



WILMINGTON URBAN AREA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

WMPO Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 31st, 2024

New Hanover County Government Center Conference Rooms 138 and 139,
230 Government Center Drive, Wilmington, North Carolina

Members Present

Mike Allen, Town of Belville
Lynn Barbee, Town of Carolina Beach
Jonathan Barfield, Jr., New Hanover County
Brenda Bozeman, Town of Leland
John Ellen, Town of Kure Beach
Wendy Fletcher-Hardee, Pender County
Mike Forte, Brunswick County
Hank Miller, Town of Wrightsville Beach
Bill Rivenbark, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Bill Saffo, City of Wilmington
Luke Waddell, City of Wilmington
Eulis Willis, Town of Navassa
Landon Zimmer, NC Board of Transportation

Others Present

Chad Kimes, NCDOT
Mike Kozlosky, WMPO
Abby Lorenzo, WMPO
Caitlin Melvin, NCDOT
Michelle Howes, NCDOT
Matt Nichols, MPO General Counsel
Veronica Carter, Town of Leland
Regina Hopkins, WMPO
Emma Stogner, WMPO
Vanessa Lacer, WMPO
Carolyn Caggia, WMPO
Greer Shriver, WMPO
Tracy Manning, City of Wilmington
Scott James, WMPO

1) Call to Order

Chairman Hank Miller called the meeting to order at 3:02 PM. A quorum was present in person.

2) Conflict of Interest Statement

Chairman Miller read the conflict-of-interest statement and asked if any Board member has a conflict of interest. No one indicated that they had a conflict.

3) Approval of Board Member Excused Absences

No Board Member requested to be excused.

4) Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Waddell made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Forte and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Miller acknowledged and welcomed the public present in the audience. He noted that 46 people have signed up to speak and that there is a three-minute cap on public comment according to the WMPO's Public Participation Policy, which can be extended by the Board.

Vice Chairman Waddell acknowledged that there are concerns about one item on today's agenda and encouraged civil debate.

Chairman Miller noted that the public comment period is limited for a total of 15 minutes.

Mr. Saffo commented that the public should be given every opportunity to speak and suggested extending the public comment period to 30 minutes at least, three minutes apiece.

Chairman Miller said that the speakers would be called in the order that they signed up. He asked that each person give their name and address and that someone would let them know when their speaking time is up.

5) Election of Officers

WMPO General Counsel Matt Nichols opened the floor for election of officers. Mr. Waddell nominated Hank Miller for chair, seconded by Ms. Bozeman. There being no other nominations, Mr. Barfield made a motion to close the nominations, seconded by Mr. Allen, and the motion carried unanimously.

The motion to elect Mr. Miller as chairman carried unanimously.

Chairman Miller expressed appreciation and opened the floor for nominations for vice chairman.

Mr. Forte nominated Mr. Barbee for vice chairman. Mr. Saffo nominated Mr. Waddell for vice chair, seconded by Ms. Bozeman. Mr. Zimmer then seconded Mr. Forte nomination of Mr. Barbee. Ms. Bozeman made a motion to close the nominations for vice chairman, seconded by Mr. Ellen. After discussion and determining that the first nomination was seconded after the second nomination was made and seconded, Mr. Allen made a motion to table the election of a vice chairman to the next meeting and motion was seconded by Mr. Barbee. That motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment Period

Given the number of members of the public who signed up to speak, the Board members agreed to extend the public comment period to 30 minutes.

Neal Andrew, President of Andrew Consulting engineers spoke to the Board and others in favor of all options being considered. He stated that he was there to speak not only as a representative of Andrew Consulting engineer, but also as a supporter of the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce. He stated he has served on the board for eight years, in 2022 had the honor of serving as the board chair for the Chamber and in February of that year, the Chamber Board of Directors took a significant step by unanimously passing a resolution urging consideration of all possible options to fund the replacement for the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. He said the Board's position on this matter has not changed. In 2004, there was a missed opportunity for a new high-rise Southern bridge. In 2010, another missed opportunity for a new bridge. From 2013 to 2015, he stated he served on the WMPO Citizen Advisory Committee for the 2040 Transportation Plan. He said the plan that was adopted 9 years ago, had a budget deficit of \$7 billion for WMPO only. Mr. Andrew noted that this deficit and spending needs versus funding has only increased over the last decade and will continue to increase. Every MPO and RPO in North Carolina thinks they deserve more money from the STIP. He encouraged the Board to vote to explore all options.

