



WILMINGTON URBAN AREA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

MPO Board Remote Meeting Minutes
Wilmington Convention Center, 10 Convention Center Drive, Wilmington, N.C.
Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Members Present (In-person)

David Piepmeyer, Pender County
Frank Williams, Brunswick County
Rob Zapple, New Hanover County
Eulis Willis, Town of Navassa

Members Present (Remote)

Pat Batleman, Town of Leland
Neil Anderson, City of Wilmington
Charlie Rivenbark, City of Wilmington
Mike Allen, Town of Belville
John Ellen, Town of Kure Beach
Hank Miller, Town of Wrightsville Beach
Mike Forte, Brunswick County
Landon Zimmer, NC Board of Transportation

Others Present (In-person)

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director, WMPO
Abby Lorenzo, Deputy Director, WMPO
Chad Kimes, NCDOT Division Engineer,
Caitlin Marks, NCDOT Division Planning Engineer
Leigh Wing, NCDOT Eastern STIP Regional Manager
Ronnie Keeter, NCDOT Eastern Deputy Chief Engineer

Others Present (Remote)

Ronnie Keeter, Deputy Director, NCDOT Division of Highways
Van Argabright, Director, NCDOT Division of Planning & Programming
Ray McIntyre, Assistant Director, NCDOT STIP, Feasibility Studies, and Strategic Prioritization
Zachary Bugg, Kittleson & Associates
Bastian Schroeder, Kittleson & Associates
Nastasha Earle-Young, Project Manager, NCDOT Transportation Planning

1) Call to Order

Chairman Piepmeyer called the remote meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

MPO Executive Director Mike Kozlosky took a rollcall pursuant to Section 4.31 of S.L. 2020-3, SB 704. A quorum was found to be present as follows:

Present: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, Eulis Willis, and Landon Zimmer. **Absent:** LeAnn Pierce, Hank Miller, and Woody White.

2) Conflict of Interest Statement

Chairman Piepmeyer read the conflict of interest statement and asked if any member has a conflict with any of the items on the meeting agenda. No members reported having a conflict.

3) Approval of Board Members' Excused Absences

Mr. Kozlosky stated that LeAnn Pierce has requested to be excused from this meeting.

Mr. Ellen made a motion to excuse the absence of Ms. Pierce. Mr. Zapple seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, Eulis Willis, and Landon Zimmer. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** Neil Anderson, LeAnn Pierce, Hank Miller, and Woody White.

4) **Approval of the Agenda**

Mr. Kozlosky asked to add Item 9c, Direct Attributable (DA) Funding under the discussion items.

Mr. Rivenbark made a motion to approve the Agenda as amended, which was seconded by Vice Chair Batleman. The motion carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, Eulis Willis, and Landon Zimmer. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** LeAnn Pierce, Hank Miller, and Woody White.

5) **Public Comment Period**

Mr. Kozlosky reported that no written or audio comments were received from the public.

6) **Presentations**

a. **STIP/MPO TIP Reprogramming - Leigh Wing, NCDOT**

Ms. Wing, NCDOT Eastern STIP Regional Manager, acknowledged the presence of NCDOT Division of Highways Deputy Chief Engineer Ronnie Keeter, Assistant Director Ray McIntyre, and Director Van Argabright. She defined the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as a 10-year planning document, the most recent version of which is the 2020-2029 STIP. She noted that the components of the STIP (estimated budget, project costs and schedules) are subject to change.

Ms. Wing gave an overview of factors impacting the STIP budget (storm response, legal settlements, project cost increases pre-COVID, and depletion of revenues as a result of COVID restrictions). She noted that this summer, the state legislature passed House Bill (HB) 77 to help stabilize financing. The legislation shifted funds from the Highway Trust Fund to the Highway Fund allowing \$700 million in BUILD NC bonds to be sold in Fiscal Year 2021. She explained that the amount comes from a \$400 million bond sale in FY20 that did not take place, plus the anticipated Fiscal Year 2021 bond sale, and will reposition funds for active construction projects and available GARVEE bonds.

