



MPO Board Meeting Minutes
6th Floor Training Conference Room, 320 Chestnut Street, Wilmington, N.C.
Wednesday, September 28, 2022

Members Present (in-person)

Mike Allen, Town of Belville
Neil Anderson, City of Wilmington
Lynn Barbee, Town of Carolina Beach
Brenda Bozeman, Town of Leland
John Ellen, Town of Kure Beach
Mike Forte, Brunswick County
Deb Hays, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Hank Miller, Vice Chair, Town of Wrightsville Beach
Luke Waddell, City of Wilmington
Eulis Willis, Town of Navassa

Members Present (remotely)

Jonathan Barfield, Jr., New Hanover County

Others Present (in-person)

Chuck Bost, Town of Belville
Adrienne Cox, NCDOT
Scott A. James, WMPO
Jamar Johnson, WMPO
Chad Kimes, NCDOT
Mike Kozlosky, WMPO

Abby Lorenzo, WMPO
Denis McGarry
Rachel McIntyre, WMPO
Matt Nichols, WMPO Attorney
Nikki Cooper, WMPO Paralegal
Marie Parker, Wave Transit
Rebekah Roth, New Hanover County
Greer Shivers, WMPO
Emma Stogner, WMPO

Others Present (remotely)

Veronica Carter, Town of Leland
Adrienne Harrington, Town of Belville
Nazia Sarder, NCDOT
Jason Orthner, NCDOT Rail Division
Joanna Rocco
Tony Sumpter, NCDOT-IMD
Rachel LaCoe, New Hanover County
Vanessa Lacer, Town of Leland
Steve Stone
J Orona
J Dayton

1. Call to Order

Vice Chairman Hank Miller called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

Based on the MPO Board's adopted Remote Participation Policy, Mr. Kozlosky called the roll, and a quorum was present as follows:

Present: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Absent:** Deb Hays, David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

Mr. Kozlosky noted that Ms. Hays has been delayed.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

Vice Chairman Miller 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 David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer have asked to be excused.

Mr. Waddell made a motion to excuse Chairman Piepmeyer and Mr. Zimmer. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** Deb Hays. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

4. Approval of the Agenda

Ms. Bozeman made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Allen seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Absent:** Deb Hays. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

5. Public Comment Period

Mr. Denis McGarry spoke to the MPO Board about pedestrian safety on South 3rd Street between Market Street and Castle Street. He said that he represents more than 670 families who have signed a petition. He noted that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) reviewed the area and recommended installing two traffic signals, at Ann Street and Orange Street, which are unable to be funded in the near term. He added that the City of Wilmington has committed to provide 20% of the funding. He requested that the MPO approve the award of the remaining 80%, which totals \$1.9 million. He reminded Board members that the half-mile section of South 3rd Street has 15,000 cars per day, half of which exceed the 35-mph speed limit, and 50 to 55 accidents occur per year, including that of an 8th grade pedestrian in the crosswalk, and a motorcyclist who suffered paralysis.

6. Closed Session

Vice Chairman Miller made a motion to enter into a closed session to discuss a personnel matter pursuant to N.C.G.S. Section 143-318.11(a)(6) and to consult with the MPO's attorney in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege pursuant N.C.G.S. Section 143-318.11(a)(3).

Mr. Anderson seconded the motion and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

Mr. Ellen made a motion to return to open session, seconded by Mr. Allen, and the motion carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

7. Presentation

a. North Carolina Department of Transportation Rail Division Update- Jason Orthner, NCDOT

NCDOT Rail Division Director Jason Orthner gave a remote update on the NCDOT Rail Division. He commented that the program is one of the best in the country and that it balances freight, safety, and passenger initiatives.