Lisa Leath introduced herself as the Chief People Officer at a software company called Vantaca, based in Wilmington and employees around 140 full-time employees. She stated that as a member of the Chamber of Commerce since 2017 and now serving as Chair of the Board of Directors for the Chamber, she has witnessed significant growth and tenacity on addressing community issues. She said the Board created a strategic plan to address polices impacting the business community, with a focus in support of the MPO's Board identification of replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge as the highest unfunded priority. She stated that to accommodate the growth of this area, the Chamber supports the Board to vote to explore all options.

Jim Hundley, Executive Vice President of Thomas Construction Group, urged the Board to vote in favor of the Resolution to submit Cape Fear Memorial Bridge for exploration purposes as a toll project in the

next prioritization process. He stated that transportation infrastructure improvements are critically important, especially as this is the fastest growing region in the state of North Carolina. Our emergency response teams need to be confident they can transport patients across a dependable bridge. As a citizen that has chosen to raise children in this community, he stated the region continues to prosper and embrace the forward-thinking mentality the region has missed on several opportunities in the past with the DOT to improve capacity with a new bridge over the river, we cannot afford to miss on this one.

Natalie English with the Chamber of Commerce stated as an advocate of businesses in Southeastern North Carolina she is asking for the Board to support the proposal that will ensure the timely and efficient replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. She noted the bridge is a vital link for the region's economy, safety, and quality of life. She requested the Board work with DOT to ensure the bridge scores higher in the process. The projects with the highest scores are selected for funding and scheduling projects with some level of consideration for alternative funding tend to score higher. She stated other regions across the state are considering tolls or other avenues because they understand that existing state revenue will not fund all the infrastructure needed across the state. In fact, we have heard specifically from NCDOT staff that if the project is submitted includes tolls, it will move our region's most critical infrastructure project to the top of the list. By including tolls in the NCDOT's prioritization process it will increase the score of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement project and make it more competitive and attractive for funding. Including tolls in the NCDOT's prioritization process does not commit to including tolls. She stated on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce Committee that they will continue turning over every possible rock for additional funding avenues and they want be part of the solution for a significantly higher ranking.

John Lennon, Vice-Chairman for BASE and a past member of the NC Board of Transportation that was part of the prioritization implementation noted that New Hanover County ranks tenth and Brunswick County eleventh for transportation funding since the inception of this legislation. He stated each of the governments that are represented have been struggling with revenues, not keeping pace with expenses, bond referendums, utilization of debt and public private partnerships have all been utilized in our region as ways to not only fund new projects, but also to replace existing infrastructure. Citizens of those respective counties and municipalities have indeed been paying taxes for projects such as the replacement of government buildings. The revenues simply don't match the expenses. In February of 2022, the Board voted to pursue all options for the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. The resolution could not be clearer, and the Board is being asked to vote to move this project forward and would still have to vote to approve tolling. He asked that instead of disparaging our local legislative delegation by saying that they aren't doing enough, give them the tool to aggressively pursue alternative funding options from both the federal and state governments, which they will be able to do, given that the tolling option qualifies for the required matching funds. Give them a high scoring project for STI and let them continue their recent efforts to bring significant resources to our region.

Tyler Newman spoke representing a regional business advocacy organization called BASE that is active in Brunswick, New Hanover, Pender, and Onslow counties. He stated he sent an email to the Board members on behalf of the BASE, encouraging support of the resolution requesting DOT modify the prioritization 7.0 to evaluate a toll option for the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. He said that voting in favor of the resolution as written is an important step as we pursue options to score, fund, and replace a critical piece of infrastructure, the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. He noted when discussing this issue, there are three absolute facts: Number 1 replacement of the Cape Memorial Bridge is our number one regional priority. Number 2, In 2013, the state made a total overhaul to the transportation funding strategy process, which left the project unfunded and number 3, voting to further study tolls

as a strategic option will not create a toll. Given these facts, the total objective should be to find a way to score the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge to place the project as high as possible within the current funding process. At the same time, supporting the resolution will make the project more viable for additional federal and state funding streams. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and your leadership on the MPO board. We appreciate your collaboration with NCDOT to ensure our region has the plans, funds, and resources to facilitate critical infrastructure and investment in our fast-growing region of North Carolina.

Mike Rush from Leland spoke in opposition to the toll option. He stated that there are currently no toll bridges in the state of North Carolina and stated the process the state uses to make decisions on infrastructure is broken and needs to be fixed.