Ms. Wing stated that the \$2 billion adjustment of the STIP budget over the next 10 years is compounded by a projected \$3 billion increase in project costs (mainly from projects selected in Prioritization 3.0 and 4.0, and right-of-way costs). As a result, improvements are underway to review and obtain better cost estimates for projects in the STIP, and internal processes to assure timely revisions to data. She explained that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, starting six months to a year ago, cash depletions caused many projects to be placed on hold, which will take time to restart due to the complexities of utility relocations, the availability of limited work crews, and the timing of right-of-way acquisitions.

Ms. Wing stated that the combination from the loss of revenues and increased project costs has resulted in the STIP no longer being fiscally constrained. As such, reprogramming became necessary to meet the federal requirements and prevent jeopardizing federal funding in the form of meeting realistic project delivery schedules and updating the BUILD NC and GARVEE bonds.

Ms. Wing gave an overview of the reprogramming process. She stated that it started with applying the revised STIP budget to the three funding buckets (Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, Division Needs) that feed 22 STI funding buckets. Reprogramming the STIP revealed that the majority of the STI buckets are overprogrammed in the first five years, nine of which by more than 50%. Region B alone was 122% or \$310 million over in the first five years, which omits a 15% overage allowance in the first five years, and 10% allowance in the full 10 years.

Ms. Wing stated that the first step was to adjust the BUILD NC bonds. Initially, the bond program included projects planned to go to let in years two and three. HB77 prescribed putting the bonds on active construction projects, which would free up money for other projects. So, year two and year three projects needed adjustments. The same held true for GARVEE bond projects, which need to be fiscally constrained in each bucket annually as well as in the five-year and ten-year windows. Reprogramming parameters included delivery of USDOT grant commitments (INFRA, BUILD, CRISI, etc.), project delivery status, substantial cost increases, and prioritization scores. The result is a starting point with adjustments to be made as a zero-sum outcome within the Division and Planning Organization, like draft STIP development. Although a committed project may be moved outside a committed window, rescoring will not be necessary unless cost increases exceed a threshold.

Ms. Wing stated that the changes were presented in a handout to the NC Board of Transportation (BOT) in September and will go for final approval at its October meeting. She expressed appreciation to the MPO Board for providing its priorities, which she has discussed with the MPO Board Chairman and Executive Director. Any changes decided today or tomorrow, can be included as an update to the final item for next week's BOT meeting. Caveats include the schedules presuming the \$700 million BUILD NC bond sale in fall 2020. She noted that the FAST Act expires today, and an extension is anticipated as well as a continuing resolution through December. She cautioned that additional cost increases are expected, and the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on revenues are unknown.

Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to Ms. Wing for the presentation and working with the MPO on its priorities. Ms. Wing reiterated that the priorities will go before the NCDOT Board next Thursday. However, if there are changes, a November handout could be created for a December final.

Chairman Piepmeyer pointed out that other MPOs and RPOs across the state are not as well prepared as the Wilmington Urban Area MPO, which is a benefit for advancing regional priorities.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Zapple, Ms. Wing clarified that the BUILD NC program is written into legislation and differs from a GO (General Obligation) bond that would go to a vote of the people. Instead, the Treasurer would sign a reimbursement resolution and make the decision to sell the bonds if certain targets are met. She specified that the amount overprogrammed for the state, region and division tiers relative to the MPO as follows:

STI Bucket	First 5-year % Overage	First 5-year \$M Overage	Full 10-year % Overage	Full 10-year \$M Overage
Statewide Mobility	81%	\$2,505	49%	\$3,652
Regional Impact – Region B	122%	\$310	65%	\$425
Division Needs – Division 3	13%	\$35	42%	\$216

Mr. Kozlosky stated that a summary and comparison of the changes that were made to the adopted 2020-2029 STIP have been included in the agenda packet. He noted that a discussion regarding the further changes will be held later as part of today's agenda.

Ms. Wing expressed regret that she would be unable to stay for the discussion; but said she would be available by phone during the next day or two.

