



METROPOLITAN PLANNING
ORGANIZATION
A PROGRAM OF LAND OF SKY

French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization

Minutes from the TCC Zoom Meeting on April 14, 2022

ATTENDANCE:

In-person and remote via Zoom:

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Elizabeth Teague | Tristan Winkler | John Ridout |
| Jane Pies (minutes) | Troy Wilson | Steve Williams |
| Nathan Bennett | Hannah Cook | Stephen Sparks |
| Daniel Sellers | David Uchiyama | Kim Roney |
| Matt Baker | Cole Sutton | Adrienne Isenhower |
| Mark Gibbs | Matthew Cable | Jessica Trotman |
| Joel Setzer | Chris Medlin | Hannah Bagli |
| Marshall Williams | Janna Bianculli | Michael Dawson |
| Daniel Cobb | Steve Cannon | |

WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING

Elizabeth Teague called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone at 11:00 AM. A roll call followed, and quorum was established for conducting the business of the TCC.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Elizabeth Teague called for public comments. No public comments were received.

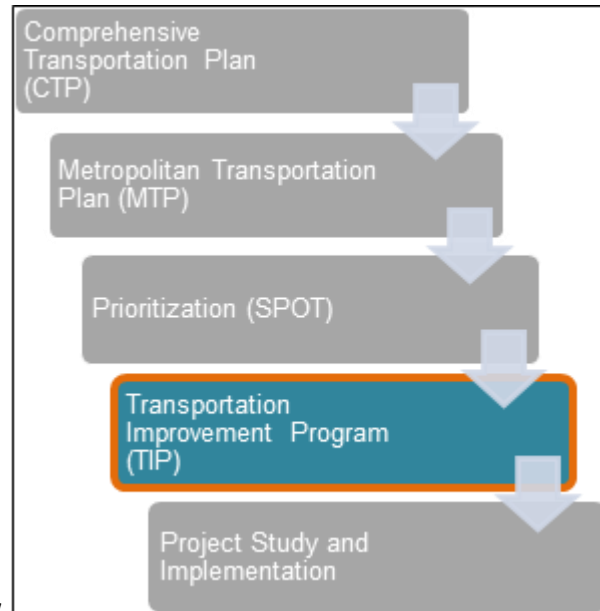
CONSENT AGENDA

Elizabeth Teague indicated that the consent agenda included the March 2022 TCC minutes and the Amendment to the FY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). She requested approval of the TCC agenda, as well.

***Janna Bianculli motioned to approve the consent agenda and the TCC agenda, as presented.
Steve Williams seconded the motion, which carried unanimously, and without further discussion.***

BUSINESS

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



Overview

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.

TIP Amendments #10 Overview

This round includes amendment delays allowing for additional time for right-of-way and construction, add delays for planning and design and construction, delays for additional time for preliminary engineering, delay construction, add utilities not previously programmed, cost increases in excess of \$2 million (\$2,000,000) threshold. In addition, there are amendments for additional funds for transit projects, modify funds for transit projects as well as program bridge repair projects. New projects are currently being added in this round.

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

MPO Staff presented on the amendments to the 2020-2029 TIP. Tristan Winkler asked if there are any specific items causing the cost increases with the I-2513 project or if they are just general cost increases. Steve Cannon with NCDOT Division 13 shared that they are mostly general increases such as right-of-way and real estate costs trending upward.

Daniel Sellers moved to accept the Amendments to the 2020-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and request approval by the Board as presented. Hannah Cook seconded the motion with passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

Amendments to the FY 2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

What is a UPWP?

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, and any programmatic support or planning being funded by FTA 5307 Support.

Amendment Summary

This amendment to the FY 2023 UPWP would add two special studies at the recommendation of the Prioritization Subcommittee:

- Patton Avenue Corridor Study (City of Asheville, \$222,000 in federal funds)
- Fonta Flora Greenway Study (Town of Black Mountain, \$28,000 in federal funds)

These studies would be in addition to other special studies already programmed:

- 2050 Regional Socio-Economic Projections (FBRMPO)
- Buncombe County Multimodal Master Plan (Buncombe County)
- Reed Creek Greenway Extension Study (City of Asheville)
- Haywood County Greenway Master Plan (already started)

NOTE: NCDOT has requested additional conversations about the Patton Avenue Corridor Study take place before initiating the study. Approval of these amendments should not conflict with that request.