Joanne Levitan, 2106 Talmage Dr, Leland spoke in opposition to the toll option. She questioned why a 135-foot bridge was needed due to more dredging, wetlands destruction, deforestation, and all the negative impacts that come with that. She stated that a 135-foot bridge would also impact low-income housing in Wilmington. She stated that upfitting a 65-foot bridge aligns without community's needs, ensuring a cost effective, and environmentally considerate resolution to our infrastructure challenges. She urged the Board to vote against considering a 165-foot span with a toll option and propose a 65-foot span instead.

Travis Gilbert, Wilmington Historical Foundation, stated that today's vote was integral to increasing scoring of this project. He noted he would like to speak on three points. He stated that the Chamber stated all options should be considered but he believes there are four options. These options include a 65-foot fixed bridge, 135-foot fixed bridge, 65-foot movable bridge, and a 65-foot movable bridge with a train component. Mr. Gilbert stated that there is a merger process which is the environmental review process occurring right now. Mike and Abby sit in on those meetings, and he is concerned that updates are not being shared from those meetings. He noted that the neighborhood Commissioner Barfield is very concerned about that merger process is setting how much that of that neighborhood is going to be in the study area. The purpose is to eliminate those four options and then determine the least environmentally damaging practical alternative. Mr. Gilbert stated point number two regarding the traffic and revenue forecasts that was shared with the Board at the November 29th meeting. He stated there was an important point being missed during that presentation. He noted if a submission of a 135-foot fixed bridge was submitted to STIP, you would drive underneath that bridge on 3rd Street and the bridge will land at 5th Avenue. By this time, 5th Avenue will have one lane, not two in each direction, based on a city project being implemented. He stated that the traffic revenue forecasts were being implemented with two lanes in each direction, which will not be the case once the city project is complete. He went on to state that a \$2.00 toll at Castle and 5th Avenue according to the forecast would increase the traffic 37% on 5th Avenue. He noted that the Coast Guard can issue a permit that defines the reasonable needs of navigation based on a 65-foot, least environmentally damaging bridge. He stated that pleasure crafts need to be looked at and studied to define the impact they have on the region and if there is truly a need for 135-foot clearance. He urged the Board not to lose sight of the merger process and the four options on the table.

Brayton Willis, Leland, stated he was a disabled veteran and lives on a fixed income. In 2018, was a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the 2045 Transportation plan. He stated it was his opinion that the STIP model is badly broken and has been from the beginning. He noted that if the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge could not make it to the top of the STIP being one of the most important bridges in North Carolina, crucial to the port of Wilmington, our local region, state and national jobs and economy. It is an emergency evacuation route for hurricanes, or other disasters, like Sunny Point, the port, and Brunswick Nuclear station. Mr. Willis noted his concerns of trucks beating the bridge up daily and the average commuter paying the bill for the bridge

replacement. He spoke on the negative financial impact a toll would have on the working-class citizens of the region. He recommended the Board to table the vote today and go ask the legislators to fix the STIP and see where the toll option sits then.

Shelley Allen, Chair of the Brunswick County Democratic Party, stated she was speaking on behalf of the citizens of the region that rely on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge to help live their lives. Ms. Allen stated that her understanding is that a yes vote on toll option scoring is the path to a toll reality. She noted taxes that are already being paid by citizens and instead of fixing the STIP and demanding the North Carolina General Assembly work to obtain state and federal funding, some of that burden will unfairly be shifted to the citizens of this region. In conclusion, she urged the Board to vote no on a toll study.

After 30 minutes of public comment, Mr. Saffo made a motion to extend the public comment period, seconded by Mr. Waddell, and the motion carried unanimously.

Nick Cherasaro, 1131 Lillibridge Drive, Leland, spoke in opposition to a toll noting the money that has been spent in the Ukraine and Afghanistan. He stated that the infrastructure bill that was passed in Congress covered that infrastructure. He noted the roads are US 17, US 74, and US 76, where is the federal government, these are US highways.

Andy Koeppell, PO Box 4443, Wilmington, commented that tolls should not be part of the scoring process. He requested that the item be tabled and that the WMPO direct the local delegation to seek an alternative for replacing the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge.

Diana Hill, 2210 Klein Road, Wilmington, requested to table the item as well, and expressed her concerns regarding some the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners being bullied to make a motion to support a toll option by declaring it an emergency agenda item. She requested to go back to the drawing board and decide what is best for Wilmington and the surrounding areas and not some kind of outrageous toll.