There being no other questions, Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to Ms. Wing. In response to an inquiry by Mr. Zapple, Mr. Kimes stated that he was aware of these findings.

b. 2020 Congestion Management Process - Zachary Bugg, Kittleson & Associates

Mr. Bugg acknowledged the presence of Bastian Schroeder also of Kittleson & Associates and gave an update on the 2020 Congestion Management Process (CMP). He said that the biennial data report satisfies the federal requirements for congestion management for the MPO. Previously, MPO staff relied on manual travel time runs to identify congested corridors and hotspots. This year, the MPO updated its data collection method by substituting manual runs with an analysis of probe data, and computation of travel time reliability.

Mr. Bugg gave an overview of the previous report completed in 2018, which provided a series of corridor summaries, the amount of time it takes to travel a corridor during rush hour, and other measures used to identify projects for prioritization. He noted that these measures would continue but also the MPO will use vehicle probe data from the NPMRDS (National Performance Management Research Data Set) for most of the 25 major corridors within the MPO boundary. He pointed out that 3rd Street, parts of College Road, Gordon Road and Market Street had the greatest corridor delays during the morning peak hour. In the afternoon, the delays were greater than the morning and included those corridors from the morning peak.

Mr. Bugg described travel time reliability as the extra buffer time needed to arrive at a destination within a threshold. To arrive at a destination 80% of the time on time, the Level of Travel Time Reliability (LOTTR) is ratio of 80th percentile travel time over the median or average (50th percentile). The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommends keeping LOTTR below 1.3 or a 30% buffer. However, MPOs can set individual goals for corridors.

Mr. Bugg stated that generally, MPO corridors met the federal thresholds. During morning peak times, College Road, Gordon Road, US 17/74/76 (Cape Fear Memorial Bridge), and portions of Front Street had a travel time reliability of between 1.2 and 1.3. Afternoon travel time was less reliable with 3rd Street, College Road, Gordon Road, Eastwood Road, Market Street, Oleander Drive and Front Street between 1.2 and 1.3. He pointed out that day-to-day variations tend to make these corridors unreliable, rather than congestion.

Mr. Bugg stated that the 2020 Biennial Data Report that was completed in June 2020 was part of the Congestion Management Process that fed into NCDOT's SPOT 6.0 project submittals for the NCDOT draft 2023-2032 STIP, which will be released in 2022. He added that data will be monitored next year (2021) for inclusion in the 2022 report.

Mr. Kozlosky stated that staff would bring the draft report to the MPO Board in November and include the final report for consideration at the Board's January 2021 meeting.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Zapple, Mr. Bugg confirmed that the data for the current report was collected in fall of 2019, pre-COVID.

7) Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Board Meeting Minutes from July 29, 2020**
- b. Resolution supporting amendments to the Wilmington Urban Area MPO's Public Participation Plan for Remote/Electronic Meetings**
- c. Resolution approving 2020-2029 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modification #20-5**

d. Opening of the 30-day public comment period for 2020-2029 STIP/MPO TIP Amendment #20-4

Mr. Rivenbark made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, Items 7a through 7d. Mr. Ellen seconded the motion and it carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** Neil Anderson, LeAnn Pierce, Woody White, and Landon Zimmer.

8) Regular Agenda

a. Resolution supporting the North Carolina Department of Transportation's master plan vision for Corridor U along U.S. 74 from N.C. 87 (Maco Road NE) in Brunswick County to U.S. 117 in New Hanover County

Nastasha Earle-Young, with NCDOT's Transportation Planning Division, provided an overview of data collection, corridor analysis, preliminary corridor vision and stakeholder involvement for the Corridor U/U.S. 74 study, which began in 2018. She gave an overview of the master plan timeline and stated the final vision plan will be ready by this winter. She noted that documents regarding the 284-mile corridor, which is federally designated as a truck corridor, can be found at the following URL:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/STC-Master-Plans-Bundle-2.aspx>

Ms. Earle-Young said that Corridor U includes 304 bridges, with six considered structurally deficient and 91 as functionally obsolete. She noted that the study also considered transportation plans and recommended projects along the corridor (70 from the STIP) from the past 10 years. She noted that most planning documents recommend that the corridor be classified as a freeway with some segments in developed/urban areas including future by-passes or boulevards. Although the study considered a deviation of the corridor to U.S. 17 at the I-140 Bypass, it was changed to remain on U.S. 74 after further discussion with MPO staff.

