



US 521 / SC 9 Corridor Study *Moving Forward*

Introduction

Chapter 1



The *US 521/SC 9 Corridor Study* is a blueprint for long-term and responsible growth in the community. Funding for the study was a joint effort among Lancaster County, the Lancaster County Economic Development Commission, and the South Carolina Department of Commerce. The study area is close to 169,000 acres in size and includes a 20 mile stretch of US 521 and a 4 mile segment along SC 9. The planning horizon for the study is 2035, with a short-term planning horizon of 2015 and a mid-term planning horizon of 2020. Additionally, because of uncertainties and inaccuracies associated with making long-term forecasts, forecasts in this study area are provided through the mid-term planning horizon of 2020. Recommendations set forth in this study were developed as a result of a comprehensive and collaborative planning process that included local residents, business owners, property owners, representatives of state and federal agencies, local groups, elected officials, public utilities, and County staff.

Premise of the Study

The *US 521/SC 9 Corridor Study* is not a formal policy document. It offers recommendations, supported by the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), to be considered by the Planning Commission and County Council. The study concludes with an Action Plan that provides direction on ways to implement the ideas and recommendations found in this study. Translating these recommendations into formal policies and action items are a key step to ensuring that the desired outcomes are achieved. Implementation is expected to occur in phases as needs are prioritized and as funding becomes available. Actions include:

- Amending existing County policy documents, such as the Unified Development Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan.
- Developing and adopting additional policies currently not in place in the County.
- Conducting additional studies and plans for specific areas and themes identified in the study.
- Implementing catalyst projects to lead the development community by example.

The *US 521/SC 9 Corridor Study* is a guide for preferred development patterns, design qualities, and transportation systems in the community. It also provides a strategy for economic vitality to build upon the Lancaster County Economic Development Corporation’s (LCEDC) efforts to foster a sustainable economic environment.

The study is organized into eight chapters:

1. An introduction including community values, why the study is needed, study area limits, regional scan, and the planning process.
2. A market analysis that reviews regional, demographic, and employment trends and provides demand forecasts for residential, retail, office, and industrial uses through 2020.

3. A general development strategy that includes guiding principles, community assessment, place typology, general development map, scenario planning, and summary of recommendations.
4. A transportation strategy that includes guiding principles, a transportation assessment, proposed Dave Lyle Boulevard extension, land use/transportation connection, green infrastructure, street typology and connectivity, preferred access management strategy, transit considerations, bicycle and pedestrian strategy, transit considerations, cross sections, intersection design considerations, and summary of recommendations.
5. A place-making chapter that identifies the physical improvements and/or planning initiatives necessary to implement the general development map. Place-making principles discussed in the chapter include gateways, wayfinding, branding and image, community design strategy, building architecture, site design, signage, and billboards.
6. An economic vitality strategy that includes guiding principles, a description of what makes a place competitive, the importance of promoting cohesive design, an understanding of tax base implications, marketing ideas, and summary of recommendations.
7. Focus area studies that provide study-in-detail recommendations for six sites within the study area. These recommendations include market realistic development programs and illustrative master plans that support catalyst projects in the study area.
8. An action plan for implementation with recommendations, implementing actions, responsible parties, potential funding sources, and a timeline for completion.

Community Values

The consultant team worked with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), key stakeholders, and members of the general public to create a set of community values for influencing the *US 521/SC 9 Corridor Study*. These values generally support, encourage, and implement the community’s vision toward more sustainable development.

Community values for guiding the planning process include:

- Build trust among participants in the planning process through transparency and collaboration.
- Consider the community’s concerns for environmental stewardship, economic prosperity, and the protection of quality-of-life when formulating recommendations for the study.
- Create a vision for the two corridors that is economically viable, reflecting both market timing and change anticipated for the next ten years.

- Preserve scenic views, natural areas, and remaining farms in more rural areas along the corridor.
- Make efficient use of existing infrastructure, and specifically, balance the needs and availability of new infrastructure with the unintended consequences to ‘livability’ in the area. Livability is defined by great streets, complete neighborhoods, plentiful and affordable housing, well designed public spaces, and a variety of transportation options.
- Balance the need for government regulation that supports the community’s vision with the interests of private property owners.

