



September 20, 2022

John E. Sandor, District Engineer
District 2, North Carolina Department of Transportation
815 Stadium Drive
Durham, NC 27704

Sean Egan, Director
Transportation Department, City of Durham
101 City Hall Plaza
Durham, NC 27701

Dear Mr. Sandor and Mr. Egan,

The Durham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) is an advisory board appointed by the Durham City Council and the Durham County Commissioners. BPAC works to make Durham a more walk-able, bike-able, and transit-friendly community for all residents.

We at BPAC believe that our roadways should be safe, comfortable, and accessible to all of its users, whether they are drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, or transit-users. Erwin Road is a core piece of Durham's transportation network, and we should be making every effort to modernize Erwin Road to make it a public facility that achieves our city's goals for accessible transportation.

BPAC is disappointed with the NCDOT and the City of Durham on how the study and design for this resurfacing was conducted and in the criteria that was used to justify denying important improvements along Erwin Road for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit-users. BPAC feels the following issues specifically demonstrate an improper prioritization of the needs of roadway users:

- The NCDOT was unwilling to delay the resurfacing as proposed by BPAC in December of 2021. This would have given more time for proper community engagement and design iterations.
- The NCDOT rejected the proposal by the City of Durham and its consulting team to add bus lanes in at least one direction due to projected intersection delays in 2035. Long term traffic projections are highly speculative, and we have seen that AADT volume on Erwin Road has remained flat for the last 20 years. Even when designing for the future, we should be designing our streets for a multi-modal transportation future, and should not be compromising today's pedestrians, cyclists, and transit-users for the speculation of more single-occupancy vehicles in 15 years.

- The NCDOT staff did not use this opportunity to relocate ramps and provide more direct, shorter crosswalks, even though the District Engineer said they would do this in June.
- The City of Durham did not share the results of any traffic analyses conducted for current year build scenarios. Knowing the current year level-of-service analysis may have presented an opportunity to negotiate with the NCDOT to provide improvements now and monitor effects over the coming years.
- The City of Durham did not share the results of any traffic analyses conducted for bicycle-lane-only build scenarios, either for current year or 2035.
- The City of Durham did not advocate strongly enough with the NCDOT for improvements to Erwin Road, nor did the City properly inform and utilize the Transportation Department Planning team that was meant to be helping with this project.
- The consultants working on the project had access to Streetlight data on bicycling volume but appear to have not used it. 2019 data shows a weekday average of 146 eastbound and 91 westbound trips. This is a high volume considering the current difficulty of bicycling on Erwin Road and demonstrates a latent demand for better infrastructure.

In order to reclaim this opportunity to improve Erwin Road for all users, BPAC signs onto Bike Durham's recommendation that the following elements be included in the upcoming resurfacing this fall:

- Provide physically protected bike lanes on both sides of Erwin Road between Main Street and Trent Drive, and between Morreene Road and Cameron Boulevard.
- Reserve a lane for use only by buses, emergency vehicles, and bikes on both sides of Erwin Road between Trent Drive and Morreene Road.
- Improve the safety of existing pedestrian crosswalks by increasing visibility, using Leading Pedestrian Intervals, disallowing right turn on red, and extending curbs to shorten crossing distances.

In addition to these short-term changes, BPAC signs onto Bike Durham's request that the NCDOT, the City of Durham, and Duke University work together to develop a long-term vision for Erwin Road that includes at least the following elements:

- Improved bus infrastructure and facilities to enable Bus Rapid Transit, including increased frequency, Transit Signal Priority, and improved stations.
- Protected facility for those bicycling, using scooters, electric wheelchairs and other mobility devices throughout the whole length of Erwin Road. The experience of such users must be as safe and comfortable as it is for cars.
- More safe, mid-block crossings for pedestrians, either through the use of signals or other means of traffic calming. The many pedestrians that access the area should be able to cross Erwin Road more easily and more frequently.
- More tree coverage, improved lighting, shorter crossing distances, and other facilities to improve the experience of all types of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit-users.

The City should not wait until the next resurfacing of Erwin Road to implement these fundamental and important changes. We at BPAC believe that this opportunity to significantly improve Erwin Road should not be missed, and there should be an ongoing effort to turn Erwin Road into a facility that reflects the priorities of our city.

Sincerely,



Susanne Schmal, BPAC Chair

cc: Brandon Jones, Division Engineer, Division 5, NCDOT
Ryan Brumfield, Director, Integrated Mobility Division, NCDOT
Nicholas Morrison, Transportation Planner, Integrated Mobility Division, NCDOT
Dr. Eugene Washington, President and CEO, DUHS, Duke University
Javiera Caballero, Durham City Council
Heidi Carter, Durham Board of County Commissioners
Dale McKeel, Durham City Department of Transportation