Mr. Orthner said that North Carolina has the following:

- Two major class carriers: Norfolk Southern Railway and CSX Transportation
- The North Carolina Railroad Company Corridor, 317 miles between Charlotte and the Port of Morehead City managed by one of the oldest corporations in the state
- More than 24 short-line railroads providing service connections
- 109 miles of rail corridor throughout the state, including the corridor between Wallace and Castle Hayne, and the Downtown Wilmington Corridor

Mr. Orthner gave an overview of current projects, as follows:

- Piedmont Atlantic Intermodal Rail System (PAIRS) initiative funded by a \$35 million grant received in 2019, to support development of intermodal system improvements between the Metrolina region and Wilmington
- Numerous projects that support the Queen City Express, the daily service between Wilmington and Charlotte
- Future service to the CCX facility completed last year in Rocky Mount
- Wilmington Beltline safety and speed improvements to dozens of crossings, which will begin in the spring of this upcoming year and be completed by 2025

Mr. Orthner gave an overview of passenger rail service in North Carolina, much of which is concentrated in the center of the state between Charlotte and Raleigh. He said that current ridership is exceeding 2019 levels by 20% to 25% every week over pre-pandemic levels. He noted that the Carolinian route from Charlotte to New York was one of the best performing services during the pandemic and continues to do well. As a result, a 4th Piedmont service from Raleigh to Charlotte is being added in the spring. Additionally, the Charlotte Gateway station will be relocated in 2026.

Mr. Orthner said that although daily bus connections from Wilmington and Morehead City to Wilson continue to do well, passenger rail service directly to Wilmington is planned. He noted that many other communities throughout the state are looking for enhanced service and that several feasibility studies are currently underway including Wilmington to Raleigh, Salisbury and Asheville to Raleigh, and Raleigh to Greenville. He added that the Southeastern North Carolina Passenger Service Study is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

Mr. Orthner said that the Raleigh to Virginia expansion is crucial to developing a high-volume core network that would support volumes of riders with multiple options. He noted that the S-Line project, Gateway to the Southeast, is the only opportunity to develop north-south capacity because the current railroad routes are owned by Norfolk Southern and CSX and are for high-volume freight. He noted that the ability to add passenger trains to the existing freight network would be more challenging than considering the S-line alternate route. In 1992, USDOT first recognized the S-Line and the southeast corridor as an important component nationally for a development corridor.

Mr. Orthner said that since that time, the Department has been working with the State of Virginia in developing the project, first with a Tier I NEPA analysis and route recommendation in 2002, and then the final EIS and Record of Decision in 2017, making the corridor one of the few cleared for development. He noted that NCDOT was awarded \$48 million in 2020 in the form of a CRISI grant

to purchase the corridor into public ownership, and \$58 million in 2022 from the same grant program to advance a detail-level survey and Preliminary Engineering (PE) for the project.

Mr. Orthner said that the project will tie together significant population centers on the east coast through a railway that does not exist today. He estimated that 20 million people will be connected by establishing this route, and 25 million by 2040. He noted that route will become the backbone of regional multi-modal connectivity and all rail services as they are expanded. He added that the new connection will lend itself to freight network resiliency by providing an alternate route and will expand services to disadvantaged regions.

Mr. Orthner said that the FY21 CRISI grant for 30% engineering will include 162 miles of railroad design and 82 miles of roadway design for the Raleigh to Richmond (R2R) segment. He commented that the project is well aligned for future grants from Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). He noted that the new 110-mph route will save more than an hour in travel time, and next steps are as follows:

- Prepare for future grant applications,
- Continue coordinating with the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA), Amtrak, freight railroads, communities, and other stakeholders
- Expedite PE for the R2R Program
- Continue to look for opportunities to accelerate delivery of the R2R program and expand rail services
- Continue analysis of additional corridors for future rail services

Mr. Anderson expressed concerns regarding the increasing capacity of the Port, and the population growth of the city. He asked about the city's rail realignment program. Mr. Orthner responded the Rail Division is engaged in the process and with the city's team leading the project, which is identified in the statewide rail plan.

