

April 9, 2008

Mayors Transportation Task Force

CORNELIUS

DAVIDSON

HUNTERSVILLE

MOORESVILLE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1 Formation of the Transportation Task Force

In December of 2007, the Mayors of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville and Mooresville came together to deal with burgeoning transportation problems. These problems seemed to be daunting: congestion on I-77; funding the North Corridor Commuter Rail project; accidents on I-77 which caused local streets to become impassible; public demand for greenways, bikeways, and sidewalks—projects which greatly exceeded the capacity of the towns to provide these amenities; congestion on local streets that had begun to degrade the quality of life of our citizens.

We should not have been surprised. Around 1980, our four towns had a total population of around 10,000 people. Today, we have in excess of 100,000 people—a ten-fold increase in one generation. Growth of this magnitude is bound to cause enormous problems. (*Attachment A*)

Our transportation system is better than it was in 1980. We have required developers to build their own streets and occasional turn lanes. The towns have elaborate plans for transportation improvements which await implementation. At the same time, however, NCDOT, which owns and maintains most of the higher volume streets in our towns, has been unable to meet the needs for construction and maintenance.

North Carolina has always taken pride in its transportation system. We have always recognized that good transportation means good jobs, good public safety, and good quality of life.

So the various streams came together: growing problems, shrinking revenues, and important history. Recognizing all three, the mayors formed a task force of citizens, elected officials and staff members to make recommendations on how to approach these problems.

Our group, the MTTF (the Mayors' Transportation Task Force) was charged with a simple task: "Find ways to improve transportation in the four-town area." The MTTF met weekly beginning January 2nd continuing through April 9th, 2008. With a clear nose-to-the-grindstone attitude, it tackled an important issue each week: air quality, widening I-77, buses, land-use planning, thoroughfare plans and connectivity, bicycling, sidewalks, greenways, north corridor commuter rail and I-77 backups resulting from incidents and congestion. In addition, we considered funding sources: Tax-Increment Financing (TIF), synthetic TIFs, automobile registration fees, sales taxes and local property taxes.

Through our deliberations, the group realized that we need a new organization to deal with these problems. All of us recognized that we could no longer go it alone. There are few transportation problems unique to any one of our towns. In fact, most problems are common to all four, and likewise, their solutions.

Another important conclusion of the task force: the sum of our efforts will almost certainly be greater than the individual parts. If we band together, we can solve transportation problems that no one of our towns can solve alone.

So we are creating a new tool to deal with transportation problems. Our four towns will give up no authority; instead, we are providing a method of working together, which will make our existing authority more effective. We recommend that the four towns create a new organization whose purpose will be to advocate for and work toward regional solutions to the transportation issues facing our communities.

With a genuine spirit of cooperation in our group and a further expectation that this spirit will extend to the four governments, we ask our towns to come together to tackle transportation problems. The end result will make our communities better places to live.

2 Recommendations of the Transportation Task Force

The Transportation Task Force recommends the formation of a new organization with

- Representatives from each of the four towns.
- A mandate to deal with regionally significant corridors, vital intersections, transit, I-77 improvements, and development impacts.
- A revenue source.

2.1 An Organization with a Vision

Our new organization must have a clear vision for our four towns. It is not enough simply to deal with today's congestion. Rather, we must ask the more difficult question: What kind of transportation system are we leaving for our grandchildren? Will it be one that we will be proud to claim, or will it simply pass on to the next generation the same problems that we face today. Central to this vision is the premise that we view transportation as a regional challenge, and that we respond collectively.

2.2 Our Vision

Our organization will use transportation to improve the quality of life for our residents. We will address congestion, increase the number of transportation choices, and build a true sense of place in each of our communities. Our goal is that our system will be effective, efficient, and safe.

Pursuing this vision, we will initially be dealing with current problems, but soon we will be anticipating opportunities. We will have several tools available but the strongest is collaboration. Our four towns together will be much more effective than our four towns individually.

