



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY
GOVERNOR

LYNDO TIPPETT
SECRETARY

February 15, 2001

Honorable Rosemary I. Waldorf, Mayor
Town of Chapel Hill
306 North Columbia Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

SUBJECT: Proposed improvements to Weaver Dairy Road (SR 1733), from NC 86 to Erwin Road (SR 1734) in Chapel Hill, Orange County, Federal Aid Project No. MASTP 1733(11), State Project No. 8.2501601, TIP Project No. U-3306

Dear Mayor Waldorf,

Thank you for your input and that of the Town Council during the project development process for the proposed Weaver Dairy Road Improvement Project (TIP Project U-3306) between NC 86 and Erwin Road in Chapel Hill. We also appreciate your efforts to involve and solicit comments from interested citizens regarding this proposed project. All of the discussion and comments have been very helpful in our understanding of the desires and objectives of the Chapel Hill community as related to proposed improvements on Weaver Dairy Road.

At the Local Officials Meeting and Citizens Informational Workshop on April 28, 1999, when the NCDOT agreed to study eight different project design alternatives, I advised you and others present that if either a three-lane or four-lane curb and gutter cross section were chosen it would have to be approved by the appropriate NCDOT officials.

In response to the Town Council's resolution endorsing a three-lane curb and gutter facility (Alternative 4A) for Weaver Dairy Road, I have had discussions with Transportation Board Member Doug Galyon, Division Engineer Mike Mills, Deputy Highway Administrator Len Hill, and members of both the Roadway Design Unit and the Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch to determine if such a cross-section would be acceptable to the State for improving Weaver Dairy Road.

After due consideration from all pertinent perspectives, it was determined that the NCDOT would not recommend construction of a three-lane project as endorsed by the Chapel Hill Town Council. It is the State's opinion that a three-lane project would not adequately meet the projected service and safety needs of this important transportation corridor. The NCDOT recommends construction of a four-lane divided cross section as outlined in Alternative 1A Revised (see Attached Cross Section).

This is the alternative that the Town Manager recommended to the Town Council at the regular meeting on January 22, 2001. This alternative calls for a four-lane median divided cross section consisting of: two travel lanes in each direction with wide outside lanes to accommodate bicycle use, a narrowed raised center median with exclusive turn lanes and refuge areas for pedestrians, sidewalks along both sides of the roadway, and bus pull-offs as necessary.

Alternative 1A Revised, which was developed by the NCDOT in conjunction with Town staff, would best address the concerns of all parties and would meet the long-range transportation plans for the area. We believe that this alternative would be safer than a three-lane cross section because it would best tie together the existing improvements (previously constructed by private developers as required by the Town) and would create continuity between different sections of the project corridor, thereby most reasonably accommodating drivers' expectations. Traffic safety would also be improved by including a center median in the project, which would separate traffic flow, allow for exclusive left turn lanes, and provide crossovers at logical locations.

Pedestrian safety would be enhanced by the refuge area created by installation of a center median, which would allow pedestrians to cross only half of the roadway (two travel lanes, both in the same direction) at a time. Additionally, the center median would provide landscaping opportunities to both beautify the roadway corridor and to eliminate the potential "runway" appearance of a three-lane or five-lane undivided cross section.

This State recommended design alternative would provide a high level of service (traffic capacity) for motorists in the design year (2025) which could not be achieved with a three-lane cross section. Also, a three-lane cross section would require supplementary improvements such as exclusive right turn lanes to maintain even marginal traffic capacity in the design year, and therefore raises serious concerns as to its viability as an acceptable long-range transportation solution for the Weaver Dairy Road corridor.

The preliminary design for the State approved alternative (Alternative 1A Revised) indicates two more impacts to residences than would occur with a three-lane cross section as endorsed by the Town Council. However, we think it is possible that these and other impacts could be avoided by careful and creative engineering during the design phase of the project. The revised four-lane divided cross section proposed by the Town Manager and the State would maximize the function, safety, and aesthetics of the improvements with minimal impacts on the project corridor.

