

MONTFORD NEIGHBORHOOD STATEMENT ON I-26 CONNECTOR

Adopted by the Montford Neighborhood Association, May 19, 2009;

Revised on July 18, 2009

MISSION STATEMENT

Montford residents and the Montford Neighborhood Association seek to promote our neighborhood's position on the I-26 Connector Project in order to ensure the best outcome both for Montford and for the entire Asheville community.

SUMMARY

Residents of Montford, and the Montford Neighborhood Association (MNA) believe that any and all proposed plans for the I-26 connector must be brought into compliance with the CCC design goals and with other adopted community-based, context-sensitive goals. We agree that protecting this precious jewel of a city from possible threats to its quality of life are essential duties, perhaps even a sacred trust of its citizens. We are certain that judicious adherence to the CCC's design goals will yield the best design for our neighborhood as well as for the city.

We believe that all four alternatives, as presented, require significant revisions to meet the community's stated goals for this project.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Montford has a unique historical symbiotic relationship with downtown. The cycle of creation, abandonment and revitalization of Montford parallels that of the downtown. The recent revitalization and preservation of the Montford neighborhood was a precursor to the revitalization of downtown Asheville, and continues to be integral to its success.

Montford has an abundance of historic, cultural and economic resources, including the Riverside Cemetery, the Visitor Center, dozens of historic Bed & Breakfasts, trolley and walking tours, cafes, and Shakespeare in the Park. All of these resources contribute to the economic and cultural base of the entire city. As a densely populated residential downtown community, Montford also has a diverse ethnic, social, and economic mix.

We believe that it is in the best interest of the entire city to recognize and protect the quality of life in this unique and diverse neighborhood, to preserve these historic and cultural resources, and to place significant value on the tourism that Montford helps to attract to Asheville.

We are very concerned that this highway project, as presented, will degrade the cultural and economic resources of this neighborhood, which may in turn, threaten the vitality of the downtown.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

The I-26 connector, as proposed, will become the largest single structure in our city. The scale (width of highway footprint, length and radius of ramps, etc.) of this highway must be compatible with the size of the community, and not overwhelm it.

We support previous community efforts, including the Community Coordinating Committee, and the CCC report, unanimously approved by Asheville City Council, Buncombe County Commission, and the MPO.

We support the separation of local and interstate traffic, as recommended in the CCC report. Accordingly, we do not support proposals that continue to mix local and through-traffic over the Smoky Park Bridge.

The project should repair and enhance urban communities by improving pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit connections between neighborhoods, the downtown, the river valley, and cultural and recreational resources.

The project should not interfere with local planning initiatives, such as the Wilma Dykeman Plan, the 2025 plan, greenways, and infill development.

The project should minimize loss of homes and businesses, and minimize devaluation of property.

We support redevelopment of Patton Avenue and the Smoky Park bridge to facilitate vehicle, pedestrian, bicycle and mass-transit connections between East and West Asheville, and downtown to the river.

Sprawl-enhancing alternatives or elements should be rejected. Urban communities should not be degraded to benefit commuter or through-traffic.

Vehicle speed has significant impact on the design. Greater speeds create more noise, require longer ramps and merge lanes, straighter footprints and more lanes to facilitate weaving, all of which enlarge the project footprint, and threaten neighborhoods. Lower design speed should be adopted as a way to minimize impact.

Highly visible river crossings (bridges) should be well designed to enhance the aesthetics of the river valley and our community.

This project should not be specifically designed to facilitate transportation of hazardous or nuclear material.

MONTFORD NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS

1. To protect our neighborhood and others, this project must meet the most stringent environmental standards, including:
 - a. Noise limits;
 - b. Air quality regulations; and
 - c. Water quality and storm runoff restrictions.
2. Degradation, depreciation, and/or loss of homes are also a primary concern and must be reduced to the greatest extent possible.
3. Noise and visual impacts from this project on Montford's historic and cultural resources, including the Riverside Cemetery, Hazel Robinson Ampitheatre, and the Asheville Visitor Center need to be minimized.
4. The project should integrate the Wilma Dykeman Plan as included in the City of Asheville's 2025 Plan. This calls for 17 miles of continuous greenways, connecting the Swananoa River to the French Broad River and includes sustainable urban development, recreation areas and neighborhood links to the river. The I-26 Connector should in no way prevent neighborhoods' access to the river and each other.

ACTION ITEMS

We urge the North Carolina Department of Transportation to:

1. include a 6 lane alternate for section A of the project in order to also consider how to reduce the scale of the project in section B;
2. provide access to detailed studies regarding noise, air and water quality, health, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts to the community from this project, and include these in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and/or the Supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement;
3. make public the most recent traffic studies, and put into layman's terms the assumptions used when calculating the projected future traffic volumes, including whether or not traffic-reducing elements such as mass-transit and enhanced local street networks were considered to reduce the significance of this highway;
4. evaluate the possibility of reducing the speed limit on I-240 and I-26 through downtown Asheville, including reclassifying I-240 to a more flexible urban highway typology, in order to reduce the scale of the project; and
5. ensure that this project complies with the NCDOT's newly adopted Complete Streets Policy.

