

# Item 3A:

## June, 2021 Minutes

**French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Virtual Meeting via the Zoom Platform**  
Minutes from the Governing Board meeting on June 24, 2021

### Attendance

Chair Larry Haris (Black Mountain Council)  
Tristan Winkler (FBRMPO)  
Emily Scott-Cruz (FBRMPO)  
John Ridout (FBRMPO)  
Nick Kronke (FBRMPO)  
Hannah Bagli (FBRMPO)  
Tim Love (Buncombe County)  
Matt Wechtel (Madison Commission)  
Stephen Sparks (NCDOT Division 13)  
Steve Williams (NCDOT Division 14)  
Troy Wilson (NCDOT Division 14)  
Anthony Sutton (Town of Waynesville)  
Kevin Ensley (Haywood Commission)  
Michael Dawson (FHWA)  
Jeff McKenna (Weaverville Council)  
William High (Buncombe County)  
Tom Widmer (Montreat Commission)  
Brendan Merithew (NCDOT Division 13)  
Anne Coletta (Flat Rock Council)  
George Banta (Laurel Park Council)  
Parker Sloan (Buncombe Commission)  
Jennifer Hensely (Hendersonville Council)  
Brownie Newman (Buncombe Commission)  
David White (Western Carolina Community Action)  
Rebecca McCall (Henderson Commission)

Billy Clarke (NC Board of Transportation)  
Janna Bianculli (Apple Country Transit)  
David Wasserman (NCDOT STIP Unit-Western Region)  
Dr. Ralph Hamlet (Canton Council)  
Matthew Manley (City of Hendersonville)  
Daniel Cobb (Town of Mills River)  
Mariate Echeverry (AECOM)  
Kim Roney (Asheville Council)  
Gwen Wisler (Asheville Council)  
Jennifer Hibbert (AECOM)  
Jill Cahoon (AECOM)  
Nathan Ramsey (Land of Sky Regional Council)  
Chuck McGrady (NC Board of Transportation)  
Brian Caskey (Mills River Council)  
Rebecca McCall (Henderson Commission)  
Keith Bamberger  
Jess Fox  
Cynthia Heil  
Ned Curran  
Teresa Robinson  
Zia Rifkin (Minutes)

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## Staff Report & Recommendations

### WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & ROLL CALL

Chair Larry Harris called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Chair Harris read the Ethics Statement and inquired if there were any conflicts of interest to note for today's meeting. Anthony Sutton registered a conflict with item 5A Proposed Amendment to the 2045 MTP, which is an informational item at today's meeting and stated he would refrain from participation in that particular matter. No other conflicts were noted with the business before the body. The roll was called, and quorum established.

### CONSENT AGENDA

***Anthony Sutton moved to approve the amended consent agenda consisting of the May 2021 meeting minutes, the FY 19 and FY 20 JARC Redistributions, the Amendment to the 2020-2029 TIP and the PTASP Performance Targets and the Amendment to the FY 21 UPWP. The motion received a second and carried unanimously upon a roll call vote, and without further discussion.***

### PUBLIC COMMENT (from a representative of Biltmore Farms and residents of Buncombe County)

Ben Teague with Biltmore Farms commented that the Pratt & Whitney project would provide good jobs for the region and the transportation piece is very important. The economic development package was an important part of the business' decision to locate in Buncombe County.

Corey Atkins commented favorably on the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP. He also commented on the potential funding available for this project, which would not push back or delay other transportation projects in the region.

Roger Ehrlich commented against the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP.

Rachel Bliss commented against the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP.

Victoria Estes commented against the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP.

Kristen commented against the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP.

Elliot commented against the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP.

Susan Ohler commented against the proposed amendment to the 2045 MTP.

Additional details regarding public comments may be found on the French Broad River MPO's website: <http://frenchbroadrivempo.org/recent-events/>, where a recording of the meeting is posted.

### NEW BUSINESS

#### MPO Local Input Point Methodology for P 6.0

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%
<b>MPO Score</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>25%</b>
Division Score	0%	15%	25%
Amount of All Funding	40%	30%	30%

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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 project boosts a Regional Impact project by 15 points, and 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 include:

- 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 include:

- 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%

***A motion was made and seconded to approve the Draft P 6.0 Local Input Point Methodology. The motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.***

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### 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.

