

FRENCH BROAD RIVER

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Staff Report & Recommendations

Item 3A:

February, 2021 Minutes

French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization

Minutes from the TCC Virtual Meeting via Zoom on February 11, 2021

ATTENDANCE:

Remote via the Zoom Platform:

Chair Autumn Radcliff	Tristan Winkler	Nick Kroncke	Emily Scott-Cruz
John Fargher	Daniel Sellers	Troy Wilson	Elizabeth Teague
Chris Lee	John Ridout	Alex Carmichael	Brendan Merithew
William High	Steve Williams	Daniel Metcalf	Vicki Eastland
James Voso	Jennifer Tipton	Matt Manley	Wanda Austin
Marshall Williams	Ron Hancock	Rachel Bronson	Erica Anderson
Dan Baechtold	Jodie Ferguson	Stephen Sparks	Chris Medlin
Michael Dawson	Kenny Armstrong	Peyton O'Conner	Jessica Morriss
Amna Cameron	Jessica Trotman	Janna Peterson	Nick Tuttle
Pat Christie	David Wasserman	Hannah Cook	Mariate Echeverry

In-Person at Land of Sky Regional Council:

Zia Rifkin (minutes)

WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING

Chair Radcliff called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone, and roll call followed. Upon completion of roll call, quorum was announced for conducting the business of the TCC.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Radcliff called for public comments. No public comments were made.

CONSENT AGENDA

Chair Radcliff indicated that the Consent Agenda included the January 14, 2021 minutes. She requested approval for the Agenda at this time, as well.

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Elizabeth Teague moved to approve the consent agenda and the agenda as presented. Steve Williams seconded the motion was affirmed upon a roll call vote of the member governments present.

BUSINESS

FTA Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) Project Selection

JARC (Jobs Access Reverse Commute) is a competitive pot of funds set aside from Section 5307 Urban Transit Formula funds to encourage regional connectivity, to fund the development and maintenance of transportation services designed to transport welfare recipients and eligible low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to their employment. The FBRMPO holds a call for projects for federal funding, and the City of Asheville is the Designated Recipient for these funds. The application process for JARC (Winter 2020) ran from November 20th to December 31st, 2020. Additional information about the program is available at: <http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/5310-and-jarc/>.

FBRMPO Winter 2020 Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) Call for Projects Funding Available	
Regional JARC Allocation utilizing FY 2020 at 10% of FTA 5307 Amount allocated to the Asheville Urbanized Area	\$324,509*
Regional JARC-10% Administration	\$32,681
Total Regional Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) – FY2020 funding, after subtracting administration costs	\$291,828

*This funding includes \$23,019 leftover funds from Spring 2020 JARC Call for Projects. 10% of that \$23,019 was added to administrative costs and the remainder was added to the total FY20 available competitive funding.

The MPO received 2 applications.

Applicant	Project Title	Project Description	Funding Requested
City of Asheville	Route 170 Transit Operations	Fixed route service for route 170 to Black Mountain (8 trips per day, Monday through Saturday from 5:30am to 9:30pm)	\$231,558
Buncombe County	Black Mountain Trailblazer	Deviated-fixed route to Black Mountain and Swannanoa (M-Sat; 5:30am-7:30pm)	\$81,704

Prioritization scored both projects, and after both projects were scored, recommended that the TCC and Board approve Alternative 2 for funding. Both projects were very competitive, and ultimately, the

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difference in scoring arose because of the benefits that were perceived in deviated-fixed route service that the County provides.

Below is a table that shows the various alternatives for funding, highlighting **Alternative 2**, which Prioritization recommended for approval by the TCC and Board.

