Lack of Funding from North Carolina Department of Transportation will suspend some Winston-Salem Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization projects

On May 21, 2020 the Winston Salem Urban Area Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) received a presentation from NCDOT Division 9 Engineer Pat Ivey and Central Region Manager Mike Stanley regarding state funding for the MPO.

According to Ivey and Stanley, NCDOT funding was not in an ideal position prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and the resulting Stay at Home Order in March. The General Maintenance Reserve (GMR) appropriations have been lower than previous years, and increases in legal settlements and storm response and recovery have left maintenance funding in an extremely poor situation.

The NCDOT is 100% receipt funded and has three main funding sources; the NC Motor Fuels Tax (Gas Tax), the Highway Use Tax, and DMV fees. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Average Daily Trips have been reduced significantly in past months causing a severe drop in the funds received from the gas tax. Though the department was already in a poor funding situation at the beginning of 2020, they remained above their cash floor. However, since the hit of COVID-19, the department has now reached their cash floor.

So how will this impact WSUAMPO projects?
- Projects currently programmed in STIP with a phase in FFY2020 that have an agreement but no funds authorized, or have no agreement executed as of yet, will not be authorized by the NCDOT. The Local Government Agency (LGA) will need to work with their Division to re-program these projects for FFY2021 or beyond.
- Projects which have authorized PE or ROW phases, but no contract commitments or cost incursions will be suspended and the future phasing schedule updated.
- If the LGA has already entered into a contract or incurred costs, the work may continue on the current phase but future phases will be rescheduled and the NCDOT will not increase funding that has not already been authorized.
- Projects which have construction phase authorization and the LGA is in the letting phase will have the work suspended and phasing schedule updated.
- If the project is already in the construction phase, completion will be pursued and all funds previously approved in the agreement will be reimbursed.

The initial drop in Average Daily Trips has hit the department budget hard, but the month of May has shown a steady increase in trips across the state and some municipalities are showing near normal numbers. So while the COVID-19 crisis will put a hold on a number of 2020 projects, a continued increase in revenues from the gas tax can only help the funding outlook for 2021.
Draft Airport/Whitaker Park Area Plan available to view

The draft Smith Reynolds Airport/Whitaker Park Strategic Area Plan is available to view online. The City-County Planning Board unanimously recommended the plan at a public hearing held on March 12, 2020. Another public hearing will be held at a future Winston-Salem City Council meeting before the council votes on it.

Four community meetings were held by elected officials and planning staff with residents and business owners to produce the draft plan. It provides approximately 25 recommendations on using the assets of Smith Reynolds Airport and Whitaker Business Park (and the plan area’s proximity to the Innovation Quarter) to increase economic development opportunities in the community, and how the appearance of the surrounding area can be improved through design enhancements.

The recommendations fall into six categories:

- Strengthen transportation linkages in the area
- Make Smith Reynolds Airport and its surrounding area an attractive gateway to the city
- Recruit aviation/aerospace-related businesses
- Cultivate job skills of area residents
- Publicize available business assistance pro-
grams
- Improve potential streetscape and development focus areas

City-County Planning and Smith Reynolds Airport would like to thank everyone who came out to the meetings and submitted their feedback. Those who signed up for updates at the meetings will continue to receive update emails. You can also follow Forsyth CountyNC and CityofWinstonSalem on Facebook for updates. The entire plan can be viewed at: www.cityofws.org/2348/AirportWhitaker-Park-Plan.

Potential Streetscape Improvements for Akron Drive/North Glenn Avenue/ North Liberty Street Intersections

United Airlines parking planes at Smith Reynolds Airport due to downturn in flights

United Airlines plans to park several of its aircraft at Smith Reynolds Airport due to the downturn in passenger flights during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aviation industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and Smith Reynolds Airport was not spared. Some of the airport's tenants were forced to furlough employees, while others scaled back hours to retain their workforce. The airport’s largest tenant, North State Aviation (NSA), temporarily furloughed its employees on April 8, but was able to bring them back on April 27, by negotiating a plan with the airlines.

Due to the dramatic loss in passengers, the airlines needed to take aircraft out of service and park them at airports across the United States. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), reported a 96% drop in screened passengers during the month of April when compared to the same time last year. Realizing the urgency of the situation, NSA with support from Forsyth County Government and AVCON, supplied the airlines with various parking plans to ensure the airlines that Smith Reynolds Airport had the capacity to accommodate over 40 B737s and B757s.

When United Airlines committed to Smith Reynolds Airport, the parking plan was approved by the FAA. In addition, the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office stepped up to increase security. “It has been a team approach at Smith Reynolds Airport in regards to navigating the COVID-19 crisis,” said Airport Director Mark Davidson. “We are happy United Airlines recognized the Airport as a resource and we hope they will continue to come to the Airport for all their maintenance needs after the crisis ends.”
Winston-Salem Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

The update of the WSUAMPO’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan has begun. The Making Connections 2045 MTP has been scheduled for completion in September 2020. This plan will also update our current Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) and illustrate the region’s vision for it’s multi-modal transportation network over the next 25 years as well as the necessary steps needed to achieve this vision.

