

# US 301: Road to Opportunity

TIGER FY 2015 Grant Wilson, NC

*Accessing economic and educational opportunity through targeted transportation investments*

## BACKGROUND

US 301 is a corridor in transition. No longer a high volume interstate highway, it now serves as an oversized roadway that creates as many barriers for residents, students, and businesses as it does opportunities. This TIGER Grant application seeks to address these barriers for all users, including freight, automobiles, pedestrians and cyclists, while enhancing opportunities for a low-wealth neighborhood that needs multi-modal access to capitalize on nearby jobs, schools, and businesses.

## ISSUES

Through plan documents, public workshops, and statements by City officials, the people of Wilson agree that US 301 has the following issues:

- Lack of connectivity between residents, educational hubs, and businesses along and nearby US 301
- Unsafe crossing conditions for pedestrians and vehicles
- Inadequate infrastructure for walking and cycling
- An unattractiveness that limits appeal for visitors and businesses.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES

Through a successful TIGER Grant application, the City hopes to raise the funds to meet several community goals:

- Crossings that safely connect residents, educational institutions, and businesses at 5 key intersections
- A multi-use path serving Wilson's educational hubs of Eastern NC School for the Deaf (ENCSD), Wilson Community College (WCC), and the future WCC Lee Campus
- Improved pedestrian paths on both sides of US 301, improving access to jobs, services, and better connecting underserved residents
- Upgraded stormwater conveyance and retention at key locations along US 301, improving environmental quality, pedestrian access, and aesthetics.

## PROJECT ELEMENTS

- Crosswalks
- Lighting
- Multiuse Trail
- Landscape
- Intersection Improvements
- Sidewalks
- Transit
- Stormwater Solutions
- Bicycle Lanes



## Community Assets Map



### COMMUNITY CONTEXT: Wilson, NC

Population: 49,167

Median HH Income: \$39,204

Wilson is located off of Interstate 95, 40 miles east of Raleigh. Wilson was once known as “The World’s Greatest Tobacco Market.” The City has since diversified its economy, now hosting an impressive number of industrial and manufacturing facilities for a city its size. The community is also home to a burgeoning Workforce Development Hub centered around Wilson Community College, along with the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, Longleaf Medical Center, and a historic downtown district. Despite these successes, much of the area around US 301 is low-wealth and in need of revitalization.

### PROJECT READINESS

This project meets all primary criteria for TIGER projects:

- State of Good Repair** – the project focuses on repurposing an outdated roadway
- Economic Competitiveness** – the project promotes access to jobs and services for Wilson’s workforce development hub and underserved populations
- Quality of Life** – the project improves travel options along and across US 301
- Environmental Sustainability** – the project decreases vehicle emissions and improves stormwater storage and conveyance
- Safety** – the project improves pedestrian and cyclist safety on one of North Carolina’s high crash corridors.

### KEY OPPORTUNITIES

**HUD Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI):** The Wilson Housing Authority received a grant through HUD’s CNI program in 2011 to prepare a Transformation Plan targeting the Whitfield Homes public housing development. The choice neighborhood abuts US 301, providing an opportunity to improve both the corridor and the neighborhood through transportation investment.

**Workforce Development Hub:** The existing campus of WCC, the new Lee Campus, and the Diversified Opportunities facility offer a confluence of opportunities for training the next generation of workers. Transportation connections between these assets can better connect residents to both education and employment opportunities.

## TIGER GRANT PROGRAM

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) is a U.S. DOT Discretionary Grant Program; \$500 million is available for 2015. Grant funds can be spent on all primary modes of transportation. This competitive program takes a broad view; criteria for selection go beyond the economy and environment, as well.

Local expectations include:

- Matching funds
- Project readiness
- Partnerships

Special considerations are made for rural projects like Wilson’s. The average rural TIGER grant award is \$7.7 million.



A public information session and workshop was conducted on March 16, 2015 to hear from the community about challenges, opportunities, and community assets relating to US 301. This feedback will guide the development of project elements included in the grant application.



# Community Engagement: Values, Vision, and Goals

## IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

On March 16th, 2015, over 50 residents and community stakeholders came together in the Wilson Operations Center to learn more about TIGER grants, to identify and prioritize improvements needed along the Wilson US 301 corridor, and to map community assets and opportunity areas. Participants were first asked to write down their vision for the future of the US 301 corridor. A brief presentation was given by the project team to familiarize participants with TIGER grants and the grant application process, as well as to introduce potential improvements. Attendees were then asked to prioritize among nine potential project elements using orange and yellow stickers. Participants were given two orange stickers, used to designate higher priority items, and four yellow stickers, used to designate lower priority (but still important) elements. Voting results can be found in the sidebar.

## BREAKOUT GROUPS

After voting, attendees were organized into three groups to share their visions for the future of the corridor, to identify community assets, to flag issues needing resolution, and to map locations of potential opportunity areas. The project team helped to facilitate these discussions and to summarize each group's findings for reporting back to the larger group. This input from the community is a critical element of the grant application process moving forward.

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Stakeholders and residents were largely in agreement that the most critical issue currently facing the corridor is safe access to jobs, services, and education, with a number of specific intersections targeted for potential improvements. An article about the meeting, featured in the March 17th, 2015 edition of *The Wilson Times*, highlights a quote from a participant that captures the sentiments of many who attended:

*"If we can get the grant, it sounds great! I think when the changes happen, people will be very happy."*

- Dianne Dew, Area Resident

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Participants voted to help identify the community's top priorities for improving the US 301 corridor. The priority of project elements were ranked as follows:

- 1st: Crosswalks & Crossings
- 2nd: Multiuse Trail
- 3rd: Lighting
- 4th: Sidewalks
- 5th: Landscape
- 6th: Intersection Improvements
- 7th: Stormwater Solutions
- 8th: Bicycle Lanes
- 9th: Transit on 301