	Project	Period of Performance	Score (out of 100)	Recommended Funding	Funding Level	Requested Funding
Alternative 2	City of Asheville -- Route 170	7/1/21-6/30/22	97.3	\$210,124	90.74%	\$231,558
	Buncombe County -- Black Mountain Trailblazer	7/1/21-6/30/22	100	\$81,704	100%	\$81,704

The alternatives that were not selected were as follows:

- Alternative 1:
 - Fund Buncombe County (Black Mountain Trailblazer) at 100% and fund the City of Asheville (Route 170 Transit Operations) at 93.1%
- Alternative 3:
 - Fund the City of Asheville (Route 170 Transit Operations) at 100% and fund Buncombe County (Black Mountain Trailblazer) at 73.7%

Discussion occurred about the deviated route and whether Warren Wilson College was served. MPO staff shared that the route serves Warren Wilson Road and then meets up with ART 170. Potentially, the route could go closer to the college, but that decision is not part of the business item at hand.

Jessica Morris moved to recommend the Board approve the recommendation given by the Prioritization Subcommittee for Alternative #2. William High seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

Safety Performance Targets

As part of MAP-21 requirements in 2012, safety performance measures became a requirement for MPOs and DOTs. Beginning in 2017, as part of the FAST Act, states established annual targets in the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) report. Safety targets are established annually, based on the calendar year, are set for all five performance measure based on five year rolling averages of data, and require coordination between state DOTs and MPOs. The five performance measures include: 1) number of fatalities, 2) rate of fatalities per 100 Million VMT, 3) number of serious injuries, 4) rate of serious injuries per 100 Million VMT and, 5) number of non-motorized fatalities and non-motorized serious injuries.

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In early 2020, FHWA completed an assessment of the target achievement for NCDOT's calendar year 2018 safety targets and determined North Carolina has not met or made significant progress toward achieving its targets. As a result, NCDOT must ensure all HSIP safety funds are obligated, and must develop an HSIP Implementation Plan that describes actions the State will take to meet these goals. These targets were based off the goal outlined in the original 2014 State Highway Safety Plan to reduce fatalities and serious injuries by half by 2030.

NCDOT submitted statewide safety performance measure targets in August 2020 to FHWA. French Broad River MPO has 180 days (until February 27, 2021) to establish safety targets by either (1) agreeing to plan and program projects so that they contribute toward the accomplishment of NCDOT's safety target for that performance measure; or (2) by committing to a different set of quantifiable targets for safety performance measures for the MPO region. NCDOT's 2021 safety targets that were provided to FHWA in the 2020 HSIP report are listed below:

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) (per year % reduction)

- For the 2021 Highway Safety Improvement Plan (HSIP), the goal is to **reduce total fatalities by 4.20% each year** from 1,427.2 (2015-2019 average) to 1,309.9 (2017-2021 average) by December 31, 2021.
- For the 2021 Highway Safety Improvement Plan (HSIP), the goal is to **reduce the fatality rate by 4.35% each year** from 1.208 (2015-2019 average) to 1.105 (2017-2021 average) by December 31, 2021.
- For the 2021 Highway Safety Improvement Plan (HSIP), the goal is to **reduce total serious injuries by 3.24% each year** from 3,905.0 (2015-2019 average) to 3,656.1 (2017-2021 average) by December 31, 2021.
- For the 2021 Highway Safety Improvement Plan (HSIP), the goal is to **reduce the serious injury rate by 3.35% each year** from 3.281 (2015-2019 average) to 3.065 (2017-2021 average) by December 31, 2021.
- For the 2021 Highway Safety Improvement Plan (HSIP), the goal is to **reduce the total non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries by 3.65% each year** from 543.4 (2015-2019 average) to 504.4 (2017-2021 average) by December 31, 2021.

MPO staff provided a presentation on the safety performance measures and targets for the region.