6) Presentations

a. Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Preservation Project Update- Chad Kimes, NCDOT

NCDOT Division Engineer Chad Kimes gave a brief update on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge rehabilitation project. He went over the schedule, and he noted that incentives have been put in place for the contractor to finish the rehabilitation on time if not earlier. He urged board members and the public to visit www.ncdot.gov/CFMB, cameras and message boards for the latest information on the project and traffic. He commended the region for a successful first few days of detours and traffic management due to the closure. He stated that the DOT will continue to monitor and make changes accordingly to reduce the impact of the closure.

In response to an inquiry by Chairman Miller, Mr. Kimes said the DOT command center is monitoring the website and detour routes 24 hours a day and that the information on the website is in real time. Chairman Miller noted that he knows of some suggestions that were sent to the site and have already been implemented.

7) Consent Agenda

a. Approval of Board Regular Meeting Minutes- November 29, 2023

b. Resolution approving 2024-2033 STIP/MPO Amendment #23-2

c. Resolution approving 2024-2033 STIP/MPO Administrative Modifications #23-3

d. Opening of the 30-day public comment period for 2024-2033 STIP/MPO Amendment #24-1

e. Resolution supporting Process Improvements for the Utilization of the Wilmington Urban Area MPO's Direct Attributable Funds

- f. **Resolution adopting the Wilmington Urban Area MPO's member jurisdiction population numbers from the 2020 Census data**
- g. **Resolution supporting the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's application for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Bicycle Helmet Initiative**

Ms. Fletcher-Hardee made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Barbee seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

8) **Regular Agenda**

- a. **Resolution requesting a modification to the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Prioritization 7.0 (P 7.0) Project Submittal to provide Evaluation of a Toll Option for the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge in P 7.0.**

Mr. Kozlosky said that the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge is the WMPO's top unfunded priority. He stated that in February of 2022, the MPO Board adopted a resolution considering all possible options to include tolls and previous proposals for replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. In July 2022 NCDOT presented a three-prong delivery process. First would be a traditional delivery that would be through the prioritization process. The second would be through conventional tolling and the third would be alternative delivery. As part of that the NCDOT indicated it would pursue grants to try to deliver this project. NCDOT has already submitted a Large Bridge Grant through the Bridge Investment Program to USDOT. Prioritization 7.0 is the process used to select projects for the 2026-2035 STIP/MPO Transportation Plan. The WMPO and the NCDOT have submitted the project for consideration in Prioritization. It has been determined that both projects would score identical under the traditional delivery. State law requires that if a toll option is to be considered that the MPO must sign off on that delivery option. The NCDOT has provided the MPO until February 1st to modify the WMPO's submission in prioritization 7.0 as a toll option. This would be for scoring purposes only and would not commit the project to be programmed or delivered as a toll facility. The resolution on the agenda also identifies and includes language that future affirmation by the WMPO Board would be required for the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement be implemented as a toll facility and the WMPO Board can withdraw any approval of Co-op until the time that the Department advertises for a contractor to deliver the bridge replacement. The resolution before the Board is requesting NCDOT modify the MPO's project submittal to evaluate the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge as toll option in Prioritization 7.0.

Mr. Saffo requested to know why the \$500 million-dollar Hampstead Bypass scored better than the Memorial Bridge replacement. Mr. Kozlosky stated that the scoring criteria that was used for the Hampstead bypass was US 17, part of the scoring was traffic congestion which impacted the score. He noted that there are several different criteria that the state uses to score projects and the projects report is based on three different tiers. One is the statewide tier that is 100% data-driven, the next tier is the Regional tier, which we are in Region B and that is 70% data driven and 30% public input. He stated that the 30% public input is shared between the MPO and the DOT Division and then projects that don't get scored in the Regional tier are stored in the Division tier, which are scored 50% based on data and 50% based on public input.

Mr. Zimmer noted that the Hampstead Bypass scored based on US 17 being the only way in or out and it was scored as three projects instead of one.

Mr. Saffo stated that hopefully the state will get interested in the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge because it has three major roadways connecting to it. Highway 421, US 17, and US 74/76, and it did not score high.

