

Continued Meeting – February 18, 2014

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, February 18, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville NC 28771 for a continued meeting from the regular meeting held on Monday, February 17, 2014. The purpose of the meeting was to have an open discussion on Corridor K.

1. Commissioner Edwards called the meeting to order and turned the meeting over to Manager Cable.
2. Manager Cable thanked everyone for attending and stated that the county is in the middle of a comprehensive transportation plan and the board felt we needed to address the major transportation needs and to decide whether design changes or route changes was needed in order to complete Corridor K.
3. Manager Cable asks that everyone introduce themselves. Those in attendance was:
 - a. Greg Cable, Graham County Manger
 - b. Edd Satterfield, P&J Representative, Robbinsville Division
 - c. Brian Burch, PE, Division 14 NC Department of Transportation
 - d. Eddie Adams, Town of Andrews
 - e. Larry Kearny, Commissioner, Division 14 NC Department of Transportation
 - f. Sam Evans, Staff Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center
 - g. D.J. Gerken, Managing Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center
 - h. Ryan Sherby, Director, Region A -Southwest Commission
 - i. C.B. McKinnon, Cherokee County Board of Commissioners
 - j. Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners
 - k. Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners
 - l. Robert (Mike) Edwards, Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners
 - m. Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners
 - n. Andy Cable, Director, Graham County Economic Development
 - o. Kim Crisp, Clerk, Graham County Board of Commissioners
4. Manager Cable began the discussion with a video showing the potential dangers to the “only” two ways out of our county. Manager Cable along with Andy Cable took photographs of the deterioration of the roads both on Highway 129 and Highway 143. Manager Cable stated that these two roads are vital to the people of Graham County and they are literally disintegrating daily. Manager Cable stated that Graham County desperately needs Corridor K which was designated by Congress for completion forty (40) years ago. Manager Cable stated that helicopters land often if not daily for medical transports from our county due to length of time it takes to transport our citizens to the nearest hospital. Manager Cable stated that our Town Alderman lost a child in transport and this is just one of many instances. Manager Cable stated that we are here to come up with an alternative to get this road built. Manager Cable stated that the county is in the middle of the OPT-IN meetings to complete the County’s Transportation Plan which works into the Regional Transportation Plan. Manager Cable stated that it seems that the most resistance of Corridor K is Segment A and we would like to have discussion on this. Mr. Larry Kernea asks “Resistance from?” Manager Cable stated potential litigation from the environmental community.
5. Mr. D.J. Gerken stated that the litigation is general principal and nothing is approved for Graham County due to limited funding but his group would like to help find a way around the issues with building suitable transportation but Segment A does stand out. Edd Satterfield wanted it known that Segment A is the Andrews to Robbinsville section. The board discussed the funding available and agreed that the money is not enough to complete the process.
6. Brian Burch, PE, Division 14 of NCDOT stated that we currently have around \$387 million dollars set aside for this project but one of the challenges we are facing is the reprioritization of the state funding. Mr. Burch stated that congress can use federal dollars to supplement this funding if they choose. Commissioner Williams stated that he is to the point where we all need to work together and felt that the county didn’t need a tunnel that runs over one mile. Commissioner Williams stated that he would like to live to see the road finished and that he has ridden in the back of an ambulance and it was not a good experience with our many curves. Mr. Gerken stated that in the past we were at cross purposes but we need to get past this and find a project that works. Mr. Kernea stated that the funding was pulled out and the road has been studied since 1965 without environment studies and this is where our problems lay. The intent today is to build the road with the least amount of damage to the environment. Mr. Kernea stated that in the past the people were not involved in the decision making but we do need to move forward because of the great need Graham County has for a road. Manager Cable asks how does the county hit the ground running in May when the comprehensive plan is completed without immediate litigation. Mr. Gerken stated that it is not the intent to enter directly into

