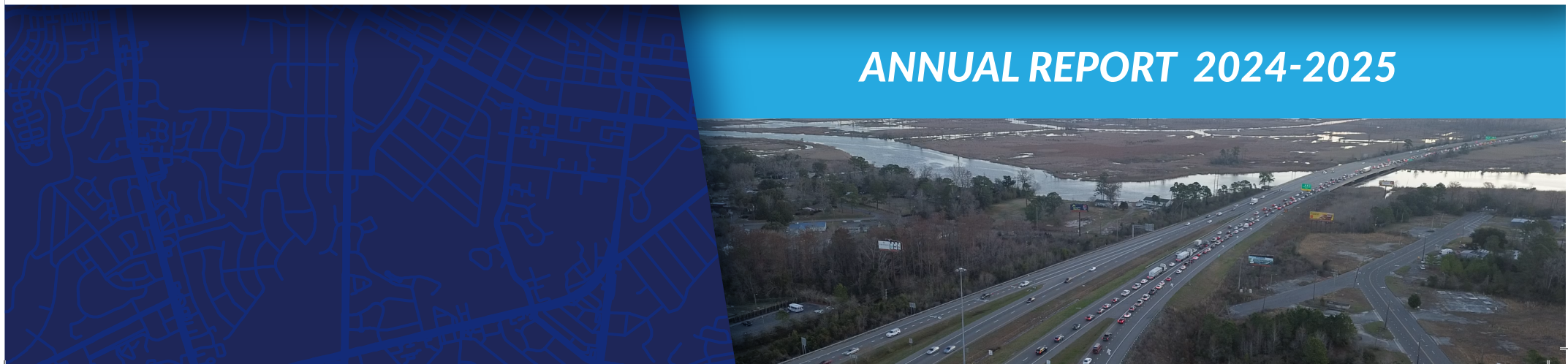


# WILMINGTON URBAN AREA

## METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

**ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025**



# ABOUT THE WMPO

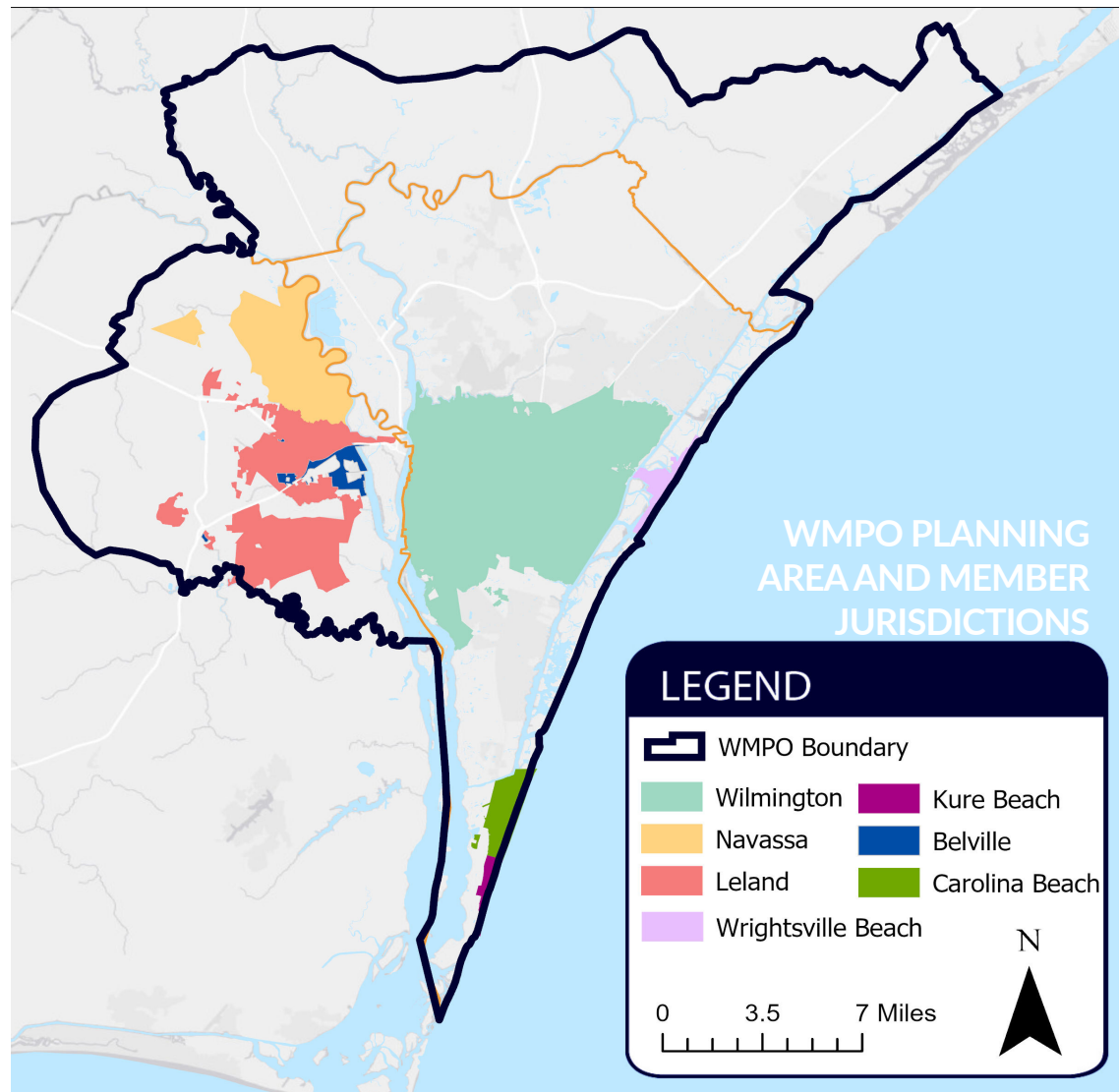
The Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) was created in the 1970's based on the region's population exceeding 50,000. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are federally mandated to conduct comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing transportation planning. This serves as the foundation for allocating federal transportation funding to regional projects.

The WMPO is recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as the official MPO for the Wilmington Urban Area. In 2012, the WMPO was designated as a Transportation Management Area (TMA) after the region's population exceeded 200,000.

The planning area covers approximately 494 square miles and includes all of New Hanover County and portions of Brunswick and Pender counties. The current population of the planning area is approximately 300,000. Member jurisdictions and organizations represented on the WMPO Board include:

- City of Wilmington
- Town of Carolina Beach
- Town of Kure Beach
- Town of Wrightsville Beach
- New Hanover County
- Town of Belville
- Town of Leland
- Town of Navassa
- Brunswick County
- Pender County
- Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
- North Carolina Board of Transportation

The members work together to guide the region's long-range transportation planning efforts, ensuring the development of a safe, efficient, and multimodal transportation system for the greater Wilmington area.