2.3 Legal Form of the Organization

There are three choices for a legal form of the organization: a voluntary association, an authority, and an inter-local agreement. The voluntary association will inevitably lose its effectiveness; the authority will require state legislation, so that the third is our best bet. Thus, we recommend that the new organization be formed by inter-local agreement.

We suggest that this organization will have a six year sunset with a governance review in three years.

2.4 Membership in the Organization

We recommend adopting the model of the Metropolitan Transit Commission: one vote for each town, each town will have one delegate and one alternate at their determination. All eight would attend all meetings. One of the four towns will serve as fiscal agent for the organization. We believe that the organization will be able to operate by consensus, but we also recommend that there be super-majorities of the four towns to pass substantive actions.

Each member Town will contribute financially.

We foresee a number of committees, addressing each of the mandates outlined below. Committee members will come from elected and appointed officials as well as citizens at large.

2.5 Mandates

The new organization should undertake the following tasks:

- Identify transportation funding sources at the local, regional and national levels.
- Advocate for the widening of I-77, accelerating the timetable for these improvements.
- Serve as a primary point of contact with CATS for the North Corridor Rail Line for financing and implementation of service.
- Develop a four-town road priority system which focuses on regionally significant road corridors. Specifically, these road corridors would include north-south and east-west connectors.
- Review major development plans from each of the towns to ascertain transportation impacts on the other member governments, and make recommendations to the governing bodies of the individual municipalities for mitigation of these impacts.
- Provide guidance to public safety agencies on transportation-related safety issues, for example, congestion in our towns resulting from incidents on I-77, and evacuation routes for catastrophic events.
- Speak as one voice with State and Federal agencies for regional matters
- Prioritize and arrange for the construction of regionally significant roads.
- Advocate that the “*point of origin clause*” is part of the new tax if the ¼ cent sales tax passes. Ensuring that money collected in North Mecklenburg will be given to the North Mecklenburg towns and spent in their municipalities.

2.6 Plan Review

The Task Force believes strongly that we must hold ourselves accountable for the impact of our developments on our neighbors. Indeed, most of our current transportation problems result from our approval of development without consideration of the impact on other towns. Unless we change this process, congestion will only worsen over time. These changes will require common standards for assessing traffic impacts. They may also require new legislative authority, but they certainly require political will to implement.

We recommend that the new organization bring sunlight to the plan-approval process. It will review major development plans to find how those plans impact neighbors. Then the organization will publicize those findings, and identify the impacts that should be addressed by the individual towns as part of the development-approval process. We believe that simply pointing out the consequences of development decisions will have a significant effect; towns will realize that the old pattern of making land-use decisions in isolation has negative consequences.

2.7 Crossing County Lines

Including entities in Mecklenburg and Iredell Counties, as well as two regional road-planning organizations and two NCDOT regions, cause both problems and opportunities. We will need to coordinate closely with all these groups. Two primary examples where coordination among the various groups will be necessary are the widening of I-77 and the North Corridor Rail Project. With respect to the North Corridor, we should work together to bring Mooresville into the MTC as a voting member with a dedicated revenue source. Advocating for improving I-77 also is clearly a two-county responsibility. Since we need to deal with that highway from south of Huntersville to north of Statesville, we must coordinate closely with Troutman, Statesville,

Charlotte and the two counties. We recommend that we bring all those entities together when we are discussing I-77.

We must also consider the exact geographical boundaries of the new organization. It should include the city limits of the four towns, and the ETJs of the three north towns. Because Mooresville has limited ETJ, the northern boundary of the new organization will need to be considered carefully and established early in the process.

2.8 Staff of the New Organization

There must be staff for the new organization with executive leadership qualities. It should start small, and grow only as the organization proves its effectiveness. There also needs to be an operating budget with funding provided by the four towns.