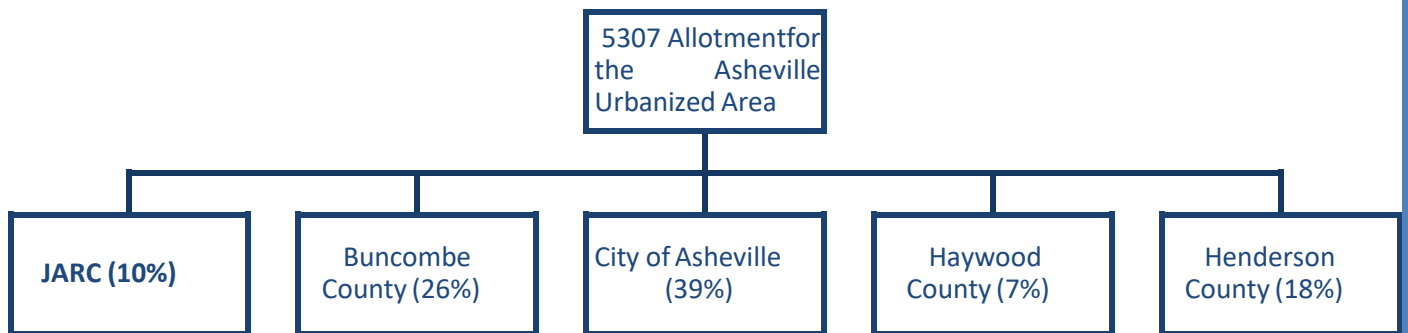
Lucy Crown moved to recommend for approval by the Board the Amendments to the FY 2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) as presented. Janna Bianculli seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.

Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) – Additional Funding

What is JARC?

Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) is a former stand-alone FTA program that provided transit funding for projects connecting urban workers with suburban and rural employment opportunities via transit. The JARC program was consolidated with FTA 5307 (Urban Transit Formula Funds) as part of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) transportation law that was passed in 2012. Since then the French Broad River MPO has elected to set-aside 10% of the region’s 5307 allotment to hold a call for JARC projects.

5307 Transit Funding Distribution in the French Broad River MPO



Funding Item

The MPO TCC and Board previously passed the allotment of JARC funds for projects requested from the City of Asheville for its Route 170 to Black Mountain as well as another project from Friends of Land of Sky to start a Recovery to Work Vanpool program that would provide rides from halfway homes and recovery centers to employment opportunities not currently on a transit line.

However, what was approved did not program the full amount of JARC that was available. The Prioritization Subcommittee and Regional Transit Operators met and recommended that the remaining funding of \$82,404 be programmed to the two projects to the extent they could be utilized. At its April meeting the Prioritization Subcommittee recommended the MPO's JARC funding be programmed as follows:

| Program | Initial Award | Additional Award | Total Allotment |
|---|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| City of Asheville JARC Program | \$231,558 | \$72,404 | \$303,962 |
| Friends of Land of Sky Vanpool Program | \$30,000 | \$10,000 | \$40,000 |

This programming would allow Friends of Land of Sky to purchase additional insurance coverage for the vanpool program and provide greater flexibility for the City of Asheville to utilize the funding for qualifying routes rather than one specific route.

Lucy Crown moved to recommend for approval by the Board the additional funding for the Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) projects. Nathan Bennett seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Changes to TIP/STIP Projects

As a result of TIP/STIP projects being overprogrammed, NCDOT engaged the MPO and local partners last fall to determine any projects that could be scaled back in scope or segmented in order to reduce costs and potentially give projects a better chance of remaining committed in the upcoming 2024-2033 TIP/STIP. NCDOT is currently in the process of getting approvals and/or updated cost estimates to proceed with scope changes and segmentation for consideration in developing the new (S)TIP.

Steve Cannon, NCDOT, Division 13, started a presentation with the background of the 2024-2033 STIP and its being overprogrammed. As of October 2021, Statewide programs are overbudgeted \$4.07B, Region G projects are overbudgeted by \$1.07B and Division 13 programs are overbudgeted \$389.9M. To bring down budgets, NCDOT reviewed scope and cost estimate goals in order to reduce costs for Division 13 projects by approximately \$330M (minimum), to allow additional new projects in SPOT 7.0 (STIP 2026-2033), and to make them subject to STI Prioritization Workgroup recommendations for developing the 2024-2033 STIP. The Division held scope and estimate review meetings (including participation by local Municipalities, MPO/RPO/s and NCDOT) for 29 projects, 13 of which are in the FBRMPO area. Three of the projects with revised estimates have a combined savings of \$53.6M.

