

Staff Memorandum

Council Regular Meeting – 01/11/2023

Background

In September 2019, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) approved the [2020-2029 State Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\)](#). The STIP is a list of all transportation projects that NCDOT plans to undertake in the next 10 years, with major updates every four years. Projects in the first six years of the STIP are considered “committed”, while projects in the latter years of the plan are considered “uncommitted”, or unfunded, and must be re-prioritized in the next update.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, NCDOT ran into a major budget shortfall and reassessed their projected revenues and costs for the projects in the STIP. This assessment resulted in a budget freeze on all projects that had not begun construction and cancellation of the next project prioritization process, which would have resulted in the next STIP. NCDOT also removed some “uncommitted” projects from the STIP to balance the budget. The state released a draft version of the 2024-2033 STIP in spring 2022, which omitted several hundred previously included projects and did not allow new projects to be added. **The projects that were removed had been “uncommitted” (unfunded) and can be reassessed in the 2028 timeframe.**

In the 2020-2029 STIP, the state scored several major highway projects in Chapel Hill’s jurisdiction and designated the widening of I-40 as a “committed” project. The remaining projects were considered “uncommitted” and were scheduled for the 2026-2029 timeframe. When NCDOT needed to revisit and remove projects for the 2024-2033 STIP, they **removed several major highway projects and kept one project in Chapel Hill** (see table below).

STIP Swap Option

NCDOT removed and kept projects in the draft STIP based on state priorities but is currently seeking input on local priorities. As a result, NCDOT **will consider swapping eligible projects at the request of the local jurisdiction.** For example;

- If Chapel Hill wanted to include Project A in the STIP and remove Project B, they would need to make sure that Project A costs no more than 110% of Project B, and that Project A is the same mode of Project B (ex: can’t trade a highway project for a transit project or greenway project).
- If approved, NCDOT would assign a new schedule to Project A and ensure it is included in the STIP, while Project B would be removed from the STIP and could be reassessed in the future.
- These projects do not require a local match or any funding beyond NCDOT sources because they are highway projects.
- Local jurisdictions must request swaps by January 18, 2023. The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro (DCHC) MPO Board is expected to approve swaps at their March 8, 2023 meeting and forward to the NCDOT Board of Transportation.

Recommended Swap for US 15-501

Several recent large development proposals, if approved, will require significant transportation improvements around the US 15-501 North focus area (Eastowne, Parkline redevelopment, Parkline East projects). As a result, staff recommends **adding the US 15-501 widening/capacity improvements (U-5304F) into the STIP in exchange for removing the NC 54 widening/capacity improvements (U-5774B).**

Staff Memorandum

Council Regular Meeting – 01/11/2023

The US 15-501 widening/capacity improvements (U-5304F) would entail some form of widening and/or capacity improvements on Fordham Boulevard between Ephesus Church Road and I-40, which would likely include at least one reduced conflict intersection (RCI – previously referred to as a superstreet) at the Sage/Old Durham/US 15-501 intersection and possibly at Eastowne Dr. Staff would also request bike-ped-transit accommodations as part of the project. If included in the STIP, Chapel Hill and MPO staff would work with NCDOT and consultants on a design that is acceptable to all parties.

The NC 54 widening/capacity improvements (U-5774B) would include some form of widening and/or capacity improvements on NC 54 between Barbee Chapel Road and the US 15-501 interchange near Glen Lennox. These improvements would likely include RCIs at multiple intersections. If removed from the 2024-2033 STIP, Chapel Hill and/or NCDOT staff could apply for the project in a future STIP cycle.

Potential Addition of Additional Highway Project

The NC 54 widening/capacity improvements (U-5774B) have an estimated cost of \$66 million dollars, significantly more than other eligible projects. As a result, the Town could remove the NC 54 project, add the US 15-501 widening/capacity improvements from Ephesus Church Road to I-40, and add one additional project to the STIP. After reviewing eligible projects, staff does not recommend adding an additional highway project.

Staff's rationale for not including each project is listed below:

- US 15-501/NC 54 & South Columbia Interchange Upgrade (U-5304A)
 - Staff does not recommend this project as it is on the North-South Bus Rapid Transit (NSBRT) corridor, which is currently at 60% design. Staff is concerned that an interchange project could interfere with the engineering and/or construction of NSBRT.
- US 15-501 from Raleigh Road to Ephesus Church Road Capacity Improvements (U-5304D)
 - Staff does not recommend this project, as widening this portion of US 15-501 conflicts with the vision of the Blue Hill District as a walkable neighborhood.
- US 15-501/NC 54 from South Columbia to Raleigh Road Capacity Improvements (U-5304B)
 - Staff does not recommend this project, as it would be disconnected from the recommended widening on the east part of the corridor and would have significant impact on residential areas.
- US 15-501/NC 54 & Manning Drive Interchange (U-5304E)
 - Staff does not recommend this project due to the potential property impacts of modifying Manning Drive for an interchange on the Kings Mill/Morgan Creek neighborhood.

If Council provides direction to request an additional highway project, staff will work with NCDOT to request the preferred project be added to the STIP.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend requesting that NCDOT include widening/capacity improvements on US 15-501 between Ephesus Church Road and I-40 (U-5304F) and removing widening/capacity improvements on NC 54 between Barbee Chapel Road and US 15-501 (U-5774B) from the

Staff Memorandum

Council Regular Meeting – 01/11/2023

2024-2033 STIP. The request would go through the MPO and, even if granted, does not guarantee that the project will be funded and completed. Requesting the swap would be the first step in making the project possible in the future.

Chapel Hill Highway Projects

Project Name (STIP ID)	Project Description	2020-2029 STIP	2024-2033 draft STIP	Total estimated cost
<u>US 15-501/NC 54 & South Columbia (U-5304A)</u>	Interchange improvements.	Right-of-way in 2029, construction TBD after 2030	Not funded, and no plans in short-term	\$33,041,000
<u>US 15-501/NC 54 from South Columbia to Raleigh Road (U-5304B)</u>	Capacity improvements, with sidewalks, wide outside lanes and transit accommodations.	Right-of-way in 2029, construction TBD after 2030	Not funded, and no plans in short-term	\$28,286,000
<u>US 15-501 from Raleigh Road to Ephesus Church Road (U-5304D)</u>	Capacity improvements, with sidewalks, wide outside lanes and transit accommodations.	Right-of-way in 2029, construction TBD after 2030	Not funded, and no plans in short-term	\$35,345,000
<u>US 15-501/NC 54 & Manning Drive (U-5304E)</u>	Convert at-grade intersection to interchange.	Right-of-way in 2029, construction TBD after 2030	Not funded, and no plans in short-term	\$37,446,000
<u>US 15-501 from Ephesus Church Road to I-40 (U-5304F)</u>	Corridor capacity improvements.	Right-of-way in 2029, construction TBD after 2030	Not funded, and no plans in short-term	\$33,725,000
<u>NC 54 from Barbee Chapel Road to US 15-501 interchange (U-5774B)</u>	Upgrade roadway corridor.	Right-of-way in 2027, construction TBD after 2030	Right-of-way in 2027, construction TBD after 2030	\$66,374,000