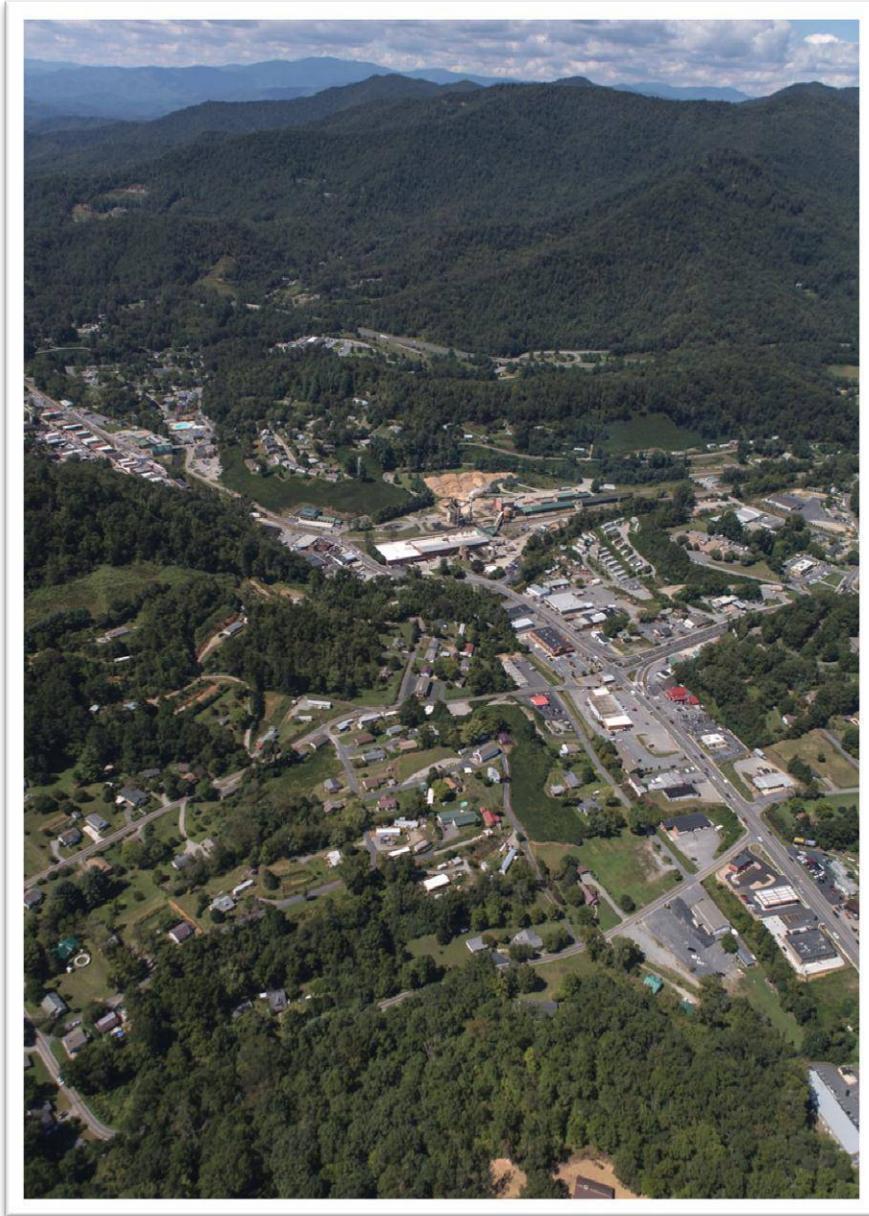


NC 107 Corridor Study Report

Southwestern Rural Planning Organization December 2012



The contents of this report summarize a local task force's evaluation of NC 107 in the Town of Sylva's city limits. The study was a cooperative effort of the Town of Sylva, Jackson County, and the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization.



NC 107 Corridor Study Report

Southwestern Rural Planning Organization December 2012

Introduction

NC 107 is one of the main arteries through the Town of Sylva, and serves as a primary commercial corridor in Jackson County. The Town of Sylva is situated directly between US Highway 74 and Western Carolina University, Southwestern Community College, and Cashiers. Commuters to these destinations, as well as the routine daily travel of county residents in and around Sylva, add up to approximately thirty thousand cars a day on NC 107. The section of the road that is within the Sylva city limits is already operating over capacity during peak travel hours, and conditions are predicted to worsen as population continues to grow.

Various solutions to the transportation issues caused by this increasingly congested corridor have been proposed over the years, but no firm decision on how to move forward has yet to be agreed upon. Controversy over the proposed by-pass, or connector road, has stalled its planning and development. Local officials have expressed a desire to improve the existing route, but are against a wholesale widening project.

***Vision Statement:** The NC 107 Corridor Study is examining existing conditions in order to assist the community with developing a more unified vision of the corridor and to create a list of strategies & recommendations that will improve the overall quality of transportation, enhance economic viability and preserve the natural resources.*

Cover Photo Credit: ©Nick Breedlove/The Sylva Herald

Corridor Study Committee Members



Harold Hensley-Town of Sylva Commissioner

Chris Matheson-Town of Sylva Commissioner

Maurice Moody- Town of Sylva Mayor

Jack Debnam- Jackson County Commissioner

Doug Cody- Jackson County Commissioner

Gerald Green- Jackson County Planner

Paige Robertson- Town of Sylva Manager

Dan Schaeffer- Town of Sylva Public Works

Scott Stanberry- Stanberry Insurance Owner

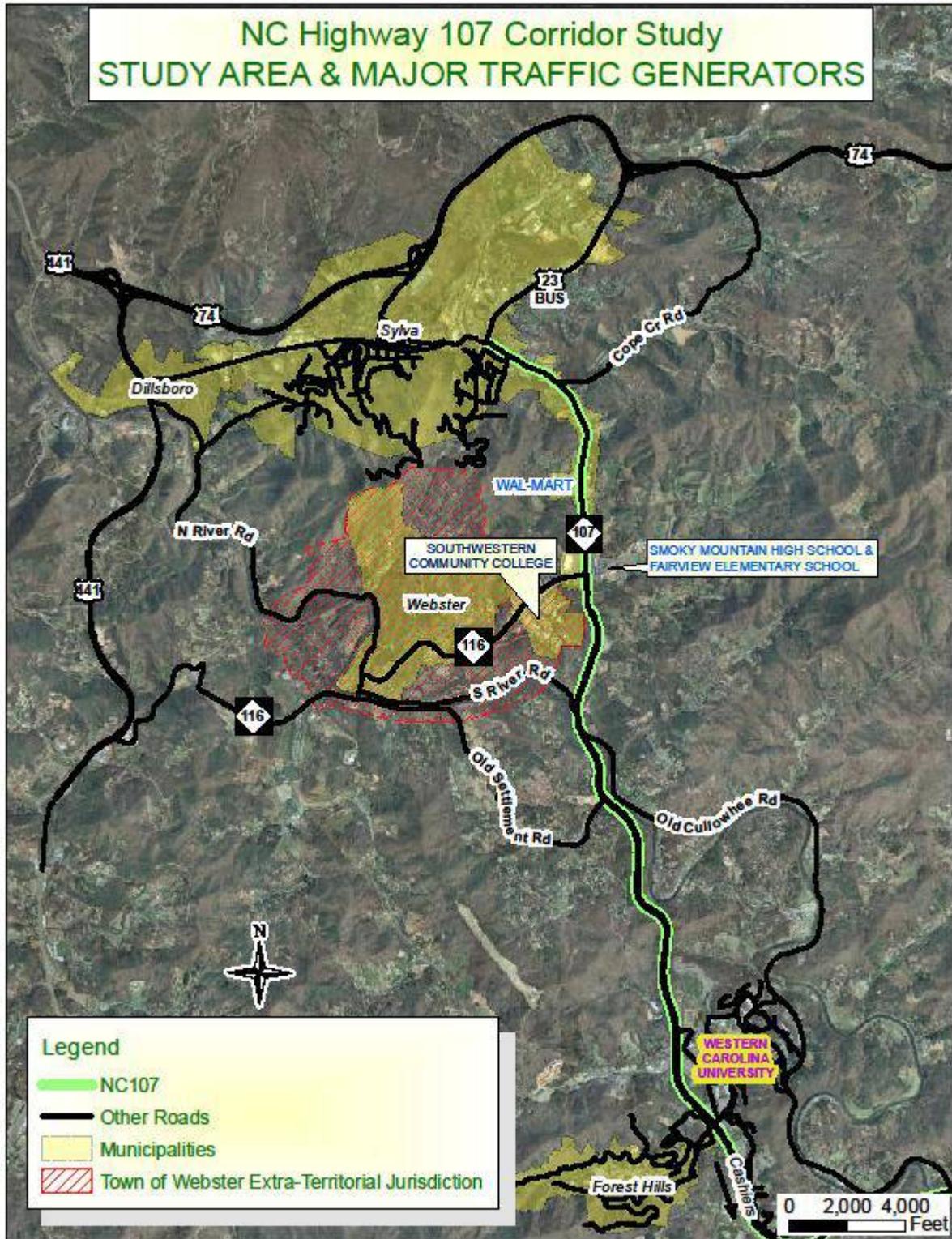
Tori Walters- Tea House Restaurant Owner

Lydia Aydlett- SmartRoads Alliance

Joel Setzer- NCDOT Division 14

Reuben Moore- NCDOT Division 14

Sarah Graham- Southwestern Commission





Purpose of the Study

The Southwestern RPO serves the six western counties in North Carolina, and is staffed by the Southwestern Commission. The RPO serves as a forum for local officials and citizens to interact with NCDOT staff on a regular basis, and for NCDOT to obtain more local input for transportation planning and projects. A countywide transportation task force was created in 2003 which included members from each municipality and major institution in the county, as well as various citizens groups. The Southwestern Rural Planning Organization (RPO) facilitated the task force.

After the Jackson County Land Use Plan was created and adopted in 2006, the transportation task force commenced work. Together with the Transportation Planning Branch of the NCDOT and the Southwestern RPO, the Jackson County transportation task force underwent the process of creating a Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) for the county. Adopted in 2010, the plan looks at transportation needs as based on population growth estimates to 2035.

