



**WILMINGTON URBAN AREA**  
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

**Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning  
Organization**

**2022 - 2026 Strategic Plan**

**Presented by:**



## Executive Summary

The Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) provides a regional and cooperative transportation planning process that serves as the basis for the expenditure of all federal transportation funds in the greater Wilmington, NC area. The WMPO is committed to working with regional partners and community stakeholders to identify and implement transportation projects that serve the needs of residents in the metropolitan area.

The WMPO worked tirelessly to create a strategic plan that will guide us in achieving the vision we set for the future. This document describes the process and results of the strategic plan and outlines the focus areas and top priorities that we developed to meet our goals.

Guiding our work over the next five years, to meet the transportation needs and expectations of our communities, the WMPO identified seven key focus areas throughout this process:

- Improve Safety
- Multi-Modal Focus
- Regionally Focused
- Economic Development
- Community Engagement
- More Organized, Vocal and Cohesive Voice
- Organizational and Operational Effectiveness

The WMPO will use these focus areas to identify and solve transportation challenges in the Wilmington Metropolitan Area. We will refer to these as we plan, develop, and advocate for our residents. These focus areas will also be used as a framework to develop and plan transportation projects under the purview of the WMPO.

## **WMPO's Strategic Plan in Context**

Over the last decade the Wilmington area has maintained steady growth that requires updated and increased levels of transportation planning and projects. This growth also has brought new priorities and perspectives around our region's transportation infrastructure. Our changing communities will require new and updated infrastructure as well as innovative, safe, and equitable programs to increase the overall mobility in the Wilmington Metropolitan Area.

In 2021, the WMPO engaged its Board and regional stakeholders in robust discussions to understand the future needs of the metropolitan area, the most pressing transportation projects, and the challenges associated with these priorities.

For this strategic planning process, the WMPO utilized a facilitated approach to develop and analyze surveys and conducted Board meetings to identify challenges and opportunities facing the WMPO. This collaborative approach to identifying challenges allowed WMPO to determine priorities, focus areas, and potential solutions for present and emerging challenges. This process, and the resulting plan, gives the WMPO an advantage in anticipating and meeting the needs of residents and stakeholders.

## Organizational Overview

The WMPO is governed by the WMPO Board, which is tasked with providing policy and direction and approving all the WMPO projects. The Board is made up of thirteen voting members that represent twelve government bodies from the municipal, county, regional, and state levels. The Board also contains non-voting members who represent various government entities whose operations impact transportation planning in the Wilmington area. Non-voting members serve at the invitation of the WMPO Board.

The WMPO is required to conduct the transportation planning process in a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive manner. In order to accomplish these goals, the WMPO has the responsibility of coordinating TCC and Board activities, adopting a Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Comprehensive Transportation Plan, reviewing and approving the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program, completing a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), approving changes to the Federal-Aid Functional Classification System, and establishing goals and objectives for the transportation planning process.

The WMPO began this strategic planning process by conducting a survey that asked Board and TCC members about the WMPO's organizational effectiveness, projects, direction, and staff effectiveness. The survey results were presented to the Board for discussion with the goal of finding areas that need improvement and areas in which the MPO can build upon its success. The Board also participated in vision exercises to better understand what will be needed in the coming years. These processes gave the Board an opportunity to review and recertify its current mission and draft a new vision to lead the MPO into the future.

### **Mission:**

To create and execute continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive regional long-range planning efforts that proactively drive transportation decisions to improve safety, connectivity, economic development, and quality of life in the Wilmington region.

### **Vision:**

The vision statement below describes our aspirations for the WMPO. This statement indicates our current and future commitments, and where we would like to see the WMPO progress over the next five years.

The Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization seeks to provide safe, reliable, and seamless options for transportation for all in the Wilmington Metropolitan Area. The WMPO will speak with a unified voice and work with residents to anticipate the transportation needs of a growing and changing community.

## Strategic Focus Areas

The WMPO will continue to work on behalf of the residents in the Wilmington Metropolitan Area by focusing on areas of need to improve our transportation infrastructure. This mission calls for the WMPO to identify these areas of need and implement plans to address them. Through the strategic planning process, we will use the seven identified focus areas to guide our work in the future.

