MPO Board Meeting Minutes
6th Floor Training Conference Room, 320 Chestnut Street, Wilmington, N.C.
Wednesday, November 17, 2021

Members Present (in-person)
Jonathan Barfield, Jr., New Hanover County
Brenda Bozeman, Town of Leland
John Ellen, Town of Kure Beach
Mike Forte, Brunswick County
Deb Hays, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
David Piepmeyer, Pender County
Charlie Rivenbark, City of Wilmington

Members Present (remotely)
Mike Allen, Town of Belville
Hank Miller, Town of Wrightsville Beach
LeAnn Pierce, Town of Carolina Beach
Landon Zimmer, NC Board of Transportation

Others Present (in-person)
Granseur Dick, Wilmington International Airport
Vanessa Lacer, Pender County
Abby Lorenzo, Deputy Director, WMPO
Scott A. James, Transportation Planning Engineer
Chad Kimes, Division Engineer, NCDOT
Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director, WMPO
Caitlin Marks, Planning Engineer, NCDOT
Rachel McIntyre, WMPO Assoc. Transportation Planner

Others Present (remotely)
Veronica Carter, Town of Leland
Scott Franko
Cheryl Hannah, HDR
Regina Hopkins, WMPO Sr. Accountant
Joseph Lewis, VHB
Marty Little, New Hanover County
Warren Miller, Fountainworks
Behshad Norowzi, NCDOT
Marie Parker, Exec. Director, Wave Transit
Catherine Peele, NCDOT
Nazia Sarder, NCDOT
Ron Satterfield, City of Wilmington

1) **Call to Order**
Chairman Piepmeyer called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m.

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


Mr. Zimmer pointed out that the Attorney General’s office advised NCDOT that no roll call is required with an in-person quorum. Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation and said that in the absence of something in writing, the roll call will continue to be taken for the purposes of this meeting.

2) **Conflict of Interest Statement**
Chairman Piepmeyer read the conflict-of-interest statement. He asked if any member has 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 no requests for excused absences were received.

4) **Approval of the Agenda**
Ms. Bozeman made a motion to approve the meeting agenda as presented. Mr. Ellen seconded the motion it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

5) **Public Comment Period**

Mr. Kozlosky stated that no public speakers signed up to speak, and no voicemail or email public comments were received.

6) **Presentation**

a. **2021 Commuter Challenge and Bike Ride Event Results - Nick Cannon, WMPO**

WMPO Associate Transportation Planner Nick Cannon gave a brief presentation on the results of the Go Coast events for October, which included the 2021 Commuter Challenge and two bike ride events. He reported that the 31st Annual River to Sea Bike Ride (20 miles roundtrip), canceled in 2020 and rescheduled from May to October 16th of this year due to Covid-19, had 300 participants, and the inaugural Brunswick Heritage Riverside Ride (16 miles roundtrip) on October 23rd had 68 participants. In addition, this year’s Annual Go Coast Commuter Challenge had about 50 participants, replacing 6,750 vehicle miles traveled and 575 trips, saving $508 in fuel costs, and burning 6,000 kcals. Top contenders were provided prizes by local sponsors.

Mr. Allen joined the meeting in progress.

b. **Pender County Streets Plan Update – Will Letchworth, WSP**

Project Manager Will Letchworth, WSP, gave a brief update on the Pender County Streets Plan. He expressed regret to Chairman Piepmeyer that this would be the same presentation given to the Pender County Board of Commissioners. He said the purpose of the collector street plan update is to provide enhanced mobility and multi-modal connectivity. He explained that the 2016 plan needed updating due to the adoption of the land use plan in 2018, population growth, changes in regional plans and changes in projects with the MPO’s Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045 Plan and NCDOT’s State Transportation Improvements Program (STIP). He expressed appreciation to Pender County and MPO staff for their efforts on the update.

Mr. Letchworth said that the 2016 plan was more specific and generated many requests for variances, and that the update provides more flexibility while accommodating projected traffic increases. He noted that the update proceeded with a typical planning process of reviewing the existing plans, gathering public and stakeholder input, developing recommendations based in input, data analysis, and presenting recommendations for public and stakeholder input prior to finalizing the update to the plan. Guiding principals were to reasonably accommodate traffic increases at the buildout of the land use plan, minimize the number of collector streets, respect the natural features (wetlands, unbuildable land, and property lines), reasonable buildability, and good connections to adjacent parcels.