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# WMPO BOARD MEMBERS

**MISSION STATEMENT:**  
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.



Hank Miller, Chair



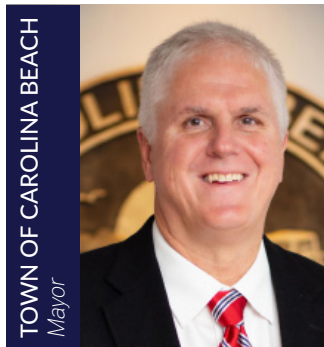
Luke Waddell, Vice Chair



Landon Zimmer



Mike Allen



Lynn Barbee



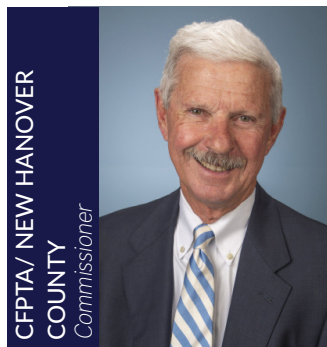
Brenda Bozeman



John Ellen



Brad George



Bill Rivenbark



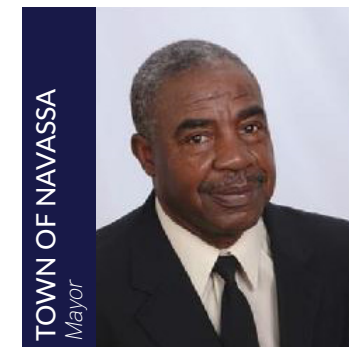
Dane Scalise



Kevin Spears



Frank Williams



Eulis Willis



# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 1, 2025

Community Stakeholders:

As we close the chapter on Fiscal Year 2025, I am encouraged by the progress that we have made during the past fiscal year. The WMPO team has done an exceptional job advancing the organization's priorities and several key initiatives that will have lasting impacts on our transportation infrastructure across the region. As Executive Director of the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, and on behalf of our Board, I am pleased to present this FY25 Annual Report. Below are some key highlights from FY25 along with a look ahead to FY26.

From the US Department of Transportation's award of \$242 million to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge to the WMPO opening our own award-winning office space, the achievements in FY25 have been numerous. The Go Coast Transportation Demand Management program has been extremely successful through events such as the Brunswick Heritage Riverside Ride, River to Sea Ride, and Be A Looker campaign. We have been working with our partners at NCDOT on several feasibility studies that have been adopted, including the Gullah Geechee Heritage Trail, Island Greenway, and Downtown Trail Phases II and III. Finally, WMPO staff have been working tirelessly on crafting Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050; the draft of which was released for public review and comment on May 28th. This plan will serve as the blueprint and foundation for our transportation network over the next 25 years.

As I reflect on the past year, I am very excited about the future of our organization and the many projects and plans underway. In addition to Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050, the WMPO is advancing several other key planning initiatives, including a Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Strategic Deployment Plan and a Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Comprehensive Safety Action Plan. A top priority remains the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, and we are committed to working with our partners at NCDOT to develop a funding strategy for replacing this aging and functionally obsolete bridge.

The future is very bright, and I look forward to the great initiatives and achievements that are on the horizon in FY26. These are very exciting times for our organization, and I am honored to be part of this MPO team committed to making FY26 another successful year.

Sincerely,

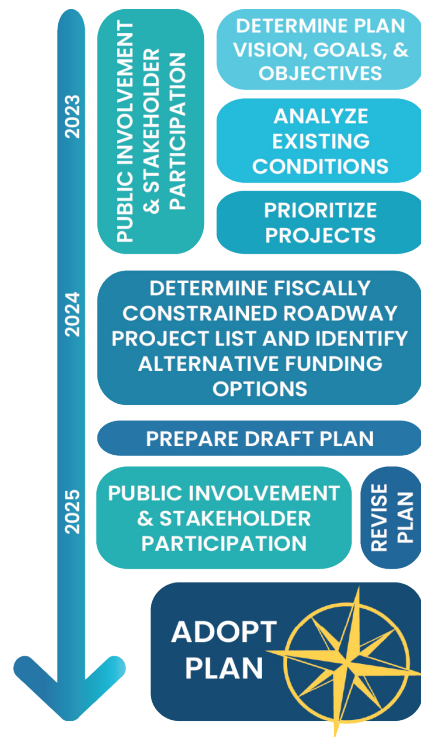
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Kozlosky', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director

# CAPE FEAR NAVIGATING CHANGE 2050

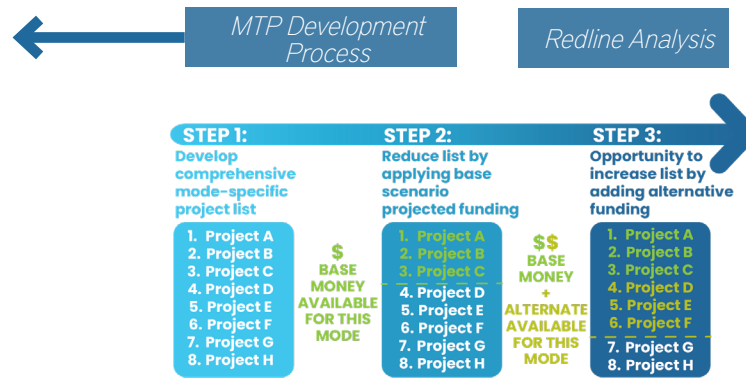
## 2050 MTP OVERVIEW

Federal law requires all metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to adopt a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and update it every five years. The MTP identifies the region's transportation needs and provides a blueprint for the next 25 years. The current WMPO MTP, Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045, was adopted in November 2020 and is due for an update by November 2025. Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 will serve as the MTP for the region once adopted. The planning process for Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 began in 2023 and continued during FY25.



## PROJECT PRIORITIZATION

As part of the continued development of Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050, the WMPO carried out a comprehensive project prioritization process to identify and rank transportation projects across five modes: bicycle and pedestrian, ferry and water transportation, public transportation, rail, and roadway. Priority projects, identified through coordination with the WMPO's member jurisdictions and planning partners, were evaluated using a data-driven scoring system developed in collaboration with the Metropolitan Transportation Plan Committee (MTPC), which included local planning staff, subject matter experts, and other stakeholders. Each project was scored out of 100 points based on how well it advanced the adopted goals and objectives of the plan. Scoring metrics were designed to be transparent, measurable, and replicable using both quantitative and qualitative data. This prioritization process helps to ensure that regional transportation investments are aligned with community goals and long-term mobility needs.



## FINANCIAL ELEMENT

Federal law requires MTPs to be fiscally constrained, meaning that projects must be achievable within anticipated funding levels. The WMPO partnered with Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. to assist in developing the financial element of the plan to include a 25-year financial forecast for anticipated transportation revenues; cost estimates for priority projects; and identification and analysis of alternative funding and financing options.

Cost estimates were developed for the priority modal projects. Estimation methods were tailored to each mode using a combination of project-specific inputs, comparable project data, and verified tools.

