



**WILMINGTON URBAN AREA**  
**METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

**MPO Board Meeting Minutes**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Floor Training Conference Room, 320 Chestnut Street, Wilmington, N.C.**  
**Wednesday, August 25, 2021**

**Members Present (in-person)**

Mike Allen, Town of Belville  
Neil Anderson, City of Wilmington  
Brenda Bozeman, Town of Leland  
Deb Hays, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority  
Hank Miller, Town of Wrightsville Beach  
David Piepmeyer, Pender County  
LeAnn Pierce, Town of Carolina Beach  
Frank Williams, Brunswick County

**Others Present (in-person)**

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director, WMPO  
Chad Kimes, Division Engineer, NCDOT  
Abby Lorenzo, Deputy Director, WMPO  
Caitlin Marks, Planning Engineer, NCDOT  
Matt Nichols, MPO General Counsel  
Jason Orthner, NCDOT Rail Division

**Members Present (remotely)**

Jonathan Barfield, Jr., New Hanover County  
Charlie Rivenbark, City of Wilmington  
Eulis Willis, Town of Navassa  
Landon Zimmer, NC Board of Transportation

**1) Call to Order**

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

Mr. Kozlosky called the roll. A quorum was present as follows:

**Present:** Mike Allen, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, David Piepmeyer, LeAnn Pierce, Charlie Rivenbark, Frank Williams, Eulis Willis and Landon Zimmer. **Delayed:** Neil Anderson. **Absent:** John Ellen.

**2) Conflict of Interest Statement**

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

**3) Approval of Board Members' Excused Absences**

Mr. Kozlosky said that John Ellen has asked to be excused from this meeting.

Vice Chair Miller made a motion to excuse Mr. Ellen from the meeting, seconded by Mr. Williams and the motion carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

**Ayes:** Mike Allen, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, David Piepmeyer, LeAnn Pierce, Charlie Rivenbark, Frank Williams, Eulis Willis and Landon Zimmer. **Nays:** None. **Delayed:** Neil Anderson.

**Absent:** John Ellen.

**4) Approval of the Agenda**

Ms. Bozeman made a motion to approve the meeting agenda as presented/amended, seconded by Vice Chair Miller, and the motion carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

**Ayes:** Mike Allen, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, David Piepmeyer, LeAnn Pierce, Charlie Rivenbark, Frank Williams, Eulis Willis and Landon Zimmer. **Nays:** None. **Delayed:** Neil Anderson.

**Absent:** John Ellen.

**5) Public Comment Period**

Andy Koeppel, Wilmington, spoke to the MPO Board in-person regarding bridges. He expressed concerns regarding replacing the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, and a desire for the MPO Board to consider a resolution requesting that NCDOT conduct a study for the cost to maintain the bridge for the next 50 years, including spare parts. He speculated that maintaining the bridge would cost a much less than replacing it with a new one and demolishing the old one. He also requested that the Board consider a resolution to complete the study for a southern bridge crossing and expressed concerns regarding the impact of an unknown route designation to property owners in Brunswick County. He noted that he would discuss the funding of the southern crossing at the next MPO Board meeting.

**6) Presentations**

**a. NCDOT Rail Division Update- Jason Orthner, NCDOT**

NCDOT Rail Division Director Jason Orthner gave an update on NCDOT Rail Division. He said that the mission of the Rail Division at DOT is the safe and efficient movement of people and goods on North Carolina's railroads through freight, passenger, and safety programs supporting job creation and economic growth. He noted that DOT has more than 3,200 miles of railroads in the state ranging from high-speed/high-capacity freight lines operated by Class 1 railroad companies to branch line/short lines that serve customers and businesses across the state.

Mr. Orthner gave an overview of some of the Rail Division projects. He noted that the FRA grant-funded Piedmont Atlantic Intermodal Rail System Program connects Wilmington to Charlotte, Atlanta, and other points, and supports the North Carolina Ports' growth mindset regarding container operations at the Port of Wilmington. He added that the linchpin project is one that improves the corridor into the Port of Wilmington, otherwise known as the beltline, from 10 miles to hour to 25 miles per hour and improves crossing safety. He noted that the project is being scheduled with CSX to begin construction in June of 2022 and be completed by June of 2024.

Another project is the CCX, Carolina Connector, for a premier intermodal facility in Rocky Mount with region significance for all eastern North Carolina, for converting truck trips to rail trips including those that would originate and terminate at the Port of Wilmington. Mr. Orthner said that the facility is targeted to open in October, which aligns with the significant increase in intermodal shipping volumes observed across the country as long-haul truck trips convert to rail trips for efficiency purposes. He added that this will provide greater options for the Triangle region and all eastern North Carolina to expand shipping options and drive business to

eastern North Carolina as businesses relocate for a premier shipping option. In addition to its partnership with the Ports, the Rail Division is also partnering with the Carolina Gateway Partnership, which is a regional economic development partnership.

