

Positively Connected: Local transportation plans to ease traffic, increase travel options

BY KELLY HUNTER
SPECIAL TO THE MEBANE ENTERPRISE

Transportation around a city encompasses more than just traveling by vehicle. Sidewalks serve as one mode to travel, while multi-use paths, streets, and public transit provide other modes of travel. The City of Mebane is committed and determined to ensure that our community has an evolving and growing multi-modal transportation system that encompasses ways to travel for motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

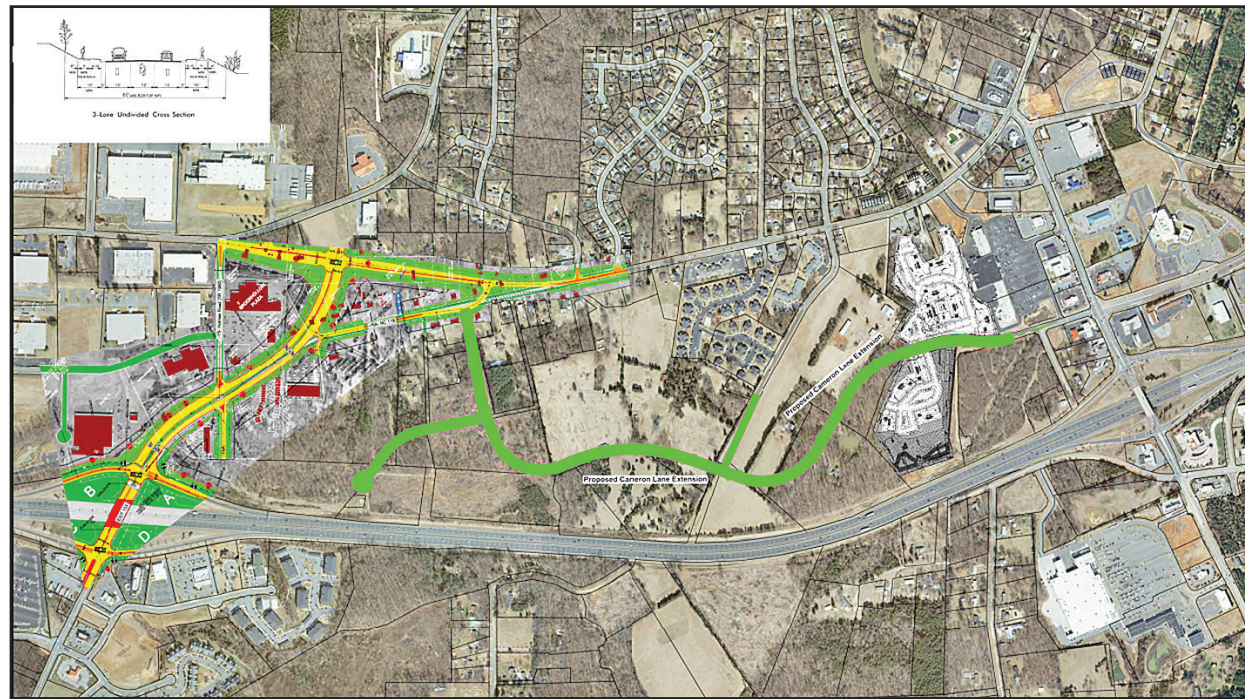
A way to determine how to move people and goods around our city is through transportation planning. Transportation planning is used to identify potential areas of growth that require improvements and provide recommendations for addressing future needs over a long-range timeframe, typically two decades. Planning is a complex process involving coordination between local, regional, state, and federal partners. Coordination with these partners also includes the process of working with local citizens and stakeholders to determine future growth areas. Mebane has its own Comprehensive Transportation Plan. We are one of twelve municipalities in the Burlington-Graham Metropolitan Planning Organization (BGMP) and partner with Orange County Transportation Services and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for transportation planning.