Establishing fiscal constraint within the MTP is a necessary step to ensure that implementation aligns with available funding and remains financially feasible. A redline analysis was conducted to achieve fiscal constraint for roadway projects based on project costs and projected revenues through 2050. Using the roadway priority project list, projects were grouped into funding bands based on cost and expected available revenues. The highest-scoring projects and those with the greatest regional impact were included in the final fiscally constrained roadway project list.

Recognizing that historical funding alone will not meet long-term transportation needs, an alternative funding analysis reviewed a wide range of mechanisms used elsewhere in North Carolina and across the country.



# CAPE FEAR NAVIGATING CHANGE 2050

## TDM OBJECTIVES AND 5-YEAR WORKPLAN DEVELOPMENT

WMPO staff continued efforts to develop the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) element of Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050. With the support and guidance of the Go Coast committee, WMPO staff hosted a set of employer commuting workshops in fall 2024 to gather feedback about regional commuting needs. In addition, staff collected various comments and takeaways from prior surveys and data from WMPO-organized bike rides to inform the development of the plan update. Using both employer and public input, as well as Go Coast committee feedback, staff drafted TDM objectives which were adopted in January 2025 by the WMPO Board. The TDM objectives were then used to draft a detailed 5-year (2026-2030) implementation plan for the TDM program, Go Coast. This implementation plan will serve as an update to the WMPO's current short-range TDM Plan, Cape Fear Change in Motion 2020, and will be included as an appendix in the 2050 MTP, anticipated for WMPO Board adoption in October 2025.



## DRAFTING THE PLAN AND PUBLIC OUTREACH PHASE II

Development efforts and outcomes for Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 were documented in a draft plan during winter and spring 2025. The draft plan brings together data analysis, regional priorities, and public input into a long-range vision for the region's multimodal transportation system through the year 2050. It outlines strategies to enhance safety, mobility, and access while meeting federal planning requirements and financial constraints.

To ensure the 2050 MTP reflects both the priorities and long-term vision of the communities it is designed to serve, the WMPO opened a 30-day public comment period in late May 2025. Throughout June 2025, WMPO staff hosted a series of in-person and virtual events across the planning area, offering community members opportunities to review draft projects, ask questions, and provide feedback. Input was also collected through an online form and direct outreach to member jurisdictions and partner organizations.

Public feedback gathered during this phase was carefully reviewed and considered in the development of the final plan.

*MTP Data Sources*

Primary Cost Estimate Data Sources	
Mode	Source(s)
Aviation	None
Bicycle and Pedestrian	NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Cost Tool
Ferry and Water Transportation	NCDOT P7
Public Transportation	NCDOT P7, Wave Short Range Transit Plan
Rail	NCDOT P7
Roadway	Kimley-Horn NC Roadway Cost Estimator Tool

*Alternative Funding Analysis*

Tax/Fee	Revenue Estimates (Rounded to the nearest million)			
	Total	New Hanover	Brunswick	Pender
Quarter-Cent Local Option Sales Tax	\$1,931	\$1,181	\$535	\$215
Quarter-Cent Local Option Sales Tax for Transit	\$1,181	\$1,181	-	-
Vehicle Registration Fee	\$68	\$68	-	-
Motor Vehicle License Tax	\$12	\$8	\$5	-
Short Term Vehicle Rental Tax	\$59	\$59	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,252</b>	<b>\$2,497</b>	<b>\$540</b>	<b>\$215</b>
Percentage by County	-	76.8%	16.6%	6.61%

# 2026-2035 MPO/STATE TIP DEVELOPMENT AND PRIORITY PROJECTS

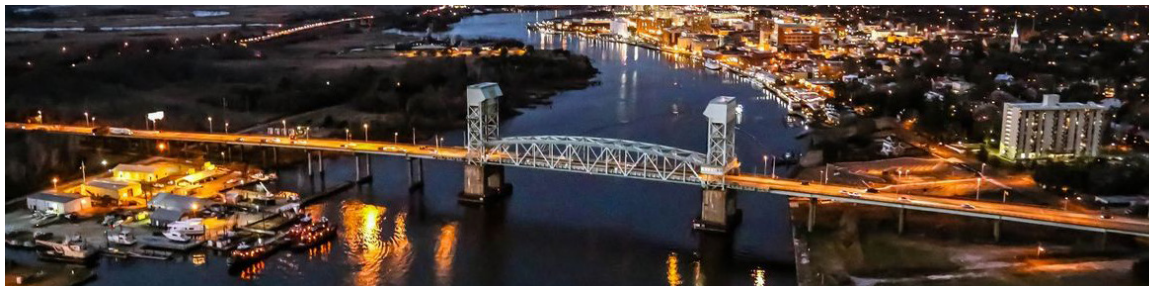
## PRIORITIZATION 7.0 LIP ASSIGNMENT

North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) Prioritization Process is a data-driven and transparent process for prioritizing and programming transportation projects for funding in the State and Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs (MPO / State TIP). Projects, based on their eligibility, are scored at Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, and Division Needs tiers. The Regional Impact and Division Needs tiers incorporate local input points (LIPs) assigned by MPOs and RPOs, as well as NCDOT Division Engineers, into the final project score. The WMPO developed a methodology in FY24 for assigning 1,600 local input points during the Regional and Division tier scoring. Application of this methodology by the WMPO began in summer 2024 with LIP assignment for Regional Impact eligible projects, and in fall 2024, a second round of local input point assignment for Division Needs eligible projects. Final project scores were released in January 2025 with the draft 2026-2035 MPO/State TIP. Final 2026-2035 MPO/State TIP was updated on June 18.

## 2026-2035 MPO/STATE TIP

The MPO/State Transportation Improvement Program (MPO/State TIP) is a 10-year transportation plan that programs the highest-scoring projects from NCDOT's Strategic Prioritization Process for funding. The draft 2026-2035 MPO/State TIP was released in January 2025 at the completion of Prioritization 7.0. Several of the priority projects identified in the WMPO's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan are included in the draft, including the Hampstead Bypass, Military Cutoff Road/Eastwood Road interchange, Independence Boulevard Extension, Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway/Kerr Avenue interchange, Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway/Market Street/Eastwood Road interchange, and Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement. In June 2025, the WMPO Board opened a 30-day public comment period for the draft 2026-2035 WMPO TIP. The WMPO adopted the the plan in August 2025.

*Cape Fear Memorial Bridge remains a top-priority project*



## CAPE FEAR MEMORIAL BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

The Cape Fear Memorial Bridge (CFMB) is a critical link for US 17/76/421 between New Hanover and Brunswick Counties in southeastern North Carolina, providing access to education, employment, cultural activities, economic development, national defense, and emergency response. Built in 1969, the four-lane lift-span bridge is functionally obsolete and currently carries over 65,000 vehicles daily, with projections reaching 94,900 by 2050. To accommodate continued growth, the bridge must be replaced as soon as possible.

