



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DANIEL H. JOHNSON
SECRETARY

July 28, 2026

Good afternoon, all,

I appreciated the invitation to join you recently in Charlotte for an open and constructive discussion about the future of the I-77 South corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation heard a clear message during the discussion: Should this project move forward, success cannot be measured solely by transportation improvements. It must also be measured by whether we leave the community along the corridor better than we found it.

As we discussed, the project's funding and delivery model allows for up to \$300 million in additional community investment. Below are examples of how NCDOT can help advance the priorities shared during our meeting. These investments will help offset impacts that come from the proposed project, and to some extent, address the lingering impacts on the corridor from the original construction.

The procurement method used to deliver transportation projects utilizing the P3 model is an evolving process that involves multiple drafts of a Request for Proposals (RFP) over many months. This process, which would still be in its early stages, allows NCDOT to incorporate and prioritize community feedback in the development of the RFP and project award. The pillars for community priorities shared during our meeting last week can serve as a strong foundation for NCDOT and developers to use should this process resume.

Economic Mobility

The project offers an opportunity to meaningfully invest in the community, not just address congestion. It presents the opportunity to contract with local and small businesses, with priority access to business along the corridor. This project has the potential to deliver several hundred million dollars to small businesses and support approximately 5,700 jobs each year of construction, according to a study conducted by NC State University. NCDOT can contribute by:

- Prioritizing corridor hiring and workforce development opportunities into project delivery where appropriate.
- Requiring the selected developer in the project contract to meaningfully engage with small businesses, particularly those along the corridor.

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Neighborhood Stability and Housing

Every transportation project has both positive and negative impacts on the local community. Our responsibility is to minimize the negative impacts wherever possible and to support those who must relocate due to the project. Reducing impacts to corridor residents will remain one of our highest priorities, and we pledge to work closely with the City to ensure that the people affected are properly supported. We will:

- Continue to refine the project to reduce right-of-way impacts wherever feasible.
- Coordinate any relocation efforts with compassion and transparency where impacts cannot be avoided.
- Ensure that for those whose homes are affected, the property owners will receive just compensation, and renters will receive relocation assistance and support.
- Collaborate with residents along the corridor and local officials to establish what housing mechanisms should be prioritized during procurement. For example, similar projects across the country have used developer funding to build housing within or near impacted neighborhoods through local housing partnerships.

Reconnecting the Corridor

We believe this project offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect communities in the West Side of Charlotte that were divided when the interstate was first constructed decades ago. While I recognize reconnection won't reverse the past, NCDOT will approach this project as an opportunity to reconnect communities and help heal the effects of historic divisions, not simply build infrastructure. Specifically, NCDOT will:

- Identify and present targeted cap-and-cover opportunities, allowing for safe crossings over the interstate and creating green space.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity across the corridor.
- Work closely with corridor residents and local officials to refine priorities for reconnection, including amenities. Potential improvements include public art, gathering spaces, and recreational amenities.

Environment, Health and Green Space

While targeted reconnection opportunities can add greenspace to the corridor, NCDOT also will use established planning and environmental processes to shape a project that reflects community priorities and results in better outcomes for the corridor.

As with any project of this size, NCDOT is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This process uses technical analysis and public input to identify impacts and evaluate alternatives. NEPA requires us to mitigate for the environmental impacts that result from construction. Specific efforts in this area include:

- Make offsetting investments to ensure that members of the community have equal, if not enhanced access to green space in their neighborhoods, in the event that the project impacts parks or other green space.
- Coordinate with the City and community partners to strengthen connections to parks, greenways and other public spaces where feasible and seek their feedback when identifying priority locations for green space investments.

- Evaluate opportunities to reduce environmental impacts, including noise, water quality and other community concerns, as part of project development.

Quality of Life

Transportation is about more than moving people and goods. It's about connecting residents to opportunity, improving safety and making it easier to access the places and services that move communities forward. I heard many great ideas around the table last week, and NCDOT will:

- Work with community partners to identify opportunities to help close the funding gap for efforts to address the West Side food desert. I'm requesting more information from community leaders on what is needed and am confident that, working together, we can solve this problem.
- Work with local planners to improve interchanges and connections throughout the corridor, ensuring safe access to goods and services that the community needs.
- Continue to refine enhancements to these connection points through the RFP process. To date, our project team has incorporated significant bike and pedestrian improvements to the cross streets in the corridor as part of the base design.

Accountability

I recognize we must continue our work to earn the community's trust. I am committed to working with local leaders to set up a transparent process that builds lasting public confidence and serves as a model for future projects. Specifically, we will:

- Define NCDOT's commitments and identify where responsibilities are shared with other partners in the most transparent way possible.
- Continue engaging residents throughout design and project delivery, not just during the planning phase.
- Develop metrics that align with community priorities and report progress publicly throughout the life of the project.

The Process Ahead

If the City and CRTPO determine this project should move forward, I want to reiterate that this process is a collaborative and evolving one. Together, we can identify the priorities that matter most and incorporate them into the multiple draft RFPs to help shape developer expectations and evaluate how well proposals advance the community's vision.

We can continue refining those priorities through ongoing engagement until the final RFP is issued. And, as discussed in our meeting, we will host more developer listening sessions if the community is interested.

Timeline

As I shared in a letter to Mayor Lyles earlier this year, the absence of a viable funding source requires NCDOT to remove the project from the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). If this project is not going to move forward, I hope to have the

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allocated funding reprogrammed as soon as possible to meet the growing demand for infrastructure investment throughout North Carolina.

State law now requires the Board of Transportation to provide 90 days' notice to the General Assembly before removing a statewide-tier project from the STIP. I've spoken with the chairman of the Board, and they intend to delay sending notice until after CRTPO has time to revisit its support of the P3 delivery process at its September meeting.

Between now and then, we remain committed to listening, sharing information openly and working alongside our partners to determine whether there is a path forward that balances growth, public safety, and community needs.

This project presents a rare opportunity to improve mobility while reconnecting communities that have lived with the impacts of the interstate for generations. I look forward to continuing this important work together.

Thank you again for your leadership and partnership.

Sincerely,



Daniel H. Johnson
Secretary