develop a preliminary alternatives report that will document the study process development, screening methodology, design options developed during the workshop(s), and preliminary study alternatives. The draft report will be provided to the project team for review and comment.

7. DETERMINE PROJECT SCOPE

The team will determine "the project" based on the selected study alternatives. NCDOT's public involvement process under NEPA will be initiated at this stage.

8. REFINE STUDY AREA AND PROJECT PURPOSE

The project team will reevaluate the preliminary study area and reduce the geographical limits if necessary. The project purpose will be refined based on "the project" selected for study.

9. FORMAL AGREEMENT ON PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT AND PROJECT STUDY AREA

The signature forms for Concurrence Points 1 and 2 of the NEPA/404 Merger Process will be circulated once agreement is reached on the refined purpose and need statement and project study area.

10. DETERMINATION OF NEPA DOCUMENT TYPE

Based on "the project" selected for study, FHWA will determine type of NEPA documentation.

11. DETAILED ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS

FHWA and NCDOT will initiate the formal start-of-study process under NEPA and will move forward with detailed analysis of the alternatives.

12. CONTINUE STUDY THROUGH MERGER PROCESS

It is anticipated that the project will resume the conventional Merger Process at this point.

DRAFT Purpose and Need Statement (v2)

Appalachian Development Highway System Corridor K
US 19 /74, NC 129, and NC 143 from Andrews to Stecoah

NEEDS (Physical)

Limited roadway options: only four paved roads provide access to the county {Graham County CTP}. Reliability of these two-lane roadways is impaired by any type of blockage or disruption due to winter weather, fog, washouts, landslides, fallen trees, traffic incidents, vehicle breakdowns, or slow moving vehicles. Such situations adversely affect travel time as travelers must wait or back-track.

Steep grades, narrow lane widths, and sharp curves on US 129, NC143, and NC 28 affect travel speed and opportunities to pass slower vehicles. The combination of narrow lanes, irregular shoulder widths, and sharp contribute to the frequency of a range of collision types (i.e., fixed object, rear-end, side swipe, and left turn crashes) which can be attributed to restricted sight distance, vehicle speed, and congestion.

Over-capacity roadway segments (2040) – US 129 between NC 143 and SR 1155; US 129 between SR 1204 and SR 1105; NC 143 between 3-lane section at SR 1275 and SR 1277 {Graham County CTP}.

NEEDS (Mobility)

Improved access to employment, medical facilities, commercial centers, and educational facilities. Sixty-seven percent of Graham County residents that are employed commute to jobs outside of the county (U.S. Census Bureau Center for Economic Studies data). Additionally 1, 000 jobs in Graham County are filled by workers that commute in from other counties, most commuting in from Cherokee County {Graham County CTP}

All paved roads into and out of Graham County are primarily two- lane and there is an inability to pass slower vehicles over substantial distances (“up to 19 miles”) {Graham County CTP}.

Impaired mobility and constrained freight movement into and out of the county due to combination of steep grades, tight curves, and heavy vehicles {Graham County CTP}.

Emergency medical service response times are frequently affected by roadway conditions and the volume/type of traffic encountered while responding to emergencies. This factor has resulted in the loss of life for those living in Graham County.

PURPOSE

The proposed project purpose is to provide the transportation infrastructure necessary for the well-being of local residents and regional traffic by improving vehicular travel time reliability and safety between the existing four-lane section on NC 28 at Stecoah and the existing four-lane section on US 74 east of Andrews; providing an average travel speed of 50 mph, consistent with the Appalachian Development Highway System criteria, and in a manner that is sensitive to the natural environment.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS:

- Improvement in travel time (build vs. no-build) per simulation based on traffic analysis
 - LOS (D or better) based on Transmodeler analysis of current and design year traffic volumes
 - Average speed of 50 mph based on design year traffic
- Reduction in number of curves that are providing < 50 mph design speed
- Increase in miles where passing is possible
- Safety study / crash data
- Graham County ingress/egress constraints (flooding/slide impacts)
- Consistency with local/regional planning documents and resource agency plans



A-0009 Project Toolkit

Toolkit Purpose:

This toolkit was developed to provide team members with the tools needed to foster a truly integrated planning approach that furthers the intent of the NEPA/404 Merger Process. It includes literature sources, GIS resources, and other information sources to assist in developing the project. If you know of additional resources you would like to see added to the toolkit, please let FHWA or NCDOT know as soon as possible.