Mr. Saffo asked Chad Kimes, NCDOT, about interchanges being built along US 74/76. He noted he was told that both bridges associated with those interchanges scored higher in Columbus County than the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge project. Mr. Kimes stated that he would need more information regarding those interchanges to discuss the exact scoring of the projects. Mr. Kimes did say that a lot of it is based on the actual dollar amount of a project. Any project over \$100 million is going to get scored differently.

Mr. Saffo noted that the Alligator River Bridge that was replaced has around 6,000 cars per day, a percentage of \$300 million to build, and no toll. This is because it was considered a replacement bridge. By adding two lanes to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge that is now considering it a new facility, and that would be the case with any existing roadway that lanes are added on too. For instance, College Road, Market Street, and Shipyard Boulevard, any state-owned existing roads with added lanes would be considered new roads.

Chad Kimes, NCDOT, stated the Alligator River Bridge was in very poor condition and if not replaced would cause traffic to adhere to an 85-mile detour. The Cape Fear Memorial Bridge is in fair condition and not the only means over the river.

Mr. Saffo then asked who would regulate tolls in North Carolina? Who is responsible for the facility? How much is charged for tolls?

Mike Kozlosky that there are different ways to deliver a project, one being through a private/partnerships like a private firm or entity. The other option is to use conventional tolling which is the method the NCDOT presented to the Board back in July of 2022 and that would be done through the North Carolina Turnpike Authority. Mr. Saffo asked if the Board does approve tolls will the Turnpike Authority be the company or entity that would build this facility.

Mike Koslosky stated that would be a conversation to have down the road. What is being asked of the Board today is to consider scoring the project as a toll facility and once those scores come in, then have further conversations.

Mr. Saffo noted that since the bridge is a state asset with the port, the State of North Carolina has put a significant amount of money into that port to deliver goods and services throughout the state. He finds it concerning the citizens of two counties are going to be asked to pay for those goods and services going all over the State.

Chairman Miller, noted to Mr. Saffo that today was a vote on a resolution not about taxable tolls, we are talking about a resolution to score the project.

Mr. Barfield, asked Chad Kimes if this resolution to score the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge as a toll option is moved forward with and is approved as a toll option, then we come back and say we do not want to put a toll would it still be funded and built?

Chad Kimes stated he is going back to the initial comment. The WMPO came to NCDOT to look at all possible funding options, including a toll. NCDOT did not come to this group. NCDOT has spent several million dollars to get to this point today. They performed and presented the traffic and revenue study and in the process of submitting for grant funding. Also, a parcel has also been purchased for around \$18 million for the replacement of the bridge and to show the state that this region is taking this replacement seriously. Down the road, this Board has the authority to not pursue the toll and continue pursuing capital funding. He stated that going after grants is key and

scoring the project as a toll option is beneficial in receiving grants. There is no guarantee on how much will be received but with positive scoring and prioritization the funding looks better.

Mr. Barfield asked if the bridge fell apart today what impact would it have on the state's budget as it relates to the ports?

Mr. Kimes stated the bridge would be maintained. He said he could not speak on behalf of the state ports.

Mr. Barfield asked if the feasibility study that is included in the resolution was sent to the MPO Board.

Mr. Zimmer made a motion to approve the modification to the WMPO's P 7.0 Project Submittal, seconded by Mr. Forte. Chairman Miller stated the Board can now have discussion.

Mike Kozlosky stated the study has been sent to the MPO Board members.

Mr. Waddell stated that the language being used in this resolution will undoubtedly be used to play the game and help get significant federal funding with grants. The replacement of the bridge would hopefully be scored under 7.0 Prioritization and would score high enough to move forward and funded without the need for a toll. He stated that he agrees that the outcome is attractive. Mr. Waddell stated that his job and every other member of the Board is to look out for the best interests of the citizens they represent. If NCDOT receives less favorable federal funding than anticipated or does not score with the toll option in the Prioritization 7.0 then a proposal would come back before this body to have a binary vote to accept a toll to get a bridge. Mr. Waddell stated that he would like to include several provisions.

Mr. Waddell stated he drafted 3 additions to add to the resolution and he is not bringing that forward at this time because he feels there needs to be discussion but would like to read them to the Board. Whereas, North Carolina General Statute Chapter 136, Article 14 B, subsection C explicitly states that the bridge replacement is not subject to prioritization criteria. The next one Whereas, in the event the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement project fails to score high enough with or without a toll option the state of North Carolina is legally obligated to replace it with light kind infrastructure, and Whereas, the highway fund primarily supports projects that maintain states existing transportation system to include the replacement of bridges. He concluded that he was not bringing these as a motion before the Board, just as a discussion.