Mr. Orthner said the Freight Rail and Rail Crossing Safety Improvement Fund (FRRCSI) statewide program is managed by NCDOT Rail Division to improve railroad infrastructure, primarily short lines, access for industries, improve safety including crossings and preservation of state-owned railroad corridors. He noted that the F20 Wilmington Terminal Railway Project will improve intermodal capacity at the Port of Wilmington. He added that FY21 projects were just awarded and include two projects with NC Ports and another with the Wilmington Terminal Railway to insure viable rail service.

Mr. Orthner said that NCDOT Rail Division has returned to pre-pandemic levels of service as far as state-supported Amtrak and Amtrak throughway buses across the state are concerned. He noted that there has been a dramatic increase in passenger rail service with the Carolinian service that operates daily between Charlotte and New York, exceeding 2019 levels by a significant percentage. He added that the Rail Division has been working with communities across the state with interest in expanding passenger rail opportunities, service between Wilmington and Raleigh for this region. He noted that state research and federal funds have been provided to update the studies of the route. Stakeholder involvement is planned for the end of this year with the completion of the study at the end of calendar year 2022.

Mr. Orthner explained that funding of railroad projects differs from other transportation projects. He said that Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) is a funding source for Class 1 freight railroad projects at the Statewide Tier. Passenger projects are eligible at the Regional and Division levels. Short lines are not eligible under STI but are funded by FRRCSI funds. He noted that rail projects do not receive formula funding through the federal government like FHWA or FTA does for transit and highway but are funded through a competitive grant programs that requires a state or local funding match. During the last couple of years, NCDOT has received \$270 million in this funding. He pointed out that surface transportation authorization and the bipartisan infrastructure bill offer significant opportunities for grand funding to support rail opportunities in the future. Challenges associated with non-formula-based federal grants such as a misalignment with the STI process used for leveraging transportation projects, can be overcome with strategy.

Chairman Piepmeyer reminded the MPO Board that several months ago he requested updates regarding modes of transportation. He expressed appreciation to Mr. Orthner.

**b. NCDOT Programming Challenges- Chad Kimes, NCDOT**

Mr. Kimes gave an update on NCDOT's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). He reminded the MPO Board that NCDOT was most recently undergoing Prioritization 6.0 (P6.0). In August of 2021, the Board of Transportation decided to suspend P6.0 to review the 10-year program. He commented that NCDOT is being

proactive and pointed out that is no cause for concern. He added that this is unrelated to the TIP two years ago (storms, Map Act, revenues impacted by COVID).

Mr. Kimes reported that NCDOT's account is \$1.89 billion today, which exceeds the target of \$650 million. He noted that this amount allows NCDOT proceed with advertising projects and let. He said that the challenge for P6.0 is the increase of costs: Steel has increased 70% over the last year; lumber, 100%; diesel fuel; asphalt, 30%. He noted that estimates can be approved through express design, which will now be done every two years. When increasing costs were identified, NCDOT did new cost estimates for every project of the MPO.

In response to request by Mr. Zimmer, Mr. Kimes gave an overview of overprogramming of the 10-year program for the WMPO in each of the funding buckets of the STIP as follows:

Tier	Available funding	Programming status
Statewide Mobility	\$9.4 billion	\$3 billion over
Regional Impact (Region B)	\$855 million	\$540 million over
Division Needs (Division 3)	\$506 million	\$240 million over

Mr. Kimes noted that all MPO Division Needs projects are committed and funds will likely be available for Prioritization 7.0:

Tier	Available funding	Programming status
Statewide Mobility	\$9.4 billion	\$2.29 billion over
Regional Impact (Region B)	\$855 million	\$3.53 million over
Division Needs (Division 3)	\$506 million	<i>\$76 million under</i>

Mr. Kimes said that let dates have also been updated. He noted that only one regional project is not committed (Oleander Drive, dual left lanes for Greenville Loop Road). He commented that the acceleration of projects several years ago benefited the MPO. He assured the Board that there is plenty of time and no panic is necessary. The new STIP does not need to be released to the public until the end of 2022. The MPO Board will take action in the spring or early summer, and there will be feedback from WMPO.

In the meanwhile, NCDOT is reviewing overprogrammed projects by instituting value engineering to identify cost-cutting measures for every project in the division, such as reducing medians and right-of-way acquisitions. Mr. Kimes estimated that the process will take six to eight months. He commented that NCDOT will work closely with the MPO over the next 15 months.

