



D U R H A M

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Durham Transportation Department ■ 101 City Hall Plaza ■ Durham, NC 27701

Phillip Barron
Scott Carter
Daniel Clever
Diane Daniel
Alan Dippy
George Dubay
Robert B. Glenn, Jr.
Timothy Griffin
Mary Malicki
Judy Martell
Peter Schubert

TO: Durham City Council
Durham County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Dan Clever, Chair
Durham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

DATE: January 24, 2007

RE: Alston Avenue Widening (TIP Project U-3308)

The Durham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) is a citizen's advisory commission charged with advising the Durham City Council and Durham County Board of Commissioners on matters related to pedestrian and bicycle safety. The BPAC unanimously opposes the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) current plans for widening Alston Avenue between the Durham Freeway and Holloway St. In their design to increase traffic flow, the current plans jeopardize the safety of the local community by putting pedestrians and bicyclists at undue risk. Durham's Department of Transportation agrees that the current NCDOT plans are off-mark because they do not adequately provide for safe bicycle and pedestrian travel.

The project corridor facilitates high levels of pedestrian activity, including destinations for children, such as Eastway Elementary School and the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club. Furthermore, the project runs through the HOPE VI community, a local and federal effort to transform this area into a vibrant, multimodal residential community.

In November of 2006, BPAC submitted recommendations to NCDOT to provide a safer environment for walking and biking on Alston Avenue. Similar recommendations were also submitted by Durham's Department of Transportation and other local stakeholders. NCDOT recently responded to comments they received on the project, including those from BPAC. It is clear that NCDOT has rejected the recommended improvements for safe bicycle and pedestrian travel. Its responses to our recommendations are summarized below:

- Remove right turn lanes. BPAC recommended the removal of all right turn lanes in the project. Right turn lanes are dangerous for crossing pedestrians as they increase the width of the roadway and encourage faster movement of vehicular traffic at intersections. They also present a danger for through-riding bicyclists. *NCDOT agreed to evaluate the right turn lanes at the*

Liberty Street intersection, but maintained the need for right turn lanes at the other intersections.

- Increase width of sidewalks. BPAC recommended increasing the width of the sidewalks along Alston Avenue from the planned 5 ft to 6 ft, while maintaining a 3.5 ft buffer between the curb and sidewalk. A 6 to 8 ft. sidewalk width is more appropriate for high pedestrian traffic areas. *NCDOT replied that the City would need to pay for any sidewalk width over 5 ft.* BPAC urges NCDOT to pave the additional one foot at intervals between the street lights and other utility posts, and to include this in the project budget.
- Include striped bike lanes. The recently adopted Durham Comprehensive Bicycle Plan recommends the inclusion of bike lanes for this corridor, which it does for most high volume roads. BPAC also recommended the provision of striped bike lanes along both sides of Alston Avenue because they encourage slower vehicle speed and provide a safer cushion for bike travel. This would require reducing the planned width of the outside lane from 14 ft. to 11 ft., which is the width proposed for the left lanes. *NCDOT rejected this request, maintaining that an unstriped 14 ft. wide outer lane would be sufficient for both bicycle and vehicular traffic.* The Bicycle Plan states that wide outer lanes are more appropriate for moderate to low volume roadways (i.e. roads with fewer than 3000 average cars per day). BPAC strongly feels that appropriate bikeway facilities should be incorporated into all corridors identified in the Bicycle Plan.
- Provide traffic signals with a protected pedestrian phase. This is a type of signal that restricts both turning and through-driving traffic from approaching an intersection while allowing pedestrians to cross. *NCDOT did not respond to this request. Rather, they commented on the use of traditional pedestrian signals.*

In summary, we feel that NCDOT's plans for the Alston corridor will have a major adverse impact on the daily activities of the local citizens. Wider sidewalks, safer traffic crossings and bike lanes will make it easier for residents to access local schools and services on both sides of Alston Avenue by foot or bike. A possible TTA transit stop at Alston and Pettigrew streets will also generate bicycle and pedestrian travel. Moreover, our recommendations will encourage slower traffic speeds, which will improve the safety conditions of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists alike. As we've learned from recent pedestrian fatalities and injuries in Durham, pedestrian crossings on road designs that encourage higher than posted speeds are a recipe for disaster.

We applaud our elected officials and staff from both the City and County who have voiced concern about the safety issues and social costs associated with this widening project, and we urge you to continue pressing NCDOT officials for project improvements. It is our hope that incorporation of design features that improve

pedestrian and bicycle safety will have a lasting, positive impact on the local community.

We thank you for your attention to our concerns and recommendations on this matter.

cc: Mr. Kenneth Spaulding, N.C. Board of Transportation
Ms. Nina S. Szlosberg, N.C. Board of Transportation
Mr. Thomas R. Davis, The Community Builders, Inc.
Mr. Mark Ahrendsen, City of Durham, Transportation Division