As this is the largest development and engineering project in our lifetimes, we urge Asheville City and Buncombe County officials to:

1. review in detail all studies provided by the NCDOT and to hold the NCDOT accountable to complying with all applicable legal standards and with community goals such as the 2025 plan, CCC report, etc.;
2. require City and County engineering, development, and planning staff to review and optimize the project, including a detailed review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the Supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Staff should develop and refine community initiatives, such as greenways, mass transit, improvements to street corridors and neighborhood connections and determine how they can be integrated into and optimize this project.

Neighborhood residents' feedback on the specific pros and cons of alternatives 3, 4, and 4b are included on the next page of this document.

MONTFORD RESIDENTS' COMMENTS ON ALTERNATIVES 3, 4, and 4b

	Negative	Positive
Alternate 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't separate Patton Avenue from I-240 as required in the CCC report • Many lanes merging at north end of Pearson • Seems to take more currently undeveloped land than 4b • Unsure of sound impact to east side of river • Potential destruction of homes in Burton Street & Emma neighborhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings interstate traffic on less populated side of river • Least expensive plan • Less construction/pylons in the French Broad river than other plans • Seems to add the least amount of connectors, ramps, and additional lanes on the west side of river. • 19/23 will be used mainly as a connection from westbound I-240 to westbound I-26, thereby reducing current traffic flow adjacent to Montford Hills
Alternate 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large I-240 flyovers/crossings negatively impact the river • Many lanes merging at north end of Pearson • Takes out 4-5 homes on Hill Street • Seems to take more currently undeveloped land than 4b • Unsure of sound impact to east side of river • More expensive than alternate 3 • Potential destruction of homes in Emma neighborhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separates traffic on Smoky Park Bridge – potential for signature bridge and Patton Avenue boulevard • Places interstate traffic on less populated side of river • Less expensive than alternate 4b • Has the benefits of alternate 4b with less negative impact to Montford and cemetery • 19/23 will be used mainly as a connection from westbound I-240 to westbound I-26, thereby reducing current traffic flow adjacent to Montford Hills
Alternate 4b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most expensive • Brings interstate truck traffic adjacent to densely populated, historic downtown neighborhood and riverfront • Takes out 4-5 homes on Hill Street • May bring more air pollution impact to Isaac Dickson School and the Montford community • Large I-240 flyovers/crossings negatively impact the river • Expected increase in noise pollution to neighborhood, cemetery, park, Hazel Robinson Amphitheatre • Double-decker highway is expensive to build, maintain and out of character with community – might create an “echo chamber” for 19/23. • Trying to squeeze too much highway into too small a space • Disconnects Montford from river • Should not sacrifice a successful downtown neighborhood for the sake of future development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces use of undeveloped land • Sound impact to Montford may be reduced by muffling of 19/23 and raising of I-26 (<i>needs study</i>) • Separates traffic on Smoky Park Bridge – potential for signature bridge and Patton Avenue boulevard

APPENDIX

COMMUNITY COORDINATING COMMITTEE (CCC)

First published in 2000, this report was produced through a collective and formal effort that involved between 500-600 community residents as well as representatives of the Federal Highway Administration, North Carolina Department of Transportation, City of Asheville, the American Institute of Architects, and several independent consulting engineers and community mediators. The Key Project Design Goals stated in this report are:

Separation of local and interstate traffic

Matching scale of project to character of community

Reunification and connectivity of community

Minimization of neighborhood and local business impacts

Use of updated traffic modeling software and data

Maintenance of compatibility with community's design vision and plans; incorporation of community-selected design features

Creation of full interstate movements between I-26 and I-40

Minimization of air quality and other environmental impacts

Emphasis on safety - during construction and in the design of the final product

The NCDOT, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and local citizens should work together as a Committee on Visual Design. to develop ideas for bridge design, signage, overpass design, landscaping and other aesthetic issues that reflect our community's character.

The NCDOT and FHWA should expedite the development of new and updated traffic models for use on the ultimate design of this project, including regional air quality modeling.

The NCDOT and FHWA should explore engineering and signage options to improve the north-to-east connection of eastbound I-26 traffic with I-40 in an easterly direction as part of this project or a simultaneous project. The specific concerns involve limiting commercial truck through-traffic on I-240 and on lesser-classified roadways proximate to residential areas.

Roadway design should reflect the Committees general consensus that the bicycle and pedestrian connectivity be restored to link neighborhoods and the French Broad River while simultaneously exploring traffic calming measures to reduce the vehicular impact on residential streets.

The NCDOT and FHWA should ensure that all interchange design is community sensitive. To achieve this end, it would be helpful to provide artists renditions of feasible design alternatives for public review.

The NCDOT and FHWA should seriously examine safety issues in project construction and design including maintenance of traffic during construction and emergency access after construction.

