

DANIEL A. OKUN

ATTACHMENT 10

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April 1, 2002

Mr. Lyndo Tippet
Secretary of Transportation, NC DOT
1501 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1501

Dear Mr. Tippet:

Re: SR 1733 (Weaver Dairy Road)

I have been a resident of Chapel Hill for almost fifty years, serving the University of North Carolina all of that time, including eighteen years as head of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering. I am a professional civil engineer, the first engineer from the State of North Carolina elected to the National Academy of Engineering. I have been a resident at the Carol Woods Retirement Community for five years. The purpose of this letter is to oppose the proposed project.

Your January 2002 Environmental Assessment on the project states: "The purpose of the proposed project is to increase the traffic carrying capacity of the roadway and enhance safety so that Weaver Dairy Road can serve as the northern link in a corridor that will connect residential, commercial and retail areas to US 15-501 and NC 86, both of which access I-40."

The principal purpose of the project is to provide a major traffic artery between Route 15-501 and Route 86 (Airport Road). Enhancing safety on Weaver Dairy Road is hardly in the picture. Your data (Table 3) on accident rates on Weaver Dairy Road indicate that the number of accidents per 100 million vehicle miles (mvm) is only 4% greater than the statewide average for similar Urban Secondary Routes. This is not statistically significant. Furthermore, no fatalities occurred on Weaver Dairy Road as compared with 0.66 mvm for the state. Nevertheless, an objective of the people who live in the neighborhood is to further improve the safety of Weaver Dairy Road.

If safety on Weaver Dairy Road was an objective, one of the many project alternatives might well have been improvements to the existing Weaver Dairy Road to reduce accidents: signal lights, sidewalks, traffic calmers, turnoffs etc. These would cost a very small fraction of the \$11,225,000 required for the recommended project.

More important is that none of the many alternatives in the Environmental Assessment recognizes that a high-speed link already exists on Interstate I-40 between Exit 270 on US 15-501 and Exit 266 on NC 86. That stretch is already scheduled to be widened to six lanes.

All of the above is only an introduction to the issues that disturb me, many other residents of Carol Woods, and our many neighbors in the area, all of whose environment and quality

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of life would be seriously impacted by a project that is clearly costly and that affords relatively little, if any, traffic relief to commuters and large trucks that would drive between US 15-501 and NC 86. It hardly seems to be fiscally wise in these years of North Carolina's straitened financial condition to spend more than \$11 million while discomfiting a large neighborhood.

The neighborhood already suffers from the noise and air pollution from the traffic on I-40. The increased noise and air pollution that would result from the creation of another major thoroughfare through the neighborhood would seriously degrade the environmental quality for the residents and employees of Carol Woods and the many residents on and near both sides of Weaver Dairy Road.

A few words about the project's impact on the residents of the area may be helpful in understanding the feelings of those who live here. We do not want a divided highway, similar to Airport Road, cutting through our neighborhood. While signed for 35 mph, traffic on Airport Road north of Homestead Road travels over 50 mph. Pedestrians would hesitate crossing Weaver Dairy Road, despite the proposed median strip, because traffic on the two lanes would be heavier and speeds would be greater than they are now or would be in the future if Weaver Dairy Road is enlarged.

Expanding the right-of-way from about 44 feet to almost 70 feet would eliminate much of the woodland which is the pride of the neighborhood. It would increase the noise and air pollution because of the heavier traffic and higher speeds. Your report shows a very conservative estimate of the noise increase of from about 60 to 69 decibels as a result of the project. This represents an almost ten-fold increase in the noise level. Air pollution from the increased traffic will penetrate the heart of the neighborhood. The heavy construction to build the highway will create sediment flow during rainy periods that will muddy the creeks; despite regulations, sediment control on construction projects is notoriously inadequate.

Because the NC DOT has made funds available for this proposed project is no reason that it needs to be accepted by the Town of Chapel Hill if the damage done is far greater than any benefits that might accrue. If the NC DOT does not want to finance the safety improvements on the existing Weaver Dairy Road, which would be very modest, the Town might pay for them, but that would be an unseemly attitude when this alternative would save the DOT many millions of dollars.

Sincerely

Copies:

Kevin Foy, Mayor of Chapel Hill

Douglas Gaylon, Chair Board of Transportation

William Gilmore, Manager Project Development and Environmental Analysis