Mr. Ellen asked about the Rail Division's involvement with rail traffic transporting munitions to Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point (MOTSU). Mr. Orthner said that the Rail Division does not have direct involvement. However, it tracks improvement impacts and supports all movements.

b. Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority Update- Marie Parker, CFPTA

Wave Transit Executive Director Marie Parker gave an update on the operations of Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority, a government entity branded as Wave Transit. She said Wave's mission is to provide public transportation services to the City of Wilmington and New Hanover County. She noted that Wave Transit has the following:

- More than 115 direct and contract employees
- Three facilities: an operations and maintenance facility as well as two bus depots/transfer stations, downtown and in central Wilmington
- 67 revenue vehicles (buses, shuttles, vans) and 8 support vehicles (shuttle, admin)

Ms. Parker said that Wave Transit operates four types of services:

1. Fixed route bus service
 - a. Urban transit network system with 12 fixed routes
 - b. Downtown trolley, which operates six days a week
2. Micro-transit service, local and regional, started 12 months ago

3. Paratransit service for those with mobility challenges within ¼ mile of fixed routes
4. University service, UNCW Seahawk shuttle

Ms. Parker said that in July of this year, Wave Transit made some significant changes to the system network including the northeast route was expanded to cover Market Street from College Road to Gordon Road. Another change was to reallocate hours adding an hour to Saturday service, and reallocating trolley hours to Friday and Saturday night service. Additionally, service was changed for two fixed routes to micro-transit on demand service for the north route to Cape Fear Community College's northern campus and the south route to Carolina Beach.

Ms. Parker said that monthly ridership has had incremental increases over time. She noted that in 2020 and in 2021, Wave Transit only had one month with more than 46,000 passengers. However, in 2022, four months had more than 46,000 passengers, without considering the remaining months of the calendar year.

Ms. Parker said that Wave's passenger amenities project is a large one. She noted that of nearly 400 stops, only 29 have a covered shelter and 15 locations have a bench with no covered shelter. She added that one of the routes to the southeast, Route 203, has no passenger amenities at all. She noted that to be comparable with other transit systems, the number of passenger amenities needs to be doubled. She added that Wave Transit was awarded funds from the MPO last year, which will go toward 10 shelters.

Ms. Parker said that Wave Transit was the first in the state to launch a regional micro-transit project, called RideMICRO, which covers three counties –southeast Pender County, Northern Brunswick County, and two local zones in New Hanover County adjacent to the fixed route system. She noted that the service was funded 100% by NCDOT and was launched in phases. She added that ridership for micro-transit zones is as follows:

- Northern New Hanover County: nearly 50%
- Southern New Hanover County: 25%
- Pender County: 18%
- Brunswick County: less than 10%.

Ms. Parker said that although the pilot program ends September 30th, Wave Transit applied for additional funding, and NCDOT awarded a grant to continue the micro-transit program for another year. She noted that although micro-transit ridership has increased incrementally month over month from October, the sunset of two of Wave's fixed routes in July caused substantial increases in ridership. She added that if the weather holds, September is expected to have the highest ridership month to date with 1,600 to 1,800 trips.

Ms. Parker said that the proposed ¼-cent sales tax referendum will directly impact Wave Transit. She noted that the sales tax could help extend service time, reduce waits for more than half of the routes, provide live ETAs and updates for most used stops, improve the Wave Transit app, and provide Wi-Fi on vehicles and other technology improvements, new greener buses, more shelters and benches at bus stops, and free youth passes.

8. Consent Agenda

- a. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes from August 31, 2022**
- b. **Resolution approving 2020-2029 STIP/MPO Administrative Modification #22-8**

Mr. Forte made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, Items 8a through 8b. Mr. Ellen seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

9. Regular Agenda

a. Resolution Supporting the Allocation of Additional Direct Attributable Funds to the Town of Belville for the Belville Elementary Multi-use Path (EB-6026) Project

Mr. Kozlosky said that the MPO funded this multi-use path project in 2017 with Transportation Alternatives Set Aside (TASA) funding. He noted that the town has identified a need for \$344,866 in additional funding. He added that the Town of Belville is requesting \$275,813 and will commit the 20% local match of \$68,973. He noted that MPO staff and the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) recommend approval of this item.

Mr. Allen said that the project is at 100% design and that the Town Council voted on Monday for an engineering group to oversee the plans. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the project, drove the cost up, and the Town has requested additional funding needed to advance the project before the end of the year.

Adrienne Harrington, Consultant for the Town of Belville, added that the increase in cost from the original estimate is typical of many current projects. She noted that if granted, a November let date is targeted. Mr. Allen said that this project will tie together communities, schools, and a new educational pavilion for the park. He expressed appreciation to Board members for their consideration.