litigation but to start with other places where flexibility could be to get this plan started. Commissioner Edwards stated that he has watched this project have environmental studies one after another and still we do not have a road. Commissioner Edwards stated that Corridor K has always been at the top of our road prioritization list with the state but there is not a guarantee that the money will come through for this project so our county keeps being held as collateral damage. Mr. Burch stated that there are three sections that have not been completed so Graham County is not standing alone on this project. Mr. Satterfield asks if we can build on the section that has passed environmental impacts and then build the rest later. Manager Cable stated that we have to lay groundwork to current needs which could include route and design changes. Mr. McKinnon stated that we needed to talk about other alternatives from the economic and safety portion because human care is critical to this region. Mr. McKinnon stated that in some types of weather a helicopter cannot land in our counties and we are willing to discuss other routes but we are not willing to give up a forty (40) year plan. Mr. McKinnon stated that we could build substandard roads then in another thirty (30) years we will have to backup and do over. Mr. McKinnon asks is there an alternative route and if so we would like to know it. Mr. McKinnon asks what our best options are, is there a Plan B or is there a way to have a different route that is more affordable. Mr. McKinnon stated that when there is a truck wreck on Nantahala then the road is shut down and we cannot provide services in or out and this is crucial not only for our people but for our economic development. Mr. Gerken stated that we needed to start with what the counties want to achieve that is both time and cost savings. Mr. Kernea stated that we have had years of meetings just like this one and we drew tons of alternatives and it came down to Segment A which held the least impact on the environment. Mr. Kernea asks that Segment A be left on the table until we understand what the negative impacts are. Commissioner Orr asks when Segment A was chosen. Mr. Burch stated that it has not been chosen and this is one reason for the OPT-IN meetings to determine the feasibility. Mr. Burch stated that the US Forest Service and the NC State Forest Service will not support changing the road to cross over the Appalachian Trail and we will be at a stalemate once again. Mr. Burch stated that we have studied the plans to determine the least environmental damage but this was not acceptable to the law center. Mr. Burch stated that we have followed the process and have done our best to look at Corridor K with the least impact to the environment but the cost is too much. Manager Cable asks what does the county need to do to get moving. Commissioner Eller stated that we needed to build an alternate Appalachian Trail. Commissioner Williams wanted to know how many people crossed the trail that benefited our county besides when our Rescue Squad has to go in and rescue them and then are not appreciated. Commissioner Williams stated that the Foothills Parkway was supposed to cross into North Carolina but that didn't happen either.

7. Mr. Gerken asks that the panel look at the map and find the flexibility. Most of the panel agreed that we needed to move past the stalemate, involve our people and let the state know what we want and need to see happen with our roads.
8. Andy Cable, EDC Director felt that this is a stall yet again and we needed to use the money that we have and go forward because what is important to the citizens of our county is not a priority. Mr. Cable stated that we have held the OPT-IN meetings and all is on paper but nothing ever happens. Commissioner Edwards asks the question, "Who are the decision makers?" because somewhere somebody is saying yes or no to this project. Mr. Burch stated that there is a Merger Team and urges everyone to attend their meetings especially our local elected officials. Commissioner Edwards stated that this is the first time he has ever heard of a merger team and if he had known that one existed he would have been at the meetings. Mr. McKinnon stated that their county has a comprehensive transportation plan in place and they fully support Corridor K. Manager Cable stated that the panel would need to meet again once our transportation plan is completed in May. Mr. Burch stated that people needed to be at the table more because District 14 has never had a project get through the merger process due to the lack of citizen involvement. Commissioner Edwards stated thanked Ryan Sherby for attending the meeting and stated that we must work with Region A to help lead and guide us so that we will be on the mark when it comes time to give our voice. Mr. Sherby stated that he was eager to help and assist in anyway.
9. Manager Cable thanked everyone for coming.
10. Commissioner Eller made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Edwards seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Signature Page for Continued Meeting – Tuesday, February 18, 2014

Robert M. (Mike) Edwards, Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Billy Holder, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board