### General Recommendations:

- Pursue 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.
- Have 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.

The AECOM team (Mariate Echeverry, Jill Cahoon, and Jennifer Hibbert) provided a presentation on the final findings and recommendations of the study.

Discussion occurred about the potential funding for a regional transit authority and how local staff might be impacted/burdened. It was shared that regional funding that is currently being utilized for local services should remain with those local services, since to take funding away from local systems would negatively impact services. Tristan Winkler shared that a 'yes' vote today means that the recommendations would be included in a planning document. Like any other plan, documenting the recommendations is one piece of the process of looking for that additional funding. He noted that a regional authority is envisioned as a supplement to local services, funded outside of existing funds.

***A motion was made and seconded to table this business item until a future MPO Board meeting.***

Discussion occurred regarding what might be the alternatives to a regional transit authority and board members shared that they needed to go back to their communities for discussion on this item before taking a vote.

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***The motion to table passed 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 must be reasonably expected to work within projected revenues. The French Broad River MPO is required to update its MTP every five years with the last update completed in September 2020.

This amendment would add a planned extension of Commercial Boulevard for a business park in the East Flat Rock area of Henderson County that has been funded with Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funds which, due to the cost of the project, does not require another project to be removed and should not impact any other projects schedule.

### **HA-0003 Project Background**

The access road project in Henderson County, HA-0003, is a project that is programmed as part of an economic development project in the East Flat Rock area of Henderson County. The project would extend Commercial Boulevard to provide access to an industrial site south of the existing termini in East Flat Rock.

The access road extension is funded with Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Access Road funds, a competitive pot of funds which has funded numerous other "smaller" projects of similar scope in the region, including:

- Crossroads Parkway in Mars Hill
- Access Road Extension in Black Mountain, near Blue Ridge Road and I-40
- Broadpointe Drive Extension in Mills River

To note: these funds from ARC are considered exempt from STI, i.e., would not impact other projects in the MTP or the schedule of other projects in the TIP.

<b>Project Added to the MTP</b>	Commercial Boulevard Extension (HA-0003)
<b>Project Removed from the MTP</b>	None
<b>Anticipated Impact to Other Projects in the MPO</b>	None
<b>Total Amount of Funding</b>	\$618,547*
<b>Scheduled Project Let Date</b>	FY 2021

***Chuck McGrady moved to approve the amendment to the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), which received a second. The motion carried upon a roll call vote and without further discussion.***

Anthony Sutton removed himself from the room prior to discussion of business item 5A that is an information item before the Board, which he previously announced was a conflict of interest for him.

### **Amendment to the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)**

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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 last update completed in September 2020.

### Update Summary

- Add a new interchange to I-26 in Buncombe County near mile marker 35, between Exit 33 (NC 191/Brevard Road) and Exit 37 (NC 146/Long Shoals Road), to connect to an access road to the Pratt & Whitney site and NC 191.
- Remove the MTP Access Management project on NC 280 between I-26 and the French Broad River in order to maintain projects within the MTP's financial plan. The project on NC 280 is not currently funded or being considered for funding.

### Project Background

In January 2021, Pratt & Whitney announced that it would be building a new 1.2 million square foot manufacturing facility in southern Buncombe County that will employ roughly 800 people and include an investment of up to \$650 million. Overall, the economic impact of the new facility's employment and wages is projected to be roughly \$72 million with several of Buncombe County's economic development goals being met. The County also agreed to up to \$27 million in economic incentives, to be provided over time, if goals are met.

At roughly the same time the development was announced, work began on an access road to the site that includes a new bridge over the French Broad River to NC 191, funded by the Golden Leaf Foundation and Biltmore Farms. This project would provide access between NC 191 and the Pratt & Whitney facility.

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 the access 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 several factors to be determined during design, including potential impacts to the Biltmore Estate.