Mr. Letchworth said that 440 responses were received from public involvement, mostly virtual, with 90% of respondents residing in the study area, about half of which work in the study area and more than half work in New Hanover County. He noted that 96% of participants travel by private vehicle, and 4% by bicycle or walking. He added that 58% responded that they would walk or bike more if they had better and safer facilities. He commented that there was a good mix of stakeholders.

Mr. Letchworth said that every house in the area generates about seven trips a day. He noted that the land use plan generates about six times the number of trips currently being generated. Even so, the update was able to reduce the number of collector streets by 75%. Additionally, all the collector streets except one are two-lane and have the option of either a shoulder section or curb and gutter, and with a multi-use path and/or bike lanes and a sidewalk. He noted that most of the policy recommendations of the 2016 plan were carried forward, except the street spacing standard.

Chairman Piepmeyer pointed out that the rural to urban transition of eastern Pender County has necessitated this update to the Collector Street Plan for the purpose of reducing traffic congestion on the main roads.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Forte, Mr. Letchworth agreed that developers are responsible for the collector streets. Chairman Piepmeyer pointed out that for many years, standards for roads within a development were lacking. But now, these roads are required to be built to NCDOT standards, so they can more easily be turned over to the Department for maintenance.
Mr. Kozlosky stated that the Pender County Board of Commissioners adopted this plan, and that the plan has been included in today’s consent agenda for consideration.

Mr. Rivenbark pointed out the importance of disclosure to potential buyers about the build-out of adjacent vacant parcels, and of connectivity, which reduces traffic on arterials.

c. **NC Ferry Division Update- Catherine Peele, NC Ferry Division**

NCDOT Ferry Division Planning and Development Manager Catherine Peele gave an overview of the NC Ferry Division. She said that the three main pillars of the organization are operations, asset management, and planning and programming. She noted that the Ferry Division has 400 full-time employees, seven year-round routes, 15 terminals, and 22 vessels. She added that the leadership team has been expanded, and a new group, the engineering unit (formerly housed under vessel asset management), has been added as a process improvement.

Ms. Peele said that the Ferry Division stretches over nine counties and three highway divisions. She noted that FY19 ridership (pre-pandemic) was 1.69 million passengers and nearly 800,000 vehicles. Operations and expenditures of all vessels including marine maintenance vessels, which has historically been under-appropriated by the General Assembly, will no longer have an option of overspending and the Division will be held to $56 million. She commented that the Division will need to carefully consider projects, as cutting departure routes is the least desirable option.

Ms. Peele said that ridership levels are starting to return to normal for all routes previously impacted by COVID-19, and the Southport to Fort Fisher Ferry was impacted by closure for the ramp and gantry replacement before then. She explained that few locations collect tolls, others collect revenues from priority passes, vendor passes and vending onsite, which go into a toll fund that can only be used for vessel replacement projects within the Division in which they were collected.

In response to an inquiry by Chairman Piepmeyer about using funds from other locations to offset overspending, Ms. Peele said that such a recommendation must come from the RPO or the MPO, and that legislation dictates toll funds be used only for vessel replacement projects and not operations and maintenance.

Ms. Peele said that hiring is a real challenge, especially temporary employees to support departures. For example, Hatteras had more than 100 cancellations due to a lack of staffing to support departure schedules. She noted that a career fair is planned for next year and bridging the gap in Coast Guard certification with training is being explored. She commented that recruiting and retention is difficult with a crew staff vacancy rate of 24.16%, not to mention the difficulty in finding trade workers.

Ms. Peele said that the operations and maintenance budget shortfalls becomes even trickier with an aging fleet. She noted that two vessels are coming online next year thanks to the support of the WMPO, and other MPOS and RPOs. She added that new tugs and barges are in operation and help support all the marine maintenance projects (dredging, piling work, repair and replacement of ramp and gantry assets, and moving the crane barge). Motor vessels Avon and Salvo will come onboard next year from this area’s replacement fund and allow for replacement of older vessels that can be sold with proceeds going to a special fund. She added that specific to Southport, project S-5707 will likely be included in the 2024 STIP. (The project will add piling to provide an additional mooring for future project S-5705.)