The Jackson County CTP includes two projects that directly address NC 107. Both of these projects are now included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the NCDOT document that schedules projects for funding:

1. **NC 107 (Northern Portion)** - Proposed improvements from US-23 to the 4-lane divided cross-section north of Lovedale Road. This project was included in the most recent draft STIP as R-5600. Its purpose, as stated in the CTP, is “to accommodate projected traffic (2035 Design Year) by maintaining a LOS D on NC 107” (CTP, p. I-21).

Note: LOS refers to the “level of service”, and “D” is a grade on a scale of A- F. It is a term used by engineers to measure the operational level of a road, and score it based on the ease of use for the user, considering delay, speed, travel time, freedom to maneuver, and traffic interruptions. “A LOS D is when speeds are somewhat reduced and is similar to a busy shopping corridor in the middle of a weekday” (CTP p.I-2).

2. **NC 107 Connector**- Proposed new facility from US74/US23 to NC 107. This project has been in the STIP since 2001 (first as a feasibility study, and in 2005 as project R-4745). According to the CTP, the purpose of this project is to “provide an alternative north-south route through the urban area of Jackson County that eases congestion along NC 107 (making NC 107 safer), serves as a more direct route for traffic on US 74/US 23 who desire to go to Western Carolina University and points beyond, and increases north-south mobility through Jackson County” (CTP, p.I-38).



Strategic Prioritization began as an executive order from Governor Perdue in 2009 and was signed into law in 2012, largely as an attempt to de-politicize transportation funding. The law reads that the NCDOT “shall develop and utilize a process for selection of transportation projects that is based on professional standards in order to most efficiently use limited resources to benefit all citizens of the State. The strategic prioritization process should be a systematic, data-driven process that includes a combination of quantitative data, qualitative input, and multimodal characteristics, and should include local input. The Department shall develop a process for standardizing or approving local methodology used in Metropolitan Planning Organization and Rural Transportation Planning Organization prioritization.” (Session Law 2012-84).

Statewide Prioritization 2.0 Final Results for NC 107

TIP #	Route	Route Name	From / Cross Street	To	Description	Congest on Points (20%)	Safety Points (10%)	Pavement Points (10%)	Benefit/ Cost Points (20%)	Econ. Comp. Points (10%)	Weighted Total Quantitative Points (70%)	Total Division Points (20%)	Total RPO Points (20%)	Multimodal Bonus Points (Extra Points)	Total Points
R-5600	NC107		US 23 Business	NC 116	Upgrade to boulevard facility with median, improve intersections, construct access management improvements	69.92	66.53	3	3.4	12.18	22.84	50	100	3	45.84
R-4745B	New Route	NC 107 Connector	West of Cope Creek	US 23/74 east of Sylva	NC 107 to US 23-74 East of Sylva. Construct facility on new location. Section B: West of Cope Creek to US 23/74 East of Sylva.	43.28	77.62	41	5.67	100	31.65	50	0	3	44.65
R-4745A	New Route	NC 107 Connector	NC 107 East of Sylva	West of Cope Creek	NC 107 to US 23-74 East of Sylva. Construct facility on new location. Section A: NC 107 East of Sylva to West of Cope Creek.	43.28	77.62	41	5.67	100	31.65	0	0	0	31.65

During Prioritization 2.0 in 2011, the Southwestern RPO evaluated regional transportation projects using a methodology developed by the SWRPO committee members, which heavily weighs the priorities of the local governing boards. The outcome was a Priority Needs List of projects for the six county region (Jackson, Macon, Swain, Clay, Graham, Cherokee), from which top scoring projects were then entered into the statewide methodology for scoring and ranking. The statewide scores are used to determine which new projects are scheduled for funding in the STIP. **The number one project on the SWRPO list is the project to improve existing NC 107 in the Town of Sylva** (see Appendix I).

During the prioritization process, staff from the SWRPO engaged the governing boards from the Town of Sylva and Jackson County in facilitated discussions regarding transportation needs. Neither board ranked the NC 107 Connector project in their top six projects, nor did they take a firm stance against it. Both boards ranked improvements to existing NC 107 in the top two priorities, the county ranking it first, the town second. The Town of Sylva ranked improving existing NC 107 second after improvements to West Main Street, which is the section of Main Street between downtown and the NC 107/ US 23 Business intersection. This section of Main Street acts as a bottleneck into the downtown area, which is seen as a major contributing factor to the congestion on NC 107, particularly at the NC 107/US 23 Business intersection.



History

The width of NC 107 is essentially as it has been since the 1960s, when it was reconstructed to its current footprint to move traffic at high speeds from Sylva to Cullowhee and south. The adjacent land

During the 2011 prioritization process, the town and county both expressed a need for building consensus and finding solutions to the problems on NC 107. The Town of Sylva requested the NC 107 Corridor Study, to examine the issues.

use then was rural residential. It was not designed to be a commercial corridor, and certainly not a “Main Street”. In 1968 NCDOT projected that by 1988 there would be 6,000 cars per day on NC 107, but the actual count was closer to 20,000. Growth occurred more quickly than

expected, and over time, Sylva expanded its jurisdictional boundaries along the corridor to capture the commercial development occurring there. No development standards were put into place to mitigate the impacts of this development.

With the addition of new businesses along the corridor came the addition of many new access points and driveways. The accident rate increased steadily with the growth, and the short term solution was to decrease the lane width and add a middle turn lane. Some additional signals and turn lanes have been added, but other than a sidewalk being added to one side of the road, no other substantial improvements have been made.

The first solution to the NC 107 problem was proposed in the 1994 Thoroughfare Plan for the Towns of Sylva and Dillsboro. The “Southern Loop” concept was a four lane highway that by-passed Sylva by running from US 74 to US 441, south of town. Opposition to this route arose when NCDOT began to take a seriously look at funding the by-pass, and the town and county asked for more planning before moving forward. Jackson County began the process of developing a Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) in 2003, while subsequently developing the county’s first land use plan.

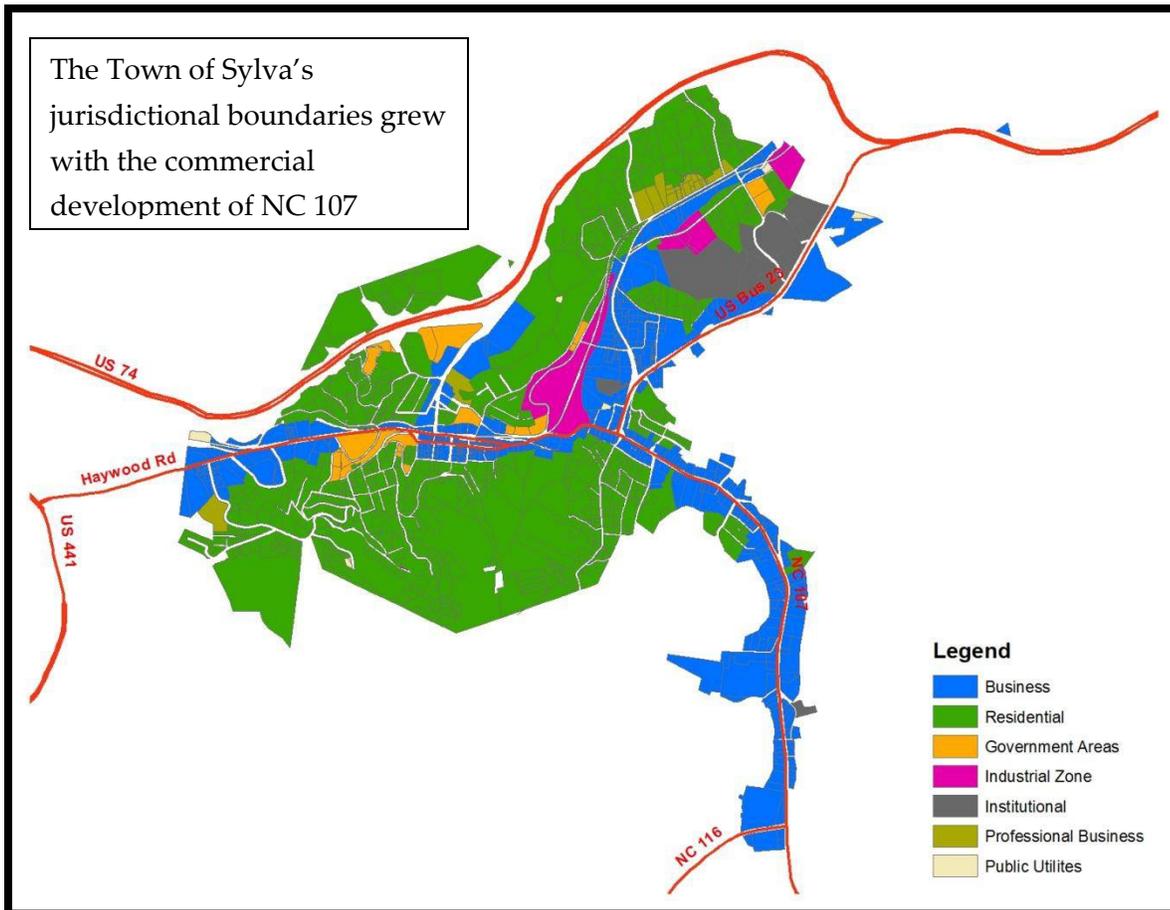
The several years between 2003-2009 saw a cyclical and continuous debate over the merits and flaws of the proposed by-pass, with an opposition group formed under the name of the “Smartroads Alliance”. The organization’s website, smartroads.org, states that it is a community news portal for transportation issues in Jackson County, and contains a log of news coverage of the debate over the by-pass.

“The Jackson County Smart Roads Alliance was formed in 2002 in response to a proposal by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to build a new \$132 million* highway through the middle of our most precious and beautiful rural county. Our goal since 2002 has been to work together as a community and create smart solutions to our traffic and transportation issues. (* \$132 million construction cost source: NCDOT 2008)”. Smartroads.org



During the development of the CTP, the conceptual “Southern Loop” was downsized by removing the western portion from US 441 to NC 107 from the plan. The remaining leg was changed from a four lane divided highway to a two lane, controlled access parkway-style facility, called the “NC 107 Connector”, connecting US 74 to NC 107 in Cullowhee. The project was altered and paired down as a result of public pressure, in an attempt by NCDOT to build a meaningful project that would be accepted by a wider range of citizens. A full set of projects that were included in the final CTP can be found at <http://www.regiona.org/transportation-planning-rpo/jackson-county/>.