Additional safety and crash data is available here:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/safety/Pages/Crash-Data.aspx>

Discussion occurred about the ramifications of using the different safety measure target set (option #2) and MPO staff shared that none of the MPO regions in the state are using different safety target measures, but ultimately, it could require more collaboration with NCDOT to meet the same

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goals. Tristan Winkler shared that it would require the MPO to work with NCDOT to find a compromise, since the region's targets must meet the State's targets. TCC members noted that it would also require additional work, which in the end, may not be supported for the region. Tristan Winkler communicated that the goal is to have these targets incorporated into the decision-making process regarding investments and prioritization of projects. MPO staff communicated that future collaboration regarding data sharing is something that is integrated into the planning process. The opportunity is available to the region to collaborate data. Going forward, more efforts could be put into highlighting safety. Tristan Winkler shared that the MTP could have a heavier emphasis on data collection.

Dan Baechtold moved to recommend the Board approve Option #1 of the Safety Target measures. Elizabeth Teague seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

Draft FY22 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The French Broad River MPO is required to develop a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and present a draft in February with the final version approved in May.

The UPWP is a federally mandated document for MPO's to produce that serves the MPO's budget. This includes line items of work for MPO staff, planning work planned by the region's designated recipient for FTA 5303 Metropolitan Planning Funds (City of Asheville), as well as studies being carried out using federal planning funds.

-More emphasis is being put on data, modeling, and travelers behavior to reflect anticipated work to build the region's base-year socio-economic dataset for the 2050 MTP. This includes further work on updating the region's land use layer;

-More funding is being put towards TIP Development/Prioritization to go along with anticipated work tasks for P 6.0;

-Less funding is being put towards Special Study Coordination with the Regional Transit Study and Corridor Studies expected to be completed.

-Less funding is being put towards Statewide involvement with some workgroups expected to be ending before or early in FY 2022;

-More funding is being put towards Regional Planning with work beginning to ramp up for the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the 5307 Suballocation Formula being discussed/reconsidered, and work to begin.

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Tristan Winkler noted that the Board usually receives about \$30k in PL funding, which is augmented by flexing STBG funding to support staff; however for FY22, more PL funding has been received and less funding will be flexed.

Discussion occurred about the timeline for the next round of corridor studies and MPO staff shared that discussion with the city, county and other interested parties are being planned. A large number of special studies are ongoing. These studies have been extremely helpful to determine what might or might not work and includes the additional input from the public. Tristan Winkler shared that the corridor study program has been successful in a lot of ways and the goal is to expand it. Studies that continue in FY22 would need to be incorporated into the UPWP, but currently, it appears that most of the studies should be completed during FY21.

Jessica Morris moved to recommend the Board approve the Draft FY22 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Steve Williams seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

Amendments to the 2020-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is our region's document that reflects planned transportation investments over a ten-year period and is required to be in conformity with North Carolina's State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The TIP describes each project, a schedule for implementation, funding sources, and estimated costs.

This round of amendments includes a large number of project delays and cost increases, due in part to the reduced financial capacity of NCDOT. Given the significance of these project delays, a summary table and maps of major highway project delays are provided for reference. There are also a number of transit amendments that reflect added coronavirus relief funding (CARES Act) in the region, in addition to the removal of completed transit projects to align the TIP with the STIP.

The amendments are currently posted for public review and comment on the [TIP page](#) of the MPO website.

Additionally, MPO staff introduced a resolution to request additional collaboration in creating a process, involving MPOs and local governments, and providing additional public involvement opportunities for major changes to the TIP/STIP that involve the prioritization of projects in the region.

Tristan Winkler reviewed NCDOT's cash flow issues, which included enormous increases in cost-estimates, declining revenues and increasing costs. He noted that the STIP is required to be a fiscally constrained document, leading to project delays through the reprogramming of the STIP to meet federal requirements, provide realistic delivery schedules and update projects funding with BUILD NC and GARVEE Bonds due to HB 77. The NCBOT approved the changes to the STIP in October 2020 and have been waiting for the MPO regions to bring their TIP into alignment.

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Tristan Winkler also shared about the resolution that requests more collaboration and transparency in future restructuring and reprioritizing of Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) projects. He noted that local priorities were considered by NCDOT when determining project delays; however MPO staff were not consulted and MPO Leadership have encouraged the development of the resolution to move the process forward with more collaboration between NCDOT. More collaboration between NCDOT, the MPO, and Local Governments in developing local, regional, and statewide priorities for the STIP and TIP; providing MPO representation on any committee or group developing the process for restructuring and reprioritizing projects in the STIP and TIP; and providing more opportunities for public and stakeholder input in the proposed changes to the STIP and TIP.