Ms. Peele said that a dredging plan set up last year includes activities with anticipated cost increases and inflation for the next 20 years. It also documents completed projects. Dredging in the Southport/Fort Fisher area is anticipated in the January-February-March timeframe of 2022. Completed projects for the area include a dorm facility for employees to reduce rental costs, and the retrofit of the ramp and gantry system. Additionally, a dock was replaced this year that was destroyed by Hurricane Isaias. A future project will research electrification of ferries to lower emissions and the burden on operations.
Ms. Peele said that the NC Ferry Division is researching passenger ferry routes. Polled riders of a seasonal route from Hatteras to Ocracoke appreciated the service and accepted the $10 roundtrip toll. She commented that although the NC Board of Transportation approved an increase of up to $15, an increase so soon seems doubtful. She noted that the route served 5,900 passengers over the last three years. Since this is a supplemental service restricted by the budget, last season was shortened by a month at the last minute. However, ridership doubled compared to the prior year during COVID-19 and the outlook seems good for continuing the service.

Ms. Peele said that state employees of the Ferry Division comply with Executive Order 224 for COVID vaccination and testing requirements. Prior to the Order, the vaccination rate was 30%, which has increased to 67% today. Only two of the total 500 permanent and temporary employees left because of the requirement. Other precautions implemented include increased cleaning, temporarily reduced trip capacity for the passenger ferry, required mask wearing indoors, teleworking when possible, and monthly conference calls to review the added measures.

Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to Ms. Peele.

d. Wilmington International Airport Update- Granseur Dick, ILM

Wilmington International Airport Facilities Director Granseur Dick gave an update on Wilmington International Airport (ILM). He noted that although New Hanover County has lifted its mask mandate, all airports follow a national directive to wear masks indoors and onboard.

Mr. Dick stated that ILM is self sufficient and receives no taxpayer funds or other funds other than those from the aviation user, the National Airspace Transportation system, and leases on airport property. The annual economic impact of the airport to the region, based on 2019 excluding the 2020 COVID-19 dip, is $2.25 billion. ILM contributes 16,000 jobs, and $85 million in state and local taxes. Although the entire air industry has been impacted by COVID-19 and is still on shaky ground, 2019 was a record year for ILM in terms of half a million enplanements, which is composed traditionally of 75% business trips. During the summer, the national enplanements started to increase. He noted that ILM was ahead of the national average and from June, ILM had a 0.3% increase over its 2019 numbers, and, in July, it reached 11.5%, which continued through August. Fortunately for ILM, when business travel declined, tourism increased. Based on percentage of enplanements, only three airports returned to 100% pre-pandemic numbers of which ILM was one, surpassed only by San Juan, Puerto Rico. Although there was a dip in travel due either to the Delta variant of COVID having eroded travel confidence or it being the shoulder season for tourism, air travel picked up again in October.

Mr. Dick noted that airports are struggling with labor challenges, like everyone else. He explained that ILM expected a four-year recovery and implemented action plans to help pilots, crews, and maintenance staff with early retirement. However, airports were not quite able to keep up with air travel when it resumed, and American, Delta and United pulled out of 26 stations during the past year. However, the air carriers expressed an interest in adding service at ILM since it has been a destination market leader. He noted that United announced last week the addition of Newark. ILM’s summer seasonal markets are Chicago, New York and Boston, and its recruiting market is south Florida. Additionally, ILM’s Air Service Development anticipates that the negative impacts of airline labor challenges (pilots) will be short term.

Mr. Dick gave an update on the terminal expansion project. He said that the total construction cost of $68 million was funded through the state, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and by local (airport) funds, based on aviation users and DOT Division of Aviation support of commercial aviation in the state. He noted that the project encompasses the following three phases, plus an additional phase:

- Contract 1, 2018 enabling phase, non-visible under the goal of operations;
- Contract 2, expanded ticket lobby to adds six ticket counters for airline expansion;
- Contract 3, gate project to add three new gates, concessions, restrooms that will accommodate passengers with increased carry-on baggage, and TSA checkpoint expandable to four lanes. The contractor, Monteith, is ahead of schedule, but the opening has been delayed to the end of 2021 due
to a holiday air travel moratorium by the airlines that are declining to commit any labor for relocation until after the holiday travel season;

- Contract 4, (previously unfunded, currently under contract review after an award of FAA dollars), a baggage claim expansion was added to the project to replace undersized, at-capacity facilities.

Mr. Dick said that the airport facility built in 1989 reached its one-million-passenger capacity in 2019. The new facility is designed to accommodate 1.5 million passengers. The baggage claim expansion will start next month and is the reason for the change in the completion date from 2022 to 2023, which complete renovations to the existing terminal and concourse areas. He commented that by the end of the project, the building will look like new -- a bright, open, and inviting gateway to the community.