Mr. Zimmer stated that this is not a motion on a toll, but this is a vote to move forward to open the region up to federal funding. If the vote is no on this, the funding will not be there. He shared money that has been given to New Hanover County, Pender County and Brunswick County has been more than a fair share. He agrees that the STIP process could use some improvements but it's the only option at this time. He said we must show with a vote of yes today that we are serious about replacing this bridge and getting the funds from the Federal government to do so. Mr. Zimmer brought up other projects that were voted on unanimously without politics and media coverage.

Mr. Zimmer expressed concern with changing the resolution at this point after the attorneys had already approved it.

Mr. Barfield stated this Board and others are fighting over someone else's stuff. The bridge belongs to the State of North Carolina not New Hanover County or Brunswick County. The State needs to take responsibility.

Mr. Saffo stated that if we vote yes today, it will come back as a toll option. He stated he investigated the process of tolling agencies and tolling companies. He presented the Board with a 923-page contract with a tolling project and stated that does not protect the public.

The state says we do not have enough congestion to score in the STIP, but the tolling companies can charge \$78.00 dollars one way on I-77. He expressed concern regarding the transparency of these companies in the public/private partnerships and they need to be investigated because they are taking public assets and possibly giving them to the private sector. He said he had no problem when the Turnpike Authority was created and no problem tolling a new road but states it is dead wrong to toll an existing road.

Chairman Miller stated there is still a motion on the floor to approve resolution by Mr. Zimmer and seconded by Mr. Forte.

Mr. Kozlosky proceeded with roll call vote as follows:

Ayes: Mike Allen, Lynn Barbee, John Ellen, Hank Miller, Wendy Fletcher-Hardee, Mike Forte, Bill Rivenbark and Landon Zimmer. **Nays:** Johnathan Barfield, Brenda Bozeman, Bill Saffo, Luke Waddell, and Eulis Willis.

The meeting was paused and resumed after a brief, five-minute recess. Mr. Ellen pointed out that a toll bridge has been approved in North Carolina although it has not been built yet.

b. Resolution supporting the allocation of additional Direct Attributable Funds to the Town of Belville for the Rice Hope Multi-use Path (EB-6025) and Belville Elementary Multi-use Path (EB-6026)

Mr. Kozlosky said that funds approved previously were insufficient for the bids received. He noted that the town has requested an additional \$151,839 for the Rice Hope Multi-use Path, and an additional \$394,920 for the Belville Elementary Multi-use Path. He added that the Town of Belville will provide the required 20% match. Mr. Allen explained that costs have continued to increase and that the projects have a contractor ready to begin.

Mr. Zimmer made a motion to support the additional Direct Attributable (DA) allocation for the Town of Belville multi-use paths, seconded by Mr. Willis and the motion carried unanimously.

c. Resolution supporting the move of the funding to P.E. Only for the Kerr Avenue Extension (U-6201) to provide for NCDOT's committed Economic Development funding for a project in Brunswick County

Mr. Kozlosky said that NCDOT committed \$10 million in economic incentives to a project in Brunswick County. At the time of the commitment, sufficient funding existed in the Division Tier. However, the Division needs tier now has a negative balance. He explained that the funds are being spent outside the WMPO Boundary in the RPO. Unfortunately, there are no projects in the Brunswick RPO from which to pull the funds. Although there are two projects in the Pender County RPO, pulling funding would defund those projects.

Considering that the WMPO Board asked NCDOT to re-evaluate the intersection improvements at College Road and Oleander Drive, Mr. Kozlosky said that staff reviewed the options and recommends moving Kerr Avenue Extension Project from Peachtree Avenue to Oleander Drive to PE only to make available the economic development funds.

In response to an inquiry by Chairman Miller, Mr. Kozlosky said that NCDOT provided some options, and staff came up with the Kerr Avenue Extension project to assist the Department.

Several Board members, Mr. Waddell, Mr. Saffo, and Mr. Forte (also on the RPO), expressed concerns about moving funding outside the WMPO boundary.

Mr. Kimes pointed out that the MPO has 50% of the Regional Tier funds, and Cape Fear RPO has very little division funds. He added that these jobs are for the region not just one town.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Barbee, Mr. Kimes confirmed that the funding would be coming off a project not ready to go but the money has been allocated too.