Ms. Bozeman made a motion to support the allocation of additional funds to the Town of Belville. Mr. Willis seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

b. Resolution supporting the Town of Leland's application for the USDOT's Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program Grant

Ms. Lorenzo said that the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) established a new discretionary goal program called the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program, which is dedicated to reconnecting communities that have previously been divided by transportation infrastructure barriers. She noted that the program is funded by approximately \$1 billion over the next five years to be awarded for planning and construction. She added that the Town of Leland plans to apply for a planning grant to reconnect the communities on either side of US 17 in Leland. She noted that the WMPO's transportation plan supports this request.

Mr. Anderson made a motion to support the Town of Leland's grant application. Mr. Allen seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously by roll call as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

Mr. Kozlosky said that a presentation on grants as part of the IIJA will be given at the Board's next meeting.

10. Discussion

a. 2020-2029 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #22-9

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

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Anderson, Mr. Kozlosky noted that there are substantive items in the modification, including safety improvements at intersections, several of which are in the City of Wilmington, traffic signal preemption, and to improvements to Carolina Beach Road in the Monkey Junction area.

b. Revised Draft 2024-2033 State Transportation Improvement Program

Mr. Kozlosky reminded Board members that in April, NCDOT released the initial draft of the 2024-2033 State/MPO Transportation Improvement Program (STIP/MTIP). He noted that with the passage of the budget signed in July by the Governor, a transfer of sales tax revenue to the Department was included, which is new funding for the Department. Based on that action, NCDOT reviewed its revenue projections and released a revised draft STIP in August. As a result, eight projects became unfunded, four projects were moved to Preliminary Engineering (PE) only, 13 projects have schedule changes and 19 projects remained unchanged.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Waddell, Mr. Kozlosky said that the projects moved to PE only were moved out.

At the request of the MPO Board, Mr. Kozlosky gave details on the changes. He noted that the eight projects previously identified for right-of-way or construction that are now unfunded include the following:

- Several taxiway improvements at Wilmington International Airport (ILM)
- Widening of NC-133 Castle Hayne Road from Division Drive to I-140 (U-5863)
- Access management, travel time improvements on College Road from Shipyard Boulevard to Carolina Beach Road (U-5702B)
- Greenville Loop and Greenville Avenue intersection improvement at Oleander Drive (U-6128)
- Additional ferry vessel for the Southport-Fort Fisher Crossing (F-5705)

Mr. Kozlosky noted that although the status of the South Front Street project has changed to Preliminary Engineering (PE) only, it has been recommended for a project swap. He said the four projects identified for PE only include the following:

- Upgrade of College Road from Gordon Road to New Centre Drive (U-5881)
- Intersection improvements at College Road and Oleander Drive (U-5704)
- Widening South Front Street, Cape Fear Memorial Bridge to Burnett Boulevard (U-5734)
- Expanding the aviation apron at ILM (AV-5795)

Mr. Kozlosky said that 13 projects have schedule changes to right-of-way and utilities (R/U) and/or construction, as follows (where no delay or acceleration indicated, the schedule remains the same):

- Flyover interchange at US-421 and the Isabel Holmes Bridge (U-5731) – R/U delayed two years to FY26

- Upgrades to Carolina Beach Boulevard (US 421) from Burnett Boulevard to Shipyard Boulevard (U-5729REG) – R/U delayed five years to FY27
- Improvements at the interchange of Carolina Beach Boulevard and Shipyard Boulevard (U-5729SW) – R/U delayed five years to FY27
- Improvements to Carolina Beach Road between the intersection of College Road and Piner Drive in Monkey Junction to Sanders Road, continuous flow intersection improvements as well as the widening of Carolina Beach Road between College and Sanders (U-5790) – R/U accelerated by two years to FY27, and construction accelerated by one year to FY29
- Access management, travel time improvements on College Road from New Centre Drive to Shipyard Boulevard (U-5702A) – R/U delayed four years to FY28
- Access management, travel time improvements on Market Street between Station Road and just north of College Road (U-4902C) – R/U delayed five years to FY27
- Interchange at Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (MLK) and Kerr Avenue (U-3338C) – construction accelerated three years to FY26
- Extension of Kerr Avenue from Peach Tree Drive to Oleander Drive (U-6201) – construction accelerated from future year to FY30 – *potential swap*
- Another segment of access management improvements on Market Street, New Centre Drive to Colonial Drive (U-4902B) – R/U delayed five years
- Independence Boulevard Extension Randall Parkway to Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (U-4434) – R/U delayed two years to FY26
- Wilmington City-wide traffic signal system upgrade, last upgraded in 2010 from DOS-based system (U-6199) – construction accelerated from future year to FY30
- Modernization of NC-133 from US 17/74/76 to Old River Road in Belville (U-5914) – construction delayed one year to FY23 (let date December 2022)
- Conversion of US 17 in Hampstead between Washington Acres Road and Vista Lane to a superstreet section (U-5732) – construction accelerated three years to FY26