Dan Baechtold moved to recommend the Board approve the Amendments to the 2020-2029 TIP and the resolution to request additional collaboration for creating a process, that would include local governments and the MPO, and allowing additional public involvement opportunities for major changes to the TIP/STIP that involve the prioritization of projects in the region.

Discussion occurred about the historical process NCDOT has used to shift funding around, causing project delays, etc. it was noted that this situation was a perfect storm of funding issues and cost increases, leading to the current situation. While it has been a painful process to go through, it has led to the current discussion about how the MPO and jurisdictions can be more involved in the process by being realistic about project costs

Matt Manley seconded the motion.

Tristan Winkler shared that the statewide MPO association (NCAMPO) is meeting tomorrow to discuss the situation.

The motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

Presentation on the Black Mountain Parking Study

In FY 2019, the French Broad River MPO provided funding to the Town of Black Mountain for a study looking at parking and circulation throughout Black Mountain's central business district. The study evaluated current parking and traffic patterns while identifying areas for improvement. Jennifer Tipton, staff with the Town of Black Mountain provided a presentation on the study and its findings.

Jennifer Tipton, with the Town of Black Mountain, shared a presentation on the Parking and Circulation Study, which evaluated the current parking and traffic patterns in Black Mountain and included data collection, community engagement and analysis and recommendations. Goals included improving safety, improving parking opportunities and ensuring connected and safe movement by foot and bicycle. The Town learned that there is sufficient parking supply; there's perceived lack of convenient parking. On-street

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parking has the greatest demand. High pedestrian demand on Cherry and State Streets. Congestion peaks during lunch and late afternoon. Intersection operations acceptable but not in the system. The Town plans to maximize the use of existing parking supply by making it safer, more attractive and easier to find. To achieve the goal of improving access to downtown parking for bicyclists and pedestrians. Considering other strategies to encourage walking and biking. The Town plans to interconnect and coordinate traffic signals and to improve the function and comfort of intersections. Parking Management and enforcement measures include implementing time restrictions for on-street parking on Cherry and State Streets. The Town understands that on-going programming, monitoring, master planning, meeting many needs, etc. are part of the continuing effort to improve the parking and traffic in the downtown area.

Additional studies like the Black Mountain Parking Study are eligible for funding with the MPO's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) which provides 80% of the cost of the project from federal funds that are passed-through the MPO; the other 20% is required to come from local or other non-federal sources. Other similar studies that have been funded this way recently include: the Hendersonville Oklawaha Greenway Extension Study, the Asheville Transit Master Plan, Buncombe County's Bent Creek Greenway Feasibility Study, and on-going studies on Hendersonville Road, Tunnel Road, the Mud Creek Greenway (Henderson), and the Richland Creek Greenway (Waynesville.)

Information only. No action required.

Presentation on NC First Commission Recommendations

The NC First Commission has released its report on long-range transportation funding recommendations to provide more sustainable funding for transportation needs in North Carolina. The commission was started in 2019 (and included then-MPO Board Chair, William Lapsley) to look at potential solutions to declines in gas tax and other transportation revenues along with the increase in cost and need to maintain and improve existing infrastructure. The primary challenge facing NCDOT and other DOTs across the nation is the gas tax has become increasingly insufficient as a primary funding source for transportation. With increased fuel efficiency, some areas seeing decreases in the amount of individual driving, and the projected increase in electric and hybrid vehicles, that challenge is likely to be further exacerbated in the coming years, especially with the cost to build and maintain infrastructure increasing. The full report from the NC First Commission features a range of potential recommendations, including short-term changes to existing fee structures, long-range recommendations (mileage-based user fees, tolling, public private partnerships), as well as potential changes for local governments to better leverage funding.

