

Special Meeting - February 4, 2014

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, February 4, 2014 at 9:30 a.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville NC for a special meeting on the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). Commissioners present were: Robert M. Edwards, Chairman; Billy Holder, Vice-Chairman; Keith Eller, Member; and Raymond Williams, Member. Commissioner Connie Orr was absent.

Commissioner Edwards called the meeting to order and thanked the committee members for attending the meeting. Commissioner Edwards turned the meeting over to Bill Tunnell, OPT-IN Team Member.

Mr. Bill Tunnell welcomed everyone and stated that main topic for discussion is the Comprehensive Transportation Plan with comments from our local elected officials. Mr. Tunnell gave a recap of the plan that involves the seven (7) far western counties of Graham, Swain, Macon, Cherokee, Jackson, Clay and Haywood. Mr. Tunnell turned the meeting over to Gianni Longo, Opt-In Team Member. Mr. Longo stated that there are three indicators to measure the progress toward our goals. Those goals are:

- a. Staying the course as is;
- b. Target management and investment;
- c. Robust management and investment;

Mr. Longo stated that the population growth forecast is 15% by 2035 and the panel needs to know what direction the counties want to go with their plan. Mr. Longo stated that a survey was taken and the majority would like to brand the region and market it together; develop shared regional business parks; focus on tourism and small businesses; create towns that will interest young people; have affordable housing available; to manage and regulate future growth; connect the regions with the highways with the priority being Asheville, NC; to support in-town development; to create and support an independent implementation entity to carry forth the regional vision; and the majority felt that a creation of a non-profit institution to lead and follow the implementation of the vision was needed. Mr. Longo asks for comment from the community leaders.

Commissioner Robert M. Edwards stated that he had attended the meeting from the night before and was very pleased with the support from our local leaders. Commissioner Edwards stated that we have to plan globally but act locally and we cannot live in isolation. Commissioner Edwards stated that we have to be at the table for opportunities and this plan is challenging as a region but workable. Commissioner Edwards felt that whatever direction is taken it needs to be "bulletproof" so that it will stand strong. Mr. Longo stated that the sole reason for the plan is "vision" and the problem is that elected officials come and go and the plan needs to be strong. Mr. Longo stated that Graham County is ranked as eight (8) years older than the state average but there is potential to draw people to this county if we find and offer the product that the people want.

Steve Hooper, Mayor for the Town of Robbinsville stated that the Town has the sewer and water capabilities to allow growth in and outside of the town limits and they have a long and short term plan in place. Mayor Hooper stated that the Town is forecasting growth and is preparing to be able to provide service to sustain this growth.

Commissioner Edwards presented the board with the ARCADIS Comprehensive Transportation Plan Socio-economic Data Forecasting Methodology which predicts a fifteen (15) percent population growth rate from 2010 to 2035. Commissioner Edwards stated that the board would need to approve this potential growth rate as part of the Opt-in process. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the growth rate as predicted. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. The methodology is as stated below:

**Prepared by ARCADIS, Phillip Moore, Southwestern RPO Coordinator**

In March of 2013, a study to develop the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP), which includes the Town of Robbinsville, Fontana Dam, and Lake Santeetlah, was initiated as a part of the regional vision plan, entitled Opportunity Initiative (Opt-In) Southwestern North Carolina, and Graham County Comprehensive Plan being led by TSW consulting. Existing and anticipated deficiencies were determined through an analysis of the transportation system looking at both current and future travel patterns.

The first step in determining future transportation deficiencies is to forecast future population and employment growth for Graham County. As part of the Opt-In process, a population growth for the seven counties of southwestern North Carolina was forecasted at 15 percent from 2010 to 2035. The Graham County CTP Committee worked with ARCADIS to estimate economic development potential and land use trends to determine the potential impacts on the future transportation system. We would like to update you on the process and to ask for your official approval of the projected socio-economic data used to determine future deficiencies. Your approval can be documented as part of the official minutes of the meeting.

Below is a description of the methodology used in analysis.

### **Population**

Consistent with the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management population projections for the seven southwestern North Carolina counties included in Opt-In, a growth rate of 15 percent from 2010 to 2035 was projected by the Opt-In consultant team. To extend the population forecast to 2040, the horizon year of the CTP, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2010 to 2035 was calculated at 0.56 percent and applied from 2035 to 2040 to extend the growth in a straight line projection. This resulted in a growth rate of 17.6 percent from 2010 to 2040. The 2040 population was projected by applying the 17.6 percent growth rate to the 2010 U.S. Census count of Graham County population. The 2010 Graham County population is 8,861 persons and is forecasted to increase to 10,421 persons in 2040.

### **Employment**

Future employment conditions within Graham County were obtained using the 17.6 percent growth rate based on the Opt-In forecast and described in the above section. Based on CTP committee input and discussions, as well as constraints such as publically owned lands, the expected growth was then spatially distributed in the county. This included approximate locations and number of jobs for anticipated employment centers. Any anticipated heavy demand on the future transportation system as a result of these proposals was accounted for in projected traffic volumes. Areas of expected higher employment growth and traffic growth are US 129 south of Robbinsville and Stanley Industrial Park based on current trends and anticipated future development activity.

### **Future Traffic**

Traffic volumes across the county from 1991 to 2009 were gathered. Growth rates for entire time period, 1991-2009, and for recent years, 2000-2009 were analyzed to note any effects the economy has had on local growth. Growth rates were used to linearly project 2040 traffic volumes. When calculated growth rates were 0% or negative, a conservative rate of 0.5% was applied. Traffic growth rates were between 0.5% and 1.5%, similar to the population growth rate for Graham County. While the overall growth in traffic is forecasted at 17.6 percent, the same as the rate of population and employment growth, the rate of traffic growth on specific roadways varies based on where population and employment growth is anticipated to occur in Graham County, so some roads may have forecasted traffic volumes above or below the forecasted increase in population.

### **Footnotes**

1. Opt-In is a process that includes the seven westernmost counties in North Carolina, the 16 municipalities within them, and the Sovereign Nation of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The purpose of Opt-In is to provide citizens, businesses, and elected officials in the region information to make decisions about how and where they invest in public infrastructure for the future.
2. Current national trends indicate that traffic volumes are not growing as fast as populations are increasing. However, as Graham County is quite rural, it is anticipated that the county will not follow the national trend and the vast majority of the forecasted new residents will choose to drive private automobiles.

Alderman Bobby Smith stated that the Town would follow the county on this growth rate prediction and will have a formal vote at their next meeting.

Commissioner Edwards asks for further comment. No further comment was given. Commissioner Eller made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Holder seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

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Robert M. Edwards, Chairman

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Billy Holder Vice-Chairman

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Keith Eller, Member

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Connie Orr, Member

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Raymond Williams, Member

ATTEST:

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Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board