The following lists the FBRMPO Projects Reviewed:

| | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|--|
| A-0010AA | I-26 | Anticipate new estimate June 2022 |
| B-4442 | I-26 Bridges over Reems Creek | \$4.6M in savings |
| I-4409 | Blue Ridge Rd interchange | Anticipate new estimate June 2022 |
| U-2801A | Sweeten Creek Rd | Anticipate new estimate June 2022 |
| U-3403B | NC 191 | Maintaining current estimates due to project estimates |
| U-4739 | Amboy Rd | \$37.3M in savings |
| U-5832 | Swannanoa River Rd | Anticipate new estimate December 2022 |
| U-5837 | Riceville Rd | \$11.9M in savings |
| U-5972 | New Leicester Highway | Estimate in process |

| | | |
|--------|-------------------------------|--|
| U-6046 | Swannanoa River Rd | Estimate in process, low priority given project schedule |
| U-6047 | Sardis Rd | Anticipate new estimate April 2022 |
| U-6162 | North Louisiana Avenue | Maintaining current estimates due to project schedule |
| U-6163 | Mills Gap Rd at Cane Creek Rd | Maintaining current estimates due to project schedule |

Tristan Winkler asked about proposed changes to U-2802A (Sweeten Creek Rd), A-0010A (I-26) and U-3403B (Brevard Rd) projects. Per NCDOT, for Sweeten Creek Road one of the primary items being looked at is to reduce the typical section. Is a 4-lane divided highway needed now or could it be reduced to a 3-lane with a center turn lane? Currently the latter doesn't look feasible, but it is being reevaluated and discussions are continuing. A-0010A doesn't have as much flexibility in design as it has to meet interstate standards. Estimates will hopefully be revised after a closer look is taken at more current information. With U-3403B, there are environmental constraints.

Discussion occurred as to if Division 13 is looking at any infrastructure grants from the Federal Government to help with projects such as I-26. Per NCDOT, not currently, but they will be. Tristan Winkler stated that NCDOT will be potentially going after a mega-grant for at least part of the I-26 project. The question was asked if as the Complete Street policies roll out, how will this impact the cost of existing projects. Steve Cannon stated that revisions at this point should not change the scope of these projects, as multi-modal information was already considered for these projects.

Steve Williams, NCDOT Division 14 Engineer, spoke on changes for two projects: U-6172 and R-5921. For U-6172, the change is from a proposed third lane on the west-bound side to going back to what was originally there, two lanes east-bound and two lanes west-bound. Focus will be placed on addressing safety of crossovers. Attention is also being placed on splitting projects up within this main project, namely splitting off the Blue Ridge Parkway section and focusing on crossings and left turns on the Parkway. With R-5921, a roundabout that was proposed near Cove Creek Road has been eliminated and project limits were pulled back slightly, saving \$1.75M. Tristan Winkler asked about the change of limits in the R-5921 project and feedback that was received. Steve Williams stated that the decision was made by upper NCDOT management and that there has been some negative feedback.