The Jackson County CTP was adopted in 2010 by a 3/2 vote of the Jackson County Board of Commissioners. The two commissioners who voted “no” did so because of the inclusion of the NC 107 Connector in the plan. A new board of commissioners was elected in 2010, which is the board that submitted projects for Prioritization 2.0. Although not adamantly against the NC 107 Connector, the new board did, as mentioned earlier, prioritize improvements to existing NC 107 far above the construction of a new facility. The 2010 board was presented with a resolution against the NC 107 Connector by the chairman in 2012, but the resolution failed for lack of a motion (see Appendix II). The purpose, need, and impacts of the NC 107 Connector projects are still uncertain among citizens and elected officials.





Study Goals and Objectives

The following list was developed by the committee at the commencement of the study:

1. Make or keep NC 107 a safe place to travel for all modes of transportation
 - a. Identify main problem spots
2. Determine acceptable levels of congestion and, where applicable, decrease congestion
 - a. Identify problem spots
 - b. Identify origin/destination
3. Identify methods for improving access onto and off of NC 107
 - a. Access management
 - b. Limit turn movements
4. Improve aesthetic appeal
 - a. Prioritize “design excellence” to honor the beauty of the natural environment
 - b. Establish site and building design standards for new development
 - c. Work with the community to enhance landscaping along the corridor
5. Understand the relationship between land use and traffic, with a focus on enhancing the economic vitality of the corridor
 - a. Access management
6. Identify tools to improve interaction between land and road
 - a. Acknowledge the relationship between transportation and land use
7. Build community consensus on transportation issues
 - a. Educate/inform the public in order to change perceptions/behavior
8. Develop recommendations
 - a. Gather community consensus on solutions to the NC 107 “problem”

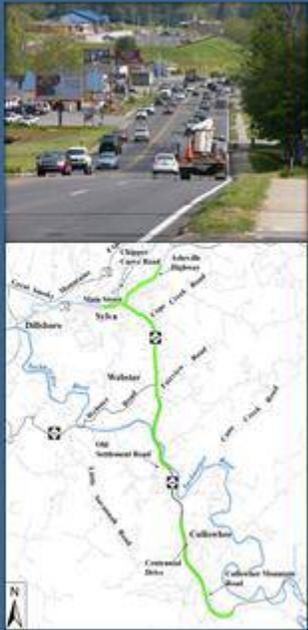


Defining the Context

Feasibility Study: During the controversy over the NC 107 Connector, local officials asked NCDOT to study possible improvements to the existing NC 107. In response, a feasibility study was conducted (FS-0814A), which considered ways to handle traffic through the year 2035, based on projected growth. Acknowledging that with no improvements, congestion in the corridor would only get worse, the study examined possible improvements to achieve a LOS D (Level of Service D). The target LOS was determined as “D” in the Jackson County CTP.

FS-0814A Recommendations

- Long term upgrades needed to solve NC 107 congestion through 2035
- Incrementally phase improvements to reach the traffic operation goals
- Include access management strategies for safer, more efficient operations
- Consider avoidance/ minimization of impacts during future environmental and design studies
- Highest priority is northern 4.1 miles in Sylva - Widening and Superstreet improvements promote most efficient operations
- Secondary priority is southern portion near Cullowhee - Traditional widening improvements would address traffic operations acceptably



The complex block contains a blue background with white text for the title and list, and two images. The top image is an aerial photograph showing a multi-lane road with significant traffic congestion. The bottom image is a map of the NC 107 corridor, with a green line highlighting the study area from Sylva in the north to Cullowhee in the south. The map shows various roads, including US 23, and geographical features like rivers and hills.

The feasibility study results showed solutions both with and without the NC 107 Connector. It determined that the connector would divert 15% of the traffic from the existing road, and that reconfiguring NC 107 without increasing its width would not address congestion. It also ruled out the use of a roundabout at the NC 107/ US 23 Business intersection, a popular discussion item

among community members involved in the process, such as the Smartroads Alliance.

The two alternatives from the feasibility study that were recommended as the most effective solutions, widening and super street improvements, both involve major impacts on existing businesses and properties in the corridor. A Citizen’s Information Workshop for FS-0814A held in November 2010 left the public dissatisfied with NCDOT’s recommended strategies for the corridor, primarily because of the increased number of travel lanes shown in the diagrams and the amount of impact to adjacent businesses. The study was perceived as suggesting that the only way to relieve congestion on NC 107 was to widen to the extent that nearly every business along the corridor would be impacted. The public made it very clear, as did the Town of Sylva Board of Commissioners through an official letter (Appendix III), that they wished for improvements to be made within the existing footprint, as much as possible.



The recommendations from FS-0814A are sound from a traffic engineering perspective, but not within the context of the actual conditions that exist in the corridor. This was very apparent to the local community when presented with the results, and further contributed to the confusion and controversy over the project. Unfortunately, rather than help the local community envision changes to the corridor, the presentation of FS-0814A alarmed the public, and in some cases, caused suspicion over the motives of NCDOT in conducting the study in this non-contextual manner.

To address these concerns, the corridor study committee invited the Feasibility Study unit within NCDOT to attend a committee meeting to explain and discuss the process and the results, which they did in January, 2012. This discussion helped the committee better understand the results of the study, as well as the difficulty of engineering a solution to the congestion that will continue to increase with the projected traffic increases in the future.

With the help of the NCDOT, the committee was able to analyze the need for such significant lane increases, and envision possible solutions that may have less impact. Because project development has not yet begun, the actual feasibility of engineering solutions that would have less impact on adjacent parcels has not yet been determined.



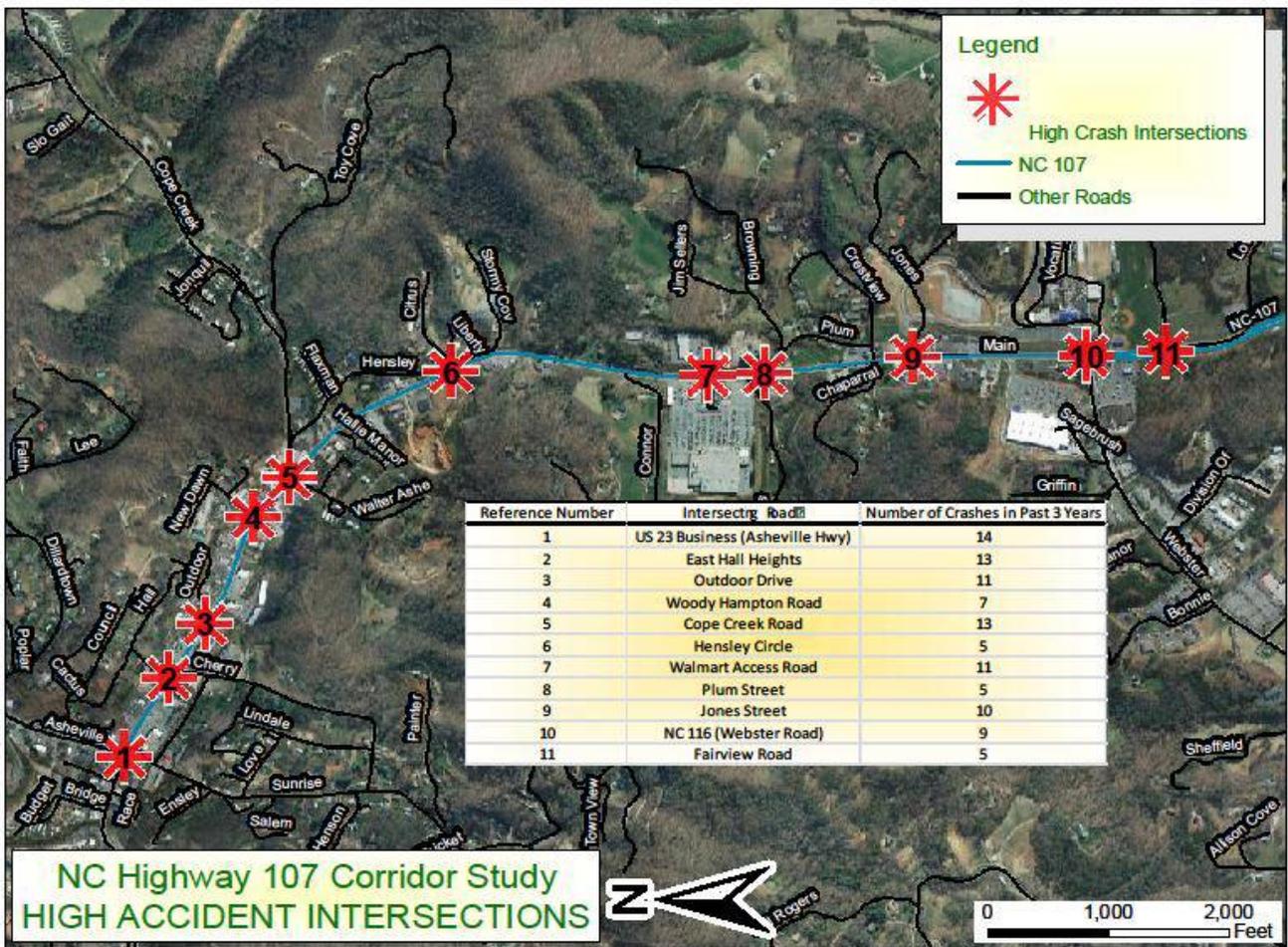
What is meant by the term

“impact”? The most negative

impact would be the total removal of a business’s building and land, leaving no viable business location. However, “impact” also includes losing some of a parcel but leaving a viable business location. “Impact” may mean only having to reconfigure a driveway, or having to share access. Minor impacts could also create opportunities for shared access, increased landscape area, even more parking. “Impact” doesn’t always mean a total loss of the property’s utility. As far as Right of Way is concerned, the parcels impacted by a transportation project include every parcel from which ROW is required. “Relocations” specify parcels that are expected to be impacted severely enough to necessitate a “taking”. Many parcel impacts are not relocations, and a relocation does not always mean that there is not residual property remaining that can be redeveloped. Finally, “impacts” can also be on the community, the natural environment (wetlands, streams, endangered species, etc), and historical or archeological features.



From the examination of the feasibility study, the committee understands that project development is a lengthy process, and that opportunities for detailed refinement have yet to be identified. **Of the three proposals in the feasibility study the committee most supports further development of the superstreet concept, with much smaller median widths.** The multiple negative impacts that show now will ideally be addressed in the preliminary stages of project development in a more identifiable and quantifiable manner, allowing for better decision-making as to what can be tolerated and accepted and what cannot be, within the context of the community's vision for the corridor.

