

3. PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The goal of I-40 HOV/CMS public involvement activities is to provide a framework within which NCDOT is able to secure broad-based support for implementing I-40 HOV/CMS findings as well as technical advice and input regarding the study process.

In order to reach this goal, the project employed numerous tools. Throughout the study process, public agencies were involved through a series of technical and policy committee meetings. In addition, numerous regional initiatives were reviewed to determine the extent of regional awareness and coordinated outreach efforts between local transportation officials. In the early stages, an attitudinal survey was conducted to determine local perceptions of I-40 operations and potential improvement options. Later, to ensure that the community had a variety of opportunities to participate in the study, several community participation strategies were used to increase awareness and knowledge of the project. Regional meetings, newsletters, a website, and hotline were developed.

3.1 Review Committees

3.1.1 Study Participation

The I-40 HOV/CMS, conducted over a two year period, brought together many of the transportation leaders from the region. These leaders provided invaluable knowledge about the region's transportation issues, concerns and ongoing planning efforts and directed the technical work of the study team. They participated through membership in one of two committees: the Technical Committee and the Policy Committee. Agencies and organizations involved in these committees included:

- North Carolina Department of Transportation
- Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Triangle Transit Authority
- Federal Highway Administration
- Research Triangle Park employers
- North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (Air Quality Division)
- Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority

3.1.2 Technical Committee

The complex nature of the I-40 HOV/CMS and its potential impact on regional traffic operations, airport services, and the local economy required that technical experts have opportunity for developing the course of the study. To address these issues, the Technical Committee was established. This Committee met periodically to review and refine the technical elements of the I-40 HOV/CMS. During both Phases of the project, the role of the Technical Committee was to:

- Assist in developing regional transportation objectives and priorities for the study;

- Assist in developing strategies to be evaluated;
- Assist in developing measures and methodologies for testing strategies;
- Assist in interpreting the results of the evaluations;
- Assist in summarizing the issues and alternatives for consideration by the stakeholders;
- Assist in identifying the scope and direction of Phase II;
- Provide guidance to the study team relating to specific technical issues; and
- Foster regional cooperation.

3.1.3 Policy Committee

The multi-disciplinary nature of the I-40 HOV/CMS and its policy ramifications on local and regional transportation management required that the regional transportation leaders have opportunities to review and comment on broader, policy-level issues associated with the findings of the study. The role of this Policy Committee was to:

- Review and approve recommendations of the Technical Committee;
- Provide credibility to the study for acceptance by other agencies and organizations;
- Assist in promoting policy and legislative changes needed for study findings to be implemented;
- Provide insight into public perception of transportation problems and issues and potential mitigation strategies;
- Assist in identifying critical issues and potential obstacles associated with any particular strategy;
- Assist in dealing with study process issues that could affect the outcome or schedule for the study; and
- Promote regional cooperation.

3.1.4 Stakeholders Group

Ongoing efforts in the region to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation, including transit improvements and commute trip reduction initiatives, are rapidly changing the circumstances in which congestion management techniques would be introduced. For this reason, it is important to obtain input from business and community leaders before assessing the viability of potential congestion management strategies.

Therefore, early in the process, several meetings were held with key stakeholders in the region to receive input regarding their concerns and ideas on congestion management. Additional input into study issues was solicited by hosting two breakfast meetings that were attended by corporate, community, and political leaders. The purpose of these meetings was to inform the stakeholders of the study, outline the study goals and process, describe existing and projected transportation deficiencies and issues, describe the alternatives being considered, and present the findings to date. Meetings were structured to provide for feedback and suggestions.



What the Stakeholders Said...

During the first Stakeholders meetings, participants were encouraged to express their opinions regarding the major issues facing I-40 travelers and to suggest approaches for improving commuter travel. Comments from the attendees included:

- Consider commuter development patterns within the Triangle Region, with many business centers in addition to RTP;
- Identify and concentrate on improving traffic bottlenecks;
- Consider more than just home-to-work trips;
- Be realistic about the impacts of Travel Demand Management (TDM) and transit;
- Educate the public about the causes of and possible improvements to traffic congestion;
- Reduce traffic volume during peak travel hours;
- Transit service is inadequate;
- Lack of coordination between public agencies; and
- Incident management on I-40 is inadequate.