In July 2024, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) was awarded a \$242 million USDOT Large Bridge Grant for the bridge replacement. The WMPO submitted the project as a toll facility for NCDOT's prioritization process, resulting in an additional \$85 million commitment, bringing total funding to \$327 million. However, NCDOT's February 2025 cost estimate of \$1.1 billion leaves a \$773 million funding gap.

On May 28, 2025 the WMPO Board voted to continue exploring all funding options, endorsed including the project as a toll facility in the 2026-2035 MPO/State Transportation Improvement Program, and supported amending Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045 to reflect the toll option. The Board reserves the right to withdraw toll approval at any time prior to construction advertisement. The WMPO remains committed to working with NCDOT to secure funding for this top-priority project.



# WMPO HIGHLIGHTS



## NEW WMPO POSITIONS

As a recommendation from the adopted 2023 Organizational Assessment, the WMPO added two additional positions to enhance communication and funding capabilities: a Public Information Officer (PIO) and a Grants Coordinator. Tessa Jones joined the WMPO in September 2024 as the organization's first PIO. In this role, Tessa leads the development and delivery of the organization's public-facing communications, including press releases, newsletters, and social media content. Tessa also manages WMPO's branding, supports regional events, oversees website and media content, and acts as the primary point of contact for public and media inquiries.

Krysdyn Burden was hired as the Grants Coordinator in December 2024 to further strengthen the WMPO's ability to pursue and manage transportation funding. In her role, Krysdyn researches and applies for competitive grants, identifies innovative funding opportunities,

and works with member jurisdictions to secure and implement project funding. She is responsible for tracking grant performance and compliance, ensuring funds are managed efficiently and effectively. Together, these new positions reflect the WMPO's commitment to strategic growth, improved public transparency, and proactive planning for the future.



## NCDOT BICYCLE HELMET INITIATIVE GRANT AWARD

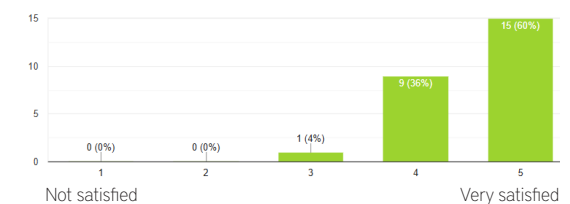
In February 2025, the WMPO applied to NCDOT's Bicycle Helmet Initiative grant. This program provides grantees up to 100 children's bicycle helmets intended for distribution to children from low-income families. In early May 2025, the WMPO received 100 children's bicycle helmets of assorted sizes and plans to continue outreach and event participation in summer and fall of 2025 to distribute the helmets to the community.

## WMPO MEMBER SURVEY

The WMPO continued efforts to improve transparency, engagement, and performance, by conducting its second annual member survey. The 10-minute survey was open throughout April 2025 and received 25 responses from the Board and TCC Members, local government staff, and transportation partners. The survey gathered feedback on the effectiveness of WMPO planning efforts, communication, regional coordination, and overall performance. Respondents were also asked to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Initial results from the 2025 survey indicated increased satisfaction with the performance of the WMPO and stronger alignment between organizational decisions and member needs. Compared to the 2024 survey, there was an increased interest in improving access to technical data, training, and tools to support decision-making, demonstrating continued progress in areas of organizational growth. These insights will guide internal improvements and inform future initiatives.

*Overall, how satisfied are you with the performance of the WMPO? Responses below.*



# WMPO HIGHLIGHTS

## BOARD AND TCC JOINT MEETING

The WMPO Board and Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) held their annual joint work session on June 25, 2025, continuing an effort first recommended in the 2023 Organizational Assessment to strengthen collaboration and communication between the two bodies. The agenda included the debut of a new WMPO explainer video and a presentation by staff summarizing results from the 2025 Annual Organizational Survey. The session provided an opportunity for discussion and reflection on organizational progress. Members of both committees expressed appreciation for the dedicated time to engage across roles and perspectives. The WMPO plans to continue holding these joint sessions annually to foster transparency, coordination, and informed decision-making.

*Joint meeting of WMPO Board and TCC underway*



## WMPO NEWSLETTER

To strengthen transparency and connect more consistently with the public and partner agencies, the WMPO launched its first email newsletter in January 2025. What began as a quarterly update quickly grew into a monthly publication, now reaching more than 11,000 contacts. Each issue reflects on the month past and previews what's ahead, featuring upcoming events, outreach efforts, staff spotlights, and updates on WMPO initiatives. The newsletter offers readers a clear view into the work happening behind the scenes and throughout the community. The newsletter has quickly become one of WMPO's signature communication tools, delivering timely, relevant, and accessible information each month.

## FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION UPDATE

Following each decennial census and adjustments to Urban Area boundaries, a review and update to the federal roadway functional classification is required to ensure roadways are accurately categorized based on how they function within the broader transportation network. The functional classification of a roadway directly correlates to the federal funding eligibility of the facility. In spring 2025, the WMPO, in coordination with NCDOT and FHWA, began reviewing the functional classification of roadways within its planning boundary. Draft changes to the classifications were identified and sent to NCDOT and FHWA for review and comment. The WMPO will work with NCDOT and FHWA to incorporate or address any comments, with a final approval by the WMPO Board required in fall 2025. The final FHWA approval for updated functional classifications is targeted for December 29, 2025.

*WMPO meets regularly with local planning staff*





# WMPO HIGHLIGHTS

## LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The WMPO Board adopts a legislative agenda on an annual basis that outlines their legislative priorities. The currently adopted WMPO Legislative Agenda outlines the WMPO Board's 2025 priorities that include transportation funding; transportation funding for drainage improvements; transportation priority project- Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement; opposition to the transfer of state road maintenance; limitation on city requirements for street improvements related to schools; and moped, electric scooter, and electric assisted bicycle legislation. The WMPO has contracted with Maynard Nexsen to advance the Board's legislative priorities.

A WMPO legislative priority surrounds the use of electric assisted bicycles. The Wilmington Urban Area MPO supports the use of electric assisted bicycles to provide an alternative mode of transportation when utilized in a safe and responsible manner. The MPO encouraged the North Carolina General Assembly to implement legislation defining e-bicycle subclasses and identifying that the locations of permissible use of electric assisted bicycles should be subject to local government control. NC Senate Bill 576 E-bike Definition and Local Control was introduced in the 2025-2026 session by Senator Lee, Senator Lazzara (primary) and Senator Moffitt on March 25, 2025. The bill was approved by the NC Senate's State and Local Government Committee and was referred to the NC Senate's Committee on Transportation where it currently resides.

## FEDERAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), signed into law in November 2021, is set to expire at the end of the 2026 federal fiscal year, which is September 30, 2026. Congress has already begun working to craft the next surface transportation reauthorization bill. The US House of Representatives Transportation & Infrastructure Committee opened a portal to accept priorities. The WMPO submitted the following priorities into this portal:

- Increase Funding for Important Transportation Initiatives
- Replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization (AMPO) Priorities:

- Increase Planning Funds to Meet Federal Planning Requirements
- MPOs Becoming Direct Recipients for Certain Federal Funds
- Reducing Local Match for Federal Transportation Programs
- Allowing for Carryover of Federal Funds
- Shifting Certain Discretionary Funding to Formula Funding.