Aside from the Comprehensive Transportation Plan, which considers citywide improvements, transportation planning often occurs on a smaller geographic scale, focusing on particular street corridors and thoroughfares. In Mebane, plans have been developed to envision new streets to relieve traffic congestion and improve connectivity in growing areas. As planning documents, these transportation plans guide future development and are consulted by officials when proposals are received. The exact location and details of the proposed street connections are determined as the City evaluates the proposed developments. The three Mebane plans discussed today are the Cameron Lane Thoroughfare Plan, the Mebane Oaks Road Small Area Plan, and the Lowes Boulevard Corridor Plan. All three plans encourage interconnectivity and provide multiple routes to get from Point A to Point B. The three plans referenced were adopted after obtaining feedback from property owners in the affected areas, coordinating with the stakeholders, and holding public meetings. Traffic consultants complete the plans and work with City staff to carefully analyze the area, the proposed development, and the expected traffic volumes at the proposed connections. All plans are living documents, which means they should be regularly reviewed by the Technical Review Committee (City staff and NCDOT staff) and amended to reflect an ever-changing environment.

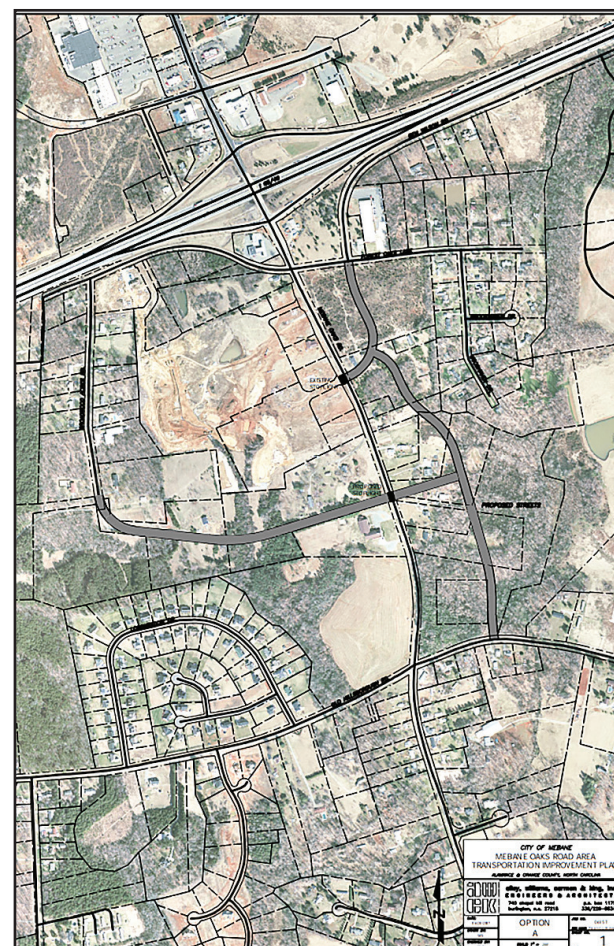
The Cameron Lane Thoroughfare Plan was adopted in December 2014 and is shown on the map. This plan aims to improve traffic from the Mebane Oaks Road area to South Fifth Street and NC Hwy 119. This plan will create a companion east-west route to South Fifth Street. The plan began as part of the Mebane Towne Center development project. The Mebane Towne Center project created the initial extension of Cameron Lane, and the residential development project of the Villas on Fifth Street further extended the lane as part of the project. Cameron Lane will continue further west as the area is developed, connecting the area of South Fifth Street and the Fifth Street Extension just to the east of NC 119, including a western cul-de-sac. The plan is being evaluated to extend further to NC 119 at the new intersection with Holmes Road.

The Mebane Oaks Road Small Area Plan was adopted in March 2008 and is shown on the map. The plan aims to improve and connect the traffic on South Mebane Oaks Road below Interstate 85/40, Forest Oaks Lane, and Old Hillsborough Road. Connecting the roads will create a companion north-south route to South Mebane Oaks Road. The plan will also include a new connection between Broadwood Acres Road and Mebane Oaks Road. Initially, the plan began as commercial development occurred in the South Mebane Oaks Road area. Wendy's and Chick-Fil-A development projects created the initial extension of Wilson Road beyond Forest Oaks Lane. Additional commercial development of Verizon and Aspen Dental extended Wilson Road south. The Mebane Oaks Road Small Area Plan will extend further south,

