



GASTON URBAN AREA

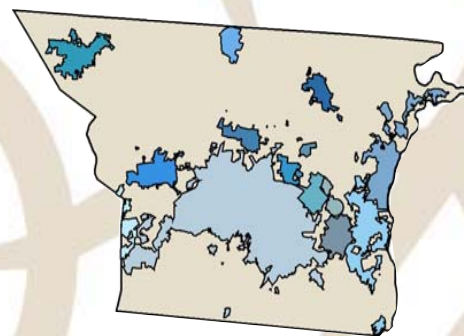
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Transportation Planning
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GASTON URBAN AREA MPO

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Belmont • Bessemer City • Cramerton • Dallas •
Gaston County • Gastonia • Lowell • McAdenville •
Mount Holly • Ranlo • Spencer Mountain • Stanley

What is the Gaston Urban Area MPO?

The Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a multi-jurisdictional of twelve local governments, NCDOT, USDOT, and other providers of transportation services. The Gaston MPO currently comprises the following member governments: Belmont, Bessemer City, Cramerton, Dallas, Gaston County, Gastonia, Lowell, McAdenville, Mount Holly, Ranlo, Spencer Mountain, & Stanley.

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PUBLIC HEARINGS ON GARDEN PARKWAY'S DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY

During the week of June 22 – 26, 2009, the NC Turnpike Authority held a series of open houses and public hearings to present their recently finished the Garden Parkway's Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS) to the public and to hear community feedback on the proposed toll road. The meetings were well attended, with approximately 1,000 people present at the first public hearing at Forestview High School in Gastonia. Speakers at the public hearings in Gastonia and Charlotte voiced concerns over the project's financial feasibility and increased traffic volumes on US-321. An Investment Grade Traffic and Revenue Study slated to begin in early 2010 will be used to determine the road's financial feasibility and establish a toll bond rating.

In response to concerns over traffic volumes on US-321, NCTA compiled traffic projections (available at www.ncturnpike.org) along I-85, US-321 North

and US-321 South for three scenarios: with the completed Garden Parkway (running from I-485 to I-85), with only the first phase of the Parkway (from I-485 to US-321), and without the Parkway. These projections suggest that traffic volumes will be roughly the same on US-321 north of Stagecoach Road whether or not the project is completed in phases.



A citizen views a map of detailed study alternatives

Others at the meeting gave their support to the toll road, citing increased congestion on I-85 and projected growth in southern Gaston County. The NCTA called for all public comments to be submitted by July 21, 2009 so that they may be considered in the selection of a preferred alternative route and in the final EIS, to be published in early 2010.

CRAMERTON CONSTRUCTS CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL CONNECTION

Cramerton, which in January 2009 became the first community to adopt a Carolina Thread Trail Greenway Master Plan, has completed the first project on its ambitious greenway to do list. The Riverside Park and Greenway Project in the Riverside neighborhood includes a kayak landing, fishing and observation pier, picnic area and ¼ mile greenway trail, which will become a link to the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT). The Riverside project provides citizens with direct access to the South Fork River – a connection that has been identified by the CTT as a "first priority segment" of the Thread Trail.

The town is partnering with Gaston County, Lowell, and McAdenville to apply for a CTT Design Corridor Grant as part of the organization's Implementation Grant Program.

For more information on Cramerton's CTT involvement or its greenway plan, visit www.cramerton.org.



Carolina Thread Trail Concept Map, courtesy of www.carolinathreadtrail.org.

NCDOT TAKES ON I-85/US-321 INTERCHANGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

In March 2006, NCDOT completed a feasibility study on I-85/US-321 Interchange Geometric Safety Improvements. The study concluded that the project was warranted and feasible within general benefit/cost parameters. The Gaston MPO voted to make this project a top priority, second only to the Garden Parkway, reasoning that a project to improve the intersection of Gastonia's main north-south artery (US-321) and the county's only east-west interstate (I-85) is necessary to ease traffic congestion and make the interchange safer for drivers on both roads. The study provides two proposed options. Of these, "Alternative 2" would best address problems of capacity, geometry, and safety by providing additional directional interchange ramps and improvements to US-321, access roads, and traffic signals.

