



Office of Mayor Pam Hemminger
Town of Chapel Hill
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Chapel Hill, NC 27514
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June 7, 2023

Michael S. Fox, Chairman
North Carolina Department of Transportation Board
1501 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1501

Dear Chairman Fox and Members of the Transportation Board,

On behalf of the Town of Chapel Hill, we are writing today to express our strong opposition to the Express Design concept for project U-6067 – the proposed major highway project to convert US 15-501 to a freeway from the I-40 interchange to Garrett Road in Durham.

Additionally, having been granted just one week to evaluate and comment on this plan, the Town wishes to express our deep concerns about the expedited process being used to move this significant project forward.

Project Concerns:

Since 2018, the Durham Chapel Hill Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHCMPO) has been working together to coordinate land use and transportation planning in this area. As presented, the redesign of the US 15-501/I-40 interchange to a diverging diamond and construction of a new road between New Hope Commons in Durham and Eastowne Drive in Chapel Hill are at odds with the plans and goals that have been developed. Furthermore, the proposal does not reflect input given on this plan by the MPO previously.

Chief among our concerns are that the project:

- Does not align with the DCHC MPO's Goals and Objectives included in the [2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan](#), which call for reduced car dependency and more multimodal travel options
- Does not align with the Town of Chapel Hill 's [Future Land Use Map](#), which calls for activated street frontages and walkable development in this part of Town
- Does not include transit accommodations along US 15-501, as outlined in the 2022 [Orange County Transit Plan's](#) long-term vision, and the draft [Durham County Transit Plan's](#) vision of studying BRT along this corridor
- Does not include an extension of Danziger Drive from N. White Oak Drive in Chapel Hill to Mount Moriah Road in Durham, as outlined in the DCHC MPO's [US 15-501 study](#).
- Includes a new northern quadrant road through a [Natural Heritage Area](#) designated by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program. This road connection was removed from the draft 15-501 Corridor Study due to concerns about the alignment and the impact on the Heritage Area.
- Will have an undesirable impact on the new UNC Health Eastowne medical campus development, which will include 1.1 million square feet of health care facilities. The traffic anticipated by the new quadrant road could have significant impact on the public's access to health care, emergency services, and will change the look and feel of the nearby residential communities.

- Does not take the impact on the Town's road system into account, and would bring significant traffic onto Eastowne Drive with no plan for improvements or mitigations for the residential neighborhoods and local streets nearby
- Results in a relatively insignificant reduction in traffic delays given anticipated cost and scope of what is proposed, and the substantial deviation from the Town's and the MPO's stated desires for this area.

Process Concerns:

- The Express Design for this project, though intended to develop a general project scope and cost estimate to inform SPOT 7.0, disregards the DCHC MPO's vision for the corridor, the local jurisdictions' transportation land use goals, and runs counter to adopted MPO plans, like the CTP and MTP.
- The project does not improve on the US 15-501 study, which was not adopted because the study's proposed transportation system for the I-40/US 15-501 quadrant area did not meet the [Goals and Objectives](#) of the DCHC MPO and the expectations of the DCHC MPO Board.
- Doug Plachcinski, the Executive Director of the DCHC MPO, [sent a letter](#) to Mr. Tracy Parrott of NCDOT Division 5 in February 2023 clearly expressing the MPO's concerns with the proposed U-6067 design and requesting that NCDOT work with the MPO and staff from local jurisdictions to improve the design
- The project was only presented to local jurisdiction staff on May 30th, with a deadline of June 9th to submit comments
- The project will be scored in SPOT 7.0 in its current design and cost estimate. Previous experiences with NCDOT indicate that they will not be willing to change the scope once the project is funded in the STIP because it will change the cost and require reprioritization.
- Local residents and landowners, including UNC Health, were not informed of this project and were unable to adequately plan around the proposed changes to the interchange. This includes UNC Health's proposed [1.1 million sq. ft. rezoning at Eastowne](#), which has new development proposed in conflict with this project's proposed road system.

Because of these many concerns, we request that NCDOT put a pause on this process and bring all parties back together to chart a path forward that better aligns with the vision and work that the DCHC MPO and its members have been doing.

Sincerely,



Mayor Pam Hemminger

cc: Division 8 Representative Lisa Mathis
Secretary Eric Boyette
Deputy Secretary Julie White
Deputy Secretary Ebony Pittman
Senator Graig Meyer
Senator Natalie Murdock
Senator Mike Woodard
Representative Allen Buansi
Representative Renee Price
DCHC-MPO Executive Director Doug Plachcinskif
DCHC-MPO Board Chair Jenn Weaver