2.9 Revenue Sources

The organization will not be effective unless it has a revenue source. Among the revenue possibilities available to the Towns are:

- An automobile registration fee
- A new quarter-cent sales tax
- TIF borrowing
- The federal RRIF loan program
- A property tax district
- Local property taxes collected by each town and spent by the new organization
- A municipal tax district
- APFO and permit fees
- Private Foundation Grants
- Other revenue sources that may become available.

The organization will seek to secure funds for road construction and the local share of the North Corridor Commuter Rail Line; for planning and lobbying, for administration, and for other activities that will inevitably arise. We have estimated the revenue we can derive from an automobile registration fee, from a sales tax, and from a property tax. Each is attractive in some respects and unattractive in others. It will be one of the first tasks to sort out these possibilities. Scenarios and estimates are included later in the report.

Since we are an organization formed by inter-local agreement, these revenues must come from the member governments. It is not essential that each government use the same revenue source.

2.10 Working with Other Parties

A number of other parties—Lowe's, Duke Energy, NCDOT, MUMPO, Lake Norman Regional RPO, Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce, the Charlotte Chamber, the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, the Lake Norman Regional Economic Development Commission (LNREDC) and Mooresville-South Iredell Economic Development Corporation (MSIEDC), and notably CATS—can be strong allies in this effort. We must work closely with these groups. There are many ways to do so, and the new organization must implement a system early on.

2.11 What is the role of the towns?

Even though the new organization will take on significant challenges, authority continues to reside with the four towns individually. The new organization will supplement and enhance the effectiveness of the towns in dealing with transportation issues.

2.12 Naming the New Organization

The name of the new organization should reflect both its geographical boundaries and its transportation and planning emphasis. Possibilities include Mecklenburg-Iredell Transportation Commission (MITC), Lake Norman Regional Transportation Commission (LNRTC), or the Lake Norman Regional Transportation & Land Use Commission (LNRTLTC).

3 Next Steps

Within a month of the submission of this report to the four Mayors, each should seek the endorsement of the report by their respective town boards.

Following that endorsement, the Towns should assemble a working party to construct an inter-local agreement and a pro-forma budget. The budget should be developed in time for the four towns to consider in the FY 09 cycle. Membership of that working party should reflect as nearly as possible the membership of the governing board of the new organization.

Once there is a draft inter-local agreement, each of the four towns should consider it in early summer of 2008. This timing will coincide with the development of data on cost of the North Corridor by CATS, with the release of reports being prepared by statewide and countywide groups, and with the possible placement on the Mecklenburg County ballot of a new quarter-cent sales tax for roads.

Target date for having the new organization functioning: Labor Day, 2008.

4 Revenue Sources

For illustration, here are scenarios and estimates of revenue that we can expect from each of three sources: an automobile registration fee, a quarter cent sales tax, and a one-cent property tax.

Mayoral Transportation Task Force Potential Revenue Sources As of March 12, 2008

	Cornelius	Davidson	Huntersville	Mooresville	Total
One penny on the property tax rate	360,000	105,000	380,000	406,000	1,251,000
1% sales tax	2,433,486	533,885	4,465,270	7,700,691	15,133,331
Auto fee per vehicle at \$1	19,948	5,881	32,851	27,283	85,963

		Cornelius	Davidson	Huntersville	Mooresville	Total
Property Tax	50%	180,000	52,500	190,000	203,000	625,500
Sales tax	25%	608,371	133,471	1,116,317	1,925,173	3,783,333
Auto fee	30	598,440	176,430	985,530	818,490	2,578,890

One penny on property tax rate source: Area Finance Directors

1% sales tax source: NC Dept of Revenue Gross Collections Taxable Sales Data for FY 2007

Auto fee source: Mecklenburg County and Mooresville Finance Director

Attachments

- A. Population Estimates
- B. Maps of the Region
 - 1) Approved Area Plans
 - 2) Bicycles & Greenways
 - 3) Land Use
 - 4) Thoroughfare & Transit Plans
- C. Minutes of the Meetings