



D U R H A M

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Durham Transportation Division ▪ 101 City Hall Plaza ▪ Durham, NC 27701

TO: Mayor Bill Bell and Durham City Council Members
FROM: Dan Clever, Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission
RE: Proposed Widening of Alston Avenue
DATE: March 31, 2008

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 affecting bicycle and pedestrian transportation and safety. As part of that charge, BPAC has closely monitored the proposed widening of Alston Avenue (TIP Project U-3308) between NC147 and Holloway Street. In November of 2006 we shared our concerns about the project design with NCDOT. These concerns included the width of the sidewalks, the lack of striped bike lanes and the proposed number of right turn only lanes, which result in wider intersections to cross by foot. BPAC felt that NCDOT's responses were unsatisfactory, and urged City Council in January of 2007 to press for improvements to the Alston Avenue widening design.

Durham City Council is now set to decide whether to accept the current design of the project. BPAC strongly urges the City Council to reject the current NCDOT design and follow the recommendations of Durham's Transportation Division. In a letter to City Council dated January 24, 2008, the Transportation Division stated that it did not support the widening of Alston Avenue as currently proposed, but recommended the following improvements:

- Include Alston Avenue as part of an ongoing streetscape design process, which involves consultation and public input on corridors such as Old Five Points, East Main Street and West Chapel Hill Street.
- Use a portion of the funding currently programmed for the Alston Avenue widening to implement the recommendations of this streetscape process, and program the remainder for other high priority roadway improvements in Durham.

We agree that safety and operational improvements are required along this section of Alston, but not the project currently proposed by NCDOT. Given the amount of bus stops in the vicinity of Alston Avenue, as well as the proximity of Eastway Elementary and new Hope VI housing, we strongly believe that a scaled-down and more pedestrian friendly project is preferable. Following a city-driven streetscape process will also allow for more public input on the appearance and function of Alston Avenue, and could ensure that the corridor is more in

alignment with the adopted Hope VI plan, Northeast Central Durham Strategic plan, DurhamWalks Pedestrian plan and Comprehensive Bicycle Transportation plan. The current project design area terminates at Holloway Street (NC98). There is no funding programmed to widen NC55 north of this point, and this future extension would not even connect directly with Interstate 85. Our fear is that the current NCDOT design would render Alston Avenue less pedestrian and bicycle friendly for little gain in travel time savings. The pending East End Connector would serve as a direct access between NC147 and Interstate 85. We also agree with the Transportation Department that it would be sensible to delay any significant widening of Alston Avenue until the impact of the future East End Connector can be assessed.

We strongly feel that following the recommendations laid forth by the city's Transportation Division will create a renewed corridor that is more amenable to pedestrians and bicycles as well as automobiles. The streets downtown were re-designed to encourage more shared use of the street, and Alston Avenue should be no different. If the Alston corridor is enhanced with these principles in mind, we are certain that future city residents will look back favorably upon your decision.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss our recommendation.

cc: Patrick Baker, City Manager
Kathryn Kalb, Public Works Director
Mark Ahrendsen, Transportation Manager