Special Issue: Spring 2012 ITRE Events

We are pleased to publish this special edition of “ITRE Directions” which we have dedicated to highlight a number of events that were held on the NC State Centennial Campus on April 12, 2012. These included our Spring Annual ITRE Council Meeting, a special White House Roundtable for our graduate and undergraduate students, and a very successful Transportation Founders Fund (TFF) evening event and panel discussion on transportation funding options.

The TFF event was opened by ITRE Advisory Council Chair Jim Westmoreland who welcomed the attendees and introduced Dr. Louis Martin-Vega, Dean of NCSU’s College of Engineering. Dean Vega provided the official public announcement of the renaming of the TFF graduate student scholarship as the C.E. “Ed” Vick Jr. Transportation Founders Fund Graduate Scholarship. Ed Vick was an NCSU Alumnus, founder of Kimley-Horn and Associates, and 2012 posthumous recipient of NCSU’s Watauga Medal, the university’s highest non-academic honor.

Dr. Nagui Rouphail, ITRE Director, presented the inaugural C.E. “Ed” Vick Jr. Transportation Founders Fund Graduate Scholarship award to David Craft, a master’s student who arrived in January 2012 after completing his undergraduate degree at LSU, and Elizabeth Hunter, a graduating NCSU senior who will begin her graduate studies at NC State in the fall.

TFF Speaker Series

The TFF panel discussion was moderated by NC Secretary of Transportation Gene Conti. Secretary Conti provided highlights of North Carolina initiatives including NC Turnpike Authority projects coming online and combination Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and private activity bond funding for the Charlotte I-77 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lane project. Secretary Conti then introduced the Honorable Jim Porcari, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Transportation. Secretary Porcari shared that although innovative financing approaches such as the TIFIA loan program are helpful, they will not solve the long-term transportation funding problem. Rather, Secretary Porcari stressed that it is essential that the public and governing bodies renew the generational commitment to providing a healthy transportation system in support of future prosperity. Next, Bob Poole, Director of Transportation Policy and the Searle Freedom Trust Transportation Fellow at The Reason Foundation, cast a vision for 21st Century tolling that is all electronic and perpetual (in contrast to traditional tolling that is in place only until capital construction bonds retired). Jim Richardson, Senior Vice President of Forest City Real Estate Services, followed with a vision of sustainable, transit-oriented development that involves bringing all parties to the table throughout the entire development process. Mr. Richardson supported this vision with real world success stories. Mr. Rob Zimmer of Battelle wrapped up the panel presentations by explaining how the technology is already in place for truly innovative tolling schemes. The discussions were followed by a lively question and answer period.

To view a video of the full TFF event you can link to http://mediasite.online.ncsu.edu/online/Viewer/?peid=71949436a747f3d49d4eb77c7f3b61d
ITRE Council Meeting

The 2012 ITRE Council Meeting was held on April 12. It began with highlights of the 2011 Annual Report and an ITRE reorganization discussion presented by ITRE Director Nagui Rouphail. The upcoming retirements of Bob Foyle, ITRE Associate Director, and Ron Hughes, VAMS Director, were acknowledged with appreciation certificates.

There was a general discussion of the University Transportation Centers (UTC) program involving NC State University. Last year, ITRE/CTE teamed up with the University of Florida as lead, along with seven other universities and successfully competed for the Southeast US Regional Transportation Center. This Center’s focus areas are on safety, livability, and economic competitiveness. Since funding for this Center expires at the end of 2013, ITRE staff and Council members discussed strategies and opportunities to successfully compete in the next round whenever a new Transportation Reauthorization bill is enacted.

An open discussion ensued in two topic areas, namely the feasibility of a program initiation in CMV planning, operations and safety led by George List, Ron Hughes and Bob Clarke, and support for multimodal statewide planning issues led by James Martin, Tom Cook, Jeff Tsai and Jim Westmoreland. Billy Williams, Associate Professor of Civil Engineering and Jeff Tsai, Director of the Pupil Transportation Program, concluded the meeting with presentations on Benchmarking Mobility in NC and on the Use of Cameras for Enforcing School Bus No-Passing Rule, respectively.

White House Roundtable

ITRE hosted a student roundtable discussion with USDOT Deputy Secretary John Porcari and NC Secretary of Transportation Gene Conti on April 12. The event was held in conjunction with the Transportation Founders Fund Speaker Series event. Porcari and Conti were joined by Paul Morris, NCDOT Deputy Secretary for Transit; Steve Smith, Technical Operations for the Federal Aviation Administration; and Joseph Peraino, Counselor to Mr. Porcari. Over 20 undergraduate and graduate students from NCSU and UNC at Chapel Hill joined the discussion of current transportation issues and future trends in transportation policy.

Porcari and Conti provided federal and state perspective on the status of the national transportation legislation and funding and North Carolina’s recent implementation of a modern toll road. Porcari noted that although public private partnerships are frequently touted as the optimal solution for funding transportation projects, the approach only has limited application, stating ‘we will always have projects that are public goods.’

Much of the discussion addressed the future of freight and passenger rail, a priority of the Obama administration. Porcari also noted the need to include a maritime component in the federal transportation bill to promote better intermodal coordination for freight movement and related economic development.

Also discussed were the policy opportunities and constraints currently affecting transportation authorization. Porcari described the USDOT TIGER grant program as a way to fund projects across the country that align with administration priorities in the absence of an overall program and long-term funding. He also noted the effects of the strong anti-regulatory mood across the country that is challenging existing and proposed safety measures, such as mandatory helmet laws for motorcyclists and bans on texting and cell phone use by drivers.

Both Porcari and Conti remarked on the thoughtfulness and understanding reflected in students’ questions. Students appreciated the unique opportunity to interact with industry leaders.