

July 15, 2016

Mr. Michael Wray, P.E.
Project Planning Engineer, Central Unit
I-26 Connector Project
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1548 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548

VIA EMAIL TO: mgwray@ncdot.gov

Dear Mr. Wray,

On behalf of the Montford Neighborhood Association (MNA) Board and the residents of Asheville who will be most impacted by the selection of Alternative 4B as the “preferred alternative” in the I-26 Connector Project, we are writing to request the participation of the appropriate NCDOT personnel at a public meeting meant to educate Montford residents and our neighboring communities in Hillcrest and along Hill Street about the design, status, and environmental impacts of the Section 4B Alternative. The meeting is scheduled here in Asheville for Tuesday, September 20 at 7:00 pm with the exact location still to be determined.

As way of background, in July 2009, the MNA -- with the input of Montford residents -- adopted a statement on the I-26 Connector Project that is still valid today: “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.”

That document spelled out four key principles that the project should meet to satisfy Montford resident concerns:

1. To protect our neighborhood and others, this project must meet the most stringent environmental standards, including noise limits; air quality regulations; and, 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 Amphitheatre, 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 and its call for 17 miles of continuous greenways, connecting the Swannanoa 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.

It is our goal for the September 20 meeting that the impacted residents of Asheville on the east side of the French Broad River living and/or working north of the Bowen Bridge leave with a clear understanding of how well these principles have been met in the 4B Preferred Alternative and the realistic extent to which any potential design adjustments can ameliorate the impacts that will accompany the selection of 4B for future construction.

To insure that we don't waste the valuable time of either NCDOT personnel or that of the public in attendance, we'd be very appreciative of NCDOT sending the appropriate staff who can address the issues of concern in some detail and respond to questions with a high level of specificity. To facilitate NCDOT's determination of who to send, we have attached a list of issues we would like to see addressed at the September 20, 2016 public forum.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to let us know. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience confirming NCDOT's intentions to participate in a forum that is critical to informing the public at this juncture in the NEPA process for the I-26 Connector Project. We look forward to working collaboratively with NCDOT to make this a well-attended and educational forum.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Devane
MNA Board I-26 Connector Committee Chair
sdevane@hdresources.net



David Patterson
MNA Board President
montford33@bellsouth.net

cc: Sec. Nick Tennyson, NCDOT
Mike Holder - Chief Engineer, NCDOT
J. Carr McLamb Jr. - General Counsel, NCDOT
Patrick Norman - Director of Planning and Programming, NCDOT
Rodger Rochelle - Director of Technical Services, NCDOT

Mayor Esther, Manheimer, City of Asheville

**I-26 CONNECTOR 4B ALTERNATIVE ISSUES OF CONCERN
FOR
SEPTEMBER 20, 2016 PUBLIC FORUM**

MNA respectfully requests that NCDOT and/or its NEPA consultants address the following issues at the September 20, 2016 public forum or in hand-outs provided at the forum:

1. Detailed Project Design Presentation including the height elevations (from highest to lowest points) for the I-26 structures and the I-240 fly-overs; number and location of lanes relative to the current highway structures; a “primer” of the issues that NCDOT took into consideration in designing the 4B Alternative presented in the DEIS and what the Department will need to take into consideration when determining the final overall height, width, location, and number of lanes for the project. It is our goal for the public to have a high level of clarity on how the various highway structures will fit into the Asheville topography from Patton Avenue and the Bowen Bridge all the way north to Broadway, so detailed 3D visuals along the lines of what you can see in the following link would be most helpful.
<http://www.us14-cn.com/sites/www.us14-cn.com/files/assets/pim3-visualizations-reduced.pdf>
2. An updated list and locations of residential and commercial properties that will be impacted by the project in terms of full or partial eminent domain takings; as well as the contours for those residences, businesses, and historical/cultural landmarks that will likely suffer negative visual impacts from the elevated highways and the construction of any noise mitigation sound walls.
3. Noise Impacts including details on NCDOT’s methodology for conducting the baseline noise analysis; how many noise receptors will be impacted and the projected increase in noise levels at varying noise contour points from the highway structures. Additionally, we would like a full explanation of the exact locations where any potential noise mitigation would be effective, reasonable, and feasible, as well as an identification and explanation for the locations where it would not generally be considered effective, reasonable, or feasible.
4. Clarification on where the additional lanes of I-26 would be built relative to Riverside Drive and the land to the east of Riverside Drive, including details regarding NCDOT’s analysis of the land undergirding the hills of Montford where GIS data provided by Buncombe County shows that this land poses a high or moderate hazard in terms of land stability and is a potential debris flow pathway throughout the project area. This reality creates concerns about maintaining the structural integrity of the homes (both historic and new) that are located in the hills above the highway project site during construction when land shifts occur.
5. Plans for insuring that the French Broad River is not cut-off structurally and/or visually from recreational use by residents located east of the River and how the City’s greenway plans can or will be accommodated along the widened I-26 corridor.

6. Impact of increased highway traffic on air quality, especially the air quality impacts for the children attending the new Isaac Dickson Elementary School at 125 Hill Street and living in the Hillcrest community (who will now be surrounded on all four sides by greatly increased highway traffic.)
7. Potential for negative emergency response impacts at the Isaac Dickson Elementary school due to 4B-induced access limitations.
8. Relevant NCDOT analysis as to the extent to which properties can expect to experience any devaluation in property values due to proximity to the project site. There are a significant number of newer middle class infill homes that have been built close to the project site on Cross Street, Greenlee Street, Houston Street, Courtland Avenue, Courtland Place, Pearson Drive, Westover Drive, Tacoma Street, and Hibriten Drive that were not included in the DEIS data. Their values are already dropping in current real estate listings when compared to average list prices before 4B was selected as the preferred alternative.
9. Expected timeline for completion of the Phase 1 NEPA process; Phase 2 project design, engineering, and land acquisition (including a discussion of early acquisition possibilities for those parties who will experience full or partial condemnations), and Phase 3 construction stages.