



WILMINGTON URBAN AREA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

WMPO Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

6th Floor Training Conference Room
320 Chestnut Street, Wilmington, NC 28401

Members Present

Mike Allen, Town of Belville
Bill Saffo, City of Wilmington
Lynn Barbee, Town of Carolina Beach
Jonathan Barfield, Jr., New Hanover County (Remote)
Brenda Bozeman, Town of Leland
John Ellen, Town of Kure Beach
Hank Miller, Chairman
Luke Waddell, Vice-Chairman
Mike Forte, Brunswick County
Eulis Willis, Town of Navassa
Landon Zimmer, NC Board of Transportation
Brad George, Pender County
Bill Rivenbark, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority

Others Present

Chad Kimes, NCDOT
Veronica Carter, Town of Leland (Remote)
Mike Kozlosky, WMPO
Abby Lorenzo, WMPO
Scott James, WMPO (Remote)
Tera Cline, WMPO
Regina Hopkins, WMPO (Remote)
Vanessa Lacer, WMPO
Michelle Howes, NCDOT
Carolyn Caggia, WMPO
Greer Shiver, WMPO
Mark Haire, Wave Transit
Tyler Newman (BASE)
Stephanie Ayers, NC Port Authority
Crew Detamore, NC Port Authority
Trevor Carroll, NCDOT
Beth King, WMPO
Jason Meyer, NCDOT Rail Division
Jason Orthner, NCDOT Rail Division
Kristina Whitfield, Kimley-Horn

Members Absent

N/A

1. Call to Order

Chairman Miller called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Mike Kozlosky, WMPO then called roll.

Present: Mike Allen, Lynn Barbee, Brenda Bozeman, Mike Forte, Luke Waddell, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Eulis Willis, Landon Zimmer, Bill Saffo, Brad George, and Bill Rivenbark

Present Remotely: Jonathan Barfield, Jr. **Absent:** N/A

Conflict of Interest Statement

Chairman Miller read the conflict-of-interest statement and asked if any Board member has a conflict of interest.

2. Approval of Board Member Excused Absences

No excused absences to approve

3. Approval of the Agenda

Benda Bozeman made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Luke Waddell and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Public Comment Period

No sign ups.

5. Presentations

a) NCDOT Rail Division Update- Jason Orthner and Jason Meyer, NCDOT Rail Division

Mr. Orthner presented information to the Board on the economic impact of the State's rail system. He stated that rail operates in 83 of 100 counties and contributes about \$20 billion in economic output to North Carolina annually. It provides about \$990 million dollars in state and local tax revenues, and supports 88,000 jobs, 860 businesses that load or unload directly on the rail, and 116 rail specific industries are located in North Carolina. The system has about 3,400 miles of rail corridor in the state and is one of the most complete systems in the country.

He then updated the Board on the Piedmont Atlantic Intermodal Rail System. This is the intermodal rail connecting Charlotte to Wilmington on the CSX intermodal network. This project will help with capacity improvements, safety improvements, and development of the belt line. This line will connect through the city to CSX's main line going west. This has been funded through an FRA grant and through projects in the STIP. The Waxhaw track project is complete, and the Wilmington Beltline work is underway.

The Wilmington Beltline (Project P-5740) will improve crossing clearance times, improve train speeds, and improve crossing surfaces. The crossing warning systems will be upgraded, and construction started in June 2023. This project is expected to be completed at the end of December 2026. The following strategic crossing surface replacement work completed thus far includes Market Street and Wrightsville Avenue, 17th Street, 16th Street, Princess Street, and Oleander Drive. He also confirmed that railroad crosstie and rail replacement have been completed. Construction that will begin in October 2024 includes the Navassa and Hilton bridges modernization, the Burnt Mill Creek Bridge replacement, and new tract construction (curve realignment) just west of the King Street crossing. Construction beginning June 2025 includes grade crossing (warning devices) and roadway improvements.

