

U.S. 29 plan calls for smarter growth, local identities

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(Photo: File)

Experts' final report on smart planning and development for the U.S. 29 corridor between Greenville and Spartanburg calls for separate communities with more population density and better transit to provide economic, social and environmental benefits.

Adaptive traffic-signal synchronization could save an estimated \$1 million per year in time and fuel, according to the report, and improved pedestrian crossings and sidewalks could improve safety on a stretch of road where nine pedestrians were killed from 2003 to 2012.

Panelists with private and government expertise ranging from land-use and public transportation to banking studied the corridor in January as members of an Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel. It was commissioned by Upstate Forever, a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to promoting environmentally healthy development.

The report calls for Greenville County, Spartanburg County, Greer, Duncan, Lyman, Wellford and the unincorporated Taylors community straddling U.S. 29, known locally as Wade Hampton

Boulevard, to work together but embrace and enhance individual identities while connecting to infrastructure laid out when they were situated and shaped by older modes of transit.

Pockets of development that connect the towns to U.S. 29 should be planned by local zoning and include improvements for pedestrians, bus stops and gateway landscapes that could be paid for with impact assessment fees collected from development on the highway, according to the report.

Traffic signal synchronization is on the way in 2016 to the nearly 90-year-old U.S. 29 after a South Carolina Department of Transportation study indicated the need for an alternative for Interstate 85, built in the 1960s and serving about 112,000 cars daily.

Panelists urged local government officials to take an ongoing role in implementing an adaptive system. As many as 40,000 vehicles a day pass through some of the 35 traffic signals on the 23-mile stretch of U.S. 29.

Sections of Interstate 85 from Greenville to Cherokee County will be widened beginning next year, but U.S. 29 should expect to see its traffic burden grow, officials say.

The panelists call for bus-service accommodations throughout the corridor. Greenlink bus service reaches out of Greenville only as far as Taylors. Greenlink includes expansion toward Greer in its long-range plans.

A corridor-long [biking and walking path](#) could be incorporated, too, according to the report. That was one of the suggestions panelists collected during a community workshop at City Hall in Greer, the centrally located and largest town on the stretch of highway bookended by the Upstate's two largest towns.

Challenges stand in the way of implementing the report's strategies. Local action would have to be initiated and coordinated through collaboration among vested groups with different perspectives and priorities. Funding sources would have to be identified and allocated. Property tax revenues, local option sales taxes, special tax districts and grants are among viable possibilities, panelists say.

Upstate Forever officials are engaging local groups to make headway, now with a plan to make the corridor more transit-ready (full plan [here](#)), thanks to support from the Greater Greenville Association of Realtors, John I. Smith Charities and the Mary Black Foundation.

The Greer Community Master Plan, meanwhile, an independent blueprint commissioned by the public-private Partnership For Tomorrow to guide development within and around Greer city limits, will be unveiled May 28. Greer Mayor Rick Danner, a member of the Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation planning organization that participated in panelists' research, expects the plans to work together.

Duncan has a downtown pedestrian and parks plan under way that could be tied in, too.

“Upstate Forever will now assess all that is happening to determine our most effective role in all of this excitement over the coming years,” said Shelley Robinson, a sustainable communities program associate of Upstate Forever.

Richland County planning director Tracy Hegler chaired the panel with Cityvolve real estate development founder Jeff Baxter, Mount Pleasant planning director Christiane Farrell, Clement Crawford & Thornhill real estate development associate Eleni Glekas, Turnberry consulting director of strategy and planning Josh Martin, Municap public finance senior vice president Thad Wilson and ULI South Carolina Project staff.

The Urban Land Institute is an international nonprofit organization with membership representing real estate development, land-use planning and financial disciplines working in private enterprise and public service.

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