



McCrorey Height's Resident Perspectives

Transportation Equity & Historic Preservation Impacts of the Proposed I-77 Toll Lane Expansion

Community Voices Brief

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Community Partners: McCrorey Heights Neighborhood Association

Based on 24 one on one resident interviews conducted from March to June 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

McCrorey Heights is a locally designated historic district within the City of Charlotte and is currently pursuing National Register designation as one of the city's most significant Black neighborhoods. Resident testimony suggests that the recently approved North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) I-77 toll lane expansion would impose disproportionate environmental burdens on McCrorey Heights, undermine historic visibility, and erode neighborhood stability and trust with government officials. Residents contend that these impacts are inconsistent with Charlotte's stated commitments to transportation equity and historic preservation. Additional concerns expressed by study participants include:

- State engagement was perceived as late and options were presented as predetermined.
- The toll lane expansion threatens air quality, noise levels, cultural landscape, and long-term livability.
- Residents expressed skepticism that the toll lanes would reduce congestion due to induced demand.
- Cancellation initially brought relief to residents, but many remained cautious to future developments.
- McCrorey Heights mobilized rapidly, drawing on its long tradition of Black civic leadership.
- Residents articulated mobility alternatives including tunneling the freeway and enhancing public transit.

These findings provide a policy-relevant evidence base for decisionmakers evaluating transportation investments in historic and environmental justice communities.

CONTEXT

Charlotte's adopted plans — the City of Charlotte's 2040 Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Mobility Plan, and the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization's Beyond 77 — commit the city to reducing emissions, expanding multimodal options, and protecting communities historically burdened by infrastructure. McCrorey Heights already absorbs cumulative impacts from two freeways; residents emphasized that further expansion would deepen existing inequities.



"It feels like the government is saying it's OK for a Black neighborhood to absorb all this extra pollution."

McCrorey Heights is also a nationally recognized historic district shaped by Black educators, clergy, civil rights leaders, and professionals. Its history is visual and spatial — expressed through views of Johnson C. Smith University, historic homes, and the neighborhood's walkable street network. Residents stressed that elevated toll lanes, would obscure visibility of cultural landmarks and diminish the district's preservation value.

"If you've got walls and elevated highways, ain't nobody gonna see all that ... that impacts our ability to honor our forefathers."

KEY FINDINGS

1. State engagement was perceived as belated, symbolic, and predetermined

Residents learned of the proposal late, often through neighbors or through the McCrorey Heights Neighborhood Association (MHNA). A meeting expected to address a sound barrier instead became the moment residents discovered the expansion. Engagement was framed as informational rather than deliberative — residents were asked to choose between two expansion scenarios, neither of which aligned with community priorities.

"None of us knew this was happening...It was shocking."

2. The proposal threatens transportation equity and historic preservation

Residents raised concerns about increased air pollution, elevated noise, construction debris, risks from elevated lanes, and long-ignored maintenance needs — harms interpreted as racially inequitable given the neighborhood's history of absorbing disproportionate burdens. They also connected the loss of visible historic landmarks to Charlotte's broader pattern of erasing Black history, citing Charlotte's historically Black neighborhood of Brooklyn as precedent, and expressed concern about the erosion of the connectivity that has defined the neighborhood.

"This highway will destroy a fabric of connectivity that's been there since I was a child."

3. Temporary relief, persistent skepticism, and project reapproval.

Residents welcomed the City Council's rescinding of support, but skepticism persisted due to unclear jurisdiction, financial pressures, perceived misaligned incentives, survey markings appearing on neighborhood streets, and long-ignored requests for a sound barrier.

"Why would we trust you'll move forward with our interests in mind with this bigger project?"

On September 21, 2026, the Charlotte City Council reversed its previous position and approved NCDOT's toll lane expansion project. This decision reinforced residents' longstanding skepticism and helps explain why many remained vigilant despite earlier assurances. For some residents, the reversal deepened existing mistrust of city officials and the public decision-making process. Residents also remain vigilant of supposed \$300 million in



community benefits, expressing concern that these investments may be insufficient to offset the project's impacts.

4. Mobilization reflects McCrorey Heights' tradition of Black civic leadership

When plans for the expansion were first shared in October 2025, residents organized rapidly and effectively — generating roughly 1,200 emails and 1,200 petition signatures, partnering with the Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, environmental groups (Sustain Charlotte and CleanAIRE NC), housing advocates, and legal partners, and reaching out to Governor Josh Stein and local officials. Mobilization also extended beyond McCrorey Heights to other neighborhoods along the corridor out of concern that they too may be harmed by the freeway alignment.

"We are continuing to fight the fight ... we are building momentum."

5. Residents articulated mobility futures aligned with equity and preservation

Residents acknowledge real congestion challenges but rejected the assumption that expansion is the only solution, proposing freeway cap parks, rerouted truck traffic, improved ramp design, expanded commuter bus service, bus rapid transit, rail expansion, park-and-ride facilities, and green-space-oriented approaches consistent with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and Beyond 77.

"We can come up with a different way to route traffic, so it's not bottlenecked."

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Infrastructure investments must reduce, not intensify, disproportionate burdens on historically Black neighborhoods.
- Transportation decisions must protect the visual integrity and cultural landscape of historic districts.
- Engagement must begin early and include opportunities for deliberation, not just information-sharing.
- Mobility solutions should reflect adopted city plans emphasizing multimodal approaches.
- Trust requires visible action, including maintenance commitments and clear interagency coordination.

CONCLUSION

McCrorey Heights residents have articulated a clear and compelling vision: transportation decisions must protect historic Black neighborhoods, reduce environmental burdens, and align with Charlotte's long-term mobility goals. Their testimony provides a critical evidence base for equitable, preservation-oriented transportation planning. While the toll lane expansion ultimately moved forward, residents' advocacy highlights the enduring tension between regional infrastructure investments and community preservation, demonstrating the importance of ensuring that future transportation decisions are guided by principles of equity, transparency, and environmental justice.