

RTP companies push for Davis Drive widening

By Ron Page

As the population mounts and traffic increases in the Triangle, Morrisville officials are taking stock of how the town will be affected and what can be done about it.

For instance, should the widening of Davis Drive be given priority among projects affecting transportation in and about Morrisville? Developers of Research Triangle Park think so, but Morrisville Commissioner Billy Sauls says that while the project has merit, there are more pressing needs.

A number of projects by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT) affecting transportation in or about Morrisville are either on the drawing boards, ready to start, or already under way. The realignment of Morrisville-Carpenter Road where it connects with N.C. 54 is currently under way. Another that isn't, however, is a proposal from RTP to widen Davis Drive from N.C. 54 to Salem Church Road.

In a report last month to town commissioners, Community Development Director Mike Allway listed results of a study he made of major projects affecting the town by DOT's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which includes roadway widenings, railroad crossing warning devices and the extension of dead-end roadways.

Each year, Morrisville, like other towns, submits a list of local priorities for state evaluation, hopefully inclusion on the TIP list.

Widening Davis Drive has been cited in letters from James O. Roberson of the Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, developers of RTP, and Nancy A. Schwarm, a manager with Cisco Systems, Inc.

Both letters recommended including the widening of Davis Drive in the 1998-2004 TIP. Roberson said with the opening of five new facilities in the Wake County portion of RTP, the traffic on Davis has grown exponentially in recent years.

Roberson said he felt Davis Drive is "approaching capacity in the peak hours," adding that RTP employs 36,000 people and represents a capital investment of more than \$2 billion.

"Adequate road infrastructure is imperative to the continued development of the Wake County portion of RTP," he said. "Existing Wake County RTP companies such as Ericsson, Cisco, and Biogen have ambitious master plans for future expansions, but these com-

panies need to feel confident that their employees will be able to get to work safely and efficiently.

"Given the long lead time which is inherent in planning for road construction, we believe it is vital to include Davis Drive in the Transportation Improvement Program as soon as possible," he said.

Schwarm mentioned peak traffic problems on the road, citing the need for widening to accommodate future development. But Commissioner Sauls said other projects are more beneficial to the town at this point in time. "Davis Drive is going to be built anyway. We don't want to use our chips to get what we can attain. Davis Drive is going to take care of itself," he said.

Two of the TIP projects affecting Morrisville which were not instituted by the town include N.C. 147 (Exit 279) in Research Triangle Park to Bradshaw Freeway at Wade Avenue (Exit 289), a stretch of roadway of about 9.4 miles which will be widened to eight lanes at a cost of \$51 million. A date for construction has not yet been scheduled.

The second is the Northern Wake Expressway, a four-lane divided freeway which will run from N.C. 55 west to U.S. 64 near Knightdale. It will be about 29 miles long, carrying a cost of \$509 million. Currently under construction, it is expected to be finished by 2003.

Currently under way is the realignment of Morrisville-Carpenter Road crossing at Norfolk Southern Railway and N.C. 54 to meet Aviation Parkway. Automatic warning devices and traffic lights, including left-turn lights, will be installed. N.C. 54 will be elevated as it approaches the new intersection. This \$1.3 million project includes the closure of the Ashe Street crossing at N.C. 54. It is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The other TIP projects under study include:
 * Extension of Cary Parkway from High House Road to N.C. 54 north of Evans Road. This multi-lane facility will cover 2.1 miles and will cost approximately \$12 million. It is scheduled for completion by 1999.
 * Widening of Aviation Parkway for about 2.6 miles from N.C. 54 to I-40 at a cost of about \$4.8 million with planning to start in 1999 and construction completed by 2003.

* A safety feature also scheduled for this year is the installation of automatic warning devices at railroad crossing at Barbee Road at a cost of \$75,000.

* Widening of Airport Boulevard to five lanes for about 1.9 miles from N.C. 54 to I-40 at a cost of \$3.4 million. Phase One construction to be completed by 1998, and Phase Two by 2003.

* Revise automatic warning devices on Morrisville Parkway at Norfolk Southern Railway Crossing this year at a cost of \$75,000.

* Extend McCrimmon Parkway from N.C. 54 to Airport Boulevard as a multi-lane curb and gutter facility. This is scheduled for a feasibility study.

In connection with the latter project, commissioners also added the planning, design and construction of McCrimmon Parkway from Evans Road at Aviation Parkway to Airport Boulevard. The two projects would open McCrimmon Parkway from N.C. 54 through to connect with Evans Road.

Another project not addressed in the 1998-2004 TIP, which commissioners also recommended, is the widening of Aviation Parkway from N.C. 54 to I-40 as a multi-lane facility.



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