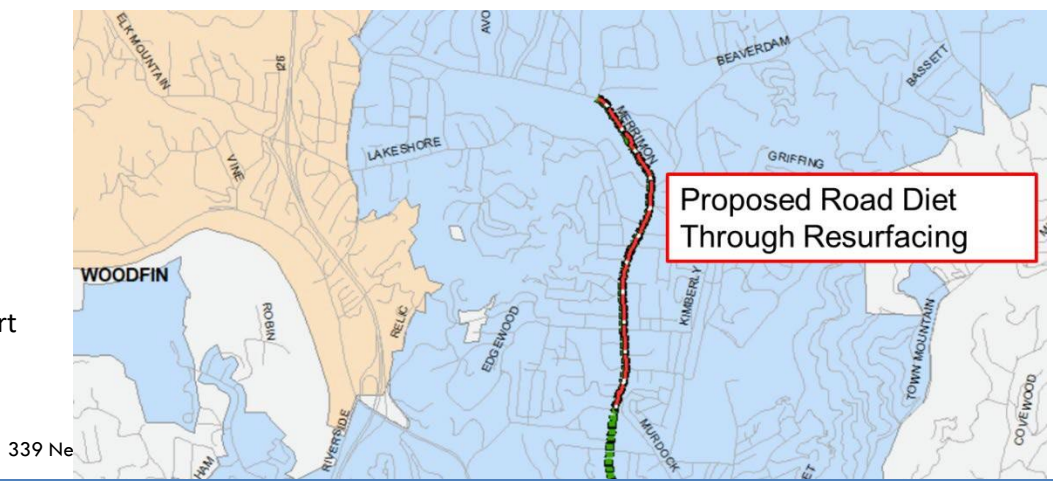
Information only. No action required

Merrimon Avenue Proposed Road Diet

Tristan Winkler presented that the Complete Streets Policy was initially adopted in 2012 and further refined in 2019. "The purpose of this policy is to guide existing decision making and design processes to ensure that all users are included during the planning, design, construction, funding, operation and **maintenance** of North Carolina's transportation network, and will not create barriers or hazards to the movements of those users."

Summary

- NCDOT plans to resurface US 25 through Asheville from Southside Avenue to Midland Drive
- A road diet is being considered to be implemented as part of the resurfacing from WT Weaver

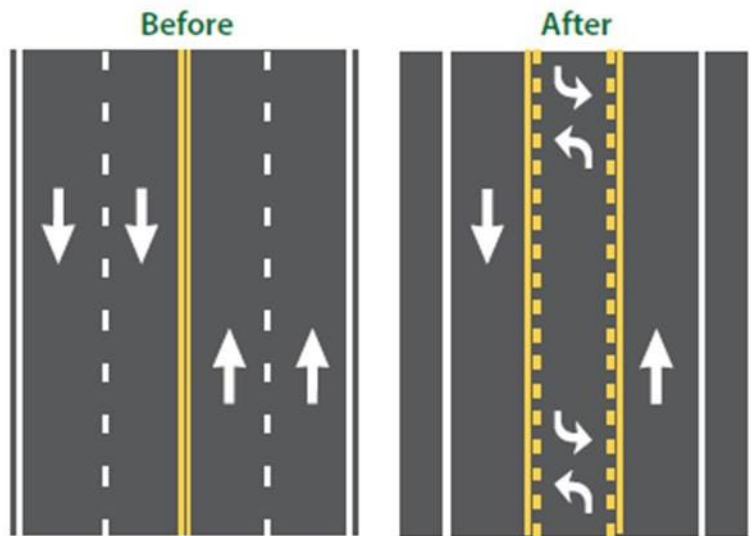


MTP Road Diet Project

Boulevard to Wembley Drive (the current termini of the four-lane cross-section.)

Road Diet Benefits & Considerations

- Generally, a reduction in vehicular travel lanes to make room for other purposes or modes
- FHWA Proven Safety Countermeasure
 - 19-47% reduction in total crashes
 - Reduction of rear-end and left-turn crashes due to the dedicated left-turn lane
 - Reduced right-angle crashes
 - Fewer lanes for pedestrian to cross
 - Opportunity to add bike lanes, parking, additional pedestrian space
 - More consistent speeds
 - Mitigate queues associated with left turning
- Typically implemented on roads with 25,000 AADT or less



Tristan Winkler shared that in 2020, the section north of WT Weaver had 31 recorded bicycle and pedestrian crashes, a 150% crash rate of similar roadway segments. Several intersections on Merrimon with safety issues were identified in NCDOT HSIP reports between 2017-2021 including just north of Beaverdam, Ottari Road, Maney Avenue, Edgewood Road, Westall Drive, Murdock Avenue, Coleman Avenue, Hillside Drive, Woodrow Avenue and Merrimon Drive.

Planning Background

- 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan
 - HR4519- Road Diet on Merrimon Avenue from I-240 to Wembley Drive
 - 2045 Travel Demand Model includes Merrimon Avenue as a three-lane roadway
 - Adopted in 2020
- Congestion Management Process
 - Recommends improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for Merrimon
 - Recommends a relaxed level of service for evaluating congestion (Level of Service E)
 - Identifies the area around Merrimon Avenue as a “Walkable Urban Place”
 - Adopted in 2018
- Safety Performance Targets
 - The MPO and NCDOT are not meeting targets for reducing roadway fatalities, roadway fatality rate, roadway serious injuries, roadway serious injury rates, or non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries
 - (Re)adopted in 2022

Background & History

Two intersection improvement projects were funded at WT Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Drive (U-5781 & U-5782) in 2014 as part of SPOT 3.0. These projects were initially programmed to add and extend turn lanes to each of the intersections to alleviate congestion. Public meetings were held in 2018 that revealed a need to extend turn lanes from Edgewood and WT Weaver Boulevard that essentially created a five-lane cross-section between the two intersections. The public response was not positive, and the projects were later removed from the (S)TIP in 2020.