During the second stakeholders meeting participants were requested to comment on the findings of the first phase of the study and recommended goals for Phase II. Key recommendations for Phase II were:

- Coordinate new development with roadway improvements;
- Identify specific projects, costs, and funding sources;
- Phase immediate improvements into future plans;
- Model future transit alternatives; and
- Communicate the vision with the public.

3.2 Triangle Regional Initiatives

There are many ongoing efforts to address congestion in the Triangle Region, particularly on I-40 in the AM and PM peak periods. These efforts include ways to add highway capacity, to better manage existing and future highways, and to provide alternative modes of travel.

As part of the I-40 HOV/CMS, the various on-going and past transportation planning studies and projects were reviewed for applicability to the objectives of the I-40 study. The most relevant projects are summarized below.

- **Regional Transit** – The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) is planning and



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implementing a regional rail service, express bus service, regional bus service, and coordinating each with local bus services and major destinations. It also operates van pool service.

- **MPO Plan Updates** – The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have considered enhanced mobility in the development of their long-range transportation plans. Both MPOs have performed analyses on enhanced transit and managed lane facilities, as well as performed regional transportation modeling to determine land use impacts on their respective transportation systems. The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) approved its long-range transportation plan on April 17, 2002.
- **Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)** – The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has developed a statewide ITS program that identifies future ITS improvements in the Triangle Region. The purpose of the ITS program is to move traffic and people more efficiently and safely and to maximize the capacity of the existing roadways. ITS provides “real time” information to transportation professionals, the transportation system itself, and to transportation users.
- **Travel Demand Management (TDM)** – NCDOT, Durham County, and major Research Triangle Park employers have come together to develop and adopt programs and ordinances to reduce the amount of traffic attributable to commuters to the RTP. Carpools, vanpools and transit are important elements of their programs.
- **Regional Development and Mobility Principles** – The Triangle J Council of Governments is performing a study to illustrate the sustainability benefits (of which transportation is an integral part) of land development patterns other than conventional suburban expansion.
- **Regional Transportation Alliance** – Early in 1999 the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce assembled a group of 35 government and business leaders to discuss transportation needs for the region. The focus was on accelerating roadway projects and increasing funding for roadway construction (particularly private funding and toll roads). The action plan includes policies for highways, transit, land use, and administrative and legislative changes to address traffic congestion. It also recommends a regional push for vanpooling, telecommuting and transit use. The report emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation.
- **Smart Growth Initiatives** – In April 1999, the General Assembly passed a bill to establish a Blue Ribbon Commission to address growth, infrastructure, and development issues. These issues include smarter infrastructure and transportation planning; more balanced economic development in rural and urban areas; fostering compatible land-use patterns; preserving and improving air quality; and preserving natural resources. The 37 Commission members represent a broad range of governmental, business, academic, and environmental groups. The Commission continued to meet throughout the year 2000 and made specific recommendations regarding Smart Growth legislation to the General Assembly.
- **Major Highway Projects** – Currently project development and environmental studies are underway for three major projects affecting I-40:
 - Widening of I-40 from I-85 to NC 147 in Durham County

- Western Wake Freeway
- Southern/Eastern Wake Freeway

Regional Transit, ITS and TDM are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

3.3 Attitudinal Survey

As part of Phase I, a statistically valid telephone survey was conducted to collect and quantify the attitudes and opinions of the users of I-40. This data provides NCDOT with a better understanding of how travelers in the region perceive congestion and the problems that cause that congestion, including an indication of the depth and breadth of user frustration.

