

**Intergovernmental Work Group on Communications and Education**  
**Notes from May 13, 2010**  
**High Point, NC**

*Attending: Curt Walton, city manager, Charlotte; Earlene Thomas, NCDOT; Becky Smothers, Mayor, High Point; Dave Hyder, transportation planner, High Point; Chris Lukasina, CAMPO; Carrie Runser-Turner, Land-of-Sky RPO; Pat Ivey, NCDOT Division 9; Unwana Dabney, Federal Highway Administration; Ryan Sherby, Southwest Planning Commission; Co-Chairs: Julie White, Metro Mayors; Ted Vaden, NCDOT.*

Julie White presented a powerpoint summary of the findings from the survey of elected officials, local staff and DOT staff.

Ted Vaden made a presentation on the organization at NCDOT in the context of, where do I go to get the information I need? He focused on the mid-level leadership levels and areas of responsibility. His general message was that the best way to communicate with NCDOT is to go first to the Division Engineer, who can serve as a conduit to appropriate staff in the division or in Raleigh. The Division Engineers also are charged with representing the department in the other modal divisions. NCDOT top management has made it very clear that they want to empower Division Engineers and make them and local board members the local areas' point of contact and liaison with Raleigh. There was discussion among the work group about how realistic that arrangement is. First, some engineers act more empowered than others, and there are varying levels of empowerment within the divisions. Mayor Smothers said there are whole vast parts of DOT that determine what things get done, not involving divisions, but those units aren't adequately staffed. She suggested that NCDOT let cities fund staff positions within NCDOT to help meet their needs. Several said they don't understand what can be decided in the division and what has to go to Raleigh. There were frustrations expressed about having the Raleigh DOT offices overrule a decision by the division especially after the public hearing process. One wondered what authority a division truly has to make decisions without fear of being overruled. The group discussed the lack of understanding of a local geography by those in the Raleigh DOT offices which they believe creates bad decisions. Another noted that it is hard to communicate when the decision making process is unclear.

There was a suggestion that DOT identify best practices and policies among the highway divisions to encourage adoption by all divisions.

Pat Ivey said the divisions are project-focused. Project delivery is how they are measured and what they are held accountable for. Earlene noted that DOT has a lot of young engineers who are new and inexperienced and thus aren't in a position to make decisions.

Chris said the delegation of decision-making, particularly regarding modal operations, is not realistic until and unless modal people are put in divisions. "Until we see full change

to multi-modal geographical divisions, we're wasting time. It's not fair to give division engineers responsibility for modes." Pat said NCDOT needs to decide if it truly wants multi-modal divisions and if so, what does that require. The group discussed having more bike and pedestrian knowledge at the division level, but concurred that not every division needs mass transit or regional rail expertise. Several questioned the rationale behind division boundaries. Pat said before we make the huge investment that would be needed to realign divisions, we should identify the underlying problems, such as the equity formula effect, and address those.

There was discussion of the project prioritization process. Julie said she does not think the general public understands or is even aware of the process. Ted said DOT plans to have a public outreach after the June Board of Transportation meeting when the Board will release the prioritization results. Dave Hyder said that while there has been an effort to be open and transparent about prioritization, that hasn't worked well in reality because the posted results are hard to decipher. The rankings are sliced and diced in so many categories that it's difficult, among 700 projects, to know how a local community's projects rank. Unwanna said there is a lot of data, but not much information. The flow charts presented at summits are too complex and hard to understand. "Transformation is not just outcome. Transformation is how you got there, and we just don't understand how you got there."

Curt Walton noted that what he was hearing were concerns that went beyond just communications which this group was tasked with. He said more effectively communicating bad process only frustrates more people. The group concurred that our mission would have to go beyond just communication recommendations to address the concerns expressed in the survey and among group members. The group argued for organizational structure improvements such as looking at where the division directors' fall on the overall organizational chart and ensuring they have the resources necessary to support a higher level of responsibility and authority.

Ted concluded the meeting with a brief presentation on the Governor's proposed Mobility Fund. He asked the local officials to encourage governing boards to approve resolutions supporting the fund. Several members said they needed to see the specific legislative language so they could understand the effect on their areas. Ted after the meeting supplied the legislative language to Julie for distribution through the League of Municipalities.