Out of the two deprogrammed intersection improvement projects, NCDOT initiated a study to look at the feasibility of a road diet on Merrimon Avenue, engaging City of Asheville staff, MPO staff, members of the Asheville Multimodal Commission, and other community stakeholders to look at issues and opportunities. An [express design](#) and [traffic forecast](#) were completed as part of the study.

For public information and feedback, a public meeting was held by City of Asheville staff and NCDOT in March 2022. An online survey was provided as well. In total, the feedback was generally split with somewhat more positive than negative feedback for implementing a road diet.

Discussions are continuing between NCDOT and the City of Asheville regarding funding needs and other considerations to implement a road diet on Merrimon as part of a resurfacing project.

Potential Delay

As part of the traffic forecast completed by NCDOT, estimated intersection delay was evaluated with three different scenarios: no-build, road diet without additional improvements, and a road diet with additional improvements (to be completed at a later time.) Below shows the estimated overall intersection delay at key intersections along the corridor (in seconds) for traffic in 2045.



Source: [Storymap via City of Asheville.](#)

Hannah Cook stated the primary goal of the department is to make transportation safer. Complete Streets aims to aid safety across all transportation modes. Implementing a road diet in conjunction with a resurfacing project provides an opportunity to install a low-cost solution rather quickly but there are limitations as it is a maintenance project. NCDOT is in support of pursuing capital funding for additional improvements that need to be made.

Next Steps

Hannah Cook shared that NCDOT and the City of Asheville are continuing to collaborate on reaching a decision of whether to implement a road diet through resurfacing or not. There was great participation in the public survey following the public open house at the end of February. NCDOT is still working to

compile the data that was gathered and anticipate releasing the results in the next week or two. Decisions made by the department are a combination of public input, data driven analysis, shared goals with the MPO and the City. Scheduling issues may delay the decision on the project until mid-May.

Discussion occurred that if the road diet doesn't happen, would there still be consideration for fixing the sidewalks with the resurfacing? Per Hannah Cook, it would have to come from an additional funding source or as it is outside of the scope of the maintenance project. The question was asked if consideration was given to possibly lowering the speed limit on Merrimon as a safety measure for pedestrians and cyclists. It has come up in meetings, but no decision has been made. It would most likely happen after implementing the road diet, Hannah Cook stated.

Information only. No action required.

REGULAR UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS

- Division 13 Updates:
<https://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/D13-Construction-April-2022-combined.pdf>
- Division 14 Updates: https://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/042022_Div14_FBRMPO_ComprehensiveProjDev-combined.pdf
- Transportation Planning Division updates were provided
- FHWA/FTA Updates were provided
- FBRMPO Committee & Workgroup Updates:
 - Prioritization Subcommittee – met April 6th; next meeting May 4th
 - Transit Operators Workgroup – met January 11th
 - 5307 Subrecipient– next meeting TBD
 - Citizen's Advisory Committee – met April 13th
 - Hellbender Trail Stakeholder Group – last meeting February 3rd; next meeting May 5th

Additional Items:

- USDOT Multimodal Discretionary Grant Open Through May 23rd. Information here: <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/multimodal-project-discretionary-grant-notice-funding-opportunity>
- USDOT Raise Grant Open Through April 14th. Information here: <https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants/raise-nofo>
- USDOT Safe Streets for All Program expected to open in May. Preliminary information here: https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022_03/Safe-Streets-and-Roads-for-All-Fact-Sheet-March-2022.pdf
- FHWA Provided a Report to Congress on Complete Streets. The report is available here: <https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/2022-03/Complete%20Streets%20Report%20Congress.pdf>
- USDOT released the National Roadway Safety Strategy in January. The guidance is available here: <https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS>
- FTA FY 2022 Funding Apportionments available here: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/apportions/current-apportions>
- Legislative updates were provided by MPO staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Elizabeth Teague opened the second public comment period. No public comments were received.

ADJOURNMENT

Elizabeth Teague adjourned the meeting, as there was no further business.