WMPO Staff attended the AMPO Fly In, held during National Infrastructure Week, in Washington, D.C. on May 13th and 14th. During this time, WMPO staff met with the offices of Senator Tillis, Senator Budd, Representative

Rouzer, and Representative Knott to educate our North Carolina Congressional Delegation on these priorities for the next Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill. WMPO staff will continue to work to educate and advance these priorities in the next federal transportation bill.

## ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SUBCOMMITTEE

The WMPO is required to update its Metropolitan Transportation Plan every 5 years, and the plan is required to be fiscally constrained. In most cases, the cost to implement priority projects exceeds the funding available in the financial forecast, creating a gap between the needs for the region and available resources. In these cases, alternative funding can be used to help close that gap. As part of Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050, the WMPO considered several alternative funding sources as additional revenue generators that would help to close this gap and accelerate much-needed transportation investments. Instead of selecting one or two of these potential alternative funding sources, the WMPO Board indicated a desire to retain all the potential funding options in the plan. To build upon the work from Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050, the WMPO Board created an Alternative Funding Subcommittee to further investigate potential alternative funding methods that could be used in the Wilmington region to advance priority transportation investments.

# WMPO HIGHLIGHTS



*Project team members accepting 2024 Mobi Award*

## 2024 MOBI AWARDS

The WMPO and City of Wilmington were awarded the 2024 NCDOT Mobi Award in the Large Urban Category for their work on Park Avenue Multiuse Trail Phase II, located in Wilmington, in October 2024. Completed in 2022, the one-mile off-road multiuse trail links Empie Park to Kerr Avenue, featuring marked crosswalks, curb ramps, seven street crossings, and two pedestrian bridges. As part of the River to Sea Bikeway, the trail follows the Historic Beach Car Line which connects Wilmington to Wrightsville Beach. The trail provides safe and accessible routes for residents to reach homes, businesses, and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW). The project was funded with Surface Transportation Block Grant funding awarded by the WMPO in 2013 with local matching funds provided by the City of Wilmington. The trail has become a vital part of the city's growing network of biking and walking paths.

## FY26 UPWP

As a federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Wilmington Urban Area MPO (WMPO) is required to develop and submit a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) by March 31st of each year. Adopted on March 26, 2025, the FY26 UPWP outlines transportation planning activities WMPO expects to carry out through June 30, 2026, and serves as the WMPO's annual budget, detailing the use of federal, state, and local funding to support this work.

The WMPO receives funding from several Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) programs, including PL 104(f), the Safe & Accessible Transportation Options Set Aside (SATO/Y410), the Surface Transportation Block Grant – Direct Attributable (STBG-DA), and the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program. Along with in-house planning and operations, these funds support a range of transportation planning-related special studies, such as the development of the WMPO's 2027–2031 Strategic Plan, Safe & Accessible Transportation initiatives, compensation analysis, and a comprehensive, region-wide Safe Streets and Roads for All Plan. In addition to grant funds, the WMPO utilizes Local Member contributions to help support public outreach efforts, non-grant funded operational needs, and—starting in Fiscal Year 2026—a new Pilot Grant Assistance Program to support local governments when applying for transportation grants.

## TARGETS FOR SAFETY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Each year, the WMPO adopts safety performance targets in coordination with NCDOT, as required by federal transportation regulations. In January 2025, the WMPO Board endorsed the state's safety targets, which are based on five-year rolling averages and focus on reducing the number and rate of fatalities and serious injuries, including those involving pedestrians and bicyclists. By agreeing to support and plan for the achievement of these statewide goals, the WMPO helps guide transportation investments that improve safety transportation investments that improve safety outcomes across the region.

*Mike uses an interactive map during outreach*





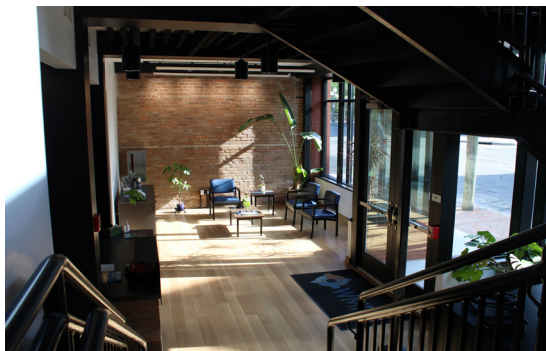
# 525 N. 4TH STREET



*525 N. 4th Street, circa 1960*



*525 N. 4th Street, 2025*



*Renovated lobby at 525 N. 4th Street*

## WMPO HEADQUARTERS: NEWLY RENOVATED AND READY

In fall 2024, the WMPO officially moved into its first standalone office at 525 N. Fourth Street in Wilmington's Brooklyn Arts District. The relocation marked the completion of a long-planned transition from 305 Chestnut to the Skyline Center, and finally to a permanent home in a building rich with history. Originally constructed in 1894 as the Thomas Grocery Company, the structure underwent a \$5.4 million restoration beginning in August 2022 funded in partnership with NCDOT, the City of Wilmington, and New Hanover County. This project also completed Phase 1B of the Wilmington Multimodal Center. On October 30, 2024, the WMPO celebrated the building's reopening with a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by Board members, elected officials, member jurisdiction staff, planning partners, and community supporters.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD

In recognition of the building's thoughtful restoration and design, the WMPO was honored with a 2025 Preservation Award from the Historic Wilmington Foundation in the Adaptive Reuse category. The award celebrates the transformation of the former grocery store-turned furniture store into a modern, functional office space that preserves the building's architectural character and ties to the community's past.



*Board members and staff cut the ribbon*



*Staff giving tours during the Open House*



*Accepting the Preservation Award*



# 2025 NCAMPO CONFERENCE

The Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) proudly served as host for the 2025 North Carolina Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (NCAMPO) Conference, welcoming over 500 transportation professionals from across the state. Held at Hotel Ballast in downtown Wilmington, the event provided a platform for collaboration, innovation, and professional development among planners, engineers, local officials, and transportation advocates.

The multi-day conference kicked off with a lively Opening Reception at the historic Brooklyn Arts Center. Over the following days, participants took part in a variety of breakout sessions focused on key topics such as innovative planning and design, funding strategies and opportunities, and data-driven decision making. These sessions sparked conversation and highlighted best practices from MPOs and transportation partners across North Carolina.

Five mobile tours offered attendees the chance to experience the Wilmington region's transportation assets and ongoing initiatives firsthand. From exploring regional trails by bike to riding the ferry across the Cape Fear River, each tour showcased our area's multimodal transportation and infrastructure. The conference also featured a keynote address by Wes Marshall, author of *Killed by a Traffic Engineer*, who spoke about the consequences of traditional street design and the need to prioritize safety in future planning.



