

The Courier-Times

Transportation plans win state approval

BY BILL WILLCOX
COURIER-TIMES STAFF WRITER
billwillcox@roxboro-courier.com

The N.C. Board of Transportation has approved funding for its 10-year State Transportation Improvement Plan, which includes two major projects in Person County set to be completed in the next five years.

The first one, set to begin in fiscal year 2019, is a runway extension at the Person County Executive Airport. The project, with a total project cost of \$11.23 million, includes a 10 percent match from the county. It will extend the runway length to 7,000 feet, and include an extension of the taxiway and relocation of Cates Mill Road.

The county's matching funds are being allocated from \$800,000 in funding

previously earmarked for a future airport hangar, with the remainder drawn from the county's fund balance.

The project is expected to have positive economic impact for the county.

According to Stuart Gilbert, the Person County economic development director, the airport already has a total economic impact of almost \$68 million in annual output, providing 100 direct jobs and a total of 220 jobs.

"The benefits of a longer runway are more planes, and larger planes can come into your airport," Gilbert said. "The more planes that come into your airport, the greater the economic benefit of the airport."

The second project will include installation

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AIRPORT: As part of plan, DOT also approves plans for median along Madison Blvd.

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of medians along a three-mile stretch of Madison Boulevard, among other improvements.

The \$32.6 million project will convert Madison Boulevard from U.S. 158 to North Main Street into a four-lane highway with a median dividing traffic. It will also improve some intersections while filling in some gaps in the sidewalks.

The project was accelerated by two years in an updated plan released earlier this year because the state projected an additional \$2.5 billion in revenues, and added 144 new state projects, while accelerating 350 projects, including Madison Boulevard.

The project is already listed as being in the plan-

ning and design stage.

DOT Division 5 Engineer Joey Hopkins said Madison Boulevard has a history of safety problems, with the way people pull in and out of driveways, and drivers turning left and using the center lane as a merge lane, which is illegal.

"The idea is to improve that section," he said, "add sidewalk and crosswalks at appropriate locations and clean up the boulevard."

CONSTRUCTION STARTING IN 2022

Construction is scheduled to begin in FY 2022 and last two years, with right-of-way acquisition in FY 2020.

Both the runway and Madison Boulevard projects are within the

five-year window of the transportation plan and designated as "fixed," or "deliverable," Hopkins said. He said the only factor which could derail the plans might be a sudden, steep downturn in the economy.

"We will be starting project development pretty quickly," he said.

The process will start with DOT officials meeting with stakeholders in county and city government. After that, there will be an opportunity for the public to comment on the project specifics, including what they want to see and what they don't want to see.

"It is not a short process, but it is lengthy because of the laws and rules we have to follow and also the opportunities for all the stakeholders to par-

ticipate," Hopkins said. "I don't want to have a project designed behind closed doors. We can't make everyone happy but we want to give everyone a chance to participate in the process so we get a good product."

He said that by 2020, DOT will have the plans developed be able to move forward.

"They won't be final plans," he said, "but they will be far along to where we can go to right-of-way," he said.

"There will be some tweaking needed but you will be able to tell what the final plan is, but there is a lot of work to do over the next two years to get to that point, a lot of coordination with the stakeholders, the residents, the businesses, the community."

MAYOR WELCOMES NEWS

Roxboro Mayor Marilyn Newell said the funding allocation was welcome news.

"Anytime we can receive DOT funding for long-range improvements to infrastructure in Roxboro and Person County it is a significant accomplishment," she said. "While these projects serve different and important needs in our community, we are confident that with the appropriate input for design from our citizens and stakeholders, we will benefit from enhanced accessibility by air and increased safety on our roads."

Not all business owners support the ideas of medians on Madison Boulevard. Larry Cole, owner of Furniture Mart and America's Mattress on

Madison Boulevard is one.

Last year, in May, he spoke before the city council and Person County Board of Commissioners, expressing strong concern that medians will hurt his business, and others as well, because southbound drivers will not be able to turn left into his furniture store's parking lot, but instead make a U-turn and come back.

The concept of the medians dates back to the county's Comprehensive Transportation Plan, adopted by the state, county and city in 2011.

County staff worked with DOT engineers to develop solutions to the growing congestion and number of crashes on Madison Boulevard and that is how the idea of medians was first proposed.