

The NC 54 / I-40 Corridor Study



What is this study about?

The NC 54 corridor is a critical link between the City of Durham and the Town of Chapel Hill including the University of North Carolina, as well as other area attractions for educational, social and recreational activities in southwest Durham County, the Research Triangle Park, Carrboro and beyond. This corridor is the only east-west link between US 15/501 and I-40, the two major north-south routes between Chapel Hill and Durham. Today NC 54 is a heavily congested arterial; the NC 54 and I-40 interchange has consistently ranked as the top congested location in the Triangle region.

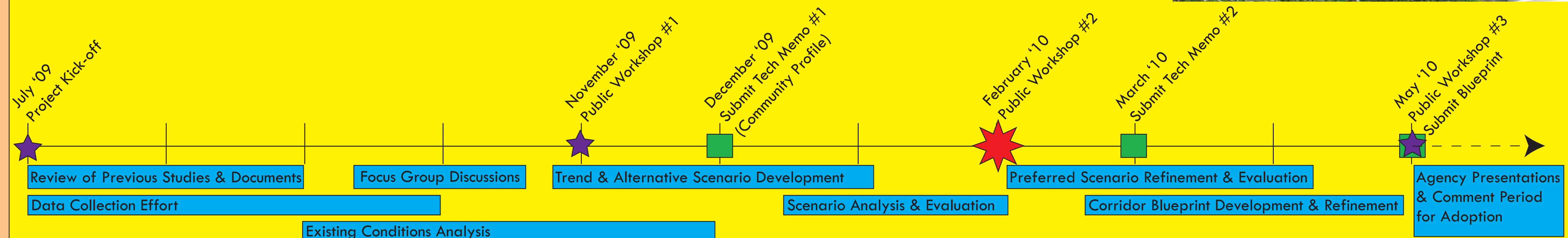
The demand for medical, commercial and residential land uses near complementary destinations like UNC and its growing medical complex continues to exert development pressures in the area. Environmental and development constraints limit east-west travel options, forcing a large amount of regional and local traffic to use NC 54. Inadequate capacity to meet this demand, as well as barriers and gaps for non-auto travel alternatives, conspire to create a serious congestion problem that threatens the economic vitality and community livability of one of the region's most economically important corridors.

This study uses a technique of 'scenario planning' to create and test impacts of alternative future outcomes to define an overall vision for the NC 54 corridor. Through a comprehensive public involvement process and technical analyses, the study will identify a preferred scenario and detailed master plan blueprint to guide orderly growth and development that sustains economic vitality, increases personal mobility, protects environmental resources and enhances community livability into the future. Recommendations for short-term and long range integrated land-use and multimodal transportation strategies will be developed, including specific transportation improvements and land-use policies.

Project Objectives

- Clearly define a realistic "blueprint" for an integrated growth and mobility strategy for the corridor
- Establish a development framework that strengthens travel options and reduces vehicle miles of travel (VMT)
- Improve operations and safety, and reduce delay
- Define project priorities and phasing linked to timing of growth

Project timeline



What have we done so far?

In July 2009, the project kicked off with the first steering committee meeting. A thorough review of all relevant planning documents, studies and assessments was conducted, and a large data collection effort began. The existing transportation conditions and land development dynamics were assessed, including environmental constraints, historical development patterns, traffic levels of service, transit use and service, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, crash rates, and land development capacity. These findings were presented at Public Workshop #1 in November and documented in the Community Profile Report submitted in December.

In addition to monthly meetings with the project's Steering Committee (comprised of local agency staff and representatives from NCDOT and UNC), issues and opportunities related to the NC 54 corridor were identified through a large public involvement process. Focus group discussions were held with key stakeholders in mid-October to help understand the project area and relevant issues from different perspectives, including commuters; businesses & developers; policymakers; transit enthusiasts; bicycle & pedestrian advocates; and those with neighborhood & environmental interests.

At the first public workshop, community members identified several visioning consensus themes and areas of disagreement. Participants also framed the different types, intensities and patterns of growth with transportation connections and improvements to guide the development of the alternative scenarios.

The visioning consensus themes and ideas conveyed at the first public workshop formed the basis of the alternative scenarios. Three scenarios were developed and evaluated on a variety of performance measures.

What is tonight about?

The objective's for this evening's workshop are:

- Understand the development of alternative scenarios
- Recognize how performance measures guided scenario development
- Confirm the priority measures of evaluation
- Reach consensus on key elements of a preferred scenario

Tonight we will review the different scenarios, recognizing that each scenario is by no means a finished product. The scenarios you see tonight are not plans, but reflect possible ways the NC 54 corridor could change. We will assess the different aspects of each scenario to identify those that are preferable and those that are not, while concurrently considering the policy trade-offs. We will compare the various growth options that affect land consumption, transit-supportive development, neighborhood and environmental preservation, economic dynamics and energy use.

The elements identified tonight as desirable will be incorporated into the 'preferred scenario' which will guide the development of the Blueprint (the corridor master plan).

It is important to remember that these scenarios are not plans; they are broad approaches to mobility and urban form in the corridor. These scenarios are a tool to help the project team determine the vision and the preferred approach to guide future growth in the corridor. The scenarios are intended to be different; elements that would be considered under all scenarios, like bicycle and pedestrian mobility and open space preservation, will be specifically addressed in the Blueprint. The purpose of the scenarios is to distinguish the broad vision and direction for the study area.

Where do we go from here?

The feedback from tonight will be used to frame the 'preferred scenario,' the future vision of how to best organize future growth within the corridor study area. This preferred scenario will form the basis for the Transportation - Land Use Master Plan (a blueprint for the corridor), which will consist of recommendations for short-term and long range integrated land-use and multimodal transportation strategies and a plan for implementation. At this stage, the details for transportation project needs and priorities will be fleshed out, including functional design for the I-40 interchange, improvements for bicyclist and pedestrian mobility and safety, access management recommendations and specific land use policies and design guidelines.

At the third and final public workshop, the project team will present a draft form of the Master Plan Blueprint. Participants at this workshop will be asked to review the blueprint and offer input and guidance on the plan elements, including project priorities, phasing and the recommended policy framework.

The final Master Plan Blueprint will be refined and presented to the stakeholder agencies for adoption in late 2010.

How can I get more information?

- Visit the project website for project materials, updates, summaries, maps and presentations at: www.nc54-i40corridorstudy.com
- Provide your email or mailing address at the sign in table to be included in our contact list.

Study Partners

- Durham - Chapel Hill - Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization*
- City of Durham*
- Durham County*
- Town of Chapel Hill*
- University of North Carolina
- Chapel Hill Transit
- Triangle Transit
- Durham Area Transit Authority
- North Carolina Department of Transportation

* Funding partners

Consultant Team

- Renaissance Planning Group
- ICF International
- Michael Baker Jr, Inc.

Who is involved?

The project is guided by a steering committee comprised of local agency staff and representatives from NCDOT and UNC. The steering committee meets monthly and serves as a focal point for the development of the technical and policy recommendations to governing bodies for the consulting team.