

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, November 19, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular monthly meeting. All board was present.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks Dirk Cody, NC Highway Commissioner and Brian Burch, NCDOT Division Engineer to speak to the board concerning the Graham County Community Transportation Plan. Mr. Cody stated that he had previously spoken with Commissioners Wiggins and Orr to request that they designate Highways 28, 129 and 143 as a National Highway in order for this district to apply for federal grants. Brian Burch stated that currently the estimate to complete the section of road from Stecoah to Robbinsville which will include a mile-long tunnel is \$400 million and there are a little over \$200 million left in the ADHS monies. Mr. Burch stated that NCDOT does not have the funds available to complete the road without the assistance of federal grants and if the roads are not on the National Highway System, you cannot apply for these grants. Mr. Cody stated that in order for the road to be changed or built it needs to be on the National Highway and asks the board how they feel about the tunnel. Commissioner Cody stated that the people of Stecoah have not heard of the tunnel. Commissioner Cody asks if NCDOT plans to reroute Highway 74 Route after Corridor K is completed to Robbinsville. Dirk Cody stated that this is no longer feasible and is not on the table as discussion. Dirk Cody stated that years ago it was proposed that a four lane would go from Murphy to Manteo but projects change and Graham County will not receive a four lane from Stecoah to Robbinsville but they will see passing lanes. Commissioner Cody stated that the original plan was a four lane to Chattanooga and this was talked about in 1993 and some in this room will be dead before we see this road. Brian Burch stated that he was hired in 1993 and everyone was supposed to have a four lane by 2000 but the environmental laws stopped it and the forecast now is 2040 or 2045, which did not indicate a four lane. Brian Burch stated that a four lane is not warranted in Graham County and they cannot legally build by environmental regulations and this is not what I like but it is what I have to do. Chairman Wiggins stated that one thing bothers him about the amendment and this is the section between Robbinsville and Andrews and if they designate this to the National Highway will it force them to build the four lane. The answer was no by Mr. Burch. Chairman Wiggins stated that if the county does adopt these amendments would this be brought back up to the board if they decide to change their plan. Dirk Cody stated that nothing prohibits the board from changing their own community transportation plan. Commissioner Orr asks what the regulations are in order to apply for federal grants. Brian Burch stated that they must be designated on the National Highway System where they will compete with all the other roads. Brian Burch stated that if they get the grant request in by 2020 the county would have a chance to receive funds next spring or early summer. Commissioner Orr asks if it is likely that we will get grant funding. Dirk Cody stated that we would not unless we are on the National Highway System. Brian Burch stated that we are only funded from Stecoah to Robbinsville. Commissioner Orr asks if there will be passing lanes up the Stecoah Mountain. Brian Burch stated that the road would include changing lanes and wider shoulders and compared it to the Super 2 highway in Tellico Plains. Commissioner Nelms stated that the project team wanted three lanes or nothing with passing zones. Brian Burch stated that he did not see an issue with that. Brian Burch asks if the board wants a tunnel or not and stated that the environmentalists like the tunnel. Commissioner Orr stated that she has heard this road talked about all her life and we need a plan in place to spend what money we do have. Brian Burch stated that DOT would deliver what they could with the money that they have. Commissioner Orr stated that the road from Tipton to Robbinsville needed to be a priority. The board wanted to know if the amendment concerning the Tatham Gap would stop this from going on Corridor K and Brian Burch stated not sure. Dirk Cody stated that if we adopt the Resolution, any extra monies obtained would be added to the ADHS funds. Commissioner Eller asks why the change to Tatham Gap. Brian Burch stated that the CTP was the county's plan and that is not the issue, the issue is finding the money to do the projects as wanted in the CTP plan. Commissioner Nelms asks if we make the amendments with the exception of the Tatham Gap connector. Commissioner Nelms stated that this connector is the easiest answer to the Corridor K connector. Commissioner Eller stated that six years ago NCDOT stated that they lacked \$63 million dollars on the Stecoah to Robbinsville connection, Robbinsville to Andrews would be \$1 billion, and then after the meeting in Fontana everything blew up with the Corp of Engineers wanting the project to be one complete instead of two separate projects. Commissioner Eller asks if we are back to segmentation. Commissioner Nelms stated that he has asked why with no answers. Dirk Cody stated that unless Congress gives

NCDOT the money the connector from Robbinsville to Andrews would never happen. Brian Burch stated that we have \$200 million to do what we can at this time. Dirk Cody stated that this can be a tunnel or improve existing but the tunnel is an option. The board did not want to address Tatham Gap Road. Brian Burch stated that changes can be made later to the CTP if we are ranked to receive money. Commissioner Eller stated that the Tatham Gap Road is the better route and if we take an out will it be a stand-alone project and Brian Burch said no it means that is the way it is designated. Commissioner Eller stated that he did not read it that way. The board discussed the options. Commissioner Eller stated that if the board would take out the mention of Tatham Gap he would go along with the plan because he is not killing that for Corridor K. Brian Burch stated that the board was given a resolution by Rose at the last meeting. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board would table this discussion to the December 3rd meeting.

3. Chairman Wiggins adjourned the meeting.

Dale Wiggins, Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board