The NCDOT and FHWA should release any unneeded right-of-way at the completion of this project to the City of Asheville to be zoned and used in accordance with a land use plan to be developed by the City in cooperation with the NCDOT.

The NCDOT and FHWA should keep the I-26 Connector project on its current or, preferably, an expedited schedule.

NCDOT STRATEGIC PLAN (excerpts)

The Strategic Plan is the Board of Transportation Policy Document that will guide the functions to be carried out by the North Carolina Department of Transportation

Mission: Provide and support an integrated transportation system and related services that enhance the state's well-being.

System Vision (External): The Transportation System in North Carolina will provide safe, affordable choices for the movement of all people and products. The system will support and sustain economic opportunities throughout the state. It will be a well-maintained, reliable, multi-modal and connected system that is considerate of local land use plans, natural resources and the environment. This system will be planned and operated in partnership with communities, local, regional, state and federal agencies, and private entities.

Department Vision (Internal): The North Carolina Department of Transportation will make decisions in an open and collaborative manner that is responsive to the needs of its customers and employees. The department will promote a safe, desirable working environment and will invest in the continuous improvement and development of the organization and its employees. Employees will be customer friendly, technically competent, fiscally responsible, and environmentally sensitive.

Goal - Provide a safe and well-maintained interconnected transportation system that offers modal choices for the movement of all people and goods

Objectives: Strive to meet transportation system needs for services, construction, and maintenance; Develop partnerships with other transportation providers; Support the development of multi-modal transportation systems; Ensure transportation safety through the enforcement of applicable state and federal laws; Continuously monitor and update the department's long range transportation plan.

Goal - Provide quality customer service

Objectives: Understand customer requirements; Respond to customer needs in a timely manner; Strive to meet customer expectations in a customer friendly manner; Regularly assess the quality of customer service.

Goal - Develop efficient processes to provide quality transportation services

Objectives: Move projects from conception to completion quickly and efficiently with regular progress completion assessments; Apply technology to support efficient processes and effective decision-making; Establish policies and procedures that are consistent with the mission, vision, and guiding principles; Regularly assess progress toward goals and objectives; Establish an interactive public communication process; Continually search for innovative and flexible transportation solutions including Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

Goal - Demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources

Objective: Preserve and enhance natural, cultural and human resources while providing a safe and well-maintained interconnected transportation system

Goal - Support the development of sustainable, vibrant communities

Objectives: Collaborate with communities in land use planning that is consistent with community values and state goals; Promote the integration of transportation and land use planning

Goal - Make decisions in a manner that builds trust and mutual respect

Objectives: Collaborate with stakeholders to build consensus in an open decision-making process; Share decision-making authority with recognized local, regional, state and federal transportation planning agencies

THE WILMA DYKEMAN RIVERWAY PLAN

UDA, August, 2003

http://www.riverlink.org/wilma_dykeman.asp

ASHEVILLE CITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2025 (excerpts)

Encourage increased property investment, particularly along our commercial corridors; Increased accommodation of population growth within the City, particularly along commercial corridors, in compatible neighborhood infill, and in urban villages; Mixed-use land use pattern; Multi-modal transportation opportunities; Development reflecting the character of Asheville; and Development that occurs in a pattern that is sensitive to air and water quality concerns.

Develop a plan for the future of I-240 through downtown Asheville that will address projected traffic volumes, and provide good access to downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. This plan should create a highway corridor with minimal impact on the urban environment. The plan should look for ways to bury or hide the highway and create opportunities urban scale development and parks that will link Downtown with surrounding neighborhoods and business districts.

The older neighborhoods surrounding Downtown are home to single-family residences, multi-family dwellings, and neighborhood shops and offices. These neighborhoods were linked historically to Downtown by numerous street connections but, in most cases, these links were severed by the construction of the I-240 expressway around Downtown. While many of these neighborhoods continue to be stable residential areas, the residential integrity of some has been eroded by changes of use from residential to non-residential and demolition of homes for road improvements and urban renewal projects. After a period of stagnation and deterioration that began in the 1960s, the older neighborhoods close to Downtown are experiencing rejuvenation as people see the value of living in walkable neighborhoods close to Downtown with its mix of activities and opportunities. The development template common in these older neighborhoods used land very efficiently while providing numerous connections to surrounding properties.

It is time to develop a new model of success for commercial development. Automobiles still have an important place in this new model, but they are not the only design consideration. While convenient parking will continue to be a priority, it is time to explore ways to make our commercial development more walkable, easier to serve with public transit, and more reflective of the unique character of Asheville. When we do widen a road or build a new road it will be of paramount importance to make sure that the design meets all of the long-term goals of an urban community. Too often, we widen a roadway to meet the goal of serving growing traffic volumes without considering the design details that will make it function well in an urban environment over the long term. Our scarce financial resources and limited land availability will drive the need to pursue creative strategies to get the most out of the transportation system.

MONTFORD WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

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