Mr. Orthner then presented an update on the Freight Rail and Rail Crossing Safety Improvement Fund. This program is about half of the appropriation for the Rail Division which is about \$21 million dollars a year. This money is spread throughout the state making improvements to railroad crossing safety with an emphasis on improving rail infrastructure for larger and heavier, and more carloads. He mentions that a lot of grant funding from this program is being used for five improvements to the Wilmington Terminal Railway and North Carolina State Port Authority.

He stated that under the Rail Initial Access Program (RIAP) major improvement support was given to the Gold Bond Company to include a rail industrial spur extension.

Mr. Orthner gave an update on the passenger side of the rail service. This included the existing inner-city service on the Piedmont and Carolinian and connecting services Raleigh to Charlotte. These services are up to five round trips a day. This service also interfaces with Amtrak's National network.

He noted that the Rail Division is showing its highest ridership in a 33-year history. They are expecting to have well over 700,000 passengers this year.

Mr. Orthner stated the Rail Division has also completed two feasibility studies. One is the Southeastern North Carolina Passenger Rail and the other for the Western North Carolina Passenger Rail.

The Southeastern North Carolina Passenger Rail service will connect Wilmington and eastern North Carolina communities. Two routes were evaluated in the study and the East route was recommended. The study also considers three round trips per day. The draft report has been issued to the stakeholders for review and the next step will be FRA's Corridor ID Program.

He then stated the East route, Wilmington to Raleigh, is 134 miles and 2 hours and 35 minutes travel time. The West route, Wilmington to Raleigh, is 187 miles and 3 hours and 30 minutes. The conceptual capital cost estimates are significantly better with the East route over the West route. The East route is around \$170 million dollars cheaper in cost than the West route.

Mr. Orthner stated that work is continuing with the City of Wilmington on the Downtown Wilmington Rail Corridor. He said this corridor is a critical component of passenger rail service to Wilmington. Regular meetings are being held with the City's project team and coordination efforts are being made to design for rail and trail in the corridor.

He gave a brief update on the S-Line and Southeast Corridor. He stated this project creates additional capacity and connects the Southeast and Northeast with safe, frequent, reliable, and fast rail service. \$1.9 billion in funding was awarded to build the first and most complex segment of the project. The department has completed a ridership analysis looking at 2.5 million passengers utilizing this route by 2040.

Mr. Orthner introduced Jason Meyer for the next part of the presentation on Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor ID passenger rail expansion program in North Carolina. He stated that Raleigh to Wilmington, along with six other corridors have now been selected in the Federal Corridor ID Program. The Corridor ID Program is a pipeline program meaning if you follow the steps of it and do the work you keep moving. There is no re-application for the grants and the goal of the program is to get projects, shovel ready to be able to get another grant like the one for the Raleigh North towards Richmond.

Mr. Meyer stated that the three main goals of the Corridor ID Program in relation to North Carolina are to build the foundation for a long-term rail program, bring world-class passenger rail service to regions across the country, and grow safer, cleaner, and a more equitable rail system. The Corridor ID creates a foundational framework for identifying and developing new or improved intercity passenger rail services. Under the program, the FRA will solicit proposals for implementing new or improving existing Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) services, select corridors for development, partner with corridor sponsors to prepare (or update) a Service Development Plan (SDP) and include an inventory of prioritized "pipeline" of projects. Then the projects in the Corridor ID Program are eligible for funding under FRA's financial assistance programs.

He then gave a brief overview of the Corridor ID process from planning and project development to final design and construction. This process includes three major steps. Step 1; Scoping; \$500,000 funding with no match required for Corridor ID grants. Step 2; Project Planning/SDP Development; \$1.5 million to \$4 million range with 10% match required. He noted the match would be dependent on the corridor complexity. Step 3; Preliminary Engineering/Environmental Process/Project Development with cost to be determined with a 20% match required.

He then touched on the planning process to include project administration, stakeholder engagement, alternatives analysis, technical analysis, environmental analysis, financial planning, governance, and SDP.

