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What makes you crazy about driving on, living near the interstate? NCDOT seeks public input for I-95 improvement study

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ROANOKE RAPIDS - "What would you like to see?" ... "What is it you would want out of 95?" ...

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Those are questions asked of you by Greer Beaty, Director of NCDOT's Communications Office, because your input is needed.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is undertaking a massive study of possible improvements for all 182 miles of Interstate 95 in North Carolina, and they want you to help.

The project, the I-95 Corridor Study, began in October of 2009.

It concludes in October 2011, with a total price tag of \$6.4 million.

"Typically when a project is started," said Greer, "the engineers do a preliminary study and see which way the road will go." Here, NCDOT is taking a new approach.

They're seeking public input on all phases of the study - funding, where the road needs the most work and what sorts of repairs should be done first.

Kristine O'Connor, the project manager for the study and a Project Planning engineer for NCDOT, has established a timeline for the study.

Currently the study is seeking to simply inform the public about the study, by posting fliers and setting up a Web site at www.driving95.com.

Study personnel are also out studying I-95 right now, collecting pavement data and checking bridges.

Engineers are also putting together a traffic model for the interstate, a model which can be adjusted for

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any project suggestions so traffic impact analysis can be done right away during the study.

A similar model for funding will also be done.

In July of this year, NCDOT will be holding informal meetings in the eight counties 95 touches - though they stress anyone from anywhere is invited to attend one of these meetings.

According to project engineer Craig Young, the meetings will be set in a specific timeframe and citizens will be invited to drop in during the timeframe.

Attendees will then be able to talk to a project engineer or planner and voice their opinions and offer their suggestions about how I-95 may best be improved.

Once the meetings are over, all the data collected from citizens will be added to the data NCDOT gathers from studying the road itself.

After this data is analyzed, another round of meetings will be held and actual project planning will begin.

O'Connor stresses all aspects of improving I-95 are completely open to suggestion and discussion, everything from where projects need to begin to possible sources of funding.

"All funding methods are on the table," O'Connor said.

"From traditional funding to private/public partnerships to tolling." Young stresses tolling has not been chosen, and any tolling done on I-95 in the future would not involve stopping at toll booths and slowing traffic.

Any funding issues are for future consideration, O'Connor suggests.

Right now NCDOT just wants public input.

"What we want is to get people involved," she said.

"We want people who live here to get involved." "This is one of the critical pieces of our transportation infrastructure," Beaty said.

"We're looking at a plan to see what 95 will be like in 20, 30 years." "At least we'll have a plan for the whole thing," O'Connor added.

"So when it's time to build, it can be done more efficiently." O'Connor also says the data will be accessible to everyone.

"The data's available for anyone who wants to be a part of the solution," she said.

"We welcome outside ideas." The study also serves the purpose of not only involving the public, but also helping the public understand NCDOT.

"There's this perception out there DOT is some evil, faceless entity," O'Connor stated.

"We're trying to dispel that idea.

In the DOT of 2010, we are transparent.

We just want everyone to know what everyone is doing." "We want people to give us input on the front end," Beaty added.

"We've all been to meetings where people gave us a plan and you react to the plan.

Here, we're asking you to help make the plan." Anyone wishing to give their suggestions or comments about improving I

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