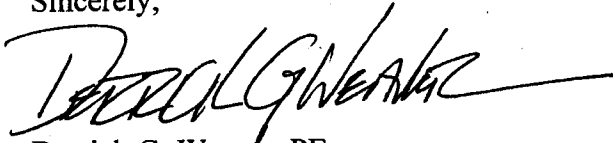
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The NCDOT will work closely with the Town staff during the final design phase of the project to determine locations of bus pullouts, median crossovers, and pedestrian crosswalks. Improvements such as new traffic signals and roundabouts will also be considered, to properly manage traffic and to create a safe environment for all Weaver Dairy Road users.

The NCDOT will work with Town staff and residents to maintain reasonable and safe access to the homes located along Country Road off of Cedar Fork Trail. Also, we agree that the existing improvements adjacent to the Chesley and Silver Creek neighborhoods should not be disturbed by the proposed project. If the Town would like this segment of the project to have a raised center median installed in place of the existing center turn lane, we would agree to include such a conversion wherever feasible to do so in the project, provided that the Town agreed to pay for any additional design and construction costs associated with retrofitting the median.

As requested in your letter, the NCDOT is continuing to work on the project Environmental Assessment and design in order to hold a public hearing this summer. If you have any questions or concerns about this recommendation, please contact Doug Galyon at 336-316-4208 or me at 919-733-7844 ext. 215.

Sincerely,

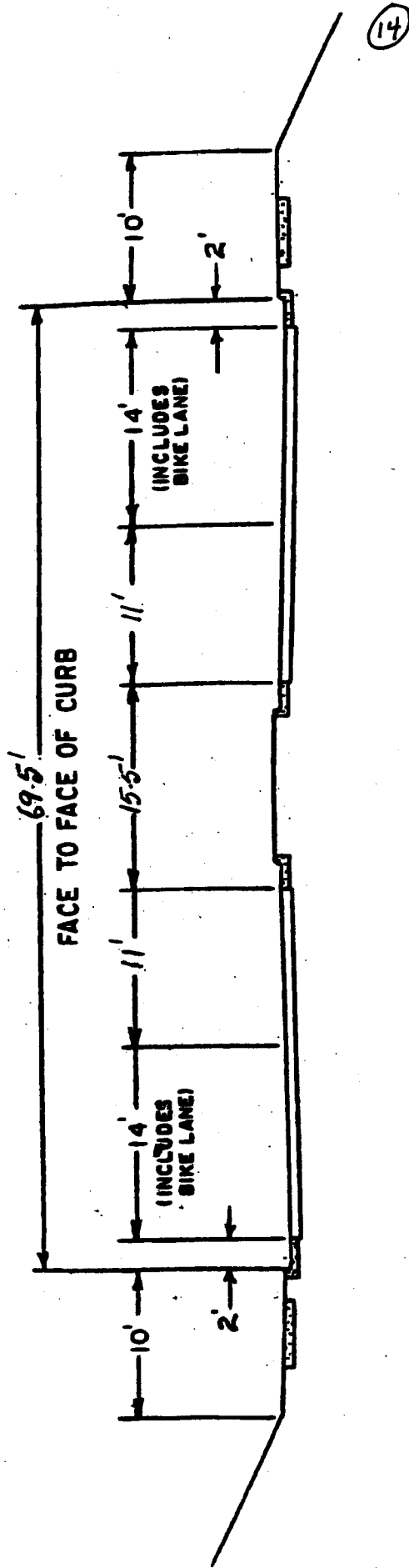


Derrick G. Weaver, PE
Project Development Engineer

- cc: W. Calvin Horton, Chapel Hill Town Manager
George Small, P.E., Chapel Hill Director of Engineering
Doug Galyon, NCDOT Board Member
Mike Mills, P.E., Division Engineer
Len Hill, P.E., Deputy Highway Administrator
Kathy Lassiter, P.E., Roadway Design Engineer
Linwood Stone, Project Development Unit Head

Attachment: Alternative 1A Revised Cross Section

MANAGERS' RECOMMENDATION



ALTERNATIVE 1A REVISED

**FOUR LANE DIVIDED MEDIAN
WITH CURB AND GUTTER**