



French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization

Minutes from the TCC Virtual Meeting via Zoom on June 10, 2021

ATTENDANCE:

Remote via the Zoom Platform:

Chair Autumn Radcliff	Tristan Winkler	Nick Kroncke	Emily Scott-Cruz
Eric Rufa	John Ridout	Hannah Bagli	Daniel Sellers
Harry Buckner	Jodie Ferguson	McCray Coates	Stephen Sparks
Troy Wilson	Daniel Cobb	Vicki Eastland	Jared Merrill
Lonnie Watkins	Kenny Bussey	Ed Evans	Janna Bianculli
William High	Jessica Morriss	David Wasserman	Brendan Merithew
Jeff Roper	Jessica Trotman	Dan Baechtold	Matt Cable
Chris Medlin	Hannah Cook	David White	Marshall Williams
Timothy Love	Mariate Echeverry	Jill Cahoon	Jennifer Hibbert
Chris Lee	Kim Roney	Nathan Bennett	Adrienne Isenhower
Matt Manley	Michael Dawson		

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. 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 May 2021 minutes, the FY 19 and FY 20 JARC Redistribution of Funds, the Amendment to the 2020-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the PTASP. She requested approval for the Agenda at this time, as well.

William High moved to approve the consent agenda and the agenda as presented. Jessica Morriss seconded the motion, which was affirmed upon a roll call vote of the member governments present.

BUSINESS

MPO Local Input Point (LIP) Methodology for Prioritization (P6.0)

As part of the Statewide Prioritization Process, determined by the [Strategic Transportation Investments Act](#), MPOs, RPOs, and Divisions have local input points that play a major role in prioritizing projects at the Regional Impact and Division Needs levels. Local input points are utilized to help priority projects have a better chance of being funded.

Funding Tier	Statewide Mobility	Regional Impact	Division Needs
Quantitative Score	100%	70%	50%
MPO Score	0%	15%	25%
Division Score	0%	15%	25%
Amount of All Funding	40%	30%	30%
Distribution	All Projects Compete Against Each Other	Split Between Seven Regions, Projects Compete Within Each Region	Split Between 14 Divisions, Projects Compete Within Division
Funding	One Big Pot of Funds	Split to Each Region Based on Population	Split Equally Between 14 Divisions

How local input points are applied can be seen as somewhat complicated. Each MPO, RPO, and Division receive a set number of points they may assign to projects. Projects may receive up to 100 local input points from each MPO, RPO, or Division. However, 100 local input points on a projects boosts a Regional Impact project by 15 points, a Division Needs projects by 25 points.

For MPOs, RPOs, and Divisions, a methodology must be developed and approved to assign local input points to projects. These methodologies must include at least one quantitative criterion and at least one qualitative criterion.

Changes in Local Input Methodology Considerations from P 5.0 to P 6.0

-MPOs, RPOs, and Divisions now have the option of “flexing” Regional Impact points to Division Needs points or vice-versa. Ex. The French Broad River MPO has 1,900 Regional Impact points and 1,900 Division Needs points; we can flex 100 points from Regional Impact to Division Needs to put points on an additional Regional Impact project.

Summary of Changes to the MPO’s Methodology Approved by the Prioritization Subcommittee

- Data points for multimodal considerations changed from planning document references to bike/ped risk data, made available through NCDOT’s Strategic Prioritization Office;
- Added resiliency and a consideration for whether or not a project is already in the MPO’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) or a Locally-Adopted Plan;
- Changed weights to several categories with the addition of the categories as well as a boost to freight considerations but with a reduction to local priority points and a minor reduction in safety, congestion, and multimodal considerations.

	P5 Weight	P6 Weight	Change
Safety	27%	24%	-3%
Congestion	20%	17%	-3%
Multimodal	15%	12%	-3%
MTP/Local Plan	0%	10%	10%
Freight	6%	10%	4%
Environment	7%	7%	0%
Resiliency	0%	5%	5%
Local Priority	25%	15%	-10%

Discussion occurred regarding what resiliency includes and it shared that the purpose of resiliency is to include factors in projects that would make it more resilient to natural hazards or disasters.

Janna Bianculli moved to recommend the MPO Local Input Point (LIP) Methodology for Prioritization (P6.0 to the Board for considerations of approval. Steve Williams seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

Amendment to the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is a federally-required planning document that MPOs are required to update and maintain to reflect planned transportation investments in the region over the next twenty-five years. The MTP is required to be fiscally constrained, meaning that projects in the MTP have to be reasonably expected to work within projected revenues. The French Broad River MPO is required to update its MTP every five years with the next update due in September, 2020.