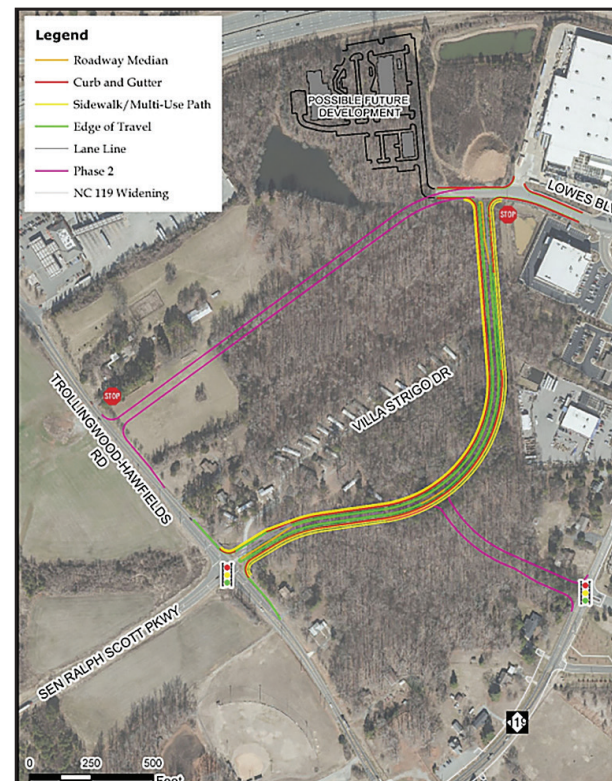
CAMERON LANE THOROUGHFARE PLAN



MEBANE OAKS ROAD SMALL AREA PLAN



LOWES BOULEVARD CORRIDOR PLAN



with construction occurring as private sector development occurs. Franz Holt, Mebane City Engineer, "As development occurs, adopted small area plans should be a flexible asset incorporating continued feedback from stakeholders (landowners, the community, developers, NCDOT, and City).

The Lowes Boulevard Corridor Plan was adopted in March 2021 and is shown on the map. The plan will improve traffic flow and connect new routes from NC Hwy 119 to existing Lowes

Boulevard, Trollingwood-Hawfields Road, and Senator Ralph Scott Parkway. This plan will assist with traffic by creating a transportation network allowing multiple connections to existing streets with two traffic signals proposed and the addition of stop signs at two intersections. It was implemented to prepare for future development in the area. In addition to the existing development along Lowes Boulevard, two new hotels and an office building have been approved at the end of the street. Additional growth is expected in the future. The current plan considers future NCDOT-funded construction projects of widening NC 119 South and NCDOT interchange improvements pending planning and design activities for the I-40/85 Interchange at Trollingwood-Hawfields Road. The City has not received any additional development proposals for the area thus far.

In conclusion, transportation planning projects can be entirely public sector or a combination of public and private sector. The public sector is controlled and funded by the government, such as local cities or counties, regions like the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and state-level departments such as NCDOT and district planning offices. The public sector also encompasses federal divisions responsible for maintaining the federal interstate highways. The private sector is part of the economy

that is not under government control. Private developments can provide small to large and partial to total transportation improvements as required by City and NCDOT policies and Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) of projects. Examples of small private sector, fully funded projects are turn lanes and sidewalks along a particular project to provide access to the site. A large private sector, fully funded project example is the installation of signal lights or construction of roundabouts regarding a specific project and the resulting traffic impact in that area. The three adopted transportation plans for the City of Mebane will advance transportation planning for future developments by ensuring traffic is not negatively impacted, and roadway capacity is improved or continued. One benefit of the adopted plans is the blueprint they provide to private-sector-funded projects, allowing the private sector to fund the construction of these new streets. Another advantage is that citizens and stakeholders are involved in planning via community and landowner input processes. These plans will create companion internal city transportation routes to major thoroughfares such as Mebane Oaks Road, South Fifth Street, and NC Hwy 119. Mebane Development Director Ashley Ownbey says, "In developing multi-modal transportation plans for growing areas, the City of Mebane is better integrating land use and transportation planning. For example, the Cameron Lane Thoroughfare Plan was created in anticipation of future development. The adopted thoroughfare plan has ensured street connectivity between new neighborhoods while also providing pedestrian connections of value to the larger Mebane community. As parts of Cameron Lane are completed, area residents will have the option to walk or bike from their homes to the future retail components of Mebane Towne Center and the existing commercial on Mebane Oaks Road. By having an adopted plan for the area, the City had the opportunity to guide private development activity that incorporated more livability and connectivity."

Kelly Hunter is the Public Information Officer with the City of Mebane.

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