Building a Case for Urgency

Lancaster County experienced record growth in the past decade, especially in the northern portions of the study area (also referred to as “Indian Land” or “the panhandle”). This growth is largely generated by its proximity to large metropolitan centers like Charlotte, as well as Rock Hill, Fort Mill and other surrounding residential communities in Union (NC) and York Counties. Population growth in the panhandle increased 52% between 2000 and 2009, which accounted for nearly 88% of the County’s total growth during the same time period. The panhandle has also experienced, and is experiencing, significant employment growth through the addition of the Lowe’s, Edgewater Corporate Center, and the new Wal-Mart.

This growth has had many unintended consequences, including increased congestion on roadways, especially along the County’s major north-south highway - US 521. Traffic along this corridor has increased from 24,100 vehicles per day (2005) on US 521 between the N.C. State Line and SC 160 to 32,200 vehicles per day (2008), jeopardizing one of the county’s greatest assets— short travel times to Charlotte. In addition to internal pressures, the study area’s major thoroughfares, US 521 and SC 9, carry a substantial amount of the region’s traffic. As surrounding counties like York County, SC and Union County, NC continue to experience growth at or above levels experienced in Lancaster County, they will look to divert their traffic onto these thoroughfares, in an effort to capitalize on their connectivity to the interstate system and the City of Charlotte.

Although employment opportunities are growing in the retail and office sectors, the County has experienced tremendous job losses in the manufacturing and textile industries. As a result, the unemployment rate has risen steadily since the 2001-2002 recession, reaching as high as 19.1% by June 2009. In total, the county has experienced a net loss of 3,217 jobs from 2002 to 2008 (18% decrease).

Unlike many other major thoroughfares in the Charlotte Region, the US 521 and SC 9 corridors are largely undeveloped. However, growth in Lancaster County is anticipated to reach or exceed recent levels when the recession ends. To date, the County has had no strategy for handling growth. Without a strategy in place, decisions are made haphazardly, and often by people who are not invested in the community. The lack of a comprehensive strategy limits the County’s ability to successfully compete against neighboring jurisdictions for economic development opportunities.

Although it seems counter intuitive, the best time to conduct studies and plans is during a recession. The recession provides a break in growth, allowing the County to effectively catch up and start being proactive. Steps can be taken to influence design, transportation patterns, and land use patterns before pressures are once again on the County. One statement that the consultant team heard from multiple participants during the planning process was “we do not want to become the next Independence Boulevard.” To avoid that outcome, the County must be poised to handle anticipated growth, with a strategy in place for where it should occur and what it should look like. This study is the first step to ensuring that growth occurs in a predictable manner that protects community character and enhances the functionality and appearance of the area.

Study Area

The study area is expansive, covering a distance of over 20 miles along US 521 and 4 miles along SC 9. In total, the study area is close to 169,000 acres in size. It is generally bounded by the City of Lancaster to the south, Chester and York Counties to the west, Mecklenburg County to the north, and Union County and Monroe Highway to the east. Some of the key features in the study area include the Catawba River running along the western edge of the study area, Andrew Jackson State Park in the central portion of the study area, Indian Land in the northern portion, and the City of Lancaster in the southern portion (see Study Area Map on page 1-3).



Because of the size of the study area, the consultant team decided to divide it into three distinct growth areas (see the Study Area Map on the following page): Twelve Mile Creek north to the state lane (Growth Area One), Twelve Mile Creek south to Shiloh Unity Road (Growth Area Two), and the area south of Shiloh Unity Road (Growth Area Three).