The survey, not surprisingly, confirmed that the public is concerned about traffic congestion on I-40. Respondents also strongly indicated a public awareness and interest in alternative transportation improvements (in addition to highways) including transit, HOV lanes, traffic management strategies, and trip reduction measures. Key findings and specific observations include:

- The vast majority of commuters drive to and from work alone. Very few drive with at least one other person, and even fewer take public transportation.
- One third of the commuters feel they encounter major delays on I-40 on more than 50 percent of their trips.
- Most I-40 users and commuters perceive traffic to be a major or moderate problem on Triangle Region roads, and especially on I-40 during morning and evening peak hours.
- Key contributing factors to traffic congestion on I-40 were perceived to be (in order of seriousness):
 - The amount of traffic during peak travel hours;
 - Lack of sufficient public transit service;
 - Poor or inconsiderate driving habits;
 - Unmanaged regional development and growth;
 - Lack of reasonable alternative routes;
 - Back-ups on I-40 entrance and exit ramps;
 - Crashes and mechanical breakdowns;
 - Congestion on roads adjacent to I-40 exits and entrances; and
 - Lack of coordination between various government agencies or departments for improvements.
- Reactions to potential congestion management strategies were:
 - A high priority should be assigned to providing commuter rail and connecting bus service along I-40 corridor. (53 percent)
 - A high priority should be given to improving crash response and removal. (48 percent)

- While adding more highway lanes was considered a high priority, providing HOV lanes for buses and cars with two or more occupants was considered to be as important as adding general purpose lanes.
- Other alternatives that were considered to be a high priority by one-third of respondents, and at least a moderate priority by two-thirds include:
 - Increase employer-sponsored incentives to carpool and use public transit;
 - Increase bus service along the I-40 corridor; and
 - Improve signal timing at intersections adjacent to I-40 entrances/exits.
- Almost fifty percent of those interviewed did not support toll lanes. Few would use the toll lanes, even at a cost of only 25 cents.

3.4 Community Outreach

Improvements to the I-40 Corridor will impact citizens in Orange, Durham, and Wake Counties. Therefore, it was important to provide citizens throughout the Triangle Region with information on the proposed project, as well as an opportunity to comment. Though not required as part of the study, a community outreach program meeting Federal, State, and other requirements for public involvement was conducted, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21), and rules promulgated by the NCDOT and the local metropolitan planning organizations.

3.4.1 Objectives

The objectives of the I-40 HOV/CMS public involvement activities were to:

- Disseminate information about the I-40 HOV/CMS to the general public and to directly affected communities.
- Identify stakeholder groups most affected by and interested in possible I-40 improvements and actively solicit their input.
- Provide a variety of opportunities for public participation and involvement throughout the study.
- Present study findings that are sensitive to and adequately address issues raised by the projects' multiple stakeholders.

3.4.2 Public Involvement Activities

Each of the public involvement tools discussed below was used to achieve these objectives. In addition, to be effective, outreach efforts were tailored to the needs and concerns of specific constituent groups in a manner conducive to their involvement. Some communications met the diverse needs of all stakeholders, such as newsletters and fact sheets. At other times, strategies tailored to specific groups were a more effective means to accomplish project objectives.



- **Open Houses** – A series of three open houses was held from December 10 to 12, 2001 to provide the public an opportunity to learn more about and provide comments on the study early in the study process. The public was given the opportunity to view display boards with information on HOV lanes in general, as well as specific information on the study progress. Citizens were also able to discuss the project with representatives from the NCDOT and to give feedback verbally or in writing.
- **Speakers Bureau** – Opportunities to present information about the project were provided on an ongoing basis. These presentations were held in order to obtain feedback from and build consensus within the Triangle Region political base and among key decision makers. Presentations were also given to other interested organizations in the Triangle Region. Presentations were continually updated to reflect the current status of the project.
- **Project Displays** – A project display consisting of sixteen display boards showing information about the study was developed for the purpose of presenting project information in public places. The project display was “manned” in order to receive feedback from the public and answer questions.
- **Project Brochure** – A project brochure was developed and distributed at all public involvement activities throughout the study.
- **Project Newsletters** – Three project newsletters were distributed at specific milestones in the project to provide specific information to the public.
- **Project Hotline** – The toll-free project hotline (866-527-7715) provided 24-hour access to I-40 HOV/CMS information.
- **Project Website** – The project website (www.I40HOV.com) also provided 24-hour access to I-40 HOV/CMS information.