Staff at NCAMPO



## MOBILE TOURS OFFERED:

WILMINGTON'S ICONIC TRAILS  
BIKE RIDE

SOUTHPORT TO FORT FISHER FERRY  
& KURE BEACH BIKE RIDE

TAKING OFF: A TOUR OF ILM'S  
EXPANDING FACILITIES

WILMINGTON'S RAILROAD ROOTS

NORTHERN BRUNSWICK COUNTY'S  
MULTIMODAL EFFORTS IN PLANNING



Welcome



Wilmington's Iconic Trails Bike Ride



Keynote Session

# LONG-RANGE PLANNING EFFORTS

## SAFE STREETS AND ROADS FOR ALL

The federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) discretionary program, established through the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), provides grant funding for planning, infrastructure, behavioral, and operational initiatives to prevent death and serious injury on roads and streets for all road users. The WMPO applied for and was awarded an FY23 planning grant to develop a regional Comprehensive Safety Action Plan. During FY25, the WMPO finalized the funding agreement with the Federal Highway Administration and procured a consultant, Kittelson and Associates, through a competitive process. Plan development efforts kicked off in March 2025 and included the identification of a steering committee and first meeting; the development of the plan's vision, goals, and leadership commitment; and the development of an appropriate public engagement strategy. Next steps of the plan's development will include crash data analysis and the identification of a regional High Injury Network (HIN) and extensive community input to identify significant safety risks which inform recommended countermeasures, strategies, and policies. The final plan is anticipated in October 2026.



## FEASIBILITY STUDIES UPDATES

In July 2022, the NC General Assembly allocated \$2 million to the NCDOT for a Paved Trails and Sidewalks Feasibility Study Grant Program, aimed at enhancing the pipeline for bicycle and pedestrian projects seeking state and federal funding. The WMPO received funding from this program to conduct two feasibility studies for the Downtown Trail Phases II and III in Wilmington and the Gullah Geechee Heritage Trail in northern Brunswick County. The WMPO also supported and was a key stakeholder in a feasibility study for the Island Greenway in Kure Beach, also funded through the Paved Trails and Sidewalks Grant.



### ISLAND GREENWAY FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Island Greenway Feasibility Study was completed through partnership between the Town of Kure Beach and NCDOT's Integrated Mobility Division (IMD). The study explored options for about four miles of paved trail and/or bike boulevard from the southern terminus of the existing Island Greenway to the Fort Fisher Ferry Terminal as part of the East Coast Greenway. The WMPO participated on the project's steering committee and assisted in public involvement efforts. The final report, adopted in early FY25, provides a recommended alignment for the trail and includes an implementation plan to guide future efforts.



*Map of Cedar Hill ca. 1874 at Reaves Chapel*

## GULLAH GEECHEE HERITAGE TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Gullah Geechee Heritage Trail Feasibility Study assessed the feasibility of constructing a multiuse path in the Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor from Phoenix Park in Navassa to Brunswick Nature Park in Brunswick County. The Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor is designated as a Cultural Heritage Area by U.S. Congress, presenting an opportunity to educate the public about the history of the Gullah Geechee people and highlight historical sites within Brunswick County. The study was developed with the help of consultant Kittelson and Associates and included two public outreach phases and several steering committee meetings. The final study report was released in August 2024, and WMPO staff presented findings to the WMPO Board and four Brunswick County member jurisdictions later in FY25 before requesting consideration by governing boards for adoption. The study was formally adopted in winter 2025.



# LONG-RANGE PLANNING EFFORTS

## DOWNTOWN TRAIL PHASES II & III FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Downtown Trail will connect the River to Sea Bikeway to the future Multimodal Transportation Center, Cape Fear Community College, and the downtown Wilmington Riverwalk. The Downtown Trail consists of three phases; Phase I proposed from 3rd Street in Downtown Wilmington, paralleling the former rail corridor, and through the Northside and Love Grove Communities to the Love Grove Bridge; Phase II proposed to cross Burnt Mill Creek at Archie Blue Park and parallel the creek to Market Street; and Phase III proposed to continue paralleling Burnt Mill Creek to terminate at Forest Hills Elementary School. Phase I of the trail is funded for engineering and design. During FY25, the WMPO continued work on the development of the feasibility study for Phases II and III. Activities included additional public outreach and review of the final recommendations and report. The WMPO Board adopted the feasibility study in June 2025.

*A planned path for Downtown Trail Phases II & III*



## MODEL TRAIL LIGHTING POLICY

Through the direction and recommendations of the WMPO's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), the WMPO developed a model trail lighting policy to serve as a starting point for member jurisdictions evaluating lighting needs along greenways and multiuse paths. Approved by the WMPO Board in March 2025, the policy outlines recommended locations for lighting such as intersections, trailheads, and areas with frequent nighttime use. It also provides guidance on lighting design that supports safety, user comfort, and long-term maintenance while minimizing environmental impacts. Rather than prescribing fixed requirements, the policy is meant to serve as a helpful tool that jurisdictions can use and modify to fit their specific conditions and priorities.

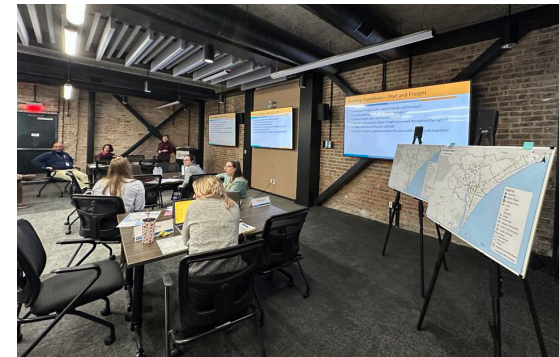
*Solar lamp post along the Cross City Trail*



## REGIONAL ITS PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The WMPO, in partnership with NCDOT, began development of an update to the Wilmington region's Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Plan in January 2025 to enhance the use of technology in transportation across the region. The plan assesses the Wilmington region's existing ITS infrastructure, identifies future needs, and outlines regional architecture that promotes coordination among local governments, state agencies, and transit providers. Focus areas of the plan include traffic signal improvements, real-time traveler information, and integrated transit technologies. The WMPO's efforts have included participation in core team meetings, regional workshops, and one-on-one stakeholder discussions to gather input. The plan is on track to be completed in July 2025 with adoption by the WMPO Board anticipated in August 2025.