NCDOT and FHWA have requested the MPO make an amendment to its MTP in order to accommodate an economic development project that would include a new interchange on I-26. Also included in the MTP amendments is a new access road for a business park in the East Flat Rock area of Henderson County that has been funded with Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funds. In order to “fit” the new interchange into the existing MTP, another project will need to be removed.

As part of the Pratt & Whitney site, NCDOT has programmed \$10 million in economic development funds towards building a new interchange on I-26 (HE-0001) to access the future industrial site. This interchange would connect to a road that would connect across the French Broad River to NC 191. The project is currently estimated to cost approximately \$25 million but that cost may increase based on a number of factors to be determined during design.

Based on the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) Act of North Carolina, funds that are applied towards economic development projects impact the respective Division Needs tier of funding.

The HE-0001 project has a very aggressive timetable, with plans to let the project later in 2022. In order to maintain the current project schedule and follow federal requirements, the French Broad River MPO would need to amend its MTP to include the project.

Discussion occurred regarding why NCDOT was providing funding for an economic development project that benefits one specific business. MPO staff communicated that the overall cost of the project could be \$25 million, which is well over the \$10 million NCDOT would provide for the project. Moving forward with the project might be impossible until the funding issues are resolved.

Tim Love with Buncombe County provided an overview of the economic development project and its projected impact.

McCray Coates, NCDOT Project Development, shared those conversations would be undertaken with surrounding property owners, including the Blue Ridge Parkway. He noted that there are challenges with having a direct connection to the Parkway. The goal is to connect NC 191 to I-26. Chris Medlin, NCDOT role, shared that there would be a tie-in to NC 191 at the Arboretum, which would allow access to the Parkway. McCray Coates shared that the NEPA process is beginning. Daniel Sellers shared that the \$10 million has been committed from the governor’s office and providing the remaining funding for the project is being looked at. On the program side, it needs to be federally compliant in the MTP in order to be

consistent with the plan. MPO staff shared that this project falls within the STI, which allows NCDOT to allocate \$10 million to a project for economic development and it would affect the Division Needs Tier. David Wasserman shared that these funds are transportation funds, and the STI law does allow for time-sensitive economic development projects. Approval was garnered for these funds, which provide a starting point for the funding required for the project. He noted that the \$10million would be used to complete the NEPA process. TCC members shared concerns that ultimately, \$35 million in Division Needs project funding might be moved to this project, which could impact the SPOT process further down the line for the MPO region. David Wasserman clarified that the \$10 million is coming from the Division Needs funding, but he noted that other funding is being sought for this project, including ARC funding. Because the project has not gone through the STI process, additional NCDOT funding could not be used on this project.

Discussion also occurred regarding how the determination was made on which project to bump out of the MTP. TCC members shared concern that the presentation of this project doesn't seem to fit the MPO's process. MPO staff shared that anytime a new transportation project is selected without input from local jurisdictions and MPO staff it might be concerning; however, this project is of a different nature, with regards to the perceived economic impact and the STI law does allow for this process. MPO staff did select the project to be removed from the MTP, which was a project that had no funding attached to it and was pretty far down the line. This project is here and it is happening and consideration should be given to the truck traffic that could be dumped out on NC 191. The possibility that this project could be \$35 million is concerning and TCC members wondered if the business was willing to put funding towards this project. David Wasserman shared that under the STI law, no more than \$10 million in transportation funding could be put on this project. Tim Love shared that the bridge off of Brevard Road would be the initial access point for P&W. McCray Coates shared that the goal is to let this project in the fall of 2022, which is a tight schedule in NCDOT timelines. He shared that NCDOT is working on applying for a federal grant (RAIS Funds?), in addition to an application for ARC and EDA funding. The identification of various partners is underway. P&W has not been approached about donating funding to the project. Chair Radcliff shared that this is probably one of those decisions that should be bumped up to the Board; however, the Board needs to receive a report on these discussions before they give consideration to the funding of this project.

Discussion occurred that there are two issues at hand: the additional funding for the P&W project and the decision for the removal of a project in the MTP. MPO staff shared that whether the project's cost is \$10 or \$25 million, it doesn't make much difference to the MTP. David Wassermann shared that the project would have to go through prioritization and it is not expected that any additional funding would come from the statewide tier. The initial \$10 million represents the limit on state funding that could be allocated towards this project. It was noted that the \$10 million would be the match on a RAIS grant. It was shared the state is seeking \$25 million from the RAIS grant. It was also noted that there is tentative site plans for other development on the 100acre site that P&W will occupy, leading to concerns about traffic levels on NC 191. TCC members suggested bringing a much more robust report to the MPO Board about this project and its impacts to the region. MPO staff concurred. Vicki Eastland shared that working with the Division and programming staff, project U-3403 Section B, might be accelerated. MPO staff shared that additional project delays are more likely than project accelerations at this time.