Mr. Dick said that with a phase opening next week on November 22nd, the contractor plans to provide a temporary route of egress from the existing hold room through the new concourse that will give passengers a glimpse of what’s to come. Temporary walls were erected to allow construction to continue and partially conceal it. February 1st is the tentative date to open the new space with two new gates, Gates 7 and 8. In December of 2022, the building will be complete with the addition of the third gate. In July of 2023, the project will be complete with the baggage claim expansion. Associated with this project is the extension of the air carrier apron, which will allow the parking of an additional airplane for the third new gate. He noted that negotiations are underway to add an additional 16,000 square yards of concrete. The apron extension will begin in July of 2022 and conclude in December of 2022.

Mr. Dick said that the airport’s business park will continue to recruit light industrial, aerospace industries, and hotels as well as support existing tenants. He pointed out that on 23rd Street, construction is in progress for a new Circle K convenience store, which will be convenient for refueling car rentals and providing small snacks for passengers or a quick lunch for on-site tenants. Also opening in February will be a new Fixed Base Operator (FBO), a service/fueling station for airplanes catering to general aviation and competing for fueling contracts with the airlines. Additionally, two new tenants are planning a warehouse and distribution facility with cross dock capabilities, about a $20 million investment in site and construction improvements. The other new tenant, CIL Capital, is looking at 37 acres on the north side of the airport with an option of 16 acres on the south side next to the terminal for warehouse and distribution facilities for the life services industry. CIL estimates a $100 million initial investment in site and construction projects.

Finally, Mr. Dick said that the new Airport Director, Jeffrey Bourk, who worked for 14 years in Branson, Missouri, the only privately developed airport in the United States, starts on January 23rd. He noted that Mr. Bourk plans to familiarize himself with the airport, followed by the community, for the first 60 days.

Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to Mr. Dick. He commented that ILM is important to the region both commercially and for private transportation.

Chairman Piepmeyer commented that he requested these updates on the various forms of transportation and organizations that support transportation in the region. He asked the Board members if they find these updates useful. It was the consensus of the group to continue receiving these types of updates.

Mr. Rivenbark expressed surprise that the airport’s news has not been covered by the media. He pointed out that the improvements are a tremendous benefit to the region. Chairman Piepmeyer concurred that these improvements support the region’s growth.

Mr. Rivenbark stated that last night at the City Council meeting, representatives of the taxi industry, which totals 40 cabs currently, expressed concerns regarding cab fares and sought support in requesting that the state increase taxi fares. They noted that Uber and Lyft entered the market with lower fares. However, the cab driver shared a recent receipt for a $97 Uber fare from the airport to Leland.

Mr. Dick agreed that there used to be 40 licensed cabs at the airport, but it has become difficult for passengers to get a taxi, Uber or Lyft from the airport.
7) Consent Agenda
   a. Approval of Board Meeting Minutes from October 27, 2021
   b. Resolution adopting the 2022 Meeting Calendar
   c. Resolution approving the 2020-2029 STIP/MPO TIP Amendments #21-7
   d. Resolution approving the 2020-2029 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #21-9
   e. Resolution adopting the 2021 Pender County Collector Street Plan Update

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


8) Regular Agenda
   a. Resolution endorsing the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee’s Model Ordinance for Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

MPO Deputy Director Abby Lorenzo said that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) requested that MPO staff develop language for member jurisdictions to potentially incorporate into their local ordinances. She noted that proposed language aligns with the MPO’s Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045 Plan.

Ms. Lorenzo said that MPO staff researched land development codes and best practices from across the country, particularly North Carolina, and the Wilmington City Attorney reviewed the draft language for compliance with statutory authority. The draft ordinance was presented to BPAC, whose feedback has been included in the draft ordinance. The final draft language includes applicability to private facilities and site plan requirements. She emphasized that the proposed ordinance is not a requirement and serves as a comprehensive starting point for members interested in adding or strengthening bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure requirements in their land development code with all or portions of the recommended language. She added that BPAC voted to endorse the model language at its October meeting, and the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) voted to support the recommended language as well.

Mr. Rivenbark inquired if the Council of Governments (COG) has been made aware of the model ordinance. Ms. Lorenzo responded that Patrick Flanagan, the RPO (Rural Planning Organization) representative on the TCC voted to recommend the model ordinance to the MPO Board, and that the RPO is the under the COG. She noted that two other model ordinances, for bicycle parking and e-bikes, are also available to everyone.

Mr. Rivenbark requested that this model ordinance be brought to the attention of the COG.