The final report and summary presentation are available here: <https://www.ncdot.gov/about-us/how-we-operate/finance-budget/nc-first/Pages/final-report.aspx>

Amna Cameron, Deputy Director of NCDOT's Office of Strategic Initiatives and Program Support provided a presentation to the MPO TCC on the report's recommendations and key considerations moving forward.

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Amna Cameron shared information about the NC First Commission, which was formed in March 2019 to develop recommendations for sustainable transportation revenue sources. Their final report was released in January 2021. She shared that a CRAFTS tool has been included on the NC First Commission's website: www.ncdot.gov/ncfirst. Key findings from the study include the finding that NCDOT is underfunded and costs for transportation projects have seen incredible increases. Currently, the State would need to invest an additional \$7.4 billion per year to bring its spending to the national per-mile average. Currently, 29 years is the average between resurfacings for NCDOT supported roadways. Other Commission findings include that Asheville citizens spend \$1280 annually due to poor transportation conditions; this includes additional vehicle operating costs, and costs due to congestion and safety. By increasing the gas tax, these conditions might be alleviated.

Ms. Cameron noted that revenues are higher, but the tax base is going down due in part to increasing numbers of hybrid vehicles and increased vehicle fuel efficiency of gas-powered vehicles. The Commission also found that fuel economy standards will continue to erode the tax base. The only way vehicle manufacturers can further increase fuel economy is to focus on the production of electric vehicles. The Commission also found through a survey of residents in the State that roads and infrastructure are a high priority; transportation is a higher priority in the Eastern and Western regions. Investment recommendation is to achieve a good infrastructure rating, increase the level of investment by at least \$20 billion over the next ten years through an increase in the Highway Use Tax (HUT), by eliminating the net-of-trade exemption, and by recapturing proceeds from alternative HUT on short-term vehicle rentals, vehicle subscription services, and car sharing. Estimated revenues for transportation over the next ten years is more than \$7.6 Billion. The study also proposes increasing the sales tax rate by 0.025% (from 0.05 to 0.075%); increasing DMV fees. Other options for consideration include a mileage-based user fee to fully replace the Motor Fuels Tax by 2030; however, this would lead to no net change in estimated revenues for transportation over the next 10 years. Other options include expanding broadband, increasing debt capacity for NCDOT and the appointment of a Chief Innovation Officer. The Commission found that this is an opportune moment. Next steps include spreading the word by increasing public outreach and education, meeting with the region's legislative delegations, participating in mileage-based user fee pilot in Fall 2021, and joining the NC Chamber's Destination 2030.

Discussion occurred about the recommendations and how those work with the other goals of NCDOT and it was shared by Ms. Cameron that the purpose of the Commission was to find a modernized revenue stretcher. In no way did the department really talk about how the revenue should be spent. The NC First Commission deals with where the money comes from and NC Moves deals with how the money should be spent. With regards to how it fits with existing policies, it does not appear to compete with complete streets. The intent was not to provide any type of advantage to any specific type of transportation system. The revenue situation is dire and all options are being looked at.

Discussion occurred about weight-based vehicle taxes, infrastructure spending and possible taxes on hybrid vehicles (EVs). Ms. Cameron noted that NCDOT follows trends on vehicle ownership and the data that is

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generated from that information. More data-backed analysis is becoming available. NCDOT is expected to come out with their legislative agenda within the next two-weeks.

Information only. No action required.

REGULAR UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS

Regular updates included NCDOT Division 13 and 14 updates, TPD updates and FHWA/FTA updates. MPO Subcommittees, Legislative, and Staff updates were also presented.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEWS, SPECIAL UPDATES

LAPP Training next Thursday (February 18) at noon.

TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETING

5310 Project Selection

Final UPWP

Mud Creek Greenway presentation (possibly)

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Radcliff opened the second public comment period. No public comments received.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Radcliff adjourned the meeting, as there was no further business.