Discussion was held regarding inflation, catastrophic events, and revenues. Mr. Zimmer pointed out that the bridge would be missing from list for decades. Mr Kimes said that the costs anticipate storm response and that every year the allocations are in the account. He noted that any additional revenue will help greatly. Mr.

Kozlosky pointed out that discussion regarding revenue continues. He noted that the NC First Commission analyzed and presented potential alternative revenue sources, and NC Chamber outlined additional revenue sources in its Destination 2030 Plan. Mr. Kimes said that NCDOT has a team that is working on the revenues other than gas tax with legislators. Discussion continued. Mr. Anderson suggested writing legislator. Mr. Zimmer expressed concern that additional revenue options would be perceived by the public as raising taxes and expressed doubt that the state would take the lead in instigating them. Mr. Barfield expressed optimism that the General Assembly could come up with some creative solutions. Mr. Zimmer pointed out that the timing is doubtful in an election year and might rely more on other states taking the lead.

Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to Mr. Kimes.

**7) Consent Agenda**

- a. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes from July 28, 2021**
- b. **Resolution approving 2020-2029 STIP/MPO TIP Amendment# 21-4**
- c. **Opening of the 30-day public comment period for 2020-2029 STIP/MPO TIP Amendments #21-6**
- d. **Resolution approving 2020-2029 STIP/MPO TIP Administrative Modifications #21-7**

Mr. Williams made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, Items 7a through 7d. Ms. Bozeman seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

**Ayes:** Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, David Piepmeyer, LeAnn Pierce, Charlie Rivenbark, Frank Williams, Eulis Willis and Landon Zimmer. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** John Ellen.

**8) Discussion**

- a. **2020-2029 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #21-8**

Mr. Kozlosky stated that this item is for information purposes only and will be brought back for consideration at the Board's next meeting.

- b. **Prioritization 6.0**

Mr. Kozlosky said that the Board of Transportation at its August 4<sup>th</sup> meeting decided that it was in the best interest of the state to stop prioritization. He noted that NCDOT will not proceed with Prioritization 6.0.

- c. **Remote Participation Policy**

Chairman Piepmeyer said that this draft policy is an extension of the remote practices of the COVID pandemic to use as an option for those who may be traveling and not have an opportunity to participate in person. However, he encouraged members to participate in person as much as possible.

MPO Attorney Matt Nichols gave a presentation on the proposed remote participation policy and procedures. He noted that the policy consists of the following components:

1. Remote meetings during a declaration of emergency (current circumstances);

2. Electronic meetings in the statutes dating from the late 1970s; and
3. Regular meetings when the State of Emergency is lifted.

Mr. Nichols said that the remote meeting is in a statute that was enacted just after the COVID-19 emergency was declared entitled, "Remote meetings during certain declarations of emergency." He explained that the statute provides a specific definition and criteria for a remote meeting, and only applies when there is a declaration of emergency by the Governor or the General Assembly. He noted that the Board is acting under the Governor's order, which at some point will be lifted or rescinded.

Mr. Nichols said that an electronic meeting is a little different and the language is somewhat outdated. He noted that it requires that the public go to a specific meeting space to view the meeting, which does not work during a pandemic, although it has some relevancy. He added that for appointed boards, a remote meeting policy is completely at the Board's discretion.

Mr. Nichols said that several articles regarding remote meetings have been posted by the School of Government. He noted that appointed boards are not subject to the same legal limitations that elected boards are. So, local governments have clear authority to provide for remote participation for these types of boards. If remote participation is desired, a policy would provide framework for remote participation. He reiterated that this does not apply to city, town, and county government boards. He cited some other articles.

Mr. Nichols said that the draft policy is modeled like the policy that was recently adopted by the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority. It includes authorized circumstances such as personal illness, travel out of town, unexpected lack of childcare, family member illness and other circumstances as well as conditions and requirements for remote participation and the actual procedure. He noted that the limit on the number of times a Board member can participate remotely has been left blank, although an allowance may be made for additional remote participation.

Chairman Piepmeyer asked if there was any interest in a remote policy. Mr. Williams commented that a policy is necessary. Mr. Barfield agreed to having the option for remote participation.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Anderson, Chairman Piepmeyer said that in-person is desired. However, this is an opportunity for a tool to facilitate conducting the business of the MPO Board. Discussion followed about the number of allowable remote participations.