### About the Funding

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. In this case, the \$10 million already committed to the new interchange on I-26 would impact Division 13's Division Needs tier in the TIP/STIP, which includes the following projects in our region:

TIP ID	Route	From	To	Cost	County
I-2513D	Riverside Drive	Hill Street	Broadway	\$42,100,000	Buncombe
U-5834	Mills Gap Road	US 25	Weston Road	\$25,533,000	Buncombe
U-4739	Amboy/Meadow Road	I-240	Biltmore Avenue	\$49,300,000	Buncombe

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U-5832	NC 81 (Swannanoa River Road)	Biltmore Avenue	S Tunnel Road	\$10,750,000	Buncombe
U-6046	NC 81 (Swannanoa River Road)	US 70	US 74A	\$23,302,000	Buncombe
I-4409	I-40	Blue Ridge Road	-	\$32,799,000	Buncombe
U-6163	Mills Gap Road	Cane Creek Road	-	\$2,810,000	Buncombe
U-6162	N Louisiana Avenue	US 19/23	Emma Road	\$5,800,000	Buncombe
U-6047	NC 112 (Sand Hill/Sardis Road)	NC 191	US 19/23	\$40,300,000	Buncombe
U-5837	Riceville Road	US 70	Clear Vista Lane	\$2,000,000	Buncombe

*\*Costs to be updated*

For reference, this section of the STI law provides the types of funds that would be accounted for in the Division Needs tier-

§ 136-189.11.D.4: *Projects requested from the Department in support of a time-critical job creation opportunity, when the opportunity would be classified as transformative under the Job Development Investment Grant program established pursuant to G.S. 143B-437.52, provided that the State investment for all projects funded under this sub-sub-subdivision in any five-year period shall not exceed one hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000) in the aggregate and ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) per project. Upon the release of a State Transportation Improvement Program, the Department shall submit a report to the Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee detailing the projects funded under this sub-sub-subdivision.*

At this time NCDOT is unable to just apply more state funding to the project since the project has not been submitted to prioritization/SPOT for consideration. Additional funds from the State would either require legislative action or the project would need to be submitted to the next round of prioritization- the latter would not fit within NCDOT's current timetable.

NCDOT staff and others are working on applying for additional funds from outside/exempt funding sources for the remainder of the project costs.

To note: projects that may be impacted don't just include projects in Buncombe County, but projects elsewhere in Division 13 at the Division Needs tier, i.e., projects in Madison, Yancey, Mitchell, McDowell, Burke, and Rutherford funded at the same tier could be impacted as well or instead of projects in Buncombe.