Ms. Earle-Young stated that a public survey ran from April 6, 2020 to June 6, 2020, was advertised via email, the website and newsletters, and had about 638 participants and 155 comments. Full survey results can be viewed at the following URL:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/STC%20Documents/US%2074%20public%20survey%20results.pdf>

For U.S. 74 over the next 20 years, many respondents chose bypasses around cities and towns (274), higher speed limits (206) and fewer traffic signals (203). Most respondents (91.3%) supported a preliminary vision of the corridor as a freeway From Monroe to Wilmington.

Ms. Earle-Young stated that the recommended vision is for the corridor to be brought up to freeway standards from I-26 in Polk County, to I-85 in Gastonia, to I-485, to U.S. 74 and the Monroe Bypass, returning to U.S. 74, and ultimately to U.S. 117 in Wilmington. She noted that both the statewide and regional models found an average increase in speed of 21 mph along the corridor with the upgrade to a freeway. She added that a bypass around the Delco area, military and transit connections, and a resiliency assessment would require additional study.

In response to an inquiry by Chairman Piepmeyer, Ms. Earle-Young stated that after prioritization, an environmental study would be needed.

Mr. Zapple expressed concerns regarding the obsolete bridges. Ms. Earle-Young stated that the bridge maintenance program monitors all bridges across the state and prioritizes the bridge projects, separate from this plan. Mr. Kimes pointed out that a functionally obsolete designation can mean that the guard rails are too low or that they do not meet current standards. He assured MPO Board members that the term does not mean that the bridge is unsafe for the public.

Mr. Zapple inquired about a study of the I-40 corridor regarding flooding issues. Ms. Earle-Young responded that a study has not been done since Hurricane Florence; but a resiliency study is planned for each of the corridors.

In response to concerns expressed by Chairman Piepmeyer, Ms. Earle-Young responded that the projects in this area would need to be submitted for prioritization, and that, although the projects are separate, the master plan is an essential vision for the entire corridor.

Mr. Kozlosky stated that the Department has looked at the I-40 corridor and the flooding issues that resulted from Hurricane Florence, and has come up with some strategies such as elevating portions of the highway that were presented to the MPO Board in the past. Chairman Piepmeyer pointed out that the costs were somewhat prohibitive. Mr. Kimes pointed out that the smaller recommendations are likely to be realized sooner rather than later.

Mr. Zapple made a motion to support the master plan vision for Corridor U. Vice Chair Batleman seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** LeAnn Pierce, Woody White, and Landon Zimmer.

b. Resolution encouraging the North Carolina Department of Transportation, North Carolina General Assembly, and Governor of North Carolina to explore new funding mechanisms that could raise funds to accelerate much needed transportation projects

Chairman Piepmeyer commented that Pender County recently developed its legislative goals. He requested a remodeling of funding for transportation projects and more favorable and reliable priorities for transportation projects.

Mr. Anderson expressed appreciation to Chairman Piepmeyer. He suggested inviting the local delegation to discuss what's being considered.

Following a lengthy discussion regarding revenue challenges, Mr. Anderson made a motion to encourage NCDOT to explore new funding mechanisms, which was seconded by Mr. Zapple. Mr. Zapple said he would propose a similar resolution to the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners. The motion carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** LeAnn Pierce, Woody White, and Landon Zimmer.

Mr. Ellen pointed out that North Carolina has the 16th greatest total amount of highways in the country.