*The WMPO hosts an ITS core team meeting*





# LONG-RANGE PLANNING EFFORTS

## LOCAL PLANNING INVOLVEMENT

The WMPO supported several local transportation planning efforts by member jurisdictions in FY25, including two bicycle and pedestrian plans which were funded through NCDOT's Integrated Mobility Division's (IMD) Multimodal Planning Program: the 2025 Carolina Beach Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and the 2024 Wrightsville Beach Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Recommendations from both plans were incorporated into the WMPO's draft Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) and are supported by inclusion in the draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

*Cover pages of local Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans*



## WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH & CAROLINA BEACH BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN PLANS

WMPO staff participated on the steering committees for both the 2024 Wrightsville Beach and 2025 Carolina Beach Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans. Development of the Wrightsville Beach plan began in March 2023 and concluded with adoption by the WMPO Board in September 2024. For the Carolina Beach plan, which kicked off in February 2024 and was adopted in June 2025, staff supported public engagement by reviewing documents and drafts and attending public meetings and events.

*Pedestrians and bicyclists frequent local MUPs*



## LELAND PLANS

The WMPO also continued support for the development of the Town of Leland's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Comprehensive Safety Action Plan and the kickoff of the town's first Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP).

### SS4A

The Town of Leland completed development of a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan in FY25 with funding through the SS4A grant program. The plan analyzes existing conditions and trends to inform strategies that improve transportation safety and prevent serious roadway crashes. The WMPO participated as a member of the plan's steering committee, providing input during plan development, promoting outreach efforts, and attending public engagement opportunities. The WMPO Board adopted Leland's Comprehensive Safety Action Plan in June 2025. The plan's recommendations will be incorporated into the WMPO's regional Safety Action Plan that is in development.

### IMP

Additionally, the Town of Leland began the development of their Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP) in FY25, with the WMPO serving on its steering committee. The IMP will update and incorporate existing land use and transportation plans that focus on the future transportation network, identifying projects, policies, and actions to be implemented over the next 25 years within the town. This plan is expected to be completed and adopted in FY26.

# 2025 BE A LOOKER CAMPAIGN

## BE A LOOKER

Watch for Bikes and Pedestrians



It only takes a few seconds to Be A Looker!



Go Coast continued the biennial *Be A Looker* campaign in 2025, which promotes safety messages for people who bike, walk, and drive in the region on how to share the road. The campaign runs from April through October 2025 to align with the warmer months, when more people are bicycling and walking, visitor traffic increases, and the annual Get There Greener challenge takes place in October. In April, May, and June of 2025, WMPO staff participated in five events promoting Be A Looker:

- City of Wilmington Health Fair
- UNCW Tabling
- Tune Up and Tunes
- Summer Safety Bash
- Annual FIRES Event

The campaign received over 110 Be a Looker pledges. At these events, staff also distributed children's bicycle helmets received from NCDOT's Bicycle Helmet Initiative, branded bicycle keychains, as well as bicycle safety gear including bike lights and bike bells.

*Staff participated in many outreach events (Clockwise from Top Left): Summer Safety Bash, UNCW Tabling, FIRES, Tune Up & Tunes*



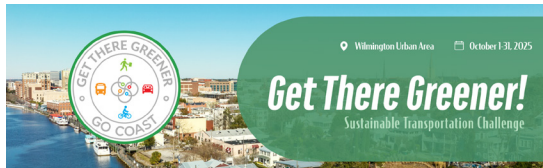


# TDM HIGHLIGHTS

## 2024 GET THERE GREENER CHALLENGE

Go Coast's annual Get There Greener challenge encourages sustainable transportation usage during the month of October and replacing single-occupancy vehicle trips with bicycling, carpooling, walking, public transportation, or teleworking. Participants can log their miles traveled by alternative transportation to win prizes donated by local businesses. In October 2024, participants tracked 2,753 miles by alternative transportation for a total of 1,101kg of greenhouse gas savings (as compared to if these miles were traveled by single-occupancy vehicle). Prizes donated by local businesses, totaling \$675 in value, were awarded to top participants.

*Go Coast celebrates alternative transportation*



## BRUNSWICK HERITAGE RIVERSIDE RIDE

The 4th Annual Brunswick Heritage Riverside Ride took place Saturday, September 28, 2024. This 16-mile, casual-paced ride travels along the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor in northeastern Brunswick County, beginning in Phoenix Park in Navassa to the Riverwalk Park in Belville, and back. In 2024, 74 riders participated in the event.

### *4th Annual Brunswick Heritage Riverside Ride*



## RIVER TO SEA BIKE RIDE

The 35th Annual River to Sea Bike Ride took place Saturday, May 3, 2025. This 20-mile, casual-paced ride travels along the River to Sea Bikeway from downtown Wilmington to Wrightsville Beach and back. The River to Sea Bikeway follows the route of the historic Wilmington Beach Car Line that carried visitors between the Wilmington Riverfront and Wrightsville Beach. Approximately 400 riders participated in the event. The WMPO also invited sponsors to support this year's ride, with 10 local businesses and organizations contributing to offset ride costs to keep the ride free for all participants.

## BIKE MONTH 2025

Go Coast promotes National Bike Month annually in May and encourages cyclists to log their bike miles to document public interest in bicycling and the importance of bicycling to the community. This year, 39 participants logged 3,622 miles by bike during the month of May 2025.

Additional Bike Month activities included proclamations from the WMPO Board, Town of Carolina Beach, Town of Kure Beach, New Hanover County, City of Wilmington, Town of Leland, and Town of Navassa. WMPO staff co-organized two new events to celebrate Bike Month, promote safety, and distribute children's helmets. The first, Tune Up and Tunes, was held at Special Pedals on May 17, 2025. The second event, Summer Safety Bash, was held May 23, 2025, and was planned with the City of Wilmington Fire Department and the Boys & Girls Club of Southeastern North Carolina.

### *Cyclists participate in the River to Sea Bike Ride*





# TECHNICAL SERVICES

The WMPO provides the following technical services:

- Development Review
- Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) Review
- Traffic Counts
- Project Management Assistance
- Management of the Direct Attributable Program

The following development reviews, TIA reviews, and traffic counts were completed during FY 2024-2025:

## 978 DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

Throughout FY24-25, WMPO staff reviewed site plans, subdivision plans, rezoning requests, and special/conditional use permits with the City of Wilmington, New Hanover County, Town of Leland, and Pender County. Plans were reviewed to ensure proposed developments are in accordance with current development regulations and policies, and required improvements to the roadway network are implemented. Additionally, staff attended Technical Review Committee (TRC) meetings to discuss comments and questions directly with our member jurisdictions and the applicants. Staff completed:

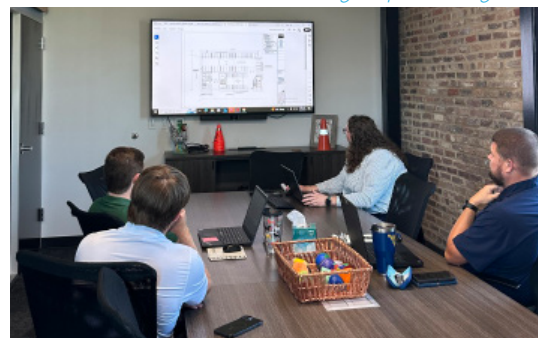
- 234 informal reviews
- 3 concept plan reviews
- 741 site development reviews

## 66 TIA REVIEWS

A Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) assesses potential impacts to the transportation network and outlines mitigation measures to facilitate safe and efficient movement of traffic on the surrounding roadway network when a new development is proposed. A TIA is required when new developments generate 100 or more AM or PM peak hour trips within the City of Wilmington, New Hanover County, Pender County, Town of Leland, Town of Belville, Town of Carolina Beach, and Brunswick County.