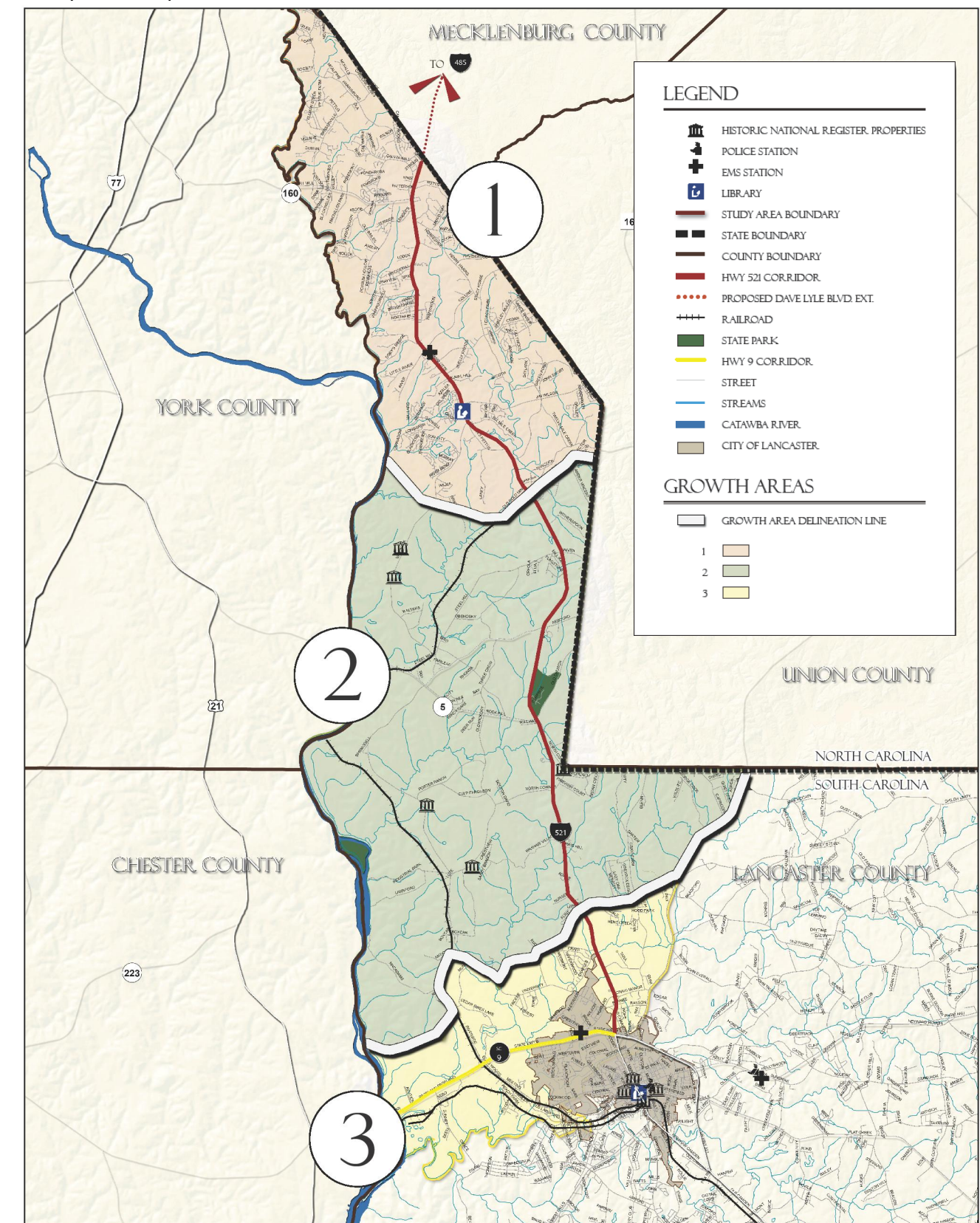
Growth Area One is the area commonly known as Indian Land. This area is characterized by rapid residential, commercial, and employment growth. It is served by water and sewer and represents the best opportunities for growth and development in the immediate future.

Growth Area Two is primarily rural in character and contains some of the County's most environmentally and historically significant areas including Van Wyck, Andrew Jackson State Park, and Landsford Canal State Park. The lack of infrastructure hinders immediate opportunities for development; however, this area represents the location for the next wave of growth in the County.