Following further discussion, Mr. Waddell made a motion to deny moving funding to P.E. only for the Kerr Avenue Extension, seconded by Ms. Bozeman.

Mr. Zimmer commented that the Board is turning down jobs in the state.

Mr. Forte expressed concern that the Board may need to apply to delegates in Raleigh about economic growth in the growing region.

Chairman Miller called the question and the motion to deny carried 11-2. (Mr. Willis and Mr. Zimmer voted "nay.")

d. Opening of the 30-day Public Comment Period for the FY 2025 Unified Planning Work Program

Mr. Kozlosky said that this item is the WMPO's budget for the coming fiscal year. He noted that the MPO is required by federal law to submit its budget to NCDOT, per the WMPO public participation policy to hold a 30-day public comment period, and have the budget approved by March 30, 2024. He gave an overview of some of the highlights of the proposed budget as follows:

- **Two new positions** – a marketing coordinator, and a grants coordinator (recommended from the organizational assessment adopted in 2023) also a reclassification of the Senior Accountant position to Accounting Manager.
- **Intelligent Transportation Systems Plan** – Recommendation from the FTA/FHWA Certification Review.
- **Non-grant eligible expenses** - \$60,000 to hire a lobbyist to advance the MPO's legislative agenda; and \$16,000 for promotional activities, these funds would be contributed by the membership relative to population.
- **10% for compensation** – final determination by the City of Wilmington, as the MPO's lead agency.
- **General operating expenses** – travel and training, professional services, etc.
- **Funding for the Safe Streets for All Grant** – awarded funding last year from USDOT to complete a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan, which carries forward and will most likely be expended in FY25.

Mr. Kozlosky displayed a table with the proposed increase in the members' shares. Mr. Forte expressed concern about a significant increase. Mr. Kozlosky responded that much of it is due to non-grant eligible expenses.

Mr. Waddell pointed out that a lobbyist would be important to advocate against tolling.

It was confirmed that the meeting is being recorded and will be available to the public.

Mr. Barfield made a motion to open the 30-day public comment period for the FY25 UPWP, seconded by Mr. Allen and the motion carried unanimously.

9) **Discussion**

a. **2024-2033 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Modifications #24-1**

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

b. **2024 Draft Legislative Agenda**

Mr. Kozlosky said that the 2023 draft Legislative Agenda has been included in today's meeting agenda for feedback from the Board members regarding any changes for the 2024 agenda. He noted that this item would be brought back for consideration at the Board's next meeting.

c. **2022-2026 Wilmington Urban Area MPO 2023 Accomplishments**

Mr. Kozlosky said that he sent out the accomplishments to the board for review. He commented that 2023 was a very successful year related to the strategic plan and requests of Board members. He noted that staff hopes to occupy the new building this year.

d. **2022-2026 Wilmington Urban Area MPO 2024 Work Plan**

Mr. Kozlosky stated that the MPO Work Plan is included in the agenda packet and was sent out in advance.

e. **WMPO Board's April Meeting Date**

Mr. Kozlosky said that Ms. Bozeman has requested that an alternate date for the Board's April meeting be considered due to a scheduling conflict with the League of Municipalities Conference.

Following a brief deliberation, Ms. Bozeman made a motion to change the date of the Board's April meeting to May 1st. Ms. Flether-Hardee seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Mr. Zimmer requested to be excused due to a scheduling conflict.

10) **Updates are all included in the Agenda Packet**

a. **Wilmington Urban Area MPO**

b. **Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority**

c. **NCDOT Division**

d. **NCDOT Transportation Planning Division**

11) **Announcements**

a. **Wilmington MPO Bike/Pedestrian Advisory Committee- February 6, 2024**

b. **MTP Technical Advisory Committee- February 15, 2024**

c. **Go Coast TDM Committee- February 15, 2024**

Mr. Kozlosky said that an Evaluation and Compensation Subcommittee meeting, as well as a Boundary, Governance, and Structure Subcommittee meeting, will be needed soon.

Chairman Miller reminded Board members about the NCDOT's Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Preservation Project website, encouraged attendance at the New Hanover County Emergency Management meeting on Tuesday and expressed appreciation for the comments and participation today. He acknowledged the new MPO Board members, Mr. Rivenbark and Mr. Saffo. He noted that he would not be present for the next meeting and expressed concern regarding the lack of a vice chairperson. Mr. Kozlosky will chair the next meeting.

12) **Next meeting – February 28, 2024**

Mr. Barfield made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:36 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.