The access road project in Henderson County, HA-0003, is funded with ARC funds which are considered exempt from STI and would not impact other projects in the MTP.

In order to work within the financial plan of the MTP, a project (or projects) would need to be removed. Staff recommends the removal of an access management project on NC 280 (Airport Road) between I-26 and the French Broad River. The project, HD134528, is currently considered a “long-term priority,” i.e., the project is not currently funded or in the prioritization process to be considered for funding. The project scored relatively low during the MTP project selection process, held last spring, and is estimated to cost more than \$27,000,000, if programmed.



HD134528 – Airport Road Access Management (I-26 to FBR)	
Jurisdictions Impacted	Buncombe County, City of Asheville
Current Status	Unfunded, Long-Term Priority
AADT	22,000-31,000
Complete Streets Reference	Blue Ridge Bike Plan
Current Sidewalks	Some
Current Bike Facilities	No

Anticipated Cross-Section

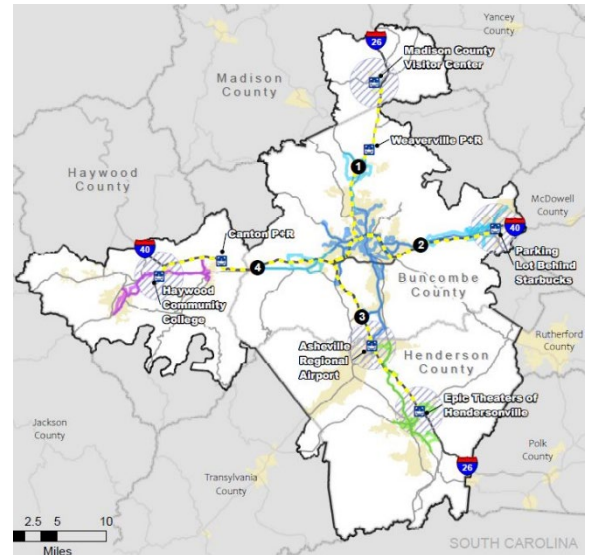
Dan Baechtold moved to defer this business item to the MPO Board for consideration. Janna Bianculli seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

Regional Transit Plan Findings & Recommendations

The MPO approved a Regional Transit Feasibility Study for its FY 2021 UPWP. The study looks at adding regionally-focused transit routes (ex. Asheville to Hendersonville, Waynesville to Black Mountain, etc.) to provide our region with express bus options in the MPO planning area (Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison counties.) This study analyzes the feasibility of providing these options by examining the likely governance structure that would be required to provide a regional service (Regional Transit Authority), the responsibilities that could fall to a regional body, funding opportunities, and potential routes.

Looking at Regional Transit has been an identified need since, at least, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan completed in 2000. This study will help to provide a roadmap for our region on how to implement a regional transit system.

The Regional Transit Feasibility Study is currently wrapping-up with the final report expected to be reviewed and made available later this month. The project has been on-going since last fall with a steering committee made up of Buncombe County, City of Asheville, Henderson County, Haywood County, and Madison County staff, as well as MPO and RPO staff. Two (virtual) public input sessions were held throughout the course of the study- one in December, 2020 and another that was held over March and April, 2021.



Mariatte Echeverry, Jill Cahoon and Jennifer Hibbert with AECOM, provided a presentation on the final findings and recommendation of the study to the TCC.

General Recommendations:

General recommendations from the study include-pursuing a Regional Transit Authority that would focus on regional transit service while preserving local control of existing systems- a regional transit service could provide express routes to connect Asheville, Hendersonville, Black Mountain, Mars Hill, Weaverville, Canton, and Waynesville.

In addition, a second general recommendation of the study includes having a Regional Transit Authority take on responsibilities that could be more efficiently provided at the regional level as opposed to having those responsibilities fall to each existing service, including: working on a regional transit fare pass, mobility management, employee training, vehicle maintenance, and potentially funding administration.

Janna Bianculli moved to recommend the MPO Board consider acceptance of the general recommendations in the Regional Transit Feasibility Study. Dan Baechtold seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.

REGULAR UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS

Regular updates from NCDOT Division 13 and 14 were distributed by MPO Staff, as were TPD updates.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEWS, SPECIAL UPDATES

No meeting cycle in July. Next meeting cycle is in August.

TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETING

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.