The project was included in the 2009-2015 State Transportation Improvement Plan and has now become an NCDOT Transportation Improvement Program (TIP Project I-5000). On June 11, 2009 NCDOT staff held a Citizens' Information Workshop on the project at Rankin Lake Park. Staff explained the need for the project and took questions from local officials on matters of funding, timelines, and viable alternatives.

The workshop marks the second step in the project's development. By July 2013, NCDOT plans to begin the estimated \$4.7 million right-of-way process, acquiring lands needed to construct the improvements. Construction on the project should begin in July 2015. Updated cost projections are due for release soon; they are expected to increase the cost estimate from \$30.3 million to \$60 million,

as they are based on current prices.



The study's preferred "Alternative 2."

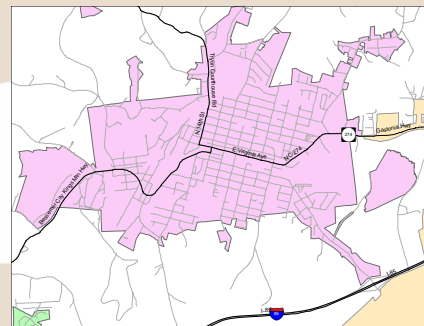
BESSEMER CITY MOUNTS LONG-RANGE COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

Bessemer City recently began its six-part community planning process with the publication of its Strategic Vision Plan, a document detailing plans for where the city wants to go and what strategies and assets will help it get there. The Plan identifies eight core community values, ranging from economic diversification to small town character, as well as several goals that will make Bessemer City a more pedestrian-friendly community with first-rate infrastructure.

As part of this effort, the city has created its own profile on www.wikiplanning.org. The site's creators, Mike Paveno and Deb Ryan (who is also working as a consultant on the Bessemer City

community plan), describe Wikiplanning as "an online solution for improving civic engagement," providing a venue for community feedback and a convenient way to make urban planning accessible to the very people whom planners serve. The site gives residents an overview of the project and allows them to post their thoughts and view completed plans like the Strategic Vision Plan and Market Study.

More information on the 2008-2009 Community Planning Process and the city's profile on Wikiplanning can be found at: www.bessemercity.com.



Bessemer City, NC

AIR QUALITY IN GASTON COUNTY

In 2005, Gaston County was designated an 8-hour ozone nonattainment area – a classification used by the EPA to describe areas with high concentrations of ground level ozone averaged over an 8-hour period. Once a region has been classified as a nonattainment area, state and local governments must develop plans to improve air quality within the next three years, or risk losing federal funding for things like transportation projects. In an effort to call attention to our poor air quality, the Gaston MPO has begun a variety of initiatives aimed at increasing public awareness.

Air quality signs have been placed outside City Hall, the Police Department, fire stations, and many recreational areas throughout Gastonia. Other MPO municipalities have obtained signs as well, including Lowell, Stanley, Bessemer City, and Dallas. The signs describe the color-coded Air Quality Index and

are updated daily to show the area's air quality index rating. Extra signs are available from the Gaston MPO for interested businesses within Gastonia or MPO member municipalities. (See Contacts on Page 6.)



An air quality sign outside Gastonia's City Hall.



MPO volunteer Kim Wallis poses with a Gastonia citizen at the gas cap check.

GAS CAP CHECKS

The Gaston MPO teamed up with NC Air Awareness (a division of the NC Department of Environment & Natural Resources) and the Gastonia Police Department to hold two gas cap checks at the Gastonia Farmers Market July 14 and 15, 2009. As part of the MPO's efforts to improve our air quality and raise public awareness, nine volunteers (including MPO staff) tested 454 vehicles and replaced 30 leaky gas caps. Police officers from both the City of Gastonia and Gaston County brought in their cruisers, and the City fleet was tested as well.

WBTV News Channel 3 was on hand July 14 to cover the event, airing the gas cap segment periodically that evening and the next morning. According to Alan Giles, Senior Air Quality Specialist in Mecklenburg County, the Farmers Market gas cap checks were incredibly successful for a stand-alone event.

The process for checking gas caps takes only a few minutes, using a STANT gun that creates a vacuum around the

cap. If the cap allows in air, it "fails" the test and is replaced free of charge. While Giles says NC Air Awareness has calculated about a 5% gas cap failure rate, the failure rate for this event is higher, at about 6.6 %.