These focus areas will guide the WMPO in developing plans and projects that meet the long-term infrastructure priorities of the Wilmington Area. As we plan for growth and more robust transportation infrastructure, the WMPO will consistently refer to these seven areas to ensure that we are moving in a direction that accomplishes our mission and helps to achieve our vision.

### Strategic Focus Areas

The WMPO Board understands that as the Wilmington Metropolitan Area grows and changes in the next five years there will be significant opportunities and challenges in the area's transportation infrastructure needs. This understanding has led the Board to highlight following seven areas of focus for the WMPO:

- Improve Safety
- Multi-Modal Focus
- Regionally Focused
- Economic Development
- Community Engagement
- More Organized, Vocal and Cohesive Voice
- Organizational and Operational Effectiveness

### Improve Safety

The WMPO is committed to providing safe and reliable transportation throughout the Wilmington Metropolitan Area. The members of our communities utilize various modes of transportation in their daily lives, and we seek to ensure that every mode of transportation is as safe as the next.

- Adopt Safety Performance Measures and track these measures to determine if and how the area is performing
- Perform data collection/analysis, perform an annual review of the highest vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian crashes and assist with road safety audits when needed
- Support safety programs such as Vision Zero, "Be A Looker," Watch for Me NC, Bike Safe NC, etc.
- Program funding and pursue grants for projects that reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities
- Successful implementation of the Traffic Separation Study
- Support the Wilmington Rail Re-alignment Project
- Promote safety, education, and enforcement - give high priority to safety improvements in the vicinity of schools, public transportation, commercial corridors, and other high use bicycle and pedestrian destinations
- Support the NC Ferry System for emergency evacuations and distressed boaters

- Support the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority for improvements to bus stop amenities and improved access to stop locations
- Focus on Roadway projects that improve safety (access management, turn lanes, signal pre-emption, lighting, signage, etc.)

### **Multi-Modal Focus**

The WMPO will continue to invest in and expand accessibility to non-traditional modes of transportation. We will focus on ensuring that residents in our communities have a choice in how they travel throughout the area.

- Encourage and provide funding to enhance walking, biking, public transportation, and the ferry system in the Wilmington region
- Support critical infrastructure improvements that include multi-use paths, bike lanes, sidewalks, high-visibility crosswalks, push-button pedestrian signal heads, and other improvements for multi-modal transportation
- Encourage an increased focus on multi-modal transportation infrastructure
- Support “complete streets” and incorporate complete streets design into transportation projects in the Wilmington region
- Provide multi-modal connectivity between the various modes of transportation
- Support the development and implementation of plans that encourage multi-modal transportation
- Support the completion of the Wilmington Multi-modal Transportation Center
- Continue to utilize MPO’s surface transportation block grant and transportation alternatives; set aside direct attributable programs to fund our members’ local priorities and needs that support our larger regional network

### **Regionally Focused**

As a planning organization it is crucial that we focus on all communities in our metropolitan area. The WMPO will work to build a robust transportation infrastructure that contributes to economic growth and development throughout the region, becoming less centrally focused and supporting all our members’ needs.

- Provide regional accessibility from our transportation infrastructure
- Work collaboratively with our partners (MPO member jurisdictions, Cape Fear RPO, ILM, CFPTA, NCDOT, etc.)
- Educate WMPO members on services and programs provided by the MPO
- Continue to support projects and policies in the MPO’s long range plan
- Continue to support projects in the MPO Transportation Improvement Program and State Transportation Improvement Program

### **Economic Development Focused**

We understand that economic growth and vitality are crucial to meeting the needs of our residents, communities, and partners. The WMPO will work to enhance the Wilmington Area’s economic development opportunities by planning and implementing infrastructure projects that will enable global competitiveness. We will work to enable growth in all levels of the economy by enhancing transportation network effectiveness, efficiency, and safety.

