Talking Points

Neighbors

At the 191 Alliance, several members have been analyzing the NCDOT R-2588B project to widen NC-191 between Mountain Road and Boylston Highway (NC-280). A lot of incorrect information has been presented to the public concerning this project. Additionally, a lot of information has not been presented and should be.

While we are not transportation highway engineers, we do believe that the R-2588B project is not based on accurate information or on NCDOT’s own data. Thus a full reassessment and design of the project is needed before any aspect of the project is started.

We realize that some people may have mixed feelings about the widening of 191. At times it may seem to be heavily congested while at other times not. The heavy occurs twice daily: when students are going to one of the two schools on 191, and when the schools let the student out for the day. The current NCDOT school safety project is designed to relieve this periodic congestion.

Following are some talking points that you can use when discussing NCDOT’s project to widen NC-191 when talking with your neighbors.

191 Alliance is a grass roots effort to reign in NCDOT on their plan to turn NC-191 into a 4-lane divided highway with a 17.5 foot median.

The widening of NC-191 to four median-divided lanes will revive the Balfour Parkway.

We are urging the County decision makers to reassess the need to widen NC-191 from Boylston Highway to Mountain Road (Project R-2588B),

We are also trying to convince them not to continue any post-Balfour initiative from Mountain Road to Hwy 25 (Asheville Highway). Many more communities will be negatively affected if this happens.

DOT has a history of wanting to widen NC-191.

- 1990s: NCDOT proposed building the east-west Clear Creek Connector and also widen NC-191 to four lanes to feed it and consume its traffic. That proposal was killed by the City of Hendersonville because the Connector would have been within the Hendersonville city limits.
- 2008: NCDOT again proposed an east-west connector, renamed the Balfour Parkway, and widening NC-191 to four lanes for the same reason. However, since the Balfour was located completely outside the Hendersonville city limits, the Hendersonville City Council had no problem it, but Henderson County rejected it again due to public outcry.
- it was incorrectly believed that a four-lane east-west highway would relieve congestion on Four Seasons Blvd, which is caused by too many traffic signals (6 signals within a 3/4-mile stretch) and not too much traffic. The continuation of Four Seasons between Dana Road and downtown Hendersonville carries the same volume of traffic and yet it is not nearly as congested because there are fewer traffic signals.
Instead of presenting a complete project plan of what is planned, NCDOT presents such plans as smaller independent projects. Such practice we believe is to keep public disagreement to a minimum.

NCDOT has plans to connect NC-191 to Asheville Highway (hwy-25) through Mills River to I-40.

The so-called reason that NCDOT touts to widen NC-191 is for safety, yet they talk about increased traffic flow.

If NC-191 is widened to four median-divided lanes north of Mountain Road, then why don't they also widen it between Mountain Road and Asheville Hwy (US 25)? The reason: the Hendersonville City Council opposes widening south of Mountain Road, which happens to pass through Hendersonville. Consequently, another project has been initiated to connect 191 to Hwy 25 at Bradley Rd. before the city limits.

Following are some reasons why making NC-191 into a four-lane highway is not feasible:

- It will significantly increase traffic, especially when connected to highway 25
- Even with 45mph speed limits people will drive significantly faster. Just clock the speed limits covertly on any four-lane road.
- Accidents will be more horrific and life threatening.
- There will be increased pollution—air, water, and land
- Taxes will increase in order to maintain the road
- There is no foreseeable impact for Mills River economy
- The concept of rural living will be destroyed
- The environmental impact will be permanent
- A four-lane speedway in front of two schools is just plain stupid!

If you think widening 191 will ease traffic congestion, it won't! Initially it will, but in the long run it won't. The adage, "if you built it they will come" is very true with road widening that does not have controlled access.

There are better solutions, with much less impact on people and property, including:

- Widening NC-191 to three lanes with wide shoulders and a center turn lane that also acts as a median;
- Adding passing lanes by the sod farm and nurseries,
- Adding merge lanes in and out of the subdivisions, and
- Turn lanes at intersections such as Rugby Road.

These modifications would speed up traffic and make traveling safer.

Other suggestions to help reduce traffic and resolve the perceived congestion on 191 include:

1. Have the school board rescind its policy of letting students go to whatever public school they want to in the county.
2. Have the school board rescind its policy of letting juniors in high school drive to school, and implement a policy that only seniors with a 3.0 or better grade average be allowed to drive to school.
3. Implement an additional tax to cover increased road and driveway maintenance to families of children who go to a school other than the closest one to them. We have school buses for a reason.
4. Restrict compression brakes use along portions of 191 where 191 borders subdivisions/communities.
5. While most of the accidents on 191 are rear-end collisions, this is caused by following too close, texting, inattentive driving. These issues must be directly addressed. Drivers in such collisions should receive higher penalty points that are mandatory (cannot avoid by going to driver school) and be required to attend driving school.

6. Widening the lanes, installing a center turn/median lane, better shoulders, and guard rails would have a more positive impact on safety which DOT touts as the primary need for 191.

In order to have the NCDOT R-2588B project reassessed or redesigned you are needed! We need to petition the County Commissioners to stop the unnecessary widening by submitting signed petitions at their January meeting.

Check out our website at www.191Alliance.org for detailed information. Sign-up for our newsletters and become involved in protecting your community and your quality of life.

*Caring about your community's future is called “paying it forward.”*