Growth Area Three is comprised of three distinct areas. It includes the business corridor along SC 9 west of the city limits and in proximity of the airport. It also includes USC-Lancaster and future educational expansion opportunities. Finally, it includes areas within and adjacent to the City of Lancaster which will continue to develop with residential, commercial and employment uses-just at a slower pace than in the Indian Land area.

Many recommendations set forth in this study will apply to the study area as a whole; however, unique characteristics of each growth area may result in some recommendations tailored to a specific growth area. Recommendations that only apply to one growth area will be delineated by area within the study.

Study Area Map



Regional Scan

Regional forces in and around the study area were considered during the planning process. Below is a summary of features and activities in the region that influenced recommendations for the *US 521/SC 9 Corridor Study*.

Catawba River

Lancaster County is bounded on the west by the Catawba River, which flows southeast from the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Lake Wateree reservoir.

The river provides many benefits to residents including recreational opportunities like canoeing/kayaking. It also creates some challenges because it hinders east-west access to York County and can constrain development in the floodplain/wetland surrounding the river banks.

The SC General Assembly designated a 30-mile segment of the Catawba River as a State Scenic River in 2008. As a result, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) will create a management plan for the river. The management plan will inventory existing land uses, assess scenic, recreational, geologic, botanical, fish, wildlife, historic, environmental, and cultural attributes of the river, identify problems in the corridor and recommend an action plan to solve them, and recommend land management practices that are compatible with the preservation of the river.



Although a management plan currently does not exist, one will be developed during the planning horizon for this study. Recommendations from that planning process should be incorporated into future County planning processes and documents.

Carolina Thread Trail

The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional network of greenways and trails planned to connect 15 counties in North Carolina and South Carolina. It will not only preserve valuable natural areas, but provide recreational opportunities to residents and link major attractions in the region.

Although specific trail routes have not been identified in Lancaster County, the County is in the process of establishing a steering committee, which will select a consultant to develop the trail routes throughout the County and ensure the plan is developed in a timely manner. Several destinations in the County have been

identified as desirable to connect to the trail including Andrew Jackson State Park, Flat Creek Natural Area, Forty Acre Rock Heritage Preserve, and Landsford Canal State Park.

Proposed Dave Lyle Blvd. Extension

The extension of Dave Lyle Boulevard into Lancaster County has been included in numerous local and statewide transportation programs/plans since the late 1980s. Most recently, a preferred alternative (evaluated during a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) approved in 2002) was adopted by both York and Lancaster counties. Lack of funding put the project on hold, and since adoption three significant development projects have been constructed or planned in or near the path of the preferred alternative within Lancaster County. As a result, a new study entitled *Dave Lyle Boulevard Extension Alternative Alignment & Cost Estimation Study York & Lancaster Counties* was completed in 2008. This report analyzed and re-evaluated the impacts of these new developments on the preferred alternative. A revised alternative was suggested in the study that will have similar impacts to the original preferred alternative. However, a re-evaluation or supplemental EIS would have to be completed to comply with federal requirements, and federal and state permits would have to be obtained prior to construction.

The project is estimated to cost approximately \$140 million and no dedicated funding source has been identified. Although planned as a limited access roadway, the Dave Lyle Boulevard Extension will alter land use along Dave Lyle, particularly at the proposed intersection of Dave Lyle and US 521.

Economic Development Strategic Plan Target Industry Study Marketing/Implementation Plan

A Strategic Economic Development Plan, including Target Industry Study and Target Marketing Plan, was developed for the Lancaster County Economic Development Corporation in April 2009. The plan included a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) which documented key factors impacting future growth in the County. Although unemployment is high, the County is growing quickly. Opportunities exist to offer competitive incentives and provide low cost alternative locations for future employment uses. Key recommendations from the plan that impact the study area include: develop a new business park along SC 9, increase public funding for the Lancaster County Economic Development Corporation (LCEDC), develop discretionary incentive packages for target sectors, implement a pro-active marketing plan, create a comprehensive redevelopment plan for all textile related properties, update existing zoning standards in order to effectively manage future development, proactively protect the County's "distressed" status for incentive purposes (the status increases the amount of incentives available to incoming businesses), and establish a County Water and Sewer Task Force to address future infrastructure issues.