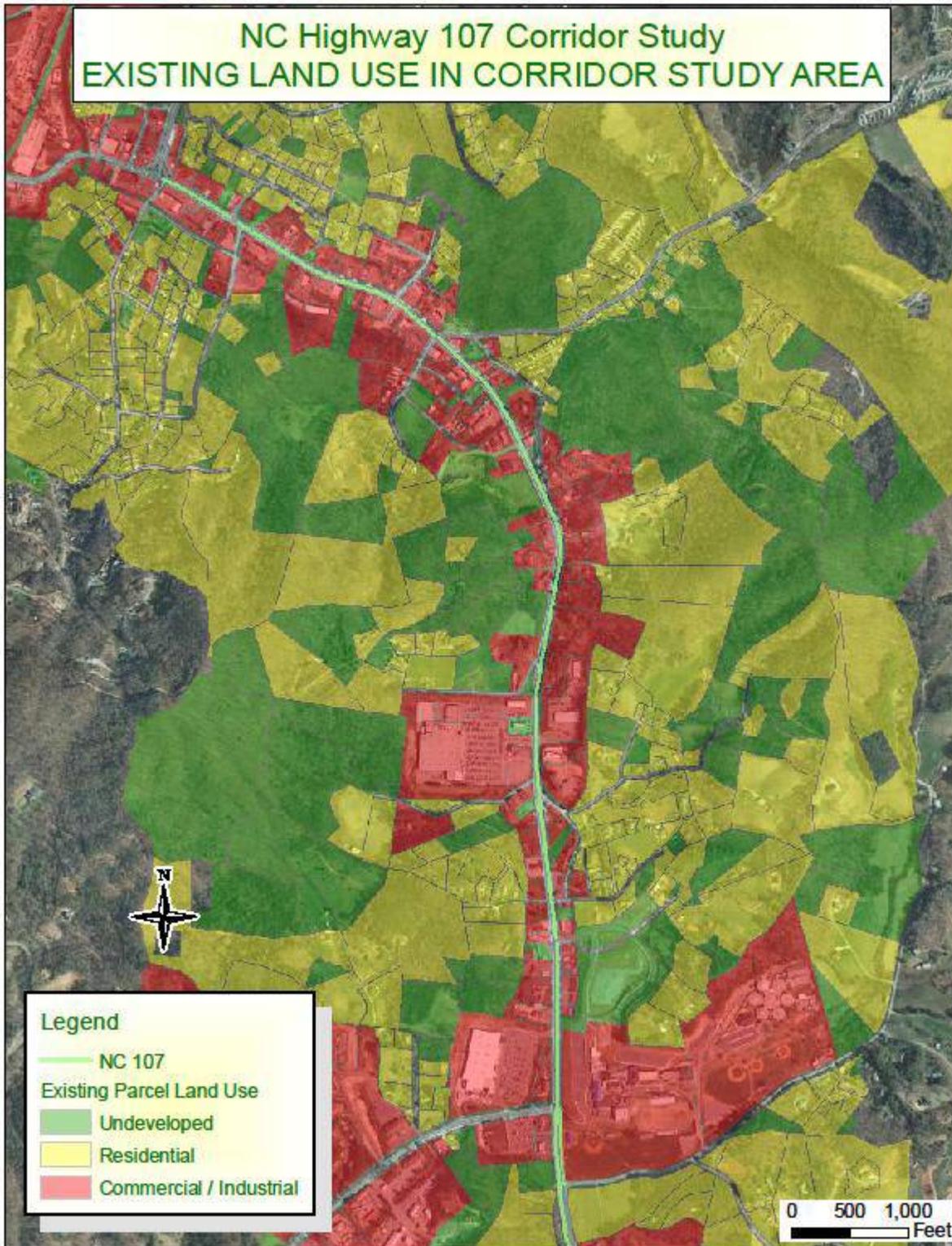




Defining the context locally: In order to assist with project development on R-5600, improvements to NC 107 from US 23 Business to NC 116, the NC 107 Corridor Study sought to determine the context in which improvements should be examined.

This chart represents the corridor committee’s perceptions of existing conditions on NC 107:

	Positives	Negatives
Access Management		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Too many driveways/curb cuts *Poor access management *Bad sight distance-makes left turns difficult, onto and off of the road *Continuous left turn lane
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Well lit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *major speed variations among drivers (not following speed limit) *High crash rate *Drainage issues/standing water
Bike/Ped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Sidewalk only on one side *unpleasant pedestrian environment *No bike lanes
Aesthetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Good sign size *Nice view of mountains *Lots of vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Not enough landscaping *UGLY- power lines, etc.
Traffic Flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Traffic moves slowly and steadily- ability to move lots of cars on a narrow footprint *Smooth surface for driving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Lots of cars for such a narrow footprint *23/107 bottle neck *No alternate route *Poor signal timing
Smart Growth/ Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Good mix of successful businesses and services *Small community hubs along the road- "organic sprawl" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Lack of land use regulations leads to inconsistent development patterns



The vast majority of parcels abutting NC 107 have already been commercially developed. Each parcel has at least one driveway cut, with many having multiple access points. It is understood that this is a major contributor to safety and mobility issues in the corridor.



Although the land use immediately adjacent to the NC 107 corridor is mainly commercial, the street also provides access to a number of residential areas and institutional uses (public schools and community college). Additionally, it serves as a travel route for those travelling from HWY 74 to and from Western Carolina University and the Cashiers community. **The Town of Sylva wants NC 107 to feel like a continuation of its Main Street**, but there is some discrepancy between how the road is currently working and what the town wants it to be. The multiple roles of this street within the community in which it is located have created the difficult situation faced in making improvements to it. It is difficult to define the context of the project.

This study has attempted to define a vision for the corridor based on what the community wants it to be, rather than assuming that there is an irreparable mess that cannot be improved upon. This study used the NCDOT's Complete Streets Design Manual as a guide in defining the land use and transportation contexts for the corridor.

The N.C. Department of Transportation adopted a "Complete Streets" policy in July 2009. The policy directs the Department to consider and incorporate all feasible modes of transportation when building new projects or making improvements to existing infrastructure. The benefits of this new approach include:

- Making it easier for travelers to get where they need to go;
- Encouraging the use of alternative forms of transportation;
- Building more sustainable communities;
- Increasing connectivity between neighborhoods, streets, and transit systems;
- Improving safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.



Policy Statement: Transportation, quality of life, and economic development are all undeniably connected through well-planned, well-designed, and context sensitive transportation solutions. To NCDOT, the designations "well-planned", "well-designed" and "context-sensitive" imply that transportation is an integral part of a comprehensive network that safely supports the needs of the communities and the traveling public that are served.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation, in its role as stewards over the transportation infrastructure, is committed to:

- providing an efficient multi-modal transportation network in North Carolina such that the access, mobility, and safety needs of motorists, transit users, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities are safely accommodated;



- caring for the built and natural environments by promoting sustainable development practices that minimize impacts on natural resources, historic, businesses, residents, scenic and other community values, while also recognizing that transportation improvements have significant potential to contribute to local, regional, and statewide quality of life and economic development objectives;
- working in partnership with local government agencies, interest groups, and the public to plan, fund, design, construct, and manage complete street networks that sustain mobility while accommodating walking, biking, and transit opportunities safely.

This policy requires that NCDOT’s planners and designers will consider and incorporate multimodal alternatives in the design and improvement of all appropriate transportation projects within a growth area of a town or city unless exceptional circumstances exist. Routine maintenance projects may be excluded from this requirement; if an appropriate source of funding is not available.



NC 107 / NC 116 intersection with public school complex, Lowes and Ingles. Photo Credit: ©Nick Breedlove/The Sylva Herald



NC 107 Corridor Land Use Context:

CURRENT:

- This is the “urban” area of Jackson County
- A destination, serving as a center of civic, social, and commercial activity
- In the Town of Sylva’s jurisdiction
- Primarily commercial land use
- Lack of organization & management of development
- No land use plan for the corridor
- Separate entrance to each parcel, some with multiple &/or continuous driveway cuts
- High density immediately adjacent to road
- No typical building type or setback-varied
- No development standards that address congestion management, access controls, etc
- “Light” zoning with minimum development standards, some regulation (sign, sidewalk)

FUTURE:

- Some parcels still available for development
- Multiple possible re-development sites
- Population growth in county and at WCU

NC 107 Corridor Transportation Context

CURRENT:

- 5-lane; middle turn lane
- Multiple unpredictable turning patterns
- Designed to carry vehicles at **60 mph**
- Primary North/South corridor through county
- Operating at capacity during peak hours (2010 AADT 35,000 at Cope Creek Rd)
- Serves low pedestrian traffic (>100-200/day); pedestrian traffic increased when sidewalk was built; complete sidewalk on west side; some crosswalks
- No existing fixed route public transit
- No bike lane; bike traffic minimal, sometimes on sidewalk- unsafe for biking
- Multiple high accident intersections, but below state average.



