

1.0 Introduction and Project Background

US 52 plays a critical role in the transportation system of the City of Winston-Salem and the Piedmont Triad region. This urban freeway passes through downtown Winston-Salem and provides an important link between I-77 to the north and I-40 and I-85 to the south. With increasing congestion and eroding travel conditions, it was recognized that both capacity and safety improvements were needed for the US 52 facility. In response to this need, the *US 52 Land Use and Transportation Plan* (2004) was conducted which presented design plans for the reconstruction of US 52 to interstate highway standards and recommended strategies for the coordination of this project with the future land use plans along the corridor. Since the completion of the first phase of the US 52 corridor study, several major development projects have been proposed for the downtown area and the surrounding communities which require further evaluation as to the impacts they will have on the existing and future transportation network. This second phase of study considers the opportunities to better serve area travelers by integrating the proposed reconstruction of the US 52 facility with other planned roadway and transit improvements as well as the major development projects proposed for the Winston-Salem area.

These recent development proposals include the major expansion of the Piedmont Triad Research Park, the redevelopment plans for the communities of Happy Hill Gardens and the Southeast Gateway Venture area, the Winston-Salem State University campus expansion master plan, the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART) commuter rail initiative and the potential streetcar system being considered for the City.

1.1 Planning Context

In 2002, the City of Winston-Salem authorized RS&H, Inc. to conduct a feasibility study of potential transportation improvements for a 12-mile segment of the US 52 corridor extending from the proposed Northern Beltway to I-40 in Winston-Salem. This study was accompanied by a detailed land use and economic development analysis that provided guidance for the City as to the potential for the redevelopment and revitalization of areas along the corridor. These efforts resulted in the adoption of the *US 52 Land Use and Transportation Plan* by the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Metropolitan Planning Organization in 2003. This Plan was completed in 2004 and contained a detailed land use and transportation plan for the reconstruction of the US 52 corridor as a six to eight-lane facility that meets interstate highway design standards and accommodates future travel demand in the area.



This earlier study, referred to as “Phase 1” of the planning efforts conducted for the US 52 corridor, included preliminary roadway design plans and detailed traffic operations for the future reconstruction of the US 52 facility as well as a land use and economic development strategy for the corridor and its environs. The Phase 1 Plan also emphasized the need to provide stronger connections between communities that are currently separated by the US 52 corridor. In addition, the Plan suggested the redesign of several access points along US 52 so that they would serve as community gateways, signifying the entrance into major activity centers and communities.

This current phase of planning is referred to as the *Phase 2 – US 52 Land Use and Multi-modal Transportation Circulation Plan* and focuses on an approximate two-mile segment of US 52 located between Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and the Vargrave Street interchanges and includes the areas within a half-mile east and west of the corridor. Figure 1-1 shows the project location and surrounding area.

1.2 Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Legacy Comprehensive Plan

To help guide the planning direction for the Phase 2 project, the overall planning goals and visions for the development of the Winston-Salem area as outlined in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Legacy Comprehensive Plan (2001) were reviewed and the most applicable elements of the Comprehensive Plan are highlighted below. As stated in the Growth Management Plan contained in the Legacy Comprehensive Plan for the region -

In the year 2015 we envision that....

- Downtown Winston-Salem is now full of vitality. A diversity of uses and activities has reestablished it as the physical and spiritual center of our community. Downtown has grown upward reducing the need for development to grow outward.
- Our creative use of abandoned buildings and vacant land in older residential, commercial and industrial areas has resulted in the transformation of these areas into productive and attractive urban environments. As a result we have created a more balanced pattern of development in our community.
- Our new compact pattern of development has resulted in more people using public transportation than at any time in the past, and traffic congestion and air pollution have declined significantly as a result.



Also stated in the *Legacy Comprehensive Plan* is a vision for downtown Winston-Salem as described below:

CITY AND TOWN CENTERS

Downtown Winston-Salem has the largest concentration of office space in the Triad and is home to several major corporate headquarters. A number of regional and national banks are represented in downtown making it the eleventh largest banking center in America. Downtown includes an emerging technology base at the Piedmont Triad Research Park, a substantial convention center-hotel complex, outstanding arts facilities and a concentration of major community churches. Recently, there have been signs of a renaissance in downtown Winston-Salem. That is encouraging because downtown is a symbol of community economic health, local quality of life, civic pride, and community history. It is our statement to visitors, prospective investors and our citizens about our confidence and pride in the future. Downtown can be an important community gathering place. Special events, parades, and celebrations held there reinforce that intangible sense of community. The following principles were developed to guide the future development of the downtown area:

Downtown Plan Fundamental Principles

- An expanded Downtown core
- Redefine Downtown along a north-south axis
- Retain the scale and character of the 4th Street corridor
- Anchor Downtown south of 4th Street with new high-rise office development
- Expanded convention center/sports facility as a north anchor
- Create a green corridor on the north-south axis

- Pedestrian orientation for all of Downtown
- New transportation components including rail

In the year 2015 we envision that ...

- Downtown Winston-Salem has reemerged as a dominant focus of economic and social life in our community, a center of the community's civic, entertainment and cultural activities, and a strong symbol of community pride and identity.
- A blend of restored buildings, new construction and design standards emphasizing a walkable scale, better streets, sidewalks, signage, lighting and additional green spaces have improved the quality of the downtown's physical environment making it an exciting place for visitors and residents alike.
- A large increase in housing and the number of people living and working in and near downtown has been a key to increasing downtown's vitality.
- The growth in tourism and convention activity, creation of special entertainment districts, exhibits, concerts, ethnic festivals and outdoor cafes in new and exciting spaces bring people to downtown and add vitality to downtown's streets, day and night.
- The effective use of public tax money and private financial incentives combined with public/private partnerships and the marketing of the downtown's assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens and visitors have made downtown a more competitive investment location for development or relocation.



Overall Goal:

A vibrant city center which is the focus of the economic and social life of our community, a center of civic, entertainment and cultural activities and a symbol of community identity.

The *Legacy Comprehensive Plan* also identifies goals and objectives for the overall transportation system for the region as listed below:

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Overall Goal:

A balanced and sustainable transportation system that links highways, transit, greenways, bikeways and sidewalks into a seamless transportation network that provides choices for people's travel needs.

Objective 1: Transit Supportive Land Use Patterns and Design

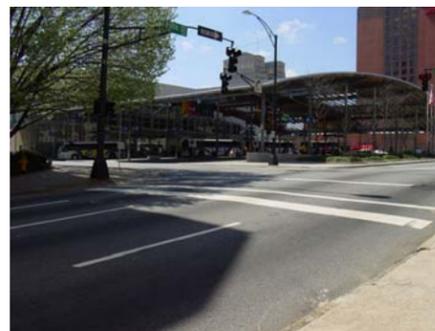
Promote land use patterns and transit-oriented design standards that support public transit, walking and bicycling and reduce the number and length of automobile trips.

Objective 2: Streets and Highways

Develop a first class street and highway network, which meets the short and long term needs and aspirations of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.

Objective 3: Street Design

Design streets and highways that are safe, efficiently and effectively move vehicular traffic, accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists and have minimum negative environmental impacts.



Objective 4: Rail Transportation

Develop a long-range plan for the establishment of a commuter rail system.

Objective 5: Public Transportation

Expand public transportation into a county-wide transit system of buses, van pools, car pools and special population transit services that is efficient, convenient, safe and cost-effective.

