

# Transportation Matters: FBRMPO Quarterly Update



August 2023

## P 7.0: Prioritization and Programming the 2026-2035 STIP

North Carolina's Prioritization Process (P 7.0, AKA SPOT) is beginning to develop the 2026-2035 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP.) The Prioritization Process is a data-driven and transparent process that determines the majority of projects that transition from long-range plans to funded projects in the STIP.

As a first step in the process, MPOs, RPOs, and NCDOT Division determine what projects will be submitted for consideration. This includes highway, bike/ped, transit, rail, and aviation projects. The French Broad River MPO will be presenting a draft list of submittals at its August meeting with final considerations at its September meeting. Public input on the draft list of submittals will be open from August 23rd-September 20th with the additional option of making comments at the MPO Board meeting on September 21st. Further steps in the process will include the application of local input points in the summer and fall of 2024 and the publication of the Draft STIP in early, 2025. For more information, please visit: <https://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/spot-7-0/>

Milestone	Dates*
Data scores and Statewide Mobility funded project list released	Spring 2024
Public comment period on Regional Impact projects & release of Regional Impact funded project list	Summer 2024
Public comment on Division Needs projects	Fall 2024
2026-2035 draft STIP released	Early 2025
2026-2035 STIP adoption by N.C. Board of Transportation	Summer 2025
Federal Highway Administration approval of 2026-2035 STIP	Fall 2025

\*Future dates are preliminary and subject to change

## Ecusta Trail Receives Two Major Grants Totaling \$45.9 Million

This summer has brought in major wins for the Ecusta Trail. In June, USDOT announces that The Ecusta Trail would receive a \$24.5 million dollar RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) grant, one of six awards in North Carolina. In July, NCDOT announced that the Ecusta would also receive \$21.4 million dollars through an NSFLTP (Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Transportation Projects Program) grant. With a total of \$45.9 million in funds, the 19-mile path between Hendersonville and Brevard now has significant funding behind it.

The Ecusta Trail was first proposed by residents of the area in 2009 and will connect Etowah, Horse Shoe, Laurel Park, Hendersonville, and Brevard with a multiuse greenway path. The Ecusta utilizes an old rail line to connect these areas. The trail will also connect to bus stops, schools, medical facilities, and the Pisgah National Forest.

Bids for the MPO funded six-mile section from Hendersonville to Horse Shoe are due back late this summer and we could see construction on the Henderson County side of the Ecusta Trail begin later this year.



Photo: Conserving Carolina

## Western North Carolina Passenger Rail Feasibility Study

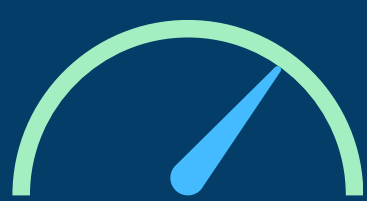


Imagine an alternative to driving on I-40 from Asheville to points east. That's one of many goals behind the June 2023 Western North Carolina Passenger Rail Feasibility Study (NCDOT Rail Division & WGI, Inc).

The study envisions a 139-mile passenger line from Asheville to Salisbury using the existing Norfolk Southern rail line and could include stations in several cities along the route. The line was included in 2021's Amtrak Connects Us vision plan, which along with NCDOT, assumes the line could run by 2035. A trip could cost \$24 one-way and take 3.5 hours, with ridership estimated at 100,000 trips per year by 2045.

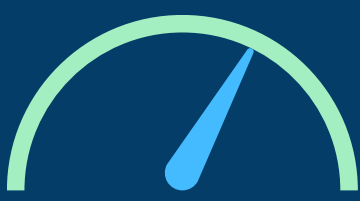
NCDOT submitted the line as one of 13 state rail corridors to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)'s Corridor ID Program. The line would require a capital investment of \$665 million and \$7 - \$11 million annually for operations and maintenance. FRA plans to announce winning Corridor ID projects by Fall 2023.

## I-26 Construction Update



**I-4400BB and I-4400C** : from .05 miles N of US-64 to NC-280 (exit 40)

70% Complete -- 2/28/25 Completion



**I-4700** : from NC-280 (exit 40) to I-40

64.68% Complete -- 6/11/26 Completion

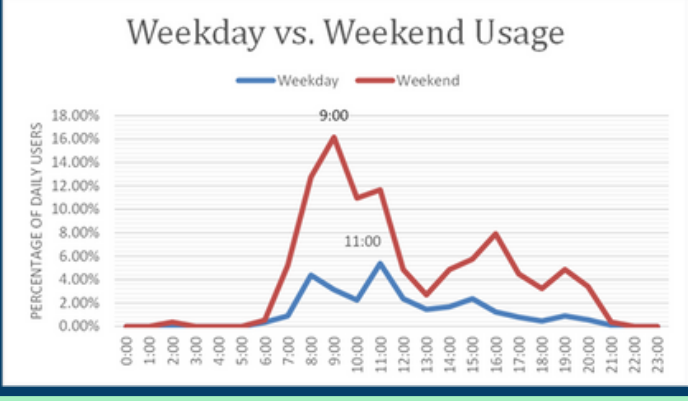
## Around the Region

### Hellbender Regional Trail Forum

The Hellbender Regional Greenway will be held on August 31st at Smoky Park Supper Club! At this forum, we'll dive deep into the world of regional greenways, exploring their impact on our environment and community. Expect a day filled with engaging discussions, informative presentations, and networking opportunities. Our keynote address will be delivered by Bret Baronak, Director of the Carolina Thread Trail. We will also have an exciting Year of the Trail update from Palmer McIntyre, NC Year of the Trail Director. For more information and to register, visit [HellbenderGreenwayForum.eventbrite.com!](https://HellbenderGreenwayForum.eventbrite.com/) Hurry, space is limited!!

### French Broad River West Pedestrian Count

Some people might think that it is too hot outside to enjoy hiking in Asheville. How about in Hendersonville? As always, our trusty Eco-Counter is used on greenways and downtown areas for weeklong periods to gauge usage on these pathways. This count was done on the Oklawaha Greenway opposite Berkley Park, during the first week of August. There were 1424 total users that week. The peak activity was Sunday with 305 visitors coming and going, on foot, rollerblade, or bike. Weekend high temperatures were in the mid-to-upper eighties, with lows in the upper sixties. Check out the graphic below, showing number of users a day during that week. If you ever see our ped counter on your greenway adventures, snap a selfie and tag us @StriveBeyondDrive on Instagram and follow us on Twitter @StriveBeyond!



## Upcoming Meetings

- **Prioritization Subcommittee:** September 6, October 4, November 6, 9:30am - 11:30am
- **MPO TCC:** September 14, October 12, November 16, 11am - 1pm
- **MPO Board:** August 17, September 21, October 19, November 16, 1pm - 3pm

Contact us: [mpo@landofsky.org](mailto:mpo@landofsky.org) [www.frenchbroadrivermpo.org/](http://www.frenchbroadrivermpo.org/)

## 2024-2033 Transportation Improvement Program and EcoInteractive

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a ten-year work program that includes all regionally significant transportation projects in the MPO planning area. The TIP includes projects for all modes of transportation including roadway, public transportation, rail, aviation, bicycle and pedestrian. The TIP is updated every two years, as a subset of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). All projects in the TIP must be consistent with the adopted Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The 2024-2033 TIP is currently available for comment here: <https://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/2024-2033-transportation-improvement-program-tip/> The comment period ends this Thursday, August 17th at 1pm.

The MPO is excited to announce an interactive version of the 2024-2033 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)! Powered by EcoInteractive, this tool allows users to easily find project information such as funding source, construction year, and previous amendments.