Recommendations

For STIP project R-5600: NC 107 from US 23 Business to NC 116

- Implement access management techniques to assist with access and mobility issues, with the understanding that it will increase the capacity and multi-modal safety of road. It is preferred that this occur in the existing footprint as much as possible (with minimal impact on adjacent parcels)
- Prioritize improvements at the intersection of NC 107 and US 23 Business
- Consider removing the Sunrise Park phase from the 107/23 intersection and redirecting local traffic to Cherry Street. Add signal at Cherry Street
- Include West Main Street in project planning and development (from the one-way split downtown to the 107/23 intersection)
- Design to a Level of Service E, rather than the LOS D that FS0814-A was targeted to meet
- Add sidewalk to east side of corridor
- Implement engineering devices to reduce the 85th percentile speed into the speed limit range
- Cooperate with the Town of Sylva to support streetscaping, which, when combined with denser development patterns (supported by city development standards), can influence the character of the road as well as reduce speed and increase safety
- Provide pedestrian crossings at all traffic signals, and at least once every quarter mile (equating to the “five-minute walk” based on walking speed of 3 mph)
- Provide sharrows and signage for bicycle usage and safety (minimum), or bike lane (if possible), or multi-use path in lieu of sidewalk on one side of corridor
- Implement a traffic signal timing system throughout corridor
- Include public transit stops (see question 6 in survey results)

For Town of Sylva

- Develop a land use plan for the town, with the NC 107 corridor as one component
- To help bring a true “Main Street” feel to the corridor, prepare new development standards/codes that incent/require a denser pattern of development and permit/require mixed use development; should be geared toward appearance, complete-streets, and an urban context. Include joint connection policy for driveways. Engage a professional firm to develop this toolbox
- Look into extending jurisdiction south on NC 107, via extra territorial jurisdiction, in anticipation of future development in this area
- Continue with streetscape plan, and implement corridor improvements (landscaping, pedestrian amenities, in cooperation with NCDOT)
- Work closely with SWRPO and NCDOT on project development for R-5600 to ensure that local priorities are considered



- Re-designate the NC 107 Corridor Study Committee to be the lead liaison between NCDOT and the public, to keep information and dialogue flowing during project development

For Jackson County

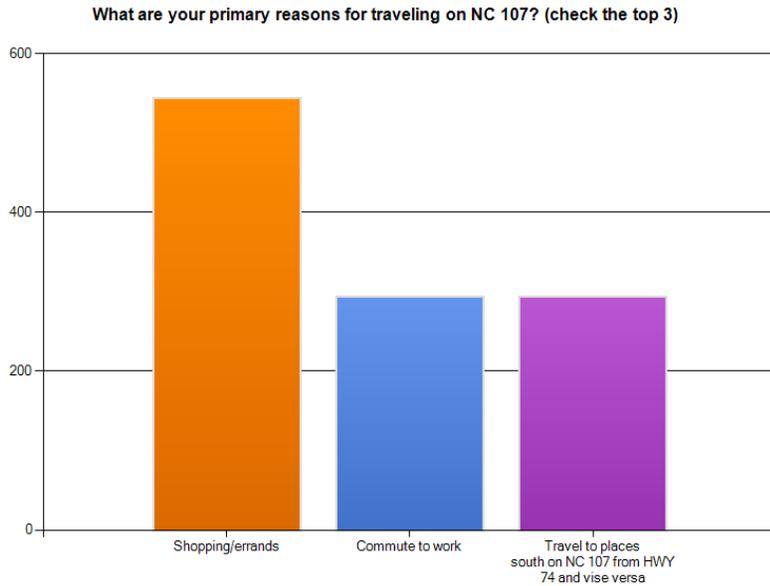
- Support the development of a land use plan for the Town of Sylva, through the county planning department
- Revise the Jackson County CTP to reflect a lesser target Level of Service in study area; revise from LOS D to LOS E. The community accepts this trade-off between impacts and capacity.
- Revise Jackson County CTP to create a new Vision Statement for the NC 107 project within the study area. Called a “Problem Statement” by NCDOT, this is a locally vetted and adopted statement regarding the purpose and need for a project.
 - Example: “Upgrade NC 107 from US 23 Business intersection to NC 116 intersection using superstreet concept and access management in a context sensitive manner to achieve more capacity while minimizing impacts on adjacent land parcels. Improve traffic flow and safety; improve access and ease of use to help remedy poor economic conditions; correct lack of multi-modal accommodations.”
- Re-designate the NC 107 Corridor Study Committee to be the lead liaison between NCDOT and the public, to keep information and dialogue flowing during project development

Public Input

The NC 107 Corridor Study Committee developed an online survey to gauge the public perception of the issues in the corridor. There were 709 voluntary respondents. It was not a random sample, but rather was distributed as a link via email. The email was initially sent to the following types of residents, who were then asked to send it along to their contacts: NC 107 Corridor Study Committee, Jackson County Planning Board, Town of Sylva Planning Board, local government administrators, public school administrators. The committee understands that there are populations that were not reached due to this method of distribution. Paper copies were made available at the Jackson County public library, but none were completed.

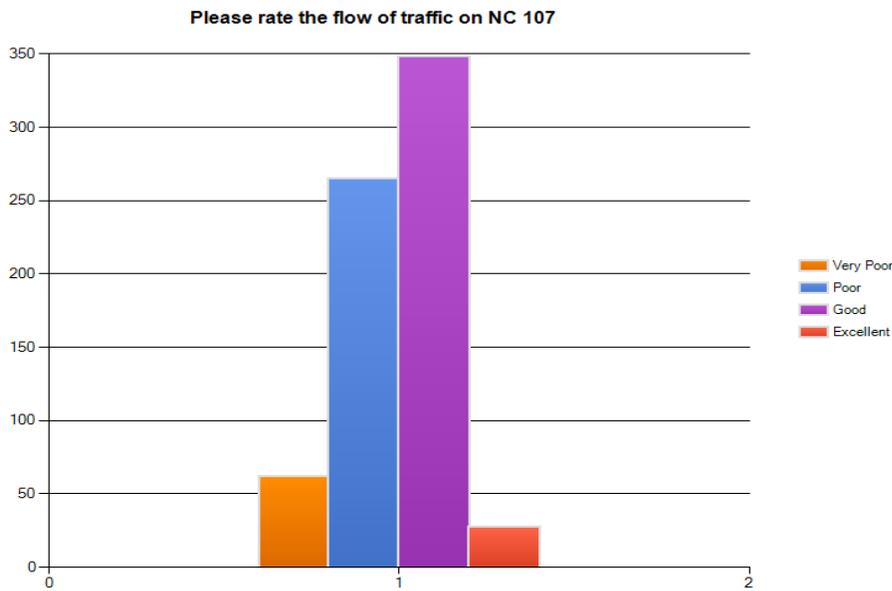


Question 1:



Top 3 responses shown. Confirms the committee’s assumption that the majority of traffic in the corridor is local and destination based, or north/south commuting.

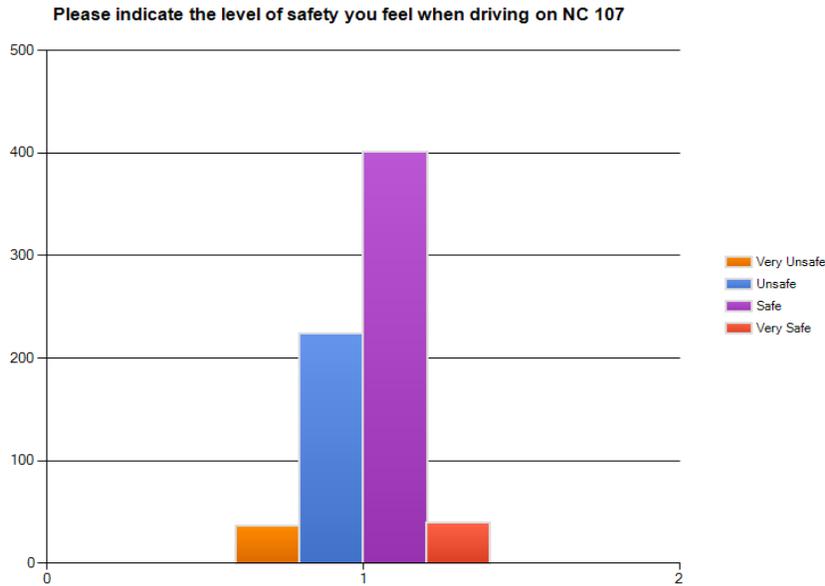
Question 2:



This question aimed to measure perceived traffic flow, and the response was mixed in the good to poor range. Very few respondents held extreme views of the traffic flow.

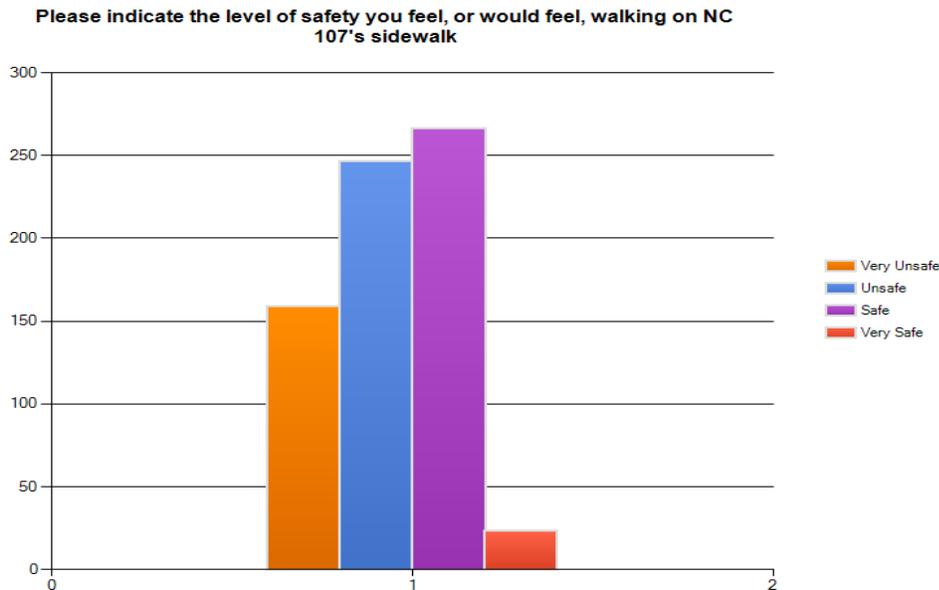


Question 3:



This question aimed to measure perceived vehicle safety, with 63% of respondents perceiving the corridor as a safe place to travel by car, and 37% unsafe to very unsafe.

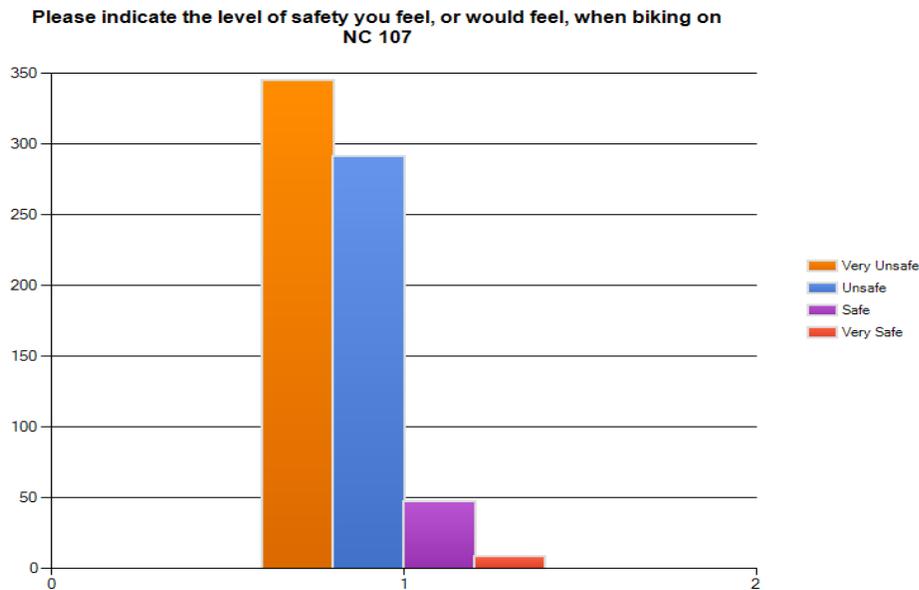
Question 4:



This question aimed to measure perceived pedestrian safety, with 58% of respondents responding either very unsafe or unsafe. This confirms the committee's recommendation for more and better pedestrian facilities.

