

**CLEVELAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**March 21, 2013**

The Cleveland County Board of Commissioners met on this date, at the hour of 6:00 p.m at the Rutherford County Board of Education Office, 382 West Main Street, Forest City, North Carolina for the purpose of a joint meeting with Rutherford and Polk Counties to discuss the Highway 74 Bypass Project.

Present:

**Cleveland County Board of Commissioners:**

Chairman- Ronnie Hawkins

Commissioner- Eddie Holbrook

Commissioner- Johnny Hutchins

County Clerk- Kerri Melton

Vice-Chairman- Jason Falls

Commissioner- Susan Allen

County Manager- Eddie Bailes

Planning Director- Bill McCarter

**Rutherford County Commissioners**

**Polk County Commissioners**

Others present included members of the NCDOT, Freddie Harrill of Senator Kay Hagan's Office and Bjorn Hansen of Centralina Council of Governments.

Chairman Ronnie Hawkins opened the meeting of the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners.

Rutherford County Commission Chairman, Julius Owens welcomed all in attendance and invited Matt Blackwell, Rutherford County Economic Development Director to make a presentation regarding the importance of Highway 74 being an Economic Development Corridor. He explained the intention of the 74 Economic Development Corridor would be to connect Western NC to Charlotte to the Port of Wilmington. This corridor would be a catalyst for jobs.

Mr. Blackwell summed up his presentation by describing what it would mean for North Carolina:

- The development of an interstate quality corridor is an important east-west connector across the state of North Carolina;
- Stimulates economic development activities across North Carolina by providing greater access to quality transportation routes in rural North Carolina;
- Enhances job creation across North Carolina in maritime, transportation, distribution, manufacturing and agriculture by providing greater access to the Port of Wilmington and Charlotte Douglas International thus increasing opportunities for international trade.

Chairman Owens introduced Cleveland County Planning Director Bill McCarter who gave a brief presentation on the history and the current schedule for the Highway 74 Bypass project. Commissioner Johnny Hutchins requested help of the other two counties to possibly move the Bypass project up. Construction is underway, however, the entire project will not be completed until 2030 due to funding.

Rutherford County recommended all three counties work together to ask NCDOT to consider upgrading Highway 74 from Interstate 26 in Polk County to Interstate 85 in Cleveland County to interstate standards.

Chairman Owens introduced Kevin Lacy with the NCDOT to discuss how a road can be classified as an interstate. Mr. Lacy began by praising the three boards for working together. “Working together is the key to success.”

He explained the new Shelby Bypass will be built to Interstate standards. The rest of Highway 74 would need to be upgraded to Interstate standards. Upgrading a freeway to an interstate does not compete well in the scoring criteria for funding of projects unless there is congestion. Currently, congestion is not a problem on Highway 74.

There are two processes of getting Interstate projects approved. In both processes, the Federal Highway Administration and AASHT (American Association of State Highway and Transportation) are the decision makers. The first process requires a Congressman to write a bill. Mr. Lacy said this is a very difficult route and Congress is very reluctant to fund projects this way. The second is to identify a route number and request preservation of the number. If approved, the road would then need to be built to interstate standards. Mr. Lacy described the process as a “decades-long process.” The road will not receive interstate designation until all upgrades have been completed.

Carl Claussen, Rutherford County Manager, presented two draft resolutions to the boards for consideration. The first resolution presented addressed the South Economic Development Corridor from I-26 to Wilmington as follows:

**Resolution to Support the Development of an Alliance of Local Government and Business Leaders to Review and Promote Improvements to a South Economic Development Corridor from I-26 to Wilmington Along the Existing Highway 74 Corridor**

**Whereas**, the development of a South Economic Development Corridor from I-26 to Wilmington would improve commerce between Western North Carolina and the Port of Wilmington and be an important east-west corridor across the state of NORTH CAROLINA; and

**Whereas**, the proposed corridor will stimulate economic development opportunities in rural North Carolina from the mountains to the coast; and

**Whereas**, developing Highway 74 to an interstate quality freeway along the existing Highway 74 corridor from I-26 to Wilmington would connect Asheville and western North Carolina to the Port of Wilmington and eastern North Carolina; and

**Whereas**, the proposed Highway 74 Economic Development Corridor would create jobs across North Carolina in maritime, transportation, distribution, manufacturing and agriculture by providing greater access to the Port of Wilmington, the Charlotte Metropolitan Area, and to Charlotte International Airport thus increasing opportunities for international trade;

**Whereas**, the proposed Highway 74 Economic Development Corridor would maintain and enhance North Carolina commerce opportunities that are currently being lost to South Carolina and Georgia as a result of access to the ports and intermodal facilities.

**Now, Therefore Be It Resolved** that the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners does support the cooperative creation of a 74 Economic Corridor Alliance to review, promote and support the development of a economic development corridor connecting Western North Carolina to the Port of Wilmington along the existing Hwy 74 corridor.

**Be It Further Resolved** that the Chairman will send this resolution to the Rutherford County state and federal legislative delegation and to all counties along the Highway 74 Economic Development Corridor requesting their support and the support of municipalities and businesses within their counties.

*Adopted this the 21<sup>st</sup> day of March, 2013.*

The second resolution requested NCDOT to conduct a study of the interstate quality of the US-74 corridor from I-26 in Polk County through Rutherford County and connecting to I-85 in Cleveland County.

### **RESOLUTION**

**Whereas:** Rutherford, Cleveland and Polk Counties collaboratively petition the North Carolina Department of Transportation to conduct a study for the potential interstate quality of US-74 corridor from I-26 in Polk County through Rutherford County and connecting to I-85 in Cleveland County; and

**Whereas,** each County would seek to foster additional collaboration between constituent jurisdictions and agencies within the corridor; and

**Whereas,** an Interstate quality US-74 Corridor will provide better connectivity, transportation planning, safety, and increased efficiency of time and travel from I-26 to I-85 in addition to the NC Routes; 9, 221, 226, and 216; and

**Whereas,** within the corridor we collaboratively seek to build a responsive, regional economic development and planning infrastructure to increase trade and industry and promote opportunity.

**Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved** that the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners does request the support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation to conduct a study of the interstate quality of the US-74 corridor from I-26 in Polk County through Rutherford County and connecting to I-85 in Cleveland County.

*Adopted this the 21<sup>st</sup> day of March, 2013.*

Both Rutherford and Polk County Commissioners unanimously adopted the resolutions presented by Mr. Claussen.

Commissioner Hutchins voiced his concern that a study on Highway 74 may have a negative impact on the Highway 74 Bypass project.

**ACTION:** Johnny Hutchins made the motion, seconded by Eddie Holbrook, and unanimously adopted by the Board, *to table approval of proposed resolutions until Commissioners can study whether or not action would delay the Highway 74 Bypass project.*

Kevin Lacy agreed that he would not recommend doing anything that would slow down the Highway 74 Bypass project. He suggested that NCDOT start looking at costs to upgrade the current Highway 74. The main upgrade would be the shoulder widths. Interstates are required to have 12 foot shoulders.

David Kielson with the NCDOT suggested this project become part of the Strategic Highways Corridor Vision Plan.

Commissioners from all three counties agreed that the doors of communications need to be open between the three counties in order to help each other.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, Johnny Hutchins made the motion, seconded by Jason Falls, and unanimously adopted by the Board, ***to adjourn the meeting.***

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*Ronald J. Hawkins, Chairman  
Cleveland County Board of Commissioners*

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*Kerri Melton, Clerk  
Cleveland County Board of Commissioners*