Duke Energy Recreation Plans

Duke Energy has recreation plans for certain rivers/creeks in Chester, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, and York Counties-one of which is for the Catawba River. Three of the ten points of interest in this recreation plan fall within the study area: the area just north of Twelve Mile Creek in Growth Area 1, Highway 5, and Landsford Canal State Park. The recreation plan also calls for improvements to the access area on SC 9. These recreation plans seek to improve access to the river, while also preserving the natural and historic aspects of the river.

Adjacent Jurisdiction Planning Efforts

Planning for the study area cannot occur in a vacuum. Growth, development, and efforts made in jurisdictions in close proximity to the study area will impact the future of the study area.

Waxhaw, North Carolina

The Town of Waxhaw adopted its 2030 Comprehensive Plan in April 2009. Waxhaw is adjacent to Lancaster County to the east, and land use and zoning changes as well as investments in infrastructure on their western edge will influence growth, development, and travel patterns in Lancaster County. Waxhaw's future land use plan calls for medium density residential north of SC 75 and a mix of rural and low density residential south of SC 75 on its western edge. These future residents will likely look for shopping and employment opportunities in Lancaster County. Additionally, a portion of these residents will also travel on SC 75 to US 521 to reach employment opportunities in Charlotte. This residential growth will impact congestion on the County's major thoroughfare.

Fort Mill, South Carolina

The Town of Fort Mill, South Carolina has recently updated its Comprehensive Plan. Fort Mill is in York County just west of the panhandle, the area experiencing the bulk of the growth and development in the study area. Fort Mill is experiencing issues similar to Lancaster County such as expanding housing choice, increasing access to the Catawba River and active recreational facilities, reducing the burden on community facilities, and reducing road congestion. Two roads in particular, SC 160 and Doby's Bridge Road (which intersect with US 521), are also roads of concern in Lancaster County.

Union County, North Carolina

Union County is currently updating its Comprehensive Plan. Although the majority of the land that borders Lancaster County has been designated Rural Conservation Area, details from the Thoroughfare Plan, Water and Sewer Master Plan, and market studies were reviewed before any land use or transportation recommendations were developed as a part of this study.

Western Union County Local Area Regional Transportation Plan (LARTP)

In November 2009, a local area regional transportation plan was prepared for the Village of Marvin, Town of Waxhaw, Town of Weddington, Village of Wesley Chapel, Centralina Council of Governments, and Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization. Like Lancaster County, Western Union County has experienced, and will continue to experience, tremendous growth pressure from the greater Charlotte region. The LARTP includes a thoroughfare plan, list of prioritized roadway projects, an intersection plan, and bicycle, pedestrian, and transit recommendations for all four participating jurisdictions. Recommendations set forth in this plan include retaining rural and small town character and protecting open spaces. In order to achieve these goals, Western Union County will be looking for options to disperse its traffic. These decisions will impact roadways within Lancaster County, specifically US 521.

Planning Process

The consultant team set out with the task of making the planning process collaborative and transparent, engaging the public throughout the entire process. In an ideal world everyone would support all the ideas and recommendations generated during the planning process. Realistically, however, residents have differing interests, needs, and ideas about how the community should grow. The goal of the consultant team was to provide each resident with a high level of "informed consent," where everyone may not agree with every recommendation made but understands the logic behind each recommendation.

Elected officials, the PAC, the consultant team, and other participants in the planning process began working together early and continued to do so throughout the development of the study. This resulted in a shared learning environment and timely communication among participants. Those most directly affected by the project (residents and business owners in the study area) were provided with multiple opportunities to participate in the planning process and influence the outcomes of the study.

Major elements of the planning process included:

Public Involvement

Project Advisory Committee

The Consultant team worked with the Catawba Regional Council of Government (CRCOG) and County staff to establish a Project Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC met monthly to provide direct oversight and counsel to the planning process. PAC members also played a key role in transmitting information to and from their respective constituencies. PAC members represented a broad base of local interests, view points, and concerns for the study area. The members of the PAC, and the organizations they represent, are detailed on the following page.