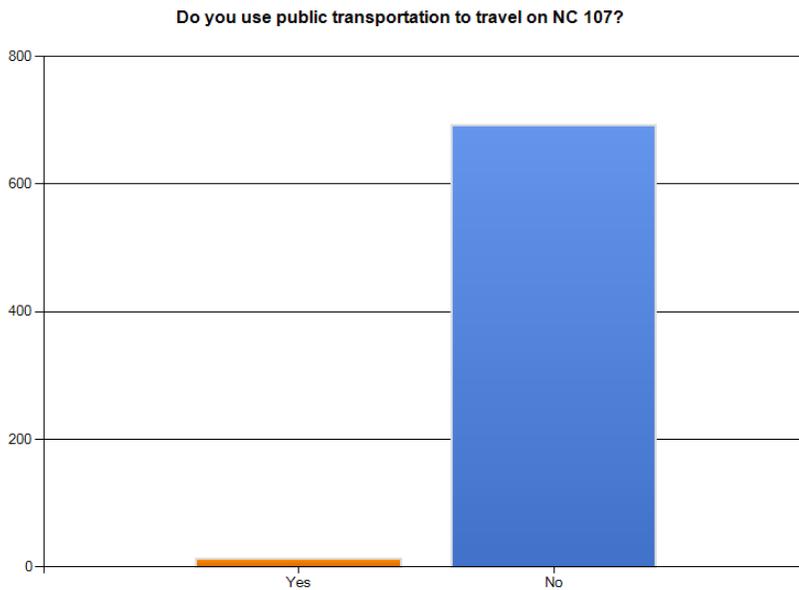


Question 5:



Bicycling in the corridor is overwhelmingly perceived to be unsafe, with 92% answering unsafe or very unsafe.

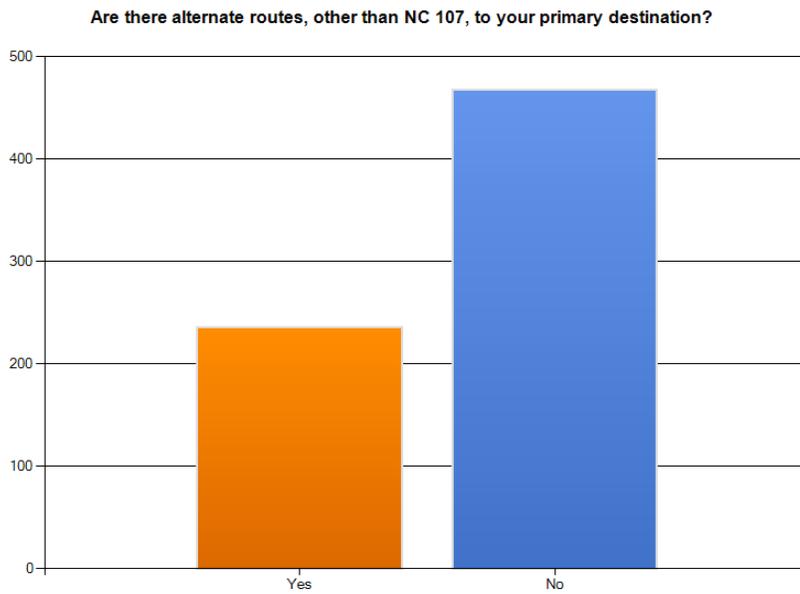
Question 6:



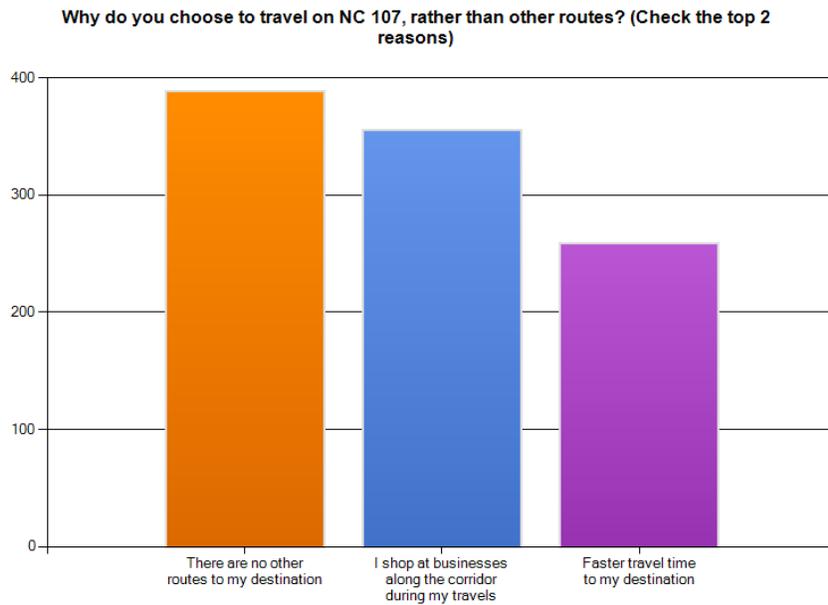
Only 11 respondents answered yes to this question. The county transit system is used primarily by transit dependent riders, not choice riders. A deviated fixed route runs hourly through the corridor, but does not make regular stops there because of the lack of adequate transit facilities.



Question 7:



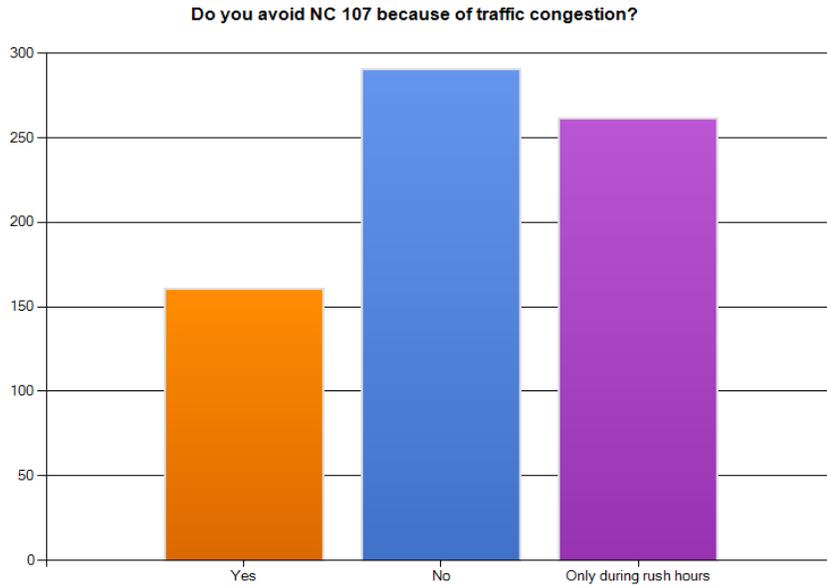
Question 8:



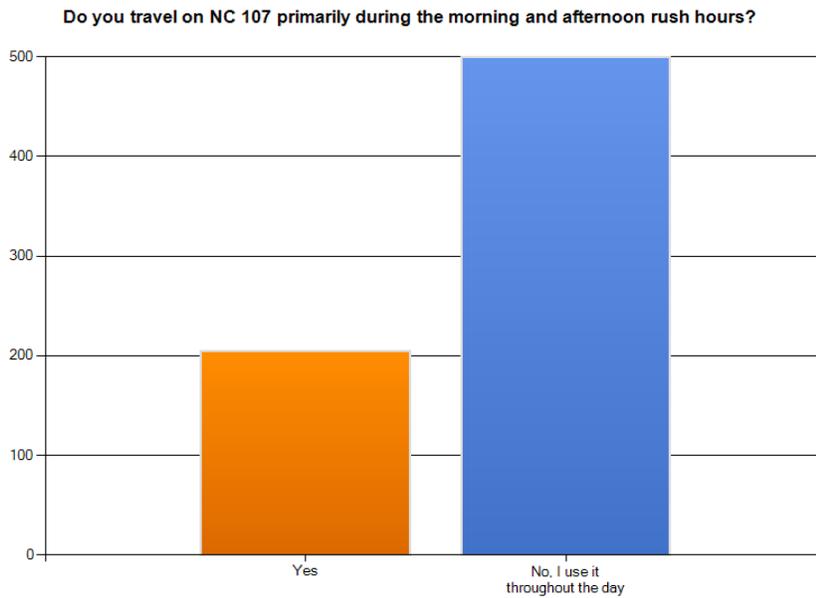
Top 3 responses shown. This question addresses the lack of alternate routes, as well as the nature of many trips being made to destinations within the corridor.