Mr. Kozlosky gave examples of several of the 19 unchanged projects, as follows:

- Military Cutoff Extension – construct new route on new location (U-4751)
- Drysdale Drive Extension – construct route on new location (U-5710A)
- US 74 (Eastwood Road) – convert at-grade intersection to interchange at Military Cutoff (U-5710)
- Gordon Rd Widening – widen roadway (U-6202)
- NC 133 (Castle Hayne Rd) – construct roundabout at North 23rd Street (U-5954)

Mr. Anderson expressed concerns regarding projects occurring simultaneously. Mr. Kimes responded that although projects proceed according to their prioritization score, thoughtful consideration is required for scheduling to avoid conflicts.

Mr. Kozlosky advised that discussion regarding project swaps or scheduling changes will need to take into careful consideration that moving projects outside the funding window will require those projects to re compete for funding. Mr. Kimes pointed out that competition with new projects in Prioritization 7.0 will be challenging.

Ms. Hays expressed concerns regarding the delay to the College Road and Oleander Drive intersection improvements project. She commented that many of the projects that became unfunded, or PE only, seemed to be scored higher than those with scheduling changes or no changes. Mr. Kozlosky

responded that changes were based on both the prioritization score and the round of prioritization in which the project was funded (Prioritization 3.0, Prioritization 4.0, or Prioritization 5.0).

Mr. Kimes pointed out that the funding tier was also considered (Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, or Division Needs).

Mr. Kozlosky continued giving examples of unchanged projects, as follows:

- MLK at College Interchange – convert at-grade intersection to interchange (U-5792)
- Several projects at ILM
- Hampstead Bypass – new route on new location:
- Southport-Fort Fisher – construct mooring facilities (F-5707)

Mr. Kozlosky said that NCDOT released the revised draft in August, and that project swaps will be considered until March 17, 2023. He reminded members that the stipulations on swapping projects are that the projects must be within 10% of the cost of each other, and that the MPO and Division 3 must agree on the swaps. He noted that MPO staff will provide scenarios to the Board for consideration at its next meeting.

Mr. Kozlosky said that although project swaps are recommended to occur at the same funding tier, some cascading may be possible. He noted that the scenarios will be sent to Board members in advance of the next meeting and that some discussion about them has occurred with Division 3. He added that the revised draft will be released in the spring and that the Board will be asked to consider the final 2024-2033 STIP in the summer of 2023.

11. Updates

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

Mr. Kozlosky said the updates are included in the agenda packet.

12. Announcements

- a. **Wilmington MPO Bike/Pedestrian Committee- October 11th**
- b. **Commuter Challenge – October 14th through October 30th**
- c. **Next MPO Board Meeting – October 26, 2022**

Mr. Kozlosky commented that significant outreach is planned for the Commuter Challenge at the beginning of October. He added that the Board of Transportation will be here next week and that an invitation to an event was sent to Board members. Mr. Barfield said he would be there. Mr. Ellen said he will be out of town.

13. Adjournment

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

Ayes: Mike Allen, Neil Anderson, Lynn Barbee, Jonathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, John Ellen, Mike Forte, Deb Hays, Hank Miller, Luke Waddell and Eulis Willis. **Nays:** None. **Excused:** David Piepmeyer and Landon Zimmer.

The meeting adjourned at 4:57 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.