The assessment of Existing Conditions in the MPO has already been completed; the consultant and steering committee are now developing recommendations and assessing future conditions. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, public meetings were required to be held virtually instead of in-person. A good amount of feedback was also received from those who took the online survey; the majority of survey-takers were from Winston-Salem and Kernersville but there were also participants from some of the smaller communities in the MPO. All of those who took the time to participate in the public input process and provide their feedback are greatly appreciated. Further plan updates and information can be viewed online at www.wsmtupdate.com, there will be more input opportunities for those who would like to get further involved in the update process.

TRANSIT

Winston-Salem Transit Authority implements service strategies to combat COVID-19

On February 26, 2020, WSTA general manager, Donna Woodson, started formulating a strategic plan for WSTA to implement in the event of possible service interruptions due to the Corona Virus (COVID-19). Although there were no indications anyone in the Winston-Salem community had been infected at that time, WSTA staff developed a plan focused on ensuring the continuation of fixed route and para-transit services.

Fast forward to April 2020 and WSTA is using the operation strategies created to maintain service to the citizens of Winston-Salem. The plan included differentiating service levels (listed below). Due in part to a Stay-at-Home order enacted by Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines and NC Governor Roy Cooper, WSTA saw an obvious reduction in phone calls and passengers on the fixed route and para-transit services. This enabled Woodson to recommend moving to Level 1 service (Saturday routes only), which started on March 30.

LEVEL 1- Saturday service Monday–Saturday with Sunday service as normal. 6am-12am/Trans-AID normal service

LEVEL 2- Sunday service seven days a week. 7am–7pm (the end time may be extended depending on the order of shut down)/ Trans-AID medical, life-sustaining, grocery and pharmacy

LEVEL 3: No Fixed Route service/Trans-AID life sustaining only (if the Governor, mayor or president mandate a city/state/ nationwide shutdown with curfews)

Woodson also recommended waiting to implement fare-free service, to discourage an increase in ridership. More passengers means less control over the use of social distancing, which is one of the measures suggested by the CDC to combat the spread of COVID-19. The fare-free service was implemented on April 15. Ridership immediately increased upon the start of the free service.

WSTA implemented a 15-passenger limit on fixed route buses and an 8-9 passenger limit on all Trans-AID vehicles. Because of the design of the Trans-AID buses, passengers must enter and exit through the front door of the bus. As an additional safety measure, fixed route passengers enter and exit from the rear-door. This greatly limits interactions between operators and the riding public.

WSTA is being responsive to the concerns of its employees by issuing masks, and hand sanitizer to all operators and other WSTA employees. Additionally, temporary staff was brought in to sanitize the buses on an hourly basis. Increased ridership requires increased safety procedures. All the service changes have required WSTA to constantly update the WSTA website and social media outlets. WSTA has been conscientious in keeping the passengers and general public aware of the information surrounding service changes; and sharing Facebook posts regarding vital service announcements by the City of Winston-Salem.

We are closely monitoring the status of ridership and passenger/employee safety. As with all public transit agencies, we look forward to normalcy with guarded anticipation.

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Active Transportation

Pedestrian Plan Update

The City of Winston-Salem has started the update of their Pedestrian Master Plan, "Walkable Winston-Salem". The update process began in January 2020 and Staff is aiming to have the plan ready for adoption at the beginning of 2021. The plan is geared towards addressing the public need for improved accessibility and more pedestrian facilities. Staff and the Steering committee have already worked to outline goals for this plan so that the expected outcome is clear and understood. This plan will be focused on increasing safety and livability, enhancing the health and mobility of our communities, promoting equity, protecting the environment, and generating a positive economic impact. The update process began with analyzing existing conditions throughout different neighborhoods to identify needs for specific areas and the unmet demands for Winston-Salem as a whole. With the existing conditions assessment finished, the drafting of the plan will now begin.

The City would like to invite the public to participate in the public workshops planned for July 2020.

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Mayor Larry Williams Retirement

Mayor Larry Williams has now retired after 28 years of service to the Town of Rural Hall. Williams is originally from Gastonia, North Carolina, where he graduated from Ashley High School in the early 1960s. Mayor Williams is a graduate of NC State University and began working for the NCDOT in Traffic Engineering and Highway Safety after earning his Civil Engineering degree. Mayor Williams and his wife moved to Rural Hall in 1966. In 1991, Williams ran for mayor of Rural Hall because he felt it was his civic duty to serve the Town. In his time as mayor, Williams has served on various different committees and was the chairman of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC serves as a forum for cooperative transportation planning and decision making for the Winston-Salem Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WSUAMPO); Mayor Williams’s last meeting with the TAC was November 12, 2019. Williams has also dedicated his time serving as member on the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART) Board of Trustees. Congratulations to Mr. Williams on his recent retirement, and thank you for your leadership and service for our community.

WSDOT relocating to Union Station

The Winston-Salem Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is moving from the Bryce A. Stuart Municipal Building downtown to the newly renovated Union Station on Martin Luther King Jr Drive. Union Station is a former train station designed by Fellheimer and Wagner in 1925. It was Winston-Salem’s main passenger train station from 1926 to 1970. The Department’s relocation adjacent to Winston-Salem’s only Historically Black University or College (HBCU) will bring more opportunities for citizens and hardworking students.
In March, Victoria joined our staff as the newest Transportation Planner. She is a Forsyth County native with a Bachelor of Science degree from NC State University and a Master of Arts degree in Applied Geography from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Prior to joining WSDOT, Victoria worked for the Town of Pittsboro as a Planner II where she handled a variety of Land Use planning projects. Victoria likes to travel and always enjoys a good NC State football game!