

Memorandum

To: Chris Blue, Interim Town Manager
From: Brittany Waddell, Planning Director
Bergen Watterson, Transportation Planning Manager
Josh Mayo, Transportation Planner I
Date: May 31, 2023
Re: U-6067 Express Design Comments

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information to senior leadership and elected officials regarding a proposed North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) highway design project. U-6067, which is on an express design track, consists of major changes to the I-40/US 15-501 interchange and parcels within Chapel Hill limits, including the UNC Eastowne proposed development.

Background:

In the mid-2010s, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) determined a need to increase vehicle capacity along US 15-501 and at the I-40 interchange, resulting in project U-6067 in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the state's ten-year transportation capital improvement program. This project **is currently being designed but does not have funds for full construction.**

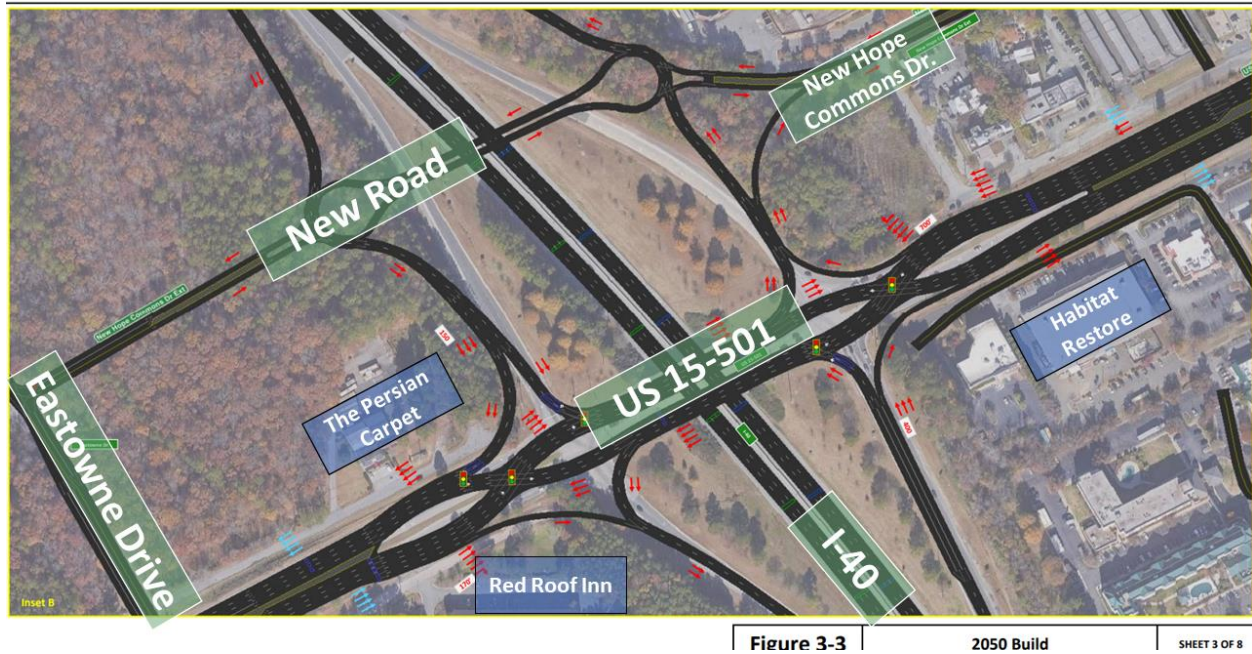
In mid-May, Town staff became aware that NCDOT was conducting "express design" for project U-6067 with elements that fall within the Town's jurisdiction. On a May 30th call, NCDOT staff shared design documents with Town and MPO staff. The end goal of this express design is to develop a cost estimate and add construction of the project to the upcoming STIP update.

Key Issues:

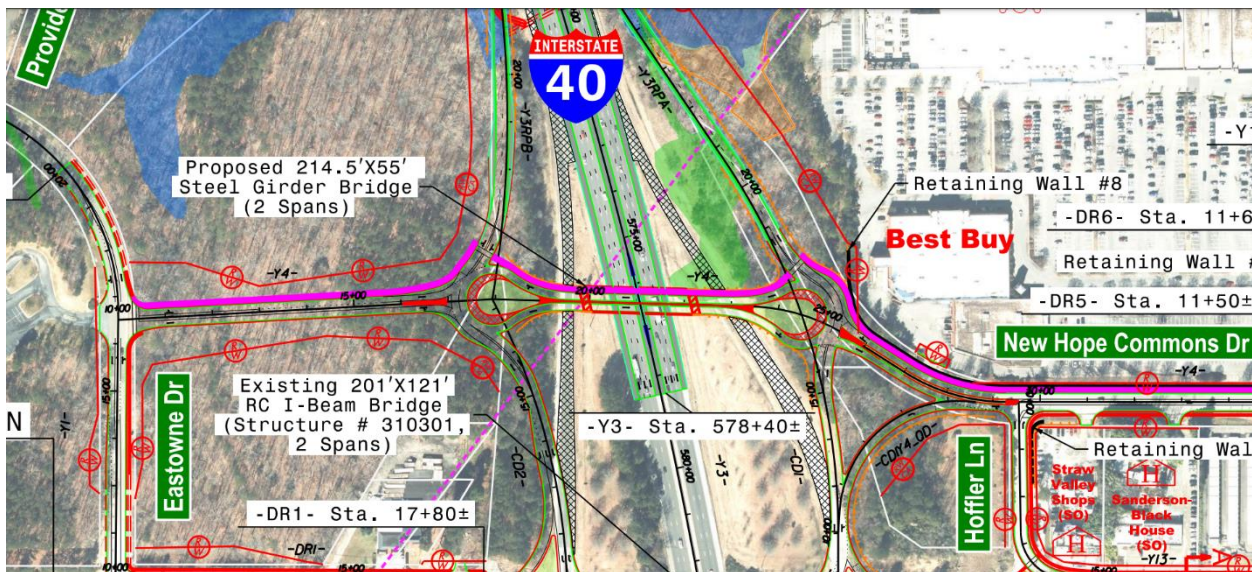
The project includes major changes to the US 15-501/I-40 interchange that **fall within the Town's jurisdiction and impact the UNC Health Eastowne parcel.** Specifically, within the Town of Chapel Hill the project would:

- Construct a **new road** that connects Eastowne Drive with New Hope Commons Drive across I-40, **cutting across** the eastern portion of UNC Health's Eastowne property, more commonly known as **the "Northern 20"**
- Realign the I-40 on- and off-ramps to connect to the new road
- Construct a Diverging Diamond Interchange at I-40 and US 15-501

Images of the proposed changes are below:



A high-level diagram of the proposed road alignment through Chapel Hill, with labels



A construction-oriented detail of the proposed project alignment, with the proposed right-of-way in red

NCDOT's traffic analysis (attached) finds that the new road through UNC Health's Eastowne property is necessary to achieve acceptable traffic flows through the US 15-501/I-40 interchange, and that the road placement is necessary to provide adequate spacing between the new road and

US 15-501. For example, NCDOT predicts that with no change, the average car traveling through the interchange towards Durham would need to wait 156 seconds at the eastbound ramps to I-40, and 85 seconds at the westbound ramps to I-40. With the new road, NCDOT predicts that the average car traveling to Durham would need to wait 40 seconds at the eastbound ramps, and 32 seconds at the westbound ramps.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff requests that Council provide comments regarding the elements of U-6067 within the Town of Chapel Hill's jurisdiction and/or the project as a whole.

Staff recommends that Council comment on the following elements of the project's alignment:

- The current design of U-6067 does not include transit accommodations along US 15-501, as outlined in the Orange County Transit Plan's long-term vision. **Staff recommends transit lanes on US 15-501 should be added to the project.**
- The current design does not include an extension of Danziger Drive from N. White Oak Drive to Mount Moriah Road in Durham, as outlined in the DCHC MPO's US 15-501 study. **Staff recommends an extension of Danziger Drive as a part of U-6067**, as it provides key bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access across I-40.
- Staff believes the bike and pedestrian access provided by this design can be improved. Currently, the project has bike and pedestrian facilities crossing on- and off-ramps to I-40. **Staff recommends design changes for safety on bicycle and pedestrian routes.**
- The current design includes a new road through the "Northern 20," a Natural Heritage Area that Council has expressed interest in preserving through the UNC Health Eastowne rezoning process. **Staff recommends that Council submit comments regarding the NCDOT proposal to express any desire to preserve the "Northern 20".**
 - It should be noted that will impact the design of UNC Health Eastowne, and possible affect concerns around the project, specifically pertaining to full conservation of the Northern 20. Council should take this into consideration during the Eastowne rezoning.

Next Steps:

NCDOT staff are requesting for **comments from local stakeholders by June 9th** and anticipate completing the express design process by June 30th. Staff will receive Council's comments and may coordinate comments through the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro (DCHC) MPO. Comments will be reviewed by NCDOT, but there is **no guarantee that any changes will be made to the project.**