9) Discussion

a. 2020-2029 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #20-6

Mr. Kozlosky stated that that this item is for information purposes only and reflects the changes in NCDOT's reprogramming exercise.

b. Wilmington Urban Area MPO Priorities

Mr. Kozlosky stated that staff has been working with the MPO Board to review and advance its priorities. He added that the members adopted five priorities and revised schedules as follows:

1. Hampstead Bypass A Section (delayed from 2023 to 2026), and the B Section (delayed from 2021 to 2024)
2. Independence Boulevard Extension (delayed from 2025 to 2028);
3. Interchange at the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (delayed from 2023 to 2029);
4. Interchange at Eastwood Road and Military Cutoff (delayed from 2022 to 2027);
5. Market Street access management improvements that include the interchanges at Market Street, Eastwood Road and the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (delayed from 2024 to 2029)

Mr. Kozlosky added that staff has been working with the Department on various scenarios and emailed a scenario last week to the MPO Board. He noted that none of the scenarios could not restore all the priorities to their original schedules and would have significant impacts (delays) to many other projects in the region.

One of the proposals would advance the Hampstead Bypass B Section to 2022. Chairman Piepmeyer pointed out that this would require delaying the eight-mile section from I-140 to NC 210. He reminded members that any changes must be a net-zero trade off.

Mr. Kozlosky stated that the Hampstead Bypass A Section would be delayed until 2027. He added that staff also worked with NCDOT to accelerate the Military Cutoff Road and Eastwood Road interchange from 2027 to 2025 with no impact to other projects in the MPO boundary. Additionally, NCDOT Division 3 has indicated a desire to accelerate the Gordon Road Widening Project, currently identified for right-of-way in 2029 and 2030 with construction beyond the 10-year program. As a result of accelerating the project to 2024, the Carolina Beach Road and South College Road intersection improvements would need to be delayed.

Mr. Kimes explained that the Division identified Gordon Road as a greater priority given all the subdivisions development along it. Following further discussion, Mr. Zapple expressed support for accelerating the Gordon Road widening project. Mr. Rivenbark expressed concerns regarding the road becoming a truck route.

Following further consideration, Mr. Zapple made a motion to approve the acceleration of the Hampstead Bypass Section B, the interchange at Eastwood Road and Military Cutoff, and the Gordon Road widening; and delay of the Hampstead Bypass A Section, and the Carolina Beach Road and South College Road Intersection improvements.

Chairman Piepmeyer seconded by Chairman Piepmeyer and the motion carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** LeAnn Pierce, Woody White, and Landon Zimmer.

c. **Direct Attributable (DA) Funding**

Mr. Kozlosky stated that NCDOT released about \$1 million in Direct Attributable (DA) funds for projects that have already been approved, and staff brought forward a proposal to the Board to draw down those funds. Currently, NCDOT has indicated that it soon will release an additional \$452,000. Staff recommends releasing those funds for the Park Avenue Phase II project, which is ready to go for construction. He requested that staff be given the ability to review project schedules and release DA funds as they become available.

Mr. Anderson made a motion to approve the release of DA funds, seconded by Mr. Zapple, and the motion carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** LeAnn Pierce, Woody White, and Landon Zimmer.

10) **Announcements**

- a. **Bike/Pedestrian Committee Meeting – October 13, 2020**
- b. **2020 Commuter Challenge – October 16-30, 2020**
- c. **Next MPO Board meeting – November 18, 2020**

11) **Updates**

- a. **Wilmington Urban Area MPO**
- b. **Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority**
- c. **NCDOT Division**
- d. **NCDOT Transportation Planning Division**

Mr. Kozlosky stated that the updates are included in the agenda packet. He noted that the MPO Board will be asked to formally adopt the Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045 Plan in November.

Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to members for their patience and efforts. He commented that the MPO Board is becoming more essential to the region.

12) **Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Anderson made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Miller. The motion carried unanimously by rollcall as follows:

Ayes: David Piepmeyer, Pat Batleman, Neil Anderson, Charlie Rivenbark, Mike Allen, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Rob Zapple, Mike Forte, and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** Woody White, LeAnn Pierce, and Landon Zimmer.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m.

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.