



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Beverly Eaves Perdue
Governor

Eugene A. Conti, Jr.
Secretary

September 21, 2012

Mr. Craig Benedict
Orange Co. Planning Director
PO Box 8181
Hillsborough, NC 27278

Dear Mr. Benedict:

Subject: Proposed Private Crossing Closures with the North Carolina Railroad (NCR)/Norfolk Southern (NS) Railway at Gordon Thomas Drive (TIP No. P-4405I), Greenbriar Drive (TIP No. P-4405J), and Byrdsville Road (TIP No. P-4405K) in Orange County

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to close private North Carolina Railroad (NCR)/Norfolk Southern (NS) Railway crossings at Gordon Thomas Drive, Greenbriar Drive and Byrdsville Road in Orange County (see Figure 1 for project location).

These rail crossings were identified in NCDOT's Private Crossing Safety Initiative (PCSI) report completed in October 2003 and updated in December 2009. This initiative proposes safety improvements along the Raleigh to Charlotte "Sealed Corridor" that close private crossings where feasible and protect the remaining open private crossings with crossbucks, automatic flashers and gates, signals and/or locking gates. This track is part of the Southeast High Speed Rail corridor (SEHSR), which when complete, will provide high speed passenger rail service between Washington, DC and Charlotte, NC.

We would appreciate any information you have that would be helpful in evaluating potential community and environmental impacts for this project. If applicable, please identify any permits and/or approvals required by your agency

Please note that there will be no formal interagency scoping meeting for this project. This letter constitutes solicitation for scoping comments related to the project. It is desirable that you respond by **November 7, 2012**, so that your comments can be used in the preparation of a proposed federally-funded Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

MAILING ADDRESS:
NC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
RAIL DIVISION
1553 MAIL SERVICE CENTER
RALEIGH NC 27699-1553

TELEPHONE: 919-733-7245
FAX: 919-715-6580

WEBSITE: www.bytrain.org

LOCATION:
TRANSPORTATION BUILDING
1 SOUTH WILMINGTON STREET
RALEIGH NC

The following describes the general features of the study area, as well as anticipated environmental impacts.

Proposed Improvements

- **Crossing #735 199Y/MP H 48.49/ Gordon Thomas Drive (P-4405I).** This crossing provides access to Old NC 10 (SR 1710) for six properties located south of the NCRR. The crossing occurs in an area where NS operates one mainline track and a passing siding. While the track section is straight at this location, it quickly enters a curved section both east and west of the crossing. The sight distance for train crews on either approach to the crossing is limited by heavy foliage on both sides of the track. The crossing is vertically humped and is protected by crossbucks. Much of the property surrounding the six parcels is owned by Duke University and is part of their School of Forestry. Alternative access to these properties will be considered using Paschall Drive west of Gordon Thomas Drive (see Figure 2). From there, drivers will be able to access Old NC 10 via Dove Creek Road (SR 1715) or Murphy School Road (SR1714).
- **Crossing #726 305F/MP H 47.62/ Greenbriar Drive (P-4405J).** This crossing serves eight residential parcels located north of the railroad and provides access to Old NC 10 (SR 1710). The crossing is located along a straight section of track. There is heavy foliage on all four approaches to the crossing. The roadway approaches are gravel, and the southbound approach is slightly humped. The crossing is protected by crossbucks. The railroad overpasses Old NC 10 approximately 550 feet east of the crossing. The Greenbrier subdivision abuts the Whispering Pines subdivision immediately to the east which has direct access to Old NC 10 without crossing the railroad. Alternative access will be considered parallel to the track to connect Greenbrier Drive to Spruce Pine Trail in the Whispering Pines subdivision. A new roadway will be studied in two locations (see Figure 2). One will be from Greenbrier Drive approximately 400 feet north of the railroad crossing to Spruce Pine Trail approximately 450 feet north of Old NC 10. The other will be from the northern end of Greenbrier Drive to Spruce Pine Trail where Spruce Pine Trail turns to the east.
- **Crossing #735 189T/MP H 43.89/Byrdsville Road (P-4405K).** This crossing serves a large subdivision of permanent and mobile homes. The crossing is protected by automatic warning devices. The approach roadway is paved and is approximately 16 feet wide. The westbound approach is curved. The crossing is slightly humped and there is heavy foliage on three of the four approaches. Approximately 70 homes are served by this crossing. Residential areas south of Byrdsville Road are surrounded on three sides by Duke University property (Duke Forest) which will most likely remain undeveloped. Alternatives will be considered for Byrdsville Road to have access to NC 86 to the west. A new roadway is proposed to connect Byrdsville Road to Walter Clark Drive (see Figure 3). From there, drivers can follow Walter Clark Drive north to NC 86. Driveway improvements will also be considered in two locations to maintain connectivity to residential areas north of Byrdsville Road.

Water Resources

All three project study areas fall within the Neuse River Basin (USGS Hydrologic Unit 03020201) (DWQ Subbasin 03-04-01). However, the Gordon Thomas Drive study area is adjacent to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Gordon Thomas Drive and Greenbriar Drive study areas are within the Eno River Water Supply Watershed. The Byrdsville Road study area is not in a water supply watershed.

Based on a review of the USGS topographic map and the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) mapping inventory, an unnamed tributary (UT) to Rhodes Creek flows adjacent to the Gordon Thomas Drive study area and through the Greenbriar Drive study area. Stony Creek is adjacent to the Byrdsville Road crossing, and a NWI wetland is partially within the study area.

A full natural resources investigation will be conducted for the project to determine if there are any impacts to natural resources including jurisdictional waters.

Federally Protected Species

Five (5) federally protected species are listed for Orange County according to the September 22, 2010 US Fish and Wildlife Service species list. The currently listed species include the following:

| <i>Common Name</i> | <i>Scientific Name</i> | <i>Status*</i> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Bald eagle | <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> | BGPA* |
| Red-cockaded woodpecker | <i>Picoides borealis</i> | Endangered |
| Dwarf wedgemussel | <i>Alasmidonta heterodon</i> | Endangered |
| Michaux's sumac | <i>Rhus michauxii</i> | Endangered |
| Smooth coneflower | <i>Echinacea laevigata</i> | Endangered |

*FSC = Federal Species of Concern; BGPA = Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

A natural resources investigation will be conducted to determine if any endangered or threatened species are in the project study area.

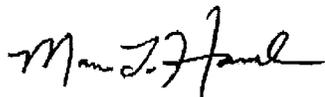
Historic Architectural and Archaeological Resources

A preliminary database search shows one property listed on the National Register of Historic Places near the study areas. The Murphy School, on the southwest corner of Old NC 10 and Murphy School Road (SR 1714), is within 0.3 mile of the Greenbriar Drive crossing but is not within the study area limits.

NCDOT will conduct appropriate studies to determine if the project will have an effect on historic or archaeological resources.

Thank you for assisting us in this study. If further information regarding the proposed action or the environmental analysis process is required, please contact me by phone at (919) 707-4705 or by email at mhamel@ncdot.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc L. Hamel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marc" and last name "Hamel" clearly distinguishable.

Marc L. Hamel, Rail Environmental Manager

NCDOT Rail Division
Environmental and Planning Branch

MH/mlr
Attachments