The WMPO, NCDOT, and staff from our member jurisdictions review all TIA deliverables for completeness and accuracy. Upon approval, the outlined mitigation efforts and improvements are required. The WMPO, NCDOT, and staff from our member jurisdictions use the TIA approval letter as a reference document to ensure all improvements to the roadway network are implemented through the plan review and driveway access permits process.

*Caitlin leads a TIA review group meeting*



## 459 TRAFFIC COUNTS

The WMPO collects traffic counts at selected locations throughout the region on an annual basis. Member jurisdictions may also request special traffic counts for specific projects and roadways. Traffic counts are used to determine traffic volumes, speeds, travel time counts, and bicycle and pedestrian volumes. The traffic data is collected and can be viewed on our website. In FY24-25 there were 459 traffic counts taken:

- 338 Annual Counts
- 121 Special Request Counts

*Greg is in the field, placing traffic counters*



# WMPO LOCALLY ADMINISTERED PROJECTS PROGRAM

## FY25 LOCALLY ADMINISTERED PROJECTS PROGRAM AWARDED PROJECTS

In 2012, the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) was designated as a Transportation Management Area (TMA) because the urban area population exceeded 200,000 in the 2010 Decennial Census. With the TMA designation, the WMPO has additional federal reporting requirements as well as became a direct recipient for Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG), Transportation Alternatives set-aside (TASA), and Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) funds to be awarded to local projects through the organization's own competitive application process.

The Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP) is the WMPO's funding program for distributing the annual allocation of Surface Transportation Block Grant, Transportation Alternatives, and Carbon Reduction funds. The WMPO issued a call for LAPP applications on July 5, 2024, with a deadline for submittal of September 13, 2024. A total of nine complete applications were received and evaluated based on the WMPO's adopted scoring process. The following were awarded funding:

17th Street MUP - City of Wilmington  
Requested Amount: \$2,400,000

Gullah Geechee Trail Gap - Town of Belville  
Requested Amount: \$720,000

Country Club Drive MUP Design - Pender Co.  
Requested Amount: \$886,000

Total sum of FY25 awards: \$4,006,000

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUESTS

During FY25, additional funding requests for three previously funded WMPO LAPP projects were received. Each request included commitment from the local jurisdiction's governing board for the 20% local matching funds. The WMPO Board approved additional funding for the following projects:

In October 2024, New Hanover County received an additional \$705,512 in direct attributable funding for the BL-0040 Middle Sound Loop and Porters Neck Walmart Connector project. The need for additional funding resulted from unanticipated utility conflicts that ultimately delayed the completion of the project's design, resulting in increased construction cost estimates.

In February 2025, the Town of Belville received an additional \$62,640 in direct attributable funding for the EB-6025 Rice Hope Multiuse Path and EB-6026 Belville Elementary School Multiuse Path projects. The request resulted from the identification of unknown underground utilities found during the project's construction, necessitating additional design and permitting work.

In March 2025, the City of Wilmington received an additional \$431,200 in direct attributable funding for the BL-0045 Downtown Trail Phase I Design project. Necessary coordination with NCDOT Rail Division and CSX for the alignment of the future trail resulted in the identification of new design elements, requiring additional funding to complete the project.

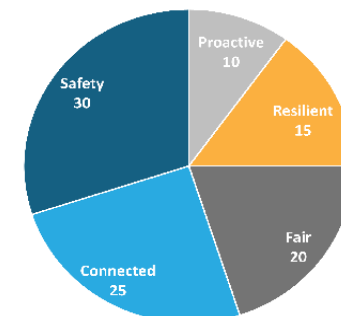
## CHANGES TO THE WMPO LOCALLY ADMINISTERED PROJECT PROGRAM (LAPP) AND WORKPLAN

The WMPO uses the Locally Administered Project Program (LAPP) to distribute its yearly funding from the Surface Transportation Block Grant, Transportation Alternatives, and Carbon Reduction programs. In the past, the LAPP was conducted annually and allocated funds for one federal fiscal year (FY). The LAPP will now take place biennially and will program funds for five federal fiscal years.

To assist members in the application process, WMPO staff held a pre-submittal meeting and provide a revised Submittal Guide and Scoring Rubric, which will offer clearer guidance for submitting applications. A provided Inflation and Contingency Calculator will also help members account for rising project costs when requesting funding.

The call for projects was released on July 7, 2025, and follows these new guidelines and program funds for FY26 through FY30.

*The pie chart shows how the LAPP is scored*



# DA PROJECT STATUS LIST

## STBG-DA AND TASA-DA PROJECTS COMPLETED OR IN DEVELOPMENT

There are currently 24 projects receiving Direct Attributable funding. These projects are at various stages of planning, design, right-of-way acquisition, bidding, or construction. Three projects were completed during the FY24-25 year.

### PLANNING

- Gullah Geechee Heritage Trail Gap **(BL-0153)**
- Country Club Drive MUP **(BL-0154)**
- Wave Passenger Amenities and Upgrades Phase I **(TC-0021)**
- Wave Passenger Amenities and Upgrades Phase II **(TC-0027)**
- Belville Elementary School & River Walk Park NC133 Traffic Safety Improvements **(HL-0131)**

### DESIGN

- St. Joseph Multimodal Improvements **(U-6039)**
- Downtown Greenway Phase I Design **(BL-0045)**
- Ogden Park/Middle Sound Loop Connector **(EB-6027)**
- North College Road Pedestrian Improvements **(BL-0118)**
- S 17th Street MUP **(EB-5600)**
- Fort Fisher Blvd/K Ave and N 3rd St Pedestrian Safety Improvements **(BL-0059)**
- North Gate Design and NEPA Work **(HL-0040)**
- S 3rd St/Ann St Installation of Traffic Signal **(HL-0109)**
- S 3rd St/Orange St Installation of Traffic Signal **(HL-0110)**
- Wilmington Signal Preemption **(U-6235)**

### RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITION

- Navassa Park MUP **(U-5534U)**
- Monkey Junction Pedestrian Improvement Project MUP **(W-5703C)**
- US 17/Olde Waterford Rd/Ploof Rd Pedestrian Crossing **(BL-0074)**

### BIDDING

- Hooker Road MUP **(U-5534G)**
- Hinton Avenue MUP **(U-5534H)**
- Middle Sound Loop Greenway Extension and Walmart Connector **(BL-0040)**
- Wrightsville Ave/Greenville Ave to Hinton Ave Intersection and Multi-Modal Improvements **(U-5534C)**

### CONSTRUCTION