Project Advisory Committee

Member	Organization
Nannette Amster	Indian Land Action Council
Doug Barnes	Airport Commission
Walter Collins	USC-Lancaster
Tommy Dabney	Lancaster County Economic Development
Dean Faile	Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce
Steve Gedney	L & C Railroad
Austin Jenkins	Katawba Valley Land Trust
Kirk Johnston	Andrew Jackson State Park
Chris Karres	Lancaster County Planning Department
Jane Massey	Van Wyck Business Group
Charlene McGriff	Lancaster County School Board of Trustees
Larry McCullough	Lancaster County Council
Helen Sowell	City of Lancaster
Melvin Threat	Lancaster County Planning Commission
Keith Tunnell	Lancaster County Economic Development
Stephen White	Lancaster County Water and Sewer District
Steve Willis	Lancaster County Administrator

Stakeholder Interviews

The consultant team, in conjunction with CRCOG and County staff, conducted a series of stakeholder interviews. These interviews were used in the planning process to gain insight into the social, political, and economic issues facing the study area. In total, 17 stakeholder groups were interviewed which included:

- Planning Department Heads (County, City, and CRCOG)
- Planning Board Chairman
- Economic Development Representatives for both Lancaster and York counties
- County and City Zoning Officials
- County and City Administrators
- Utility Representatives
- Chamber of Commerce
- Parks and Recreation Representatives
- Katawba Valley Land Trust
- Local Realtors
- Local Developers
- Airport Commission

- South Carolina Department of Transportation
- Springs Industries
- Van Wyck Community Development Club
- Sun City Carolina Lakes
- Large Property Owners

Answers to the questions asked by the consultant team during the stakeholder interviews were used to identify needs and priorities and validate background information collected prior to presentation to the general public.

Public Workshops

Two public workshops were held during the course of the planning process. The first public workshop was held August 11th and 12th, 2009 at the County Administration Building. Approximately 50 people attended the workshop – viewing resource maps and data, completing questionnaires, and participating in focus group discussions and break-out sessions. In total, there were seven focus group meetings on the following subjects:

- Traffic/Transportation
- Bike/Pedestrian
- Parks and Open Space
- Gateways/Design/Branding
- Land Use and Development
- SC 9 and the Airport
- Economic Development

The second public workshop was held November 17, 2009 at the Indian Land Middle School Cafeteria. The event included a two hour open house/drop-in session followed by a presentation and break-out sessions. Attendees moved between five stations – General Development, Transportation, Focus Area Studies, Economic Vitality, and Place-Making to review detailed recommendations. Attendees also participated in a visual preference survey where they voted for preferred design elements for the community. Approximately 30 people were in attendance.

Special Interest Group Meetings

The consultant team, upon request by various interest groups, attended group meetings to present study information and to answer questions. Special interest group meetings included a presentation at an Indian Land Area Council meeting, a public meeting at Pleasant Hill Methodist Church, and a booth at the Indian Land Fall Festival.

County Council Briefing Event

The consultant team led an event during a Special Meeting of the Lancaster County Council on January 7, 2010. Several county groups including the Lancaster County Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors, the Chamber of Commerce, the Planning Commission, and City of Lancaster representatives were invited to attend as well as the general public.

Public Questionnaire

An informal questionnaire was created and filled out by all members of the PAC to obtain feedback on specific issues related to quality of life, land use, transportation improvements, and desired needs and improvements along the corridors. This questionnaire was also made available to the general public online and at public meetings. Approximately 200 questionnaires were completed. Responses were incorporated into the recommendations detailed later in the plan. Results of the survey are detailed in the Appendix.

Project Website

A project website was maintained throughout the duration of the planning process. The project website provided details on upcoming public workshops and events. All project materials including presentations given to the PAC, resource maps, interim deliverables, and newsletters were available on the project website. Residents could also complete the questionnaire from the project website.