Ms. Hays made a motion to approve the model ordinance, seconded by Mr. Rivenbark, and the motion carried unanimously by roll call as follows:


9) Discussion
   a. 2020-2029 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #21-10

Mr. Kozlosky stated that Administrative Modification #21-10 is for informational purposes only and will be brought back for consideration at the Board’s next meeting.

b. Proposed December meeting (Military Cutoff Road Extension Tour)- December 1st at 2 pm

Mr. Kozlosky reminded the Board that Mr. Kimes offered to provide a tour of Military Cutoff Extension Project. After polling the MPO Board members, the date that worked best was December 1st at 2:00 p.m. He requested that a motion and a second be made to vote for a special meeting on that date and time. He noted that the
special meeting would convene at NCDOT Division 3 offices on Barbados Boulevard, Mr. Kimes would conduct the tour, and then the meeting would be closed.

In response to an inquiry by Chairman Piepmeyer, Mr. Kozlosky said that 11 Board members responded that they would be available to participate on that date and time.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Barfield, Mr. Kozlosky said this will be a site visit. Mr. Kimes noted that the tour would drive to the site, and stop at various points along the site, such as the interchange on I-140 and other intersections. He commented that the project is massive and sure to impress. He added that Board members will gain a better understanding of how things tie together at I-140, and Military Cutoff extension with the Hampstead Bypass coming online.

Ms. Hays made a motion to approve the special called meeting on December 1st at 2:00 p.m., seconded by Mr. Rivenbark, and the motion carried unanimously by roll call as follows:


Mr. Ellen requested that an invitation be sent, and a cancelation if necessary.

c. **2022-2026 Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Strategic Plan**

Mr. Kozlosky said that a draft of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan has been included in the agenda packet. He acknowledged that the consultant, Warren Miller, Fountainworks, to provide an overview of the plan.

Mr. Miller said that the key components of the strategic plan include mission and vision, strategic focus areas, topic focused project areas, processes to move forward with funding, and implementation steps. He noted that the strategic plan process surveyed both TCC and Board members over the summer, followed by meetings with the Board in August and September. He summarized that the mission stayed the same, the vision was modified, and economic development was added to the strategic focus areas, which are as follows:

- Safety
- Multi-modal transportation options
- Regional
- Economic development
- Community engagement
- Advocacy for an organized, cohesive voice
- Organizational/operational effectiveness

Mr. Miller said that once the strategic plan is adopted, MPO staff will develop a work plan of specific action steps and performance measures. He noted that the plan includes a template for staff to follow.

Mr. Kozlosky added that staff will use this plan to guide the organization for the next five years. Next steps include identifying key performance indicators, that will be used to track performance and success. He expressed a desire to create a dashboard to identify what is being achieved in the strategic plan. The first step is to be sure that the plan captures the MPO achievements desired by the Board. He added that the strategic plan pulled information from Cape Fear Moving 2045, the MPO’s overarching, long-range plan for the region. He explained that the intention of this item is to make sure members are comfortable with the strategic plan before returning with it for consideration at the Board’s January meeting.

Chairman Piepmeyer commended Mr. Kozlosky and Ms. Lorenzo for their efforts.

10) **Updates**

a. **Wilmington Urban Area MPO**

b. **Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority**
Mr. Kozlosky stated that updates are in the agenda packet. He noted two additional items as follows:

1. The MPO has three current staff vacancies and is operating at 75% capacity. The vacant positions include Engineering Associate, GIS Analyst, and Associate Planner.
2. The MPO’s Map Act indemnification language has been included in the state budget, thanks to Senator Rabon and Senator Lee, as well as the entire delegation.

Chairman Piepmeyer noted that the State Senate passed the state budget yesterday. He noted that it will go to the House either today or tomorrow, and the Governor has indicated that he will sign it. He expressed appreciation to Senator Lee and Senator Rabon, and commented that there is a lot of good in it including beach nourishment.

11) Announcements
   a. Go Coast TDM Committee Meeting – November 18th at 3:00 p.m.
   b. FY 23 Local Planning Needs Requests Due – December 10th until 5:00 p.m.
   c. Wilmington MPO Bike/Pedestrian Committee – December 14th at 2:00 p.m.

   Mr. Kozlosky added that the special meeting of the MPO Board will be held December 1st at 2:00 p.m. starting at NCDOT Division 3 offices on Barbados Boulevard.

12) Adjournment
   Next meeting – January 26, 2022

   Mr. Rivenbark made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Ellen. The motion to adjourn carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

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

   The meeting adjourned at 4:36 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.**