



**CITY OF DURHAM**

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March 11, 2011

Ms. Beverly Robinson  
NC Department of Transportation  
Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch  
1548 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548

Dear Ms. Robinson:

Thank you for attending the Durham City Council's March 10, 2011, work session. We appreciate the consideration you and Division 5 Engineer, Wally Bowman, gave to the City Council's questions and concerns regarding the NC Department of Transportation's proposed project to widen NC 55/Alston Avenue from NC 147 to NC 98/Holloway Street.

At its regular business meeting on March 21, 2011, the City Council will be considering the Department's request for a response to the proposal to use the eastern alignment for the widening. As you heard at the work session, the City Council's desire is to construct the project to accommodate the four-lane typical section but to initially stripe the project for two lanes with bicycle lanes and on-street parking until traffic warrants the conversion to the four-lane section.

The four-lane typical section provides for 27 feet of pavement on either side of the median. We request that the pavement be initially striped to provide a twelve-foot travel lane, five-foot bicycle lane, three-foot buffer between the parking and the bicycle lane, and seven-foot parking area (includes the two-foot gutter). Turn lanes should be provided as needed at intersections. We would like this cross-section used until the level-of-service for the intersections consistently falls below Level of Service E during peak hours and cannot be improved through operational changes. We would like the flexibility to have the cross-section vary within the corridor if there are logical transition points. The Alston Avenue corridor falls within the Downtown and Compact Neighborhood Tiers according to the Durham Comprehensive Plan. Level of Service E is the City's minimum standard for intersections in these tiers.

The City understands that the modeled future volumes of the roadway justify the ultimate four-lane cross-section and that the purpose and need of the project is to provide additional capacity to accommodate this traffic. However, since this widening project is anticipated to be complete near the same time that the East End Connector is completed, traffic volumes on Alston Avenue may initially decrease as compared to today's volumes. Furthermore, the addition of turn lanes at the intersections will improve the traffic flow through the corridor. We are hopeful that the two-lane improved section will provide a satisfactory improvement in the traffic flow in the interim until the ultimate four-lane cross-section is necessary.

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In addition to the functional improvement the interim two-lane improved cross-section will provide, this cross-section will also bolster the ongoing revitalization of the Alston Avenue corridor, help support the U.S. Department of Transportation's emphasis on creating livable communities, and be compatible with the NC Department of Transportation's vision for constructing "Complete Streets." A two-lane cross-section will help reduce speeds and make the road more hospitable to pedestrians and bicyclists. This is particularly important as the neighborhoods in this corridor are in the early stages of reinvestment and revitalization. We are concerned that the dramatic change of conversion to a four-lane section may stifle this reinvestment. The interim cross-section would best support the changes in the neighborhood while allowing flexibility to accommodate the longer term capacity needs.

In addition, the City Council requests that right-of-way acquisition for the properties between Main Street and Taylor Street be delayed as long as possible to allow for the option of using the western alignment should the environmental justice issue associated with the Los Primos grocery store change. While the City understands the need and importance of having a grocery store in this corridor, we are also concerned about the impact the eastern alignment has on the Durham Rescue Mission's property. The City's preference is to use the western alignment and understand that may be possible should the Los Primos grocery store close. Delaying right-of-way acquisition for this section of the road would allow for this option should conditions change in the coming years.

We appreciate your consideration of the City's requests for the widening of Alston Avenue. So the City Council can consider the Department's position before the March 21, 2011 general business meeting, we would appreciate a response by Friday, March 18, 2011. Please contact Mark Ahrendsen with any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Bonfield  
City Manager

TJB\eeb

c: Chuck Watts, NC Board of Transportation  
J. Wally Bowman, PE, NC Department of Transportation  
Mayor and City Council