Mr. Kozlosky reminded the Board that remote participation would require voting by roll call, which has been indicated in the policy. Chairman Piepmeyer commented that it might not be necessary for unanimous votes. Mr. Miller pointed out that a roll call vote could be called instead. Mr. Kozlosky noted that the draft policy would need to be amended. In response to an inquiry by Mr. Rivenbark, Mr. Nichols said that it would not be necessary once the state of emergency is lifted.

Mr. Williams suggested adding quarantine and business obligations to the allowable reasons for remote participation. Ms. Hays pointed out that roll call voting also provides some protection. Chairman Piepmeyer said that the policy could be amended at a future date.

Mr. Kozlosky said that staff will bring back two versions of this policy to the Board for consideration at its next meeting.

Mr. Rivenbark expressed concerns regarding conduction closed sessions. Mr. Nichols responded that there is a provision in the draft policy for the remote participant to be in a confidential setting. He noted that he would work with Mr. Kozlosky to refine it.

In response to an inquiry by Ms. Bozeman, Mr. Kozlosky said that if remote participation is allowed, it will have to be extended to the public.

Ms. Pierce expressed concerns regarding limiting the number of remote participations.

**9) 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 MPO's Annual Report has been distributed to the Board members and it will be distributed to the member jurisdictions as well.

Mr. Kimes left the meeting.

**10) Strategic Planning Exercise**

Mr. Kozlosky said that the Board adopted the long-range transportation plan in November and the next step is to develop a strategic plan for the next five years. He added that the strategic plan for 2017-2025 will expire at the end of this year. He noted that the MPO contracted with Fountainworks and acknowledged Mr. Warren Miller to facilitate a discussion on the strategic plan with the Board. Some information and survey results from April and May have been included with the agenda packet. Mr. Miler will return in September to facilitate discussion.

Mr. Miller kicked off the conversation by asking Board members to describe the current state of mobility for the WMPO region, summing it up in a title with a couple of bullet points, and the ideal state of mobility.

Board member	Current state of mobility	Ideal state of mobility
Ms. Pierce	Fair	

Board member	Current state of mobility	Ideal state of mobility
Mr. Williams	Adequate but falling behind	Seamless (smooth functioning) and ahead of the curve (assumes a pipe dream of unlimited DOT funding). Road system updated to handle population growth.
Mr. Piepmeyer	Pockets of congestion (and safety issues)	Safe and fluid movement (constant, making progress in a timely fashion). More consideration for multi-modes of transportation in rural areas.
Mr. Anderson	Too many halts or bottlenecks	More free-flow traffic, lower wait time and choke points (more split-grade intersections, rail realignment, bypasses, completing extensions). Better pedestrian safety/facilities.
Mr. Miller	Crowded and congested	Multifaceted (bikes, bus, car, feet, etc.) and smooth (consistency, flow)
Ms. Hays	Points of congestion (it's relative)	Depends on plans. Well planned out system, walkable, bikeable, public transportation system that serves those who need it and choice ridership.
Mr. Willis	Kind of poor, natural boundaries such as Eagles Island, lack of mass transportation, lack of population to support mass transportation	Local: Northern Brunswick County needs mass transportation; Interconnectivity: Passenger rail; Ferries to defeat natural boundaries of river and marshes would improve mobility with safety and efficiency
Mr. Rivenbark	Points of congestion, but moves	Better educated driving public. Funding mechanism to make improvements.
Mr. Barfield	State of mind – depends where you're from (relative)	Legislative agenda, lobbying General Assembly, fourth crossing
Mr. Allen		More funding

Ms. Pierce and Ms. Hays left the meeting for another commitment (TDA).

Mr. Miller led an exercise for strategies over the next 10-years, with results as follows:



**Start doing:**

- Using technology to improve safety and reduce costs
- Let's catch up
- More frequent discussions of high-level strategies
- Become a more organized, vocal, cohesive force to and through elected representative in Raleigh and DC.  
Try to effect real change
- Find a mechanism to get the public more involved to get buy-in
- Educate the public that public transportation is a good thing
- Have a true bypass around the region
- Make a true multi-modal, multi-modular system

**Continue doing:**

- Invest in bike and ped safety projects
- Push for needed infrastructure

**Do differently:**

- Reactionary political infighting

**Stop doing:**

- Discussion regarding lack of funding

**11) Adjournment**

**Next meeting – September 29, 2021**

Vice Chair Miller mad a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Anderson, and the motion carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

**Ayes:** Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, Hank Miller, David Piepmeyer and Eulis Willis.

**Nays:** None. **Absent:** John Ellen, Deb Hays, LeAnn Pierce, Charlie Rivenbark, Frank Williams and Landon Zimmer.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 5:03 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.**