Toolkit Contents:

The toolkit contains print material available via the project ftp site and an online GIS viewer. These resources are being updated throughout the planning process to provide the team with the most up-to-date information available. The team will be notified as new material is added.

Project ftp site:

Automatic Login:

<ftp://SA00091213:8851209@projftp.stantec.com>

Manual Login:

<ftp://projftp.stantec.com>

Login name: SA00091213

Password: 8851209

Online GIS viewer:

<http://arcg.is/1ovtgzo>

Username: ncdot_stantec

PW: Stantec1

Ftp site contents:

- Meeting materials
- Reference materials:
 - Reports
 - Land use plans
 - Transportation plans
 - Studies

GIS viewer contents (3/28/16):

- Preliminary study area boundary
- Alternate study area boundary (excluding US 19-74)
- Roadways
 - Locally Identified Hot Spots
 - Areas with LOS D based on 2040 AADT estimates
 - Accident location, type, and severity
 - Grades
 - Curve data
 - Structure locations
- Rail corridors
- Appalachian Trail
- Watersheds
- County boundaries

POTENTIAL DATA SOURCE: OPT-IN GIS VIEWER

<http://optinswnc.nemac.org/gis/>

Highlights indicate data likely to be most relevant reference layers for A-0009.

Political Boundaries and Locations

Political Boundaries and Locations

- Census Blocks 2010
- Census Block Groups 2010
- Census Tracts 2010
- Cherokee Townships
- Communities Incorporated
- Communities Other
- Counties Boundaries
- County Seats
- EBCI Lands
- Federal Lands
- Municipal Boundaries
- State Owned Lands
- Wilderness Areas
- ZIP Codes

Natural Ecosystems

- Black Bear Sanctuary
- Critical Habitat
- Important Bird Areas
- Roadless Areas
- Significant Natural Heritage Areas
- Spruce Fir Forest
- Wetlands

Geology

- Geology
- Geologic Faults
- Landslide Locations

Terrain

- Digital Elevation Model
- Hillshade

Topography

- Eastern Continental Divide
- Slope

Water

- Floodplains 500yr
- High Quality Waters Outstanding Resources Waters
- Major Lakes
- Major Rivers
- Streams
- Waterbodies
- Watersheds 8Digit
- Watersheds 12Digit
- Water Supply Watersheds

Weather and Climate

- Avg Annual Max Temp 81_10
- Avg Annual Min Temp 81_10
- Avg Annual Precip 81_10
- Mar Aug Avg Annual Precip 81_10
- Sept Feb Avg Annual Precip 81_10

Human Culture

- Fishing Access Points
- Game Lands
- Public Trout Rivers
- Public Trout Lakes

Education

- Colleges and Universities
- Non Public Schools
- Public Schools

Health

- Hospitals
- Medical Facilities
- Public Health Centers

Built Infrastructure

- Appalachian Trail Parking
- Appalachian Trail Shelters
- Dams
- EMS Locations
- Fire Stations
- Hydro Dams
- Water Tanks

Land

- Conservation Tax Credit Properties
- Impervious Surfaces 2006
- Landuse 2030
- Landuse 2025
- Landuse 2020
- Landuse 2015
- Landuse 2010
- Landuse 2006
- Landuse 1995
- Landuse 1985
- Landuse 1976
- Land Cover 2006
- Land Cover 2011
- Managed Areas
- Tree Cover 2006
- Urban Areas

Risks, Hazards, and Stressors

- Hazardous Waste Sites
- Public Landfills

Transportation

- Abandoned Railroads
- Airports
- All Trails
- Appalachian Trail
- Bike Routes
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Greenway Trails
- GSMNP Trails
- Heliports
- Interstates
- Mountains-to-Sea Trail
- NC Routes
- Other Local Trails
- Railroads
- Scenic Byways
- US Highways

Growth Scenarios and Models Suitability

- Agriculture Suitability
- Conservation Suitability
- Urban Agriculture Overlap
- Jobs, Housing, Infrastructure and Agriculture Overlap
- Jobs, Housing, Infrastructure and Conservation Overlap