Question 9:

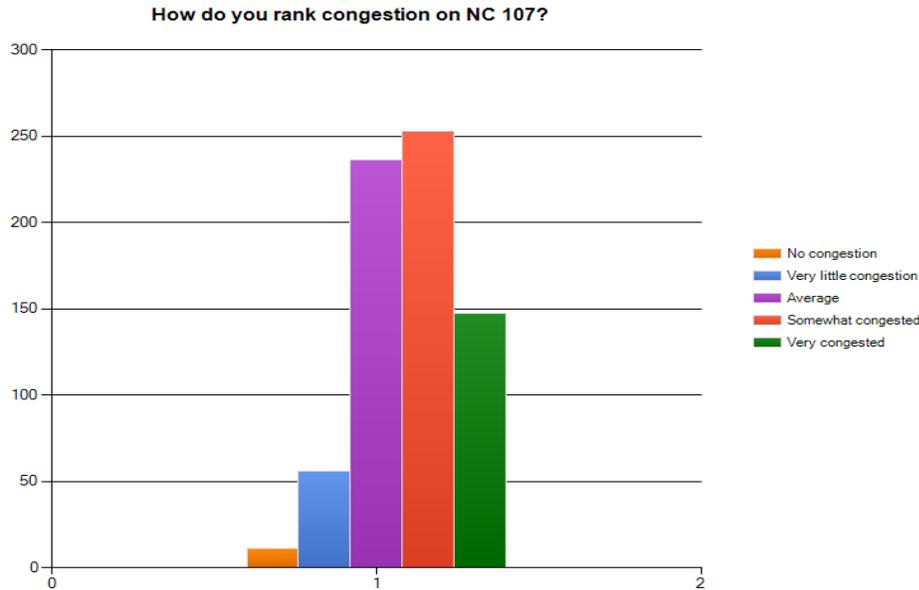


Question 10:





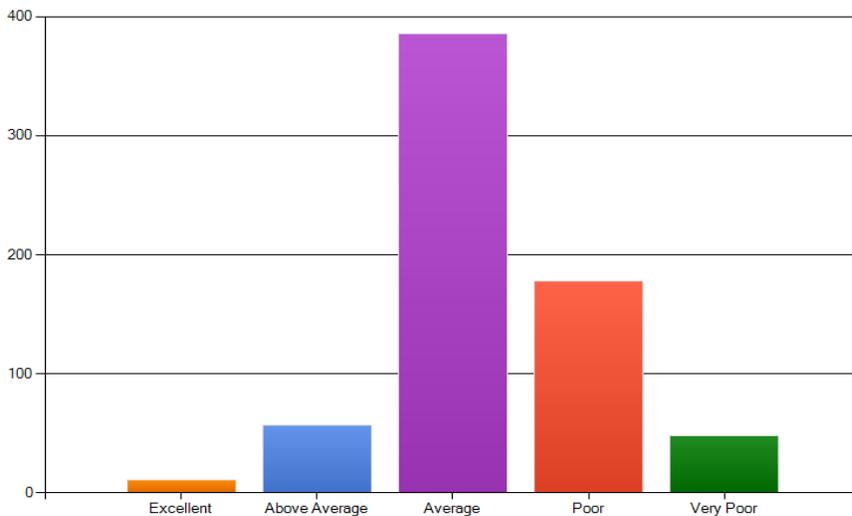
Question 11:



This question aimed to measure the perception of congestion in the corridor. 57% of respondents view congestion as somewhat to very congested, 34% view it as average. Only 9% of respondents view the corridor as better than average on congestion.

Question 12:

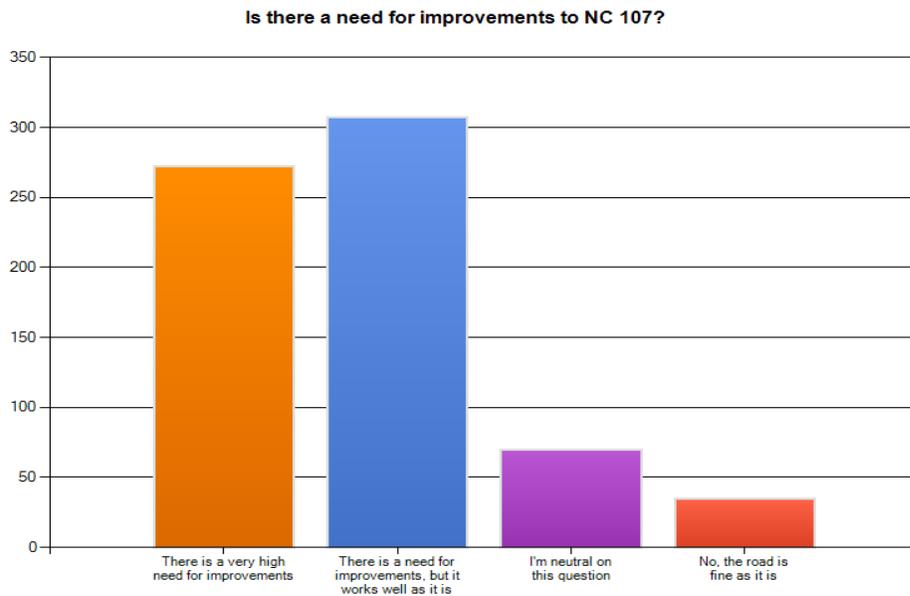
Compared to the commercial corridors in other towns you have visited, how would you rank the overall condition of Sylva's commercial corridor, NC 107? This includes its appearance as well as its functionality.



57% of respondents view the overall condition of the corridor as average. When combined with the poor to very poor responses, 90% of respondents' perception of the corridor is average or less, with only 10% viewing it favorably to comparable commercial corridors in other communities.

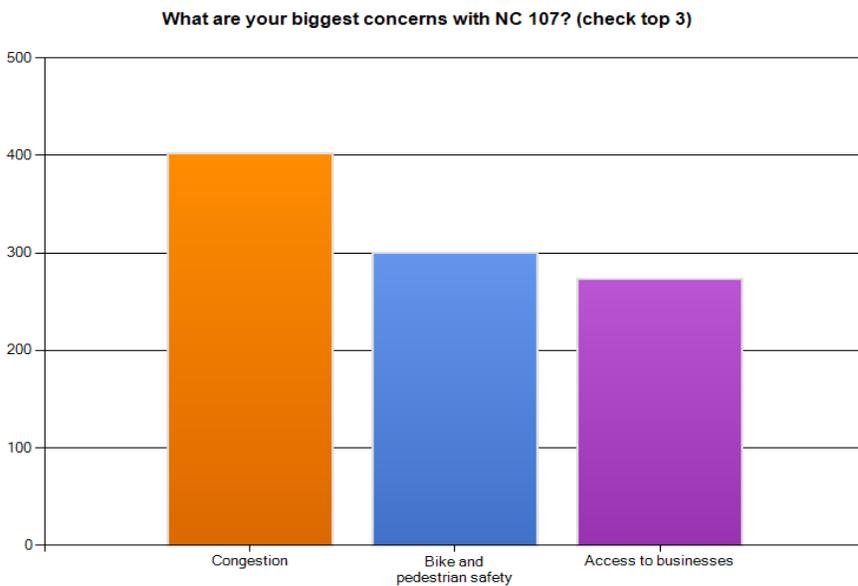


Question 13:



Vast majority sees a need or a high need for improvements. 40% of respondents answered that there is a very high need for improvements, 45% declaring a need for improvement but also acceptance of the current conditions.

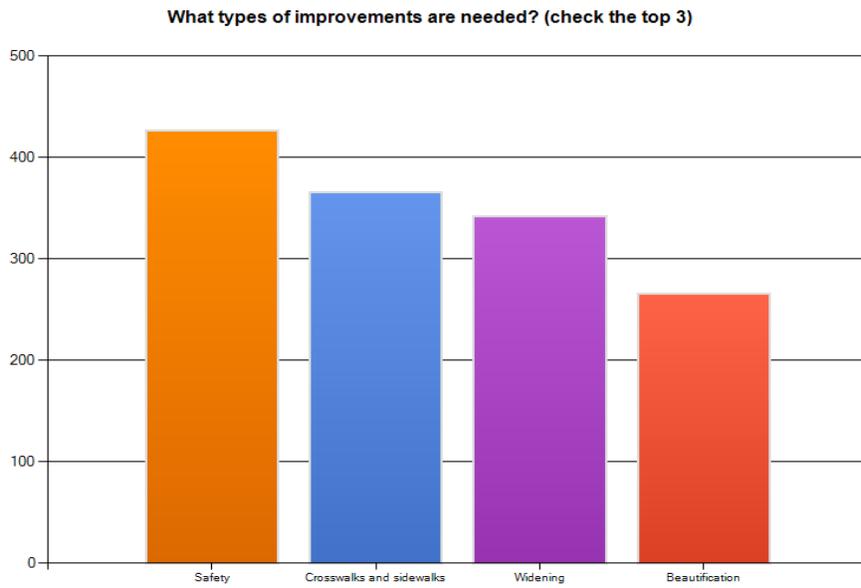
Question 14:



Top 3 responses shown.

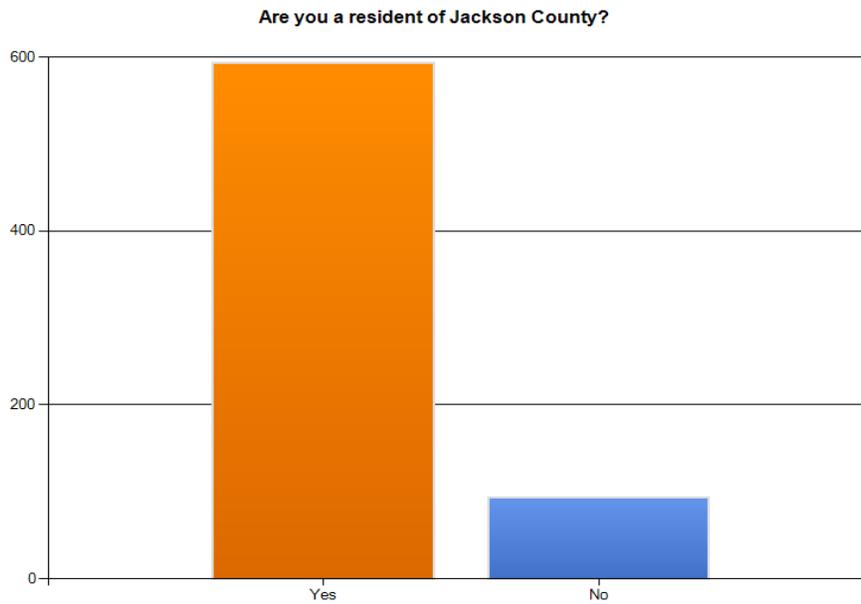


Question 15:



Top 4 responses shown.

