



For immediate release

Wednesday May 5, 2010

Contact: Scott Dadson, Beaufort City Manager, 843-525-7070

New route, new bridge proposed for Northern Bypass around Beaufort

Seeking to maximize traffic improvements while minimizing costs for a Northern Bypass loop around downtown Beaufort, the city's engineering firm proposes a composite route that would link northern Lady's Island with US 21 north of the Marine Corps Air Station.

The recommendation takes the best parts of four other plans that all ended up costing more than they would be worth, said Beaufort City Manager Scott Dadson.

Thomas & Hutton Engineering Co. created the new route and shared it May 4 with Beaufort City Council during an afternoon work session. The route would:

- Begin at Brickyard Point Road South and Middle Road at the intersection with Holly Hall Road on SC 802
- Wind northward on Lady's Island along Johnson Landing Road
- Cross the Beaufort River at the extreme northern tip of Lady's Island and touch down north of Perry Clear Drive at the far tip of the Air Station's main runway
- Skirt the outer reaches of the Air Station property and connect with US 21 at Bruce K. Smalls Drive near Clarendon Road.

"The proposed new route is an attempt to take the best of all the other bridge routes, to cause the fewest problems with land acquisition, to design the shortest and least expensive bridge, and to create a plan that solves the most traffic problems with the fewest dollars and headaches," Dadson said.

The other options studied by Thomas & Hutton included a crossing a Perry Clear Drive, Brickyard Point, Central Drive and Bellamy Curve -- the latter in downtown Beaufort where Carteret Street turns into Boundary Street.

The Bellamy Curve option originally found the most public support and was the least expensive of the four options studied. However, the Bellamy Curve design's benefits only covered 78 percent of its anticipated costs, the engineers said. It also creates potential conflicts with the National Landmark Historic District and could increase traffic counts on Boundary Street.

Goals of the Northern Bypass include reducing daily traffic on US 21 from Clarendon Road in Grays Hill to SC 802 at the Publix intersection on Lady's Island, and reducing traffic delays on the existing two bridges to Lady's Island and beyond.

During public comment sessions last year, the preferred location for a Northern Bypass and bridge was "not in my backyard," the engineers said.

Traffic studies and projections show a likely gridlock scenario by 2025 on sections of US 21 without a Northern Bypass being built. Compounding the challenge is the Woods Memorial swing bridge between downtown Beaufort and Lady's Island. In 2007 the swing bridge opened for river traffic 1,597 times. Each opening lasted an average of eight minutes, for a combined daily closure of about 35 minutes, according to an October 2009 study by Thomas & Hutton.

"We are trying to solve a lot of challenges with this Northern Bypass project, and we're not the first ones to tackle it," Dadson said. The project has been discussed for more than 20 years.

"We talk a lot about it, and we study it over and over, and every year there are more cars and trucks on US Highway 21. Traffic backs up more and more. Even with the new McTeer Bridge, we're still going to have traffic problems related to moving people off Lady's Island and through downtown Beaufort. The Northern Bypass is an attempt to ease that problem," he said.

The Thomas & Hutton feasibility study is funded by the County's 1 percent sales tax from 2007. While construction is many years away, tentative estimates for the Northern Bypass projects range from \$55 million to more than \$190 million.

The options created by Thomas & Hutton all utilized existing roads and tried to minimize potential environmental impacts.

Next steps include submitting the new bypass route to state and federal officials for input on the environmental aspects of the project and begin baseline environmental studies.

For comprehensive background on the Northern Bypass project, visit http://www.bcgov.net/transportation_Projects/Northern_Bft_Bypass/feasibilityStudy/ for the October 2009 study. The most recent updated information is available in a PowerPoint at www.cityofbeaufort.org, along with an aerial view of the recommended route from Lady's Island to Grays Hill.

END