

Charlotte Business Journal - April 13, 2009  
[/charlotte/stories/2009/04/13/focus2.html?b=1239595200%5E1808763](http://charlotte/stories/2009/04/13/focus2.html?b=1239595200%5E1808763)

## CHARLOTTE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, April 10, 2009 | Modified: Thursday, April 16, 2009

# Towns take joint approach to transportation: Gray

Charlotte Business Journal - by [Aletha Hart](#) Contributing writer

Carroll Gray was known for helping the business community work with government officials as the president of the Charlotte Chamber. He's applying those well-honed political skills to his new position as executive director of the **Lake Norman Transportation Commission**.

The commission has the task of prioritizing, aligning and advocating for the transportation needs of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville and Mooresville. It's a job Bill Russell, Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce president, likens to herding cats.

"For Carroll to get all of the towns on the same page, pushing the same regional transportation agenda — well, he is probably the only person in our region who understands the politics, who has the background from working with Charlotte-Mecklenburg and has the patience to do this. The consensus is that he will be successful," Russell says.

The mission of the group is to become an active and vocal lobby for funding from federal, state and local authorities. It's a task Gray relishes. He recently spoke with the *Charlotte Business Journal* about the organization. Following are excerpts from that conversation:

### What is your greatest challenge in your new role?

Getting the approval process to work. The four towns have adopted an interlocal agreement creating the LNTC to get more revenues for our transportation needs. However, once the LNTC makes a recommendation, the four towns' elected boards require each town to independently review and approve the recommendation before the LNTC is given authority to advocate and lobby. If one town opposes a LNTC recommendation, nothing is likely to happen. So consensus is our operating goal.

### How did you get involved?

The LNTC was officially initiated by the four towns — Huntersville first, with Mooresville the last to approve it on Jan. 5 of this year. In order to get started, the four mayors asked me last fall to get involved in putting everything together before the LNTC was officially sanctioned. In February, I was officially retained by the LNTC.

### What are the most recent developments with the organization?

The four town boards have shown strong unanimity in supporting improvements of all major interstate and state-owned roads that run through the Lake Norman region, including I-485, I-77, N.C. 21, N.C. 115, N.C. 150, N.C. 73 and N.C. 3. Further, the LNTC has gotten approval to review direct and indirect costs for the north-corridor commuter-rail line, including engineering cost estimates for construction and operations. We will review secondary costs for providing road access, parking and pedestrian walkways. Also, we evaluate all funding options, including federal sources, stimulus funds, N.C. DOT revenues, developer and corporate partnerships, tax-increment financing and possible local options.

### How did the towns arrive at a consensus on transportation needs for the area?

The four towns had a retreat in February, which was attended by a majority of elected officials and staff. We spent an afternoon discussing our likes and dislikes and priorities, and came away with a good framework for future action. We actually used a group-voting process to highlight preferences. I was and am impressed at the spirit of cooperation virtually everyone exhibited. This gathering of the four towns should be done at least annually for updates and plans.

### What's the likelihood of finding funding?

If we work together, our chances of getting more money will improve. A great deal of state and local money is being spent every year on road and rail in Mecklenburg County, and the federal stimulus package offers more opportunities. Due to economic conditions, we are competing for smaller recurring-revenue streams, but the top projects will continue to get millions of dollars.

The leadership of Mecklenburg County, including our four towns, is exploring other revenue concepts. One example is the "Pennies for Progress" initiative in York County. An extra penny of sales tax is set aside to construct and improve a list of roads, with a sunset provision. (The tax expires after a specified period.)

### Which projects do you expect to be in the works soon and have endorsed?

Our first regular meeting was this month, but we achieved consensus on two items. State DOT and our Mecklenburg/Union Planning Organization both endorsed widening of Highway 73 from Highway 21 through the Highway 115 intersection using stimulus-fund money. This shovel-ready project should be under construction by fall of this year. The LNTC endorsed this project, but it was well on its way to



photo SEAN BUSHNER

Carroll Gray, executive director, Lake Norman Transportation Commission

[View Larger](#)

approval before now.

Also, our group has endorsed the realignment of Prosperity Church Road where it intersects with Highway 73 at Davidson-Concord Road.

**What are the differences you see in working on behalf of Charlotte businesses vs. the four towns?**

As a 20-year resident of Cornelius, the transportation issues around the lake are real to me. In Charlotte, I tended to work at a long-range planning level, and would get involved in various projects with a multi-county impact. Now I am working at a subregional level, but the challenges are the same — being inclusive, listening to all opinions and promoting the greater good. With the LNTC, I operate closer to the ground, where people live.

**For the towns on the outskirts of a city like Charlotte, how important is a cooperative effort such as the LNTC?**

Charlotte/Mecklenburg's successes and challenges generate attention and political support because of the media attention, size of the city and its staff. The smaller municipalities need to work collectively to be heard, and that's what we plan to do. While the LNTC governance model is complicated, the process worked quickly to support Highway 73. I hope this spirit of cooperation continues on more complex, regional issues.

*Aletha Hart is a Huntersville-based writer who can be reached at [hart808@bellsouth.net](mailto:hart808@bellsouth.net).*

*All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.*