

GroWNC Transportation Workgroup Meeting Notes February 16th, 2012

I. Welcome and Introductions; Review of January 19th Workgroup Discussions

Paul Black welcomed the group and gave a brief overview of the first workgroup meeting that took place on January 19th. Linda Giltz explained that the next workgroup meeting will take place on March 14th, 3 PM-5 PM, with the consultants. At that meeting the consultants will discuss their observations from the plan review and discussions from the workgroup's meetings, and work with the group to prioritize regional issues and draft a regional vision, goals and objectives. The workgroup will be expected to nominate two or three members to the GroWNC Steering Committee. Check the project website – www.gro-wnc.org – for project updates and meeting notes and notices.

So far the consultant team has reviewed a variety of previously-completed transportation plans in the region, and have identified some common trends and issues. The memo will be circulated to the transportation workgroup, for the workgroup's information and comments.

II. Bus Rapid Transit and Express Bus Routes. Discuss where in our region Express Bus service and BRT make sense.

Paul Black introduced the topic, indicating that while the FBRMPO staff are involved with the GroWNC initiative, they would also like to get some useful discussions out of it that can be folded into the future Long Range Transportation Plan update, such as where in the region Bus Rapid Transit and Express Buses make sense. Bus Rapid Transit typically goes over shorter distances than Express Bus lines, and requires more infrastructure improvements (dedicated bus lanes, local station improvements so that riders can pre-pay for their fare).

The following were comments and suggestions expressed by the group before breaking out into a mapping exercise to identify potential stops and routes:

- BRT systems need density, otherwise they might fail; in lower-density situation, Express Bus system might be more appropriate; while BRT is lower-cost capital investment than Light Rail, it still requires a high investment
- There is a need to identify the characteristics of local travel market—where and how far people are traveling; what is the redevelopment potential along identified corridors
- Don Kostelec explained that there are three purposes of transit investment:
 - Providing a social service for the transportation-disadvantaged
 - Providing commuter service



- Serving as an economic development tool—this third purpose has not been addressed in our region before, and maybe should be considered
- BRT is a quicker-to-implement investment than Light Rail; it is cheaper to implement and can go into traffic where needed (like downtown or to get around a barrier to dedicated busway).
- There is a concern that the new system should not be in competition with existing transit, but rather in addition and a complementary investment to existing transit; financially the region should probably support existing system first and foremost
- Incremental BRT-style improvements to existing transit system is possible over time

The participants then broke out into a mapping exercise, where the following potential and routes were discussed:

- BRT Line from UNCA to Mission Hospital, eventually expanding to the Airport and Hendersonville
- BRT Line up Merrimon Avenue
- BRT Line out east to the Asheville Mall and VA Hospital
- BRT Line serving West Asheville and RAD
- BRT Line serving Asheville HS and AB- Tech
- BRT line serving Biltmore Village
- BRT line connecting to Transit center in downtown Asheville and Pack Square

(the mapping of potential stations/stops exercise result is at the end of the meeting notes)

During and after the mapping exercise, the following additional thoughts and comments were expressed:

- There is an ITS/signals upgrade project planned for Asheville Metro to upgrade many signals—we need to make sure that signal preemption for buses is considered as part of ITS upgrades and not precluded
- At some point, there will be a need for a traffic management center to help manage more complicated algorithms of signal preemption
- There is a concern about Right-of-Way that would be needed for separate bus lanes – ROW might not be readily available on most arterial and local roads
- Queue jumping lanes can be a feasible capital improvement where dedicated bus lanes are not easily feasible
- Park-and-ride lots will be needed wherever new Express Bus lanes are created
- Need to provide good connectivity between Express Bus lines, BRT, and local bus and vanpool services
- Start by testing out vanpools on lines that could become Express Bus lines in the future
- Transportation is generally vulnerable to oil prices shocks. How do we address that?
- “Multimodal travel options” is a broad goal. Does the Transportation Workgroup need to break this goal down into smaller actionable steps/directions?
- Might need a GroWNC Criteria Matrix against which to evaluate transportation projects going forward, to filter out projects that are against the region’s goals and priorities



There was a discussion of what will be the final outcome of Transportation Workgroup and the overall GroWNC initiative. A regional toolbox for sustainable planning will be created/compiled, from which counties and municipalities can select appropriate tools that they would like to use. There will also be recommendations regarding specific actions to improve how planning for transportation, housing, economic development and land use can be more integrated, and some specific projects to exemplify the recommendations.

An example of a regional toolbox was developed in Region A. The Southwestern Regional Commission developed the *Region A Toolbox* (2009, <http://www.mountainlandscapesnc.org/>) through the Mountain Landscapes Initiative study. The Southwestern Commission is using this toolbox to evaluate future transportation, and possibly other, projects.

Julie Mayfield and Robert Eidus have expressed willingness to serve as co-chairs of the group and help set the agendas.

Land-of-Sky staff agreed to circulate the consultants' memo to the group, and would remind everyone about the meeting on March 14.

After March 14th, the next transportation workgroup meeting will be set for sometime in April.

