

THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE COUNTY OF CRAVEN RECONVENED ITS RECESSED SESSION OF JUNE 15, 2015 ON JUNE 15, 2015 AT 11:00 A.M. IN THE COMMISSIONERS' ROOM OF THE CRAVEN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, 406 CRAVEN STREET, NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS TO CONDUCT A JOINT MEETING WITH THE BOARD OF TRANSPORTATION.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Steve Tyson
Vice Chairman Scott C. Dacey
Commissioner Jason R. Jones
Commissioner George S. Liner
Commissioner Thomas F. Mark
Commissioner Theron L. McCabe
Commissioner Johnnie Sampson, Jr.

STAFF PRESENT:

Jack B. Veit III, County Manager
Gene Hodges, Assistant County Manager – Operations/Facilities
Rick Hemphill, Assistant County Manager – Finance/Administration
Amber Parker, Human Resources Director
Gwendolyn M. Bryan, Clerk to the Board
Craig Warren, Finance Department

OTHERS PRESENT:

Hugh Overholt, N.C. Board of Transportation member
Patrick Flanagan, Down East Rural Planning Organization (RPO)
Mauritzia Chapman and Kim Maxey, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
John Rouse, Department of Transportation (D.O.T) Division Engineer
Marc Finlayson, Executive Director, Highway 17 Association
Durwood Stephenson, Director, Highway 70 Corridor Committee

The meeting convened with general discussion regarding transportation infrastructure in Craven County.

John Rouse, D.O.T Division Engineer provided the following project updates:

- Havelock By-pass Final Environmental Impact Study is expected any day
- Right-of-way acquisition will begin in December, to continue over a two-year duration. Funding is in place and construction should begin December, 2017. Construction is expected to extend over 2 ½ -3 years.
- Bids will be opened June 16, 2015 on the remaining four laning section of Highway 17 in Jones County.
- The preliminary planning for the James City project is just beginning with community outreach. The project should extend to tie in with the Havelock bypass (bridge to Garner Road). This project is slated for construction in 2023.

In response to Commissioner Tyson's inquiry about the Kinston bypass, Mr. Rouse stated that it was not funded. The draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was started. Work was stopped because of its not being funded under the new allocation policy. There will be an opportunity for consideration every two years and it would only be able to be funded at the statewide level. He stated that it is an expensive project. Division funding over ten years would not cover the cost of the project, which is more than \$300 million. It will be broken into logical segments that can be more manageable. The project extends from LaGrange to Dover. Durwood Stephenson, Director, Highway 70 Corridor Committee, stated that the community is divided about the project, which does not bode well for scoring and funding. Economic Development, which is an incentive for developing the Highway 70 corridor, is not considered in scoring; however, traffic numbers and congestion are highly weighted. The potential of Highway 70 becoming an interstate may provide pressure for consideration of the project.

Patrick Flanagan, Down East Rural Planning Organization, stated that the criteria for multimodal scoring no longer requires that the transportation infrastructure touch the property line. A twenty mile buffer has been adopted for freight, and a five mile buffer for busses and trains.

Hugh Overholt, Board of Transportation, stated that the Governor's proposed bond is for projects that are ready to go and that have been interrupted. Craven County has one project in this category, the Highway 43 connector, for \$12 million. The ten-mile stretch between Washington and Williamston is on the list at \$50-60 million. Mr. Rouse stated that a portion of the funding is allocated to paving unpaved roads. Most roads on the list were in the western areas. Craven County is low on the priority list. Marc Finlayson, Executive Director, Highway 17 Association, stated that there is \$176 million in new recurring revenue potential from DMV fees or automobile and truck sales fees to be set aside for transportation.

Commissioner Dacey asked what can be done to turn the system around. Gas tax is a major component of funding. A cap was put on gas tax; however, a floor has also been applied.

Mr. Stephenson stated that the last portion of the Goldsboro by pass is slated to be completed next year, twenty months early.

Commissioner Tyson asked how local officials can help in supporting the Kinston project. Mr. Overholt recommended that some of the Board members meet with Lenoir County officials to see where they stand and adopt a regional approach. He stated that advocacy is the key.

Mr. Veit stated that based on reactions of potential industries, three choke points have been identified in transportation arteries affecting industrial sites here. He suggested developing a strategy for getting them pushed as far away as possible from industrial sites.

Commissioner Jones stated that insufficient secondary roads funding has caused dire concerns in his district. Mr. Rouse responded that funding has gone from \$151 million a year to \$12 million a year for secondary roads. He is neutral on paving; however, he is all for more maintenance on unpaved roads. He further stated that road stabilization funding has gone away. They are now only able to treat the most severe potholes.

Commissioner Dacey inquired if there is a benefit in addressing the gas tax rates.

Commissioner Sampson stated that too many people are already suffering under the gas tax burden and there is no need to seek an increase.

Mr. Finlayson stated that the gas tax primarily funds projects; however, other states that we compete against for economic development have additional sources of funding for infrastructure; for example, higher transfer fees, odometer tax and percentage of sales tax.

Mr. Overholt stated that they have done as well as they can under the current system. He stated that David Rouzer, freshman Congressman from North Carolina, serves on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He recommended that Commissioner Dacey speak with him concerning reauthorization and lobby Congressman Bill Schuster, Committee Chair, who will be in Wilmington the following week.

Mr. Finlayson stated that without federal reauthorization, North Carolina could stand to lose \$300 million.

Highway 17 Update:

Mr. Finlayson announced that the Jones County project is costing \$200 million and is a big deal. The project was sped up to get grandfathered under the new State Transportation Plan (STP). He stated that the following three main projects need to be back on the STI list:

1. Bridgeton to Chocowinity (R2513)
2. Washington to Williamston
3. Hampstead bypass

Commissioner Dacey stated that the Highway 17 Association's mission going forward needs to be focused on the money side of things and less on the engineering.

Mr. Finlayson also expressed a need to amend the STI to be more favorable to rural areas; to continue working with John Rouse and Patrick Flanagan on calculation and prioritization process, and to re-energize the regional MPO and RPO groups. He urged the officials to push for interstate designation, and for seasonal traffic counts versus year-round averages. In addition, he suggested building additional interest in rural issues on the task team to counter balance strong voices of urban mayors on the task team.

Mr. Stephenson and Commissioner Dacey were in agreement that legislators need to be supported in any potentially tough and courageous decisions to raise additional revenue for transportation rather than abandoning them politically.

Commissioner McCabe requested that D.O.T take a look at the double yellow line in the vicinity of the Dollar General store in Harlowe and that there be a 45 MPH speed limit sign placed on Highway 101 in that area. Mr. Overholt responded that if safety is an issue, they will find the funding.

Mr. Overholt asked for the Boards' opinion of the effectiveness and service of the DMV regarding waiting times at licensing offices. Commissioner Mark responded that the Pamlico County DMV office is now closed causing the New Bern location to be more crowded. Mr. Overholt requested that the Board report back to him regarding any ongoing complaints.

Mauritzia Chapman, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), reminded the Board that the County has representatives on both the MPO and RPO that are available when needed.

Mr. Flanagan reminded the Board that STP is a ten-year plan, but has only been locked in for five years. The second five years is revisited. It is important to stay in the planning process in order to improve the chances during the re-prioritization process.

At 12:33 p.m. Commissioner McCabe moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Dacey and unanimously carried.

Chairman Steve Tyson
Craven County Board of Commissioners

Gwendolyn M. Bryan
Clerk to the Board