Gas cap checks are especially necessary here, given the region's air quality classification, for the following reasons:

- Leaking gas caps contribute to air pollution and waste fuel due to evaporation.
- According to US Car Care Council estimates, 17% of vehicle gas caps are either damaged or missing, allowing 147 million gallons of gasoline to evaporate each year.
- Gas caps can leak regardless of the vehicle's age (although the chance is higher if the vehicle is more than 3 years old).

For information on upcoming gas cap checks visit: www.charmeck.org/Departments/LUESA/Air+Quality/Home.htm

The Gaston MPO also provides a brochure on improving your air quality awareness, available on our website (www.gastonmpo.org). Some tips to reduce air pollution include:

- Conserve energy
- Refuel carefully, avoiding spillage
- Keep car, boat, and other engines tuned up
- Keep tires properly inflated and wheels aligned
- Carpool, use public transit, bike, or walk to your destination
- Use environmentally safe paints and cleaning products
- Drive smart by combining errands, reducing trips, and limiting idling
- Refuel cars and mow lawns after 6:00 pm
- Get your car's gas cap checked



Donna Lahser of the City Police Dept. and Alan Giles change out a leaky gas cap.



MPO volunteer Bernie Yacobucci tests a gas cap.

HOV/HOT LANE STUDY PRESENTED

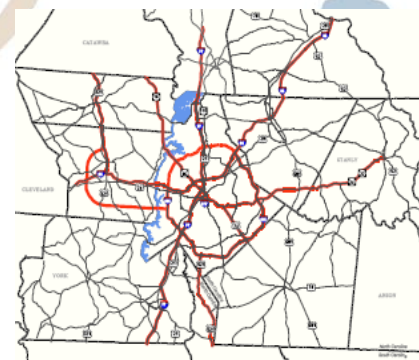
Transportation planners with MPOs, RPOs, and cities across the Charlotte region, led by project managers Tim Gibbs of the City of Charlotte and Jack Flaherty of NCDOT, have completed the Charlotte Region Fast Lanes Study. The study examines the technical, financial, and institutional feasibility of Fast Lanes on major roadways in the Charlotte area, including I-85, I-485, and I-77. The study was undertaken as planners recognized that traditional approaches to alleviating traffic congestion would not likely solve the area's traffic problems, especially in light of the great increase in population growth projected for the Charlotte region.

Tim Gibbs, AICP, presented the study's findings to the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO's) Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) at their July 8, 2009 meeting. The study, which began in June 2007, analyzed 12 corridors in a 10-county region for

(HOT) and Truck Only Toll (TOT) lanes. Funded by a variety of sources – the Gaston MPO, the Cabarrus-Rowan MPO, and the Town of Mooresville among them – the study considered projected traffic data from the years 2013 and 2030. Based on such criteria as traffic congestion, travel patterns, and car occupancy, the 12 roads considered were narrowed to six: I-85, I-485, I-77, US-74, NC-16, and US-521. To implement Fast Lanes on I-85 South would require much rebuilding of the highway in Gaston County, where there is little to no room to expand the existing roadway. Yet, Fast Lanes could save commuters ½ mile every minute. The price of HOT lanes would differ based on the time of day, day of the week, and the congestion level and speed of traffic in the general use lanes.

Mr. Gibbs asked the TCC to consider the study's findings when updating their municipalities' long

range transportation plans and perhaps do a few corridor level studies of their own for specific stretches of road. He also asked the committee to take into account such policy questions as who controls and monitors the HOT/HOV lanes, where funding is obtained and where toll revenue goes, and how to make Fast Lanes policies uniform in both North and South Carolina counties.



Major Charlotte-area roadways analyzed in the Fast Lanes study (www.fastlanes.org).

GASTONIA'S HIGHLAND RAIL TRAIL TO BE PART OF CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL

The City of Gastonia Planning Department is developing plans for the Highland Branch/Rail Trail, a 2.75-mile greenway that will extend from Long Avenue to Rankin Lake Park, where it will connect with the park's proposed trail system. The "rail" portion of the trail utilizes both abandoned and rail-banked Norfolk Southern railroad right-of-way, running from Long Avenue to Rankin Lake Road and is intended to connect to the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT) system, a multi-county greenway system that, once finished, will link 15 counties in the region. The "branch" section follows the flood plain from Rankin Lake Road to the park. Almost half of the trail has already been paved, with the remainder in the beginnings of the design phase.