In closing Mr. Meyers, stated the SDP outcomes (results of study) include operational plans for how service works, list of projects that must be built, and feeds the next steps for NEPA with projects and cost estimates. He then noted that Corridor ID will need the MPO's to ask questions and promote

community readiness during this first phase. Soon they will ask for a non-federal match, respond to RFP, start stakeholder engagement and work on alternative analysis. Later they will ask for plan concurrence, STI collaboration and Corridor champions.

b) NC State Ports Authority Update-Stephanie Ayers, NCSPA

Stephanie Ayers introduced her summer intern, Crew Detamore and stated her presentation will give a high-level overview of things happening at the ports.

She stated that there are two deep water ports in North Carolina, Wilmington and Morehead City. Both serve all types of commodities ranging from containers to bulk to breakbulk and ro/ro operations. Both ports are 2 of 15 strategic seaports in the United States.

Ms. Ayers stated that the ports support North Carolina by supplying 88,200 jobs, \$660 million in tax revenue which accumulates to around \$16.1 billion in economic output.

In 2022 the port was named the number one most efficient port in North America, and she stated that a lot of that has to do with activities that are underway. They were also named 44th globally, the most efficient port in the world. They are making a lot of construction infrastructure improvements to increase the capacity in the port so that higher volumes and velocities can move through the port.

She then discussed Wilmington's capital improvement projects. The refrigerated containers project was a big part of the strategic focus, and they are still looking for grants to put more into that project. The intermodal rail yard was funded with a federal grant that was awarded in FY 22. This dedicated rail yard will allow the port to expand the capacity from 15,000 containers to 50,000 containers. The next big project is the new North gate. This will prevent trucks from having to transit down South Front Street to Burnett Boulevard. The port is also adding 6,000 linear feet of rail storage track.

Ms. Ayers then presented to the Board an update on carrier services. She stated that the ports volumes have expanded to Asia, Europe, and Central America, Caribbean, and South America.

In closing, Ms. Ayers stated that the port is continuing to work on growth of cargo volumes, expanding the global coverage of vessel services, engaging and supporting state-wide economic development projects, developing a talent pipeline, and building the NC Ports brand.

c) WMPO Drone Acquisition and Usage-Greer Shivers, WMPO

Ms. Shivers presented information on the MPO's drone program. She came to the WMPO having already obtained a Part 107 Certified Remote Pilot License. WMPO staff wanted a way to obtain aerial imagery to assist the WMPO's operations including Traffic Impact Analyses, help bolster social media content, and bolster planning documents. WMPO is the first MPO in North Carolina to create a drone program.

The acquisition of the drone consisted of collaboration with NCDOT, FHWA, and the City of Wilmington to purchase the recommended drone and secure an insurance policy.

The drone selected for purchase was the DJI Mini 3 (More Fly Combo) which includes the DJI Mini 3 drone, RC Remote Controller, 3 Intelligent Flight Batteries, 3 propeller sets, 18 replacement screws, a screwdriver, gimbal protector, 2 USB cables, 2-way charging hub, a shoulder bag, a hard-shell travel case, a lens care and cleaning kit, an ND filter set, a landing pad, and 128GB microSD card. She shared the following specifications, each battery allows for 38 minutes of uninterrupted flight time, under 0.5 lbs. including the battery, it captures 4K video and 12MP stills, it captures true vertical shooting with a gimbal that can rotate 90°, it has 4x digital zoom, and has a flight speed up to 36 mph.

She stated the WMPO received the drone in October 2023 and the maiden flight was traffic monitoring to capture existing conditions of the roadways prior to the directional closures of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. Ms. Shivers then gave a brief overview of flight logistics and examples of applications that the drone has been used for since its acquisition.

In closing Ms. Shivers noted that the WMPO is continuing the drone program to bolster planning activities that are provided to our region and member jurisdictions and create a Drone Operation Policy.