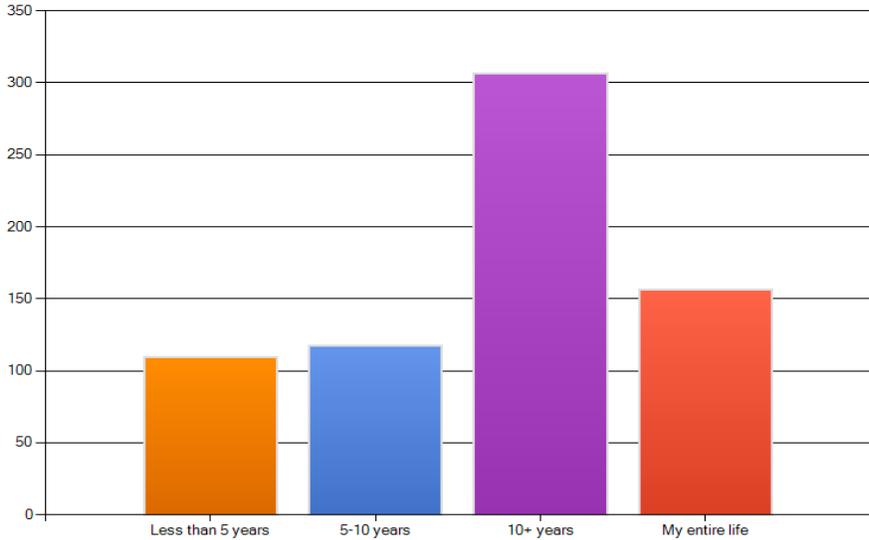
Question 16:





Question 17:

How long have you lived near and traveled on NC 107?



Some questions arose during the survey period. They are listed here, along with the answer provided.

1. Why is only the Sylva section of the road addressed in the survey? Shouldn't there be an "overall road system evaluation"?

The NCDOT created a Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) for the Jackson County that was adopted in 2010. It was created with the assistance of a local task force, and adopted by the local governing boards. This process looked at the overall transportation network of the county. Existing roads were evaluated to determine future deficiencies of volume (average annual daily traffic) to capacity (number of cars the road was designed to carry).

In the CTP, the section of NC 107 from the Business 23 intersection (Bogarts) to the NC 116 intersection (Ingles/SMH) was found to be operating "over capacity" during peak hours. Projected population increases over the 25 year planning period (to 2035) indicate that congestion on this section will continue to worsen. The Jackson County CTP is available here : <http://www.regiona.org/transportation-planning-rpo/jackson-county/>

NCDOT asks for local prioritization of transportation projects when creating the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the document that schedules projects for funding. In 2011, the Jackson County Commissioners ranked improvements to existing NC 107 as their top transportation priority. The Town of Sylva ranked it second (after improvements to West Main Street from the Mill and Main Street split to the Business 23 intersection). When fed into a regional



methodology for determining needed transportation improvements, NC 107 in the Town of Sylva ranked as the highest local priority in the six western counties.

2. The questions are leading, and written as though it has already been determined that improvements are needed.

It has been determined that this section of road is over capacity. The local and regional prioritization processes have determined that improvements are *wanted*. The 2012 STIP (funding document) includes this project, scheduling it for right of way acquisition to begin in 2021. This is subject to change, as project planning and development progress, but this means that work on this section of NC 107 has been scheduled for funding.

NCDOT conducted a Feasibility Study in 2010, to determine what types of improvements could be made. You can find the results here: <http://www.regiona.org/transportation-planning-rpo/jackson-county/> . Because the recommendations of this study included a major widening that would affect numerous businesses, governing boards and public comments were negative.

The NC 107 Corridor Study is being conducted to assist the Town of Sylva with land use planning decisions around the study area, and to assist the NCDOT with project planning and development. Essentially, the town, county, and NCDOT want some consensus on the issues with and vision for this section of NC 107.

3. Is the "agenda" of the survey to "marshal evidence in favor of the much contested bypass"?

No. It is to measure public perception on various aspects of the existing road.

4. Why are we doing this now? Shouldn't we wait until improvements are actually needed?

It takes many years to plan and fund transportation projects. The NC 107 Corridor Study committee is attempting to do some work now that will help the efficiency of the 10+ year planning and development period for a project that may or may not ever come to fruition. There are a lot of variables feeding into the process.



Appendices

Appendix I: SWRPO Priority Needs List (top 15 only)

SPOT ID#	RPO points	Rank	County Rank	County	STIP #	Route	Description - From-To	Project
1006	100	1	1	Jackson	R-5600	NC 107	US23 toward WCU and Lovedale Road	Improve from 5 lane to divided 4 lane boulevard
1	100	2	1	Graham	A-0009 A	Corr. K	US 19B Andrews to US 129	4 lane divided new location
301	100	3	1	Swain	R-4751	US 19	SR 1152 (Hughes Branch) to 441	Upgrade Roadway - 9 miles
753	100	4	1	Macon		lotla Church Rd (SR 1372)	NC 28 to lotla Baptist Church	Upgrade roadway
5	100	5	1	Clay	A-0011 C	NC 69	GA Stateline to US 64	Widen to 4 lanes - 4.5 miles
1008	100	6	2	Jackson		US74 and US23-Bus	Intersection of US74 and US23-Bus (AVL Highway)	US-23Bus traffic to go Westbound on US74
1009	100	7	3	Jackson		US23 (AVL Highway)	NC107 to Hospital Road	Widen to 4-lane with median
1037	100	8	1	Cherokee		Joe Brown Highway -SR1326	Town to Hiawassee Dam access road	Widening and Paving
1040	100	9	2	Macon		US 441 Bus	imrpovemnts (Womack, Maple, Porter)	3 intersection imprpovemnts (Womack, Maple, Porter)
749	100	10	3	Macon		US 23-441 (Georgia Road)	US 64 toTerrell Rd	Remove center turn lane, replace signals with superstreet design
746	100	11	2	Clay	na	SR 1307	Tusquittee Rd	Safety Improvments
1049	100	12	2	Cherokee	na	Davis Creek Road SR1337	Bald Creek to TN State Line 9US Forest Service Lands)	Widening and Paving
1071	100	13	2	Swain	na	Depot Street	Depot St and Deep Creek Rd	Intersection safety improvments
751		14	2	Graham	na	New location	Industrial Park Connection - Paralleling Long Crk	Similar to a thoroughfare plan project not adopted
754		15	3	Swain	na	Alarka Rd (Lower)	US 74 @ interchange to Grassy Branch Rd	Upgrade, Drainage and safety improvements, trestle



Appendix II: Jackson Co. Resolution, not adopted

After further discussion and review, upon a motion of _____, seconded by _____ and, upon being put to a vote, was carried _____, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners approved the following resolution:

Resolution

In opposition to the funding of R-4745, also known as the NC107 Connector, by the NCDOT in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

WHEREAS, Jackson County and the Town of Sylva named improvements to the existing NC 107 (local project number Jac0009-H) as the top transportation priority in the county and town during the 2011 prioritization process (P2.0); and

WHEREAS, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners believes that the majority of county residents agree with the prioritization of improvements to the existing NC 107 above the construction of a new facility; and

WHEREAS, improvements to NC 107 (Jac0009-H), when analyzed using the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization’s (SWRPO) methodology for determining regional transportation priorities, ranked as the number one regional transportation priority; and

WHEREAS, the Transportation Advisory Committee of the SWRPO adopted a regional transportation Priority Needs List naming improvements to NC 107 (Jac0009-H) as the top regional transportation priority; and

WHEREAS, Jackson County is concerned that R-4745 will receive NCDOT funding before the top transportation priority as named by the local community; and

WHEREAS, Jackson County and the municipalities within adopted a Comprehensive Transportation Plan in 2010 that included R-4745 with a caveat that the project’s inclusion in the plan could be reconsidered if further study of the project deemed it unnecessary or unwanted ; and

WHEREAS, Jackson County may exercise its right to amend the CTP, removing R-4745, if this resolution does not result in removal of R-4745 from the STIP; and

WHEREAS, Jackson County Board of Commissioners understands that the NCDOT is undergoing a transition in its process for determining which projects are entered into the STIP, and that the new system intends for the local community to have a more prominent role in naming which projects should receive funding ; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that the Jackson County Board of Commissioners is in opposition to the inclusion of R-4745 in the NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program and is hereby recommending to the North Carolina Department of Transportation that it be removed from consideration for funding.

ADOPTED, this the xxth day of xxxxx 2011.

I, Jack Debnam, Jackson County Board of Commissioners Chairman, hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution adopted in an adjourned meeting of the Jackson County Board of Commissioners held on xxxxx, 2012. WITNESS my hand this the xx day of xxxxxx, 2012.

Jack Debnam, Jackson County Chairman of the Board



Appendix III: Town of Sylva response to FS-0814A

Appendix III



Derrick W. Lewis
Feasibility Studies Unit Head
NCDOT – Program Development Branch
1534 Mil Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1534

NOVEMBER 16, 2010

Dear Mr. Lewis,

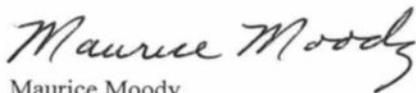
In response to the NC 107 Improvements Feasibility Study presented at the November 9th Citizen's Information Workshop, the Sylva Board of Commissioners submit the following comments.

The terrain in Jackson County is mountains, ridges, narrow valleys and streams. This terrain is extremely important in the development of Sylva and Jackson County. NC 107 in Sylva runs through a narrow valley between two ridges. Between Sylva and Cullowhee the highway is either sandwiched between ridges, or between a ridge and the river. With this in mind, we would like for NC 107 to remain a four (4) lane city street with little or no increase in width. Increasing NC 107 to six (6) or seven (7) lanes would have a negative impact to business and the growth of Sylva. We have faith in NC DOT's ability to forecast traffic and determine future needs or highway requirements. Therefore, if the current or improved four lane highway will not carry the forecasted traffic, we would endorse the connector concept, in conjunction with the improvements to NC 107.

We would also recommend that NC DOT consider increasing the width of the bridge across Scotts Creek at Jackson Paper to four lanes.

Your consideration for our concerns and for the growth of Sylva is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Maurice Moody
Mayor of Sylva
83 Allen Street
Sylva, NC 28779

cc: Mark L. Reep, P.E.
Joel Setzer



Special Thanks

to the following individuals for assistance with the study:

All members of the study committee, listed on page 1

Joel Cranford, NCDOT

James Dunlop, NCDOT

Don Kostelec, Kostelec Planning

Derrick Lewis, NCDOT

Philip Moore, Southwestern Commission

Nathan Phillips, Hatch Mott MacDonald

Mark Reep, Florence & Hutcheson, Consulting Engineers

Mike Reese, NCDOT