Planning staff is currently applying for a Corridor Design Grant through the CTT's grant program.

Other applicants for thread trail grants include Gaston County, Cramerton, McAdenville, Lowell, Bessemer City, and Mt. Holly.

From its current terminus on Long Avenue, the Highland Rail Trail will link up with the CTT Downtown Connector project, which is soon to begin construction. The trail is the first greenway to be built in the Highland area and will provide Gastonia citizens with a direct connection between downtown and several recreational areas.

For more information on the Carolina Thread Trail or its granting process, visit www.carolinathreadtrail.org.



Gastonia planning and engineering staff walk the Highland Branch corridor in June 2009.



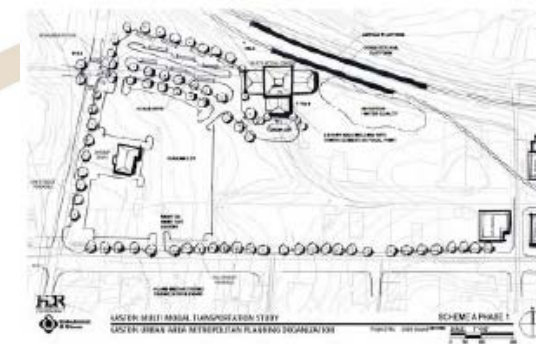
A view of Rankin Lake.

MULTIMODAL CENTER COMMITTEE SELECTS PREFERRED OPTION

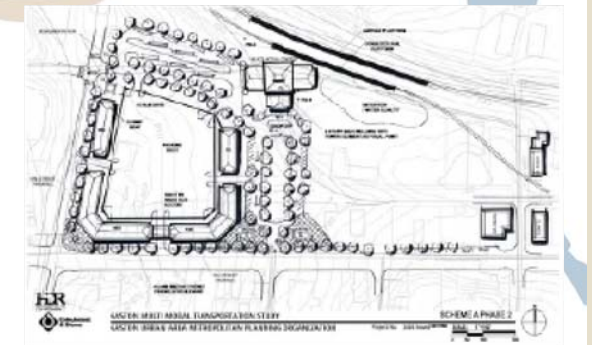
Plans for a new multimodal transportation hub on West Franklin Boulevard in downtown Gastonia continue to progress. On May 5, 2009 Gastonia's Multimodal Center Technical Committee, comprised of city, county and state representatives, voted to adopt what HDR design consultants termed "Scheme A," one of three possible frameworks considered as part of the Multimodal Center's Conceptual Design Study. "Scheme A's" advantages include positioning the bus staging area to leave space for future development along the center's main entrance, giving greater separation between the bus area and the general parking lot, and allowing for greater design flexibility and close access to the indoor waiting area.

The May 5 meeting was the final steering committee meeting for the Suitability and Conceptual Design Study. At a May 14 public forum, the committee's selection was presented to the public. The project is slated to be completed in phases, with Phase I providing near-term transportation infrastructure, including P&N and Amtrak rail lines and bus service by Gastonia Transit, CATS, Gastonia ACCESS, and Greyhound. According to the study, Phase I's conceptual cost ranges from \$15.3 to 26.7 million. Potential funding sources for this phase of development include contributions from facility tenants (like Greyhound, CATS, and Amtrak), federal programs, and public-private ventures.

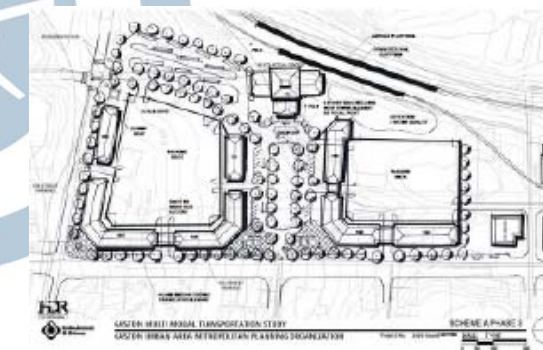
The project's next steps will involve refining conceptual designs and costs, and conducting environmental analyses and preliminary engineering plans, culminating in a final design.



An aerial view of "Scheme A" Phase I.



"Scheme A" Phase II.



"Scheme A" Phase III.



A conceptual design of the Multimodal Center in its final phase of development.