Mr. Forte stated that he was a big fan of drones, and his friend Sean Barry from Oak Island gave him a brief demonstration and tutorial on his drone. Mr. Forte stated that if staff needed any help or had questions about putting together the policy manual Mr. Barry would be a great resource.

d) Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 Draft Financial Forecast and Alternative Funding and Financing Opportunities, Kristina Whitfield, Kimley-Horn & Associates

Ms. Whitfield stated she was sharing a brief presentation reviewing some high-level numbers from our financial forecast and the process that went into that for the development of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Alternative funding and financing mechanisms are being explored with the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Committee (MTPC). A forecast for the reasonably expected revenues for transportation projects will be based on historically available data. Then the cost estimates for those projects will be created and up to balance. The Wilmington MPO on its own is not required to look at non-traditional funding sources that may be used to help bridge funding needs. This is not a federal requirement. The Wilmington MPO has done this for many cycles now and is going above and beyond the federal requirements.

Looking at the financial forecast, it starts with a review of historical data from the last two cycles. We had a lot of meetings with our modal experts. Then meetings with modal experts like WAVE, ILM, the ferry division, and NCDOT Division 3 which allowed them to weigh in with any input that is valuable. This information was then reviewed and refined into the forecast. The last two steps are the prioritization metrics. The MTPC approved these at their last meeting. Staff will now prioritize the projects and then use that priority list partnered with the cost estimates to constrain the projects against the available revenues. Using this approach will provide a better understanding of what the funding gap is for the region. For the major funding sources, three buckets are evaluated. The federal sources that are out there, the state sources and the local sources, as well as some possible new funding with the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) that was not available when the last MTP was updated.

Ms. Whitfield then explained the capitol numbers for each of the modes between now and 2050. Highways are at \$4.1 billion, airports \$631 million, bike/pedestrian \$108 million, transit \$94 million, ferry \$70 million, and rail \$53 million. She stated highways have gone up a decent amount and that's to be expected with some of the new funding through the IJA. Airports and ferry have both gotten on infusion from some of the newest legislation. In aggregate, across the 2050 horizon year, you can see the breakdown here of federal, state and local funds, and this underscores why it's so important for us to talk about that local funding component right now with our existing revenue sources. Only 7% of our transportation funding comes from local sources. It is anticipated that there will be a significant funding gap between the needed projects and the financially constrained projects. Local and alternative funding is a funding mechanism that allows the cities, member jurisdictions, and county's priorities to serve a more local need. Ms. Whitfield explained that alternative funding options means a bigger pie, more

money to spread around to more projects. This allows more local control and less NCDOT reliance. North Carolina having a large state-maintained roadway system, they're always going to be very strategic and an important partner.

She stated the Inflation Reduction Act, has been a huge infusion of discretionary grant programs and alternative funding sources that gives the tools to have a reliable local match for some of those federal and state grant programs. The NC First Commission released their report and stated that traditional revenue streams are tied to assumptions and trends that are very quickly becoming obsolete.

Ms. Whitfield then gave a quick recap of some of the alternative funding mechanisms.

- The local option sales tax. This is a referendum that gives the voting public control. It doesn't have to be tied to specific projects, and it doesn't have a funding sunset. Counties can leverage up to a quarter of a penny for this. There is also a local option sales tax for transit similar to the local option sales tax for more general use, but specifically tailored revenues must be used for financing, constructing, operating, and maintaining the transit system.
- Vehicle registration fees are another one of the traditional funding mechanisms available to counties in North Carolina. The Board of County Commissioners can have a vote, and they can essentially tack on up to \$7.00 dollars for every registered vehicle in their county, and that would go towards improvements for transportation.
- Municipalities can levy an annual general motor vehicle tax up to \$30.00 dollars in the state and \$5.00 dollars of that can go to any lawful purpose, \$5.00 dollars for transit, and the rest can be used for public streets that are not part of the state highway system.
- The vehicle rental tax, counties in North Carolina can levy taxes on the gross receipts of vehicle rentals at the rate of 1 ½%.
- The bicycle registration fee was dropped as an option by the MTPC due to being regressive and could penalize people who must use a bicycle as their primary means of transportation.
- Transportation impact fees are illegal in the state of North Carolina, but they are included for awareness.
- Tolling

She noted there are two different types of bonds that are typically used in North Carolina for transportation facilities, the first being revenue bonds. These are bonds that are paid back by user generated revenues. They're typically used in the transportation space and public transportation, ferry, or on the rail system. Those are all great examples of projects that could potentially be funded with revenue bonds. Then there is the more traditional bond in the state of North Carolina, that is our general obligation bond. They are backed by the full faith and credit of the municipality or county that's leveraging them. They can be backed by any revenue source, but here in North Carolina, we most typically see this as property tax increases. They do require voter approval, whereas the revenue bond does not. One more option that is getting used more and more in North Carolina, especially for some of our bigger transit type projects is Public Private Partnerships. This is where the private sector and the public sector partner together for project delivery.

Ms. Whitfield touched on Tax Increment Financing (TIF) that was authorized by the General Assembly back in 2004. The advantages to this is it can grow the tax base and raise the value of tax base. It can revitalize areas that may be in decline or have been underinvested in the past and can alleviate burdens on developers. The disadvantages are the need to mediate between multiple groups, assessing

incremental gain in tax revenues related to TIF project and can contribute to displacement via gentrification.

She closed by stating the next steps are to finalize revenue projections for existing funding sources, conduct further research and forecast alternative funding sources. A future presentation will be scheduled for financially constraining the projects.

6. Consent Agenda

- a) **Approval of Board Regular Meeting Minutes- May 1, 2024**
- b) **Approval of Board Special Meeting Minutes-May 7, 2024**
- c) **Resolution approving 2024-2033 STIP/MPO Administrative Modifications #24-4**
- d) **Resolution supporting the award of the FY 25 Section 5310 Community Grant Project Funds**

Mr. Forte made a motion to approve the consent agenda and Ms. Bozeman seconded, the motion carried unanimously.

7. Regular Agenda

- a. **Resolution adopting the Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 Vision, Goals, and Modal Objectives**

Vanessa Lacer, WMPO gave a brief update from the technical steering committee's adoption of the vision statement, goals, and modal objectives for Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050. She read the vision statement and goals and noted the modal objectives.

Vice Chairman Waddell made the motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Bozeman, motion carried unanimously.

- b. **Resolution approving the WMPO FY 25 Direct Attributable Project Submittal Guidelines and Scoring Criteria**

Scott James, WMPO stated that included in the packet are the Submittal Guide and scoring criteria, which are the same as they were for FY24. Important dates are the official release will be July 5th. A pre-application review on August 9th. Electronic application submittals are due no later than 5:00 PM on September 13th and we anticipate the award being October 30th of 2024.

Mr. Barbee made the motion to approve and seconded by Vice Chairman Waddell, motion carried unanimously.

- c. **Resolution amending the TCC and WMPO Board meeting schedule for a Joint Special Meeting at 2 pm on June 26, 2024**

Mike Koslosky, WMPO requested amending the calendar to accommodate the joint special meeting of TCC and MPO Board.

Vice-Chairman Waddell made a motion to approve and seconded by Mr. Zimmer, motion carried unanimously.

8. Discussion

a) 2024-2033 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #24-5

Mr. Kozlosky stated this was for informational purposes only and will be brought back to the Board at the next meeting for approval.

b) Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 Modal Project Lists

Vanessa Lacer and Greer Shivers, WMPO gave a brief overview and presentation outlining the modal project lists. Ms. Lacer stated in fall of 2023, WMPO staff began coordinating with member jurisdictions and modal planning partners on project submissions for Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050. This included projects for six modes of transportation: bicycle and pedestrian, ferry and water transportation, public transportation, rail, and roadway. A draft list was compiled in December 2023. In January 2024, members and planning partners were provided results from the recently completed Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 public engagement process and were offered the opportunity to make any changes/additions/subtractions to their project submissions at that time. At the conclusion of the submission process a total of 374 projects, inclusive of all modes, were identified, however some changes to public transportation project submissions are anticipated, pursuant to the adoption of Wave Transit's Short-Range Plan, which is expected in May 2024. The draft project lists presented today have been reviewed by the Cape Fear Navigating Change Technical Steering Committee as well as the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) and comments received have been incorporated. In spring/summer 2024, projects included in the draft project lists will be scored using modal scoring matrices developed by the Cape Fear Navigating Change Technical Steering Committee and project costs will be developed by the plan's financial element consultant, Kimley-Horn. Following the scoring and cost estimation of projects, draft fiscally constrained project lists will be developed and provided to the TCC and WMPO Board for their review in fall of 2024.

Greer Shivers, WMPO gave a tutorial on how to overview the list using the Navigating Change 250 Draft Modal Projects web maps.

c) Prioritization 7.0 Statewide Scoring and Programming

Abby Lorenzo, WMPO stated there was a total of 2,754 projects that were scored for six modes of transportation: aviation, bicycle, and pedestrian, ferry, highway, public transportation, and rail. Statewide Mobility addresses significant congestion and bottlenecks. 587 projects were eligible at the Statewide Mobility tier, 19 aviation, 411 highways, and 157 rail. The Regional Impact tier improves connectivity within regions and 1,326 projects were eligible at the Regional Impact tier. Division Needs tier addresses local needs, and 2,754 projects were eligible at the Division Needs tier. The revenue is divided 40% Statewide, 30% Regional, and 30% Division.

She explained that \$1.033 billion in funding is available. 13 projects were funded including 11 highway projects, 1 aviation project, and 1 rail project. The highest funded project score was 90.02 and the lowest scored project to be funded was 82.08. Projects funding my MPO:

- Charlotte Regional TPO-7
- Wilmington MPO-3
- Capital Area MPO-2
- Greensboro MPO-1

Vice Chairman Waddell asked for clarification on the NCDOT costs on the funded projects list. It was determined WMPO was not given the updated cost sheet.

Ms. Lorenzo gave an overview of the three WMPO projects that scored high enough to be funded. U-5732 (US 17 Signal and Access Management Improvements) project scope consists of upgrading signals to fiber and constructing access management improvements along the US 17 corridor through Hampstead from SR 1582 (Washington Acres Road) to Vista Lane. HB-0039 (Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Replacement, Toll Option) project scope consists of replacing the existing Cape Fear Memorial Bridge with a 6-lane median-divided facility with a separated multi-use path. She stated the WMPO had 15 project submissions, and these were submitted to Division and the STIP.

The Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Replacement project toll score was 83.95 (ranked 9th and funded) and non-toll scoring was 62.48 (ranked 211) . No action is being asked of the Board today.

Ms. Lorenzo then explained the funding availability for both the Regional Impact and Division tiers' needs. The region currently has a balance of negative \$32 million and the Division has a negative balance of \$54 million, but this is going to change based upon updated processes, and scheduling data. However, the exercise of assigning appropriate points to projects will be done and submitted.

There was a brief discussion on the percentages, the amount of funding, cost and grant funding.

9. Updates

a) Wilmington Urban Area MPO

Mr. Koslosky stated that updates are included in the agenda packet.
Front Street.

b) Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority

Mark Hairr stated WAVE did get their short range plan approved and adopted by their Board and they are currently working on their budget.

c) NCDOT Division

Chad Kimes, NCDOT, introduced Trevor Carroll.

d) NCDOT Transportation Planning Division

Amanda Killian, NCDOT, that she will be filling in for Nazia Sadar while she is out on maternity leave.

Announcements

a. WMPO Bike/Ped Committee- June 11, 2024

b. Wilmington MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan Technical Steering Committee (MTPC) meeting- June 20, 2024

7. Next meeting – June 20, 2024

The meeting adjourned at 4:57 p.m. Motion made by Mr. Ellen and seconded by Chairman Miller.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Kozlosky
Executive Director
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

THE ABOVE MINUTES ARE NOT A VERBATIM RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS.
THE ENTIRE PROCEEDINGS ARE RECORDED DIGITALLY AS PART OF THIS RECORD.