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency
- Promote economic growth in the region through enhanced transportation infrastructure
- Support economic vitality and innovation, transportation network efficiency and safety, and supply chain resilience and reliability
- Support economic development at Wilmington International Airport (business park, improve international and domestic trade and commerce facilities, general aviation improvements), biking (bike tourism, events, etc.), walking, ferry, freight/rail, and public transportation
- Support the NC Ports in their efforts to grow and expand

### **Community Engagement**

The WMPO exists to serve the transportation needs of the residents in our communities. We understand that this is not possible without input and feedback from people who are affected by our decisions. With this understanding we will work with community groups and members to plan and develop programs and projects that anticipate the concerns of our residents.

- Educate citizens and elected officials in order to increase general understanding of transportation issues
- Utilize the adopted Public Participation Plan and enhance efforts related to community engagement
- Enhance the use of social media to disseminate information regarding MPO projects and programs

### **More Organized, Vocal, and Cohesive Voice**

The WMPO seeks to become an organization that effectively communicates with a singular voice on a regular basis. We will use our voice to inform our partner organizations and communities of the projects and plans that we develop as an MPO.

- Continue to develop a Legislative Agenda that outlines the MPO's legislative priorities
- Prioritize transportation projects in order to facilitate conversations amongst local, state, and federal delegation
- Utilize Board and staff relationships to advocate for transportation infrastructure in the Wilmington region

### **Organizational and Operational Effectiveness**

As an MPO it is crucial that we operate effectively and efficiently to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves. The WMPO will continue to improve our operations and find ways to increase operational effectiveness for the people of the Wilmington Metropolitan Area.

- Enhance the utilization of technology to improve operations
- Complete the Compensation Study to compare the MPO staff salaries to the public/private sector and in an effort to mitigate turnover
- Continue annual updates from the MPO's partner and supportive organizations (NCDOT Division 3, NC Rail Division, NC Ferry Division, Wilmington International Airport, and Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority)
- Celebrate and communicate successes to the public- utilize available member jurisdictions communication resources

## Top Project Priorities

Through the strategic planning process, the WMPO identified six major projects that we consider to be our top priorities. We view the completion of these projects as crucial to the network of transportation infrastructure in the Wilmington Area. The completion of these projects will vastly improve mobility throughout the region and create opportunities to advance towards the goals that we have for our communities.

### Top Priorities (Physical Projects)

- Hampstead Bypass A Section
- Military Cutoff, Eastwood Acceleration
- Independence Boulevard Acceleration
- MLK - Kerr Acceleration
- MLK - Market - Eastwood Acceleration
- Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Replacement

## Transportation Funding Methods

As the Wilmington Area continues to grow, we understand that exploring alternative funding methods will be necessary to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our communities and the ambitious and critical goals that we set. The WMPO staff will work with our partners and funding agencies to identify and seek out potential funding methods, including state and federal grants; we will also provide the Board with further funding opportunities to consider.

- Evaluate all potential funding sources for important transportation projects
- Evaluate state and federal grants as potential funding sources
- Develop a list of potential options for MPO Board consideration
- Delineate between larger and smaller projects when developing these options

## Key Performance Indicators

The tactical actions and performance indicators for this strategic plan will be developed by the WMPO staff as they take the strategic priorities and create an annual implementation plan. Performance indicators will be used to track progress and support shared accountability across the organization regarding progress on the various priorities. The WMPO Staff will outline the indicators of success and provide them, along with the strategic plan, in a presentation to the Board for final approval. The staff will provide updates to the Board on the progress of the plan at regular intervals.

## Implementation Plan and Process

The implementation plan will be developed by the WMPO staff as they finalize the tactical actions and performance indicators. This plan will outline the steps and timelines necessary to meet the objectives of this plan and achieve the goals that derive from it. As the WMPO moves forward with this plan some aspects of implementation will change; thus, it is important that we remain flexible and agile.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Implementation Template

The following template provides an example of how the WMPO may implement the strategic plan. This template contains space to outline the action steps, necessary participants, and proposed timeline for each Focus Area.

<b>Focus Area 1: Improve Safety</b>			
	<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
a			
b			
c			
<b>Focus Area 2: Multi-Modal Focus</b>			
	<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
a			
b			
c			