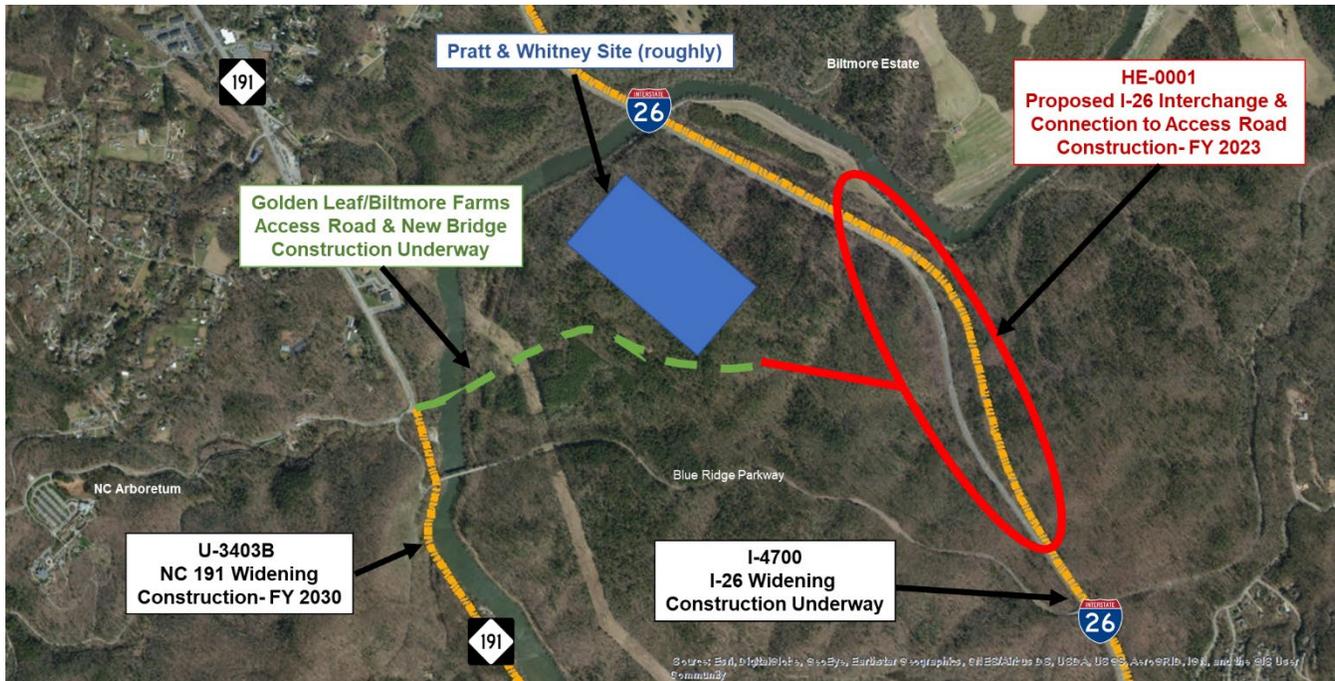
### Project Details

The new interchange at the Pratt & Whitney site would provide a new interchange in the four mile stretch between Exit 37 (NC 146/Long Shoals Road) and Exit 33 (NC 191/Brevard Road), mostly on land currently owned by Biltmore Farms.

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Several alternatives are currently being considered by NCDOT and the Merger Team for the interchange, but all alternatives include an interstate interchange that would provide a two-lane road accessing development to the west and connecting to the access road that would allow travelers to access NC 191, improving east-west connectivity in the area.

The HE-0001 has a very aggressive timetable, with plans to let the project later in 2022 and environmental documentation beginning to get underway. 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.

Tristan Winkler shared that currently, the NC Senate has included \$30 million in the FY22 state budget for this economic development project. Additionally, other grants are being explored and there is strong potential that ARC and EDA funding could be secured for this project.

In order to work within the financial plan of the MTP (funding projected to be available over 25 years), a project (or projects) would need to be removed to accommodate HE-0001.

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.

### Potential Actions by the MPO Board & Steps Forward for Consideration in August

Option #1: Approve the MTP Amendments: If the MPO Board approves the MTP amendments, work would continue on the approved projects. For HE-0001, the State Board of Transportation plans to consider approval of funds in the

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STIP for preliminary engineering for the project at its July meeting with MPO concurrence in its TIP, to officially approve the funding, in August.

Option #2: Reject the MTP Amendments: If the MPO does not include HE-0001 in its MTP, the project would not move forward. FHWA would require any new interstate interchange to be adopted in the region's MTP and would not authorize work to move forward without MPO approval.

Discussion occurred regarding delaying other projects in the region for the proposed HE-0001 project.

Discussion occurred regarding how funding was committed to this proposed project, without the input of the MPO until recently.

Discussion occurred regarding that the project has a high potential for positive economic impact in the region, making this a compelling project.

Discussion occurred about how different pots of funding are pursued in order to bring economic development projects to fruition.

***Informational item. No action requested at this time.***

### REGULAR UPDATES

- Divisions 13 and 14 updates available on website: [http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/D13\\_June2021.pdf](http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/D13_June2021.pdf) and [http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/D14\\_June2021.pdf](http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/D14_June2021.pdf).
- The Transportation Planning Division newsletter is also available on the website: [http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FBRMPO\\_Newsletter\\_2021\\_5\\_June.pdf](http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FBRMPO_Newsletter_2021_5_June.pdf).
- A FHWA/FTA Update was provided.
- FBRMPO Committee & Workgroup Updates:
  - Prioritization - Met June 1; next meeting July 6.
  - Transit Operators Workgroup – Next meeting TBD.
  - Citizens' Advisory Committee - Next meeting July 14.
  - Hellbender Trail Stakeholder Group – Next meeting TBD – July or August.
  - Regional Transit Study - Drafting final materials.
  - Corridor Studies - Awaiting final document of the Tunnel Road Corridor Study; anticipating going through City of Asheville & Buncombe County approval process in the summer & fall.

Tristan Winkler expressed appreciation to MPO staff working through the technical difficulties at the meeting.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEWS, FUTURE TOPICS AND SPECIAL UPDATES

Land of Sky luncheon in Mills River on July 30. More details will be distributed on this public event.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Comment received about renewable energy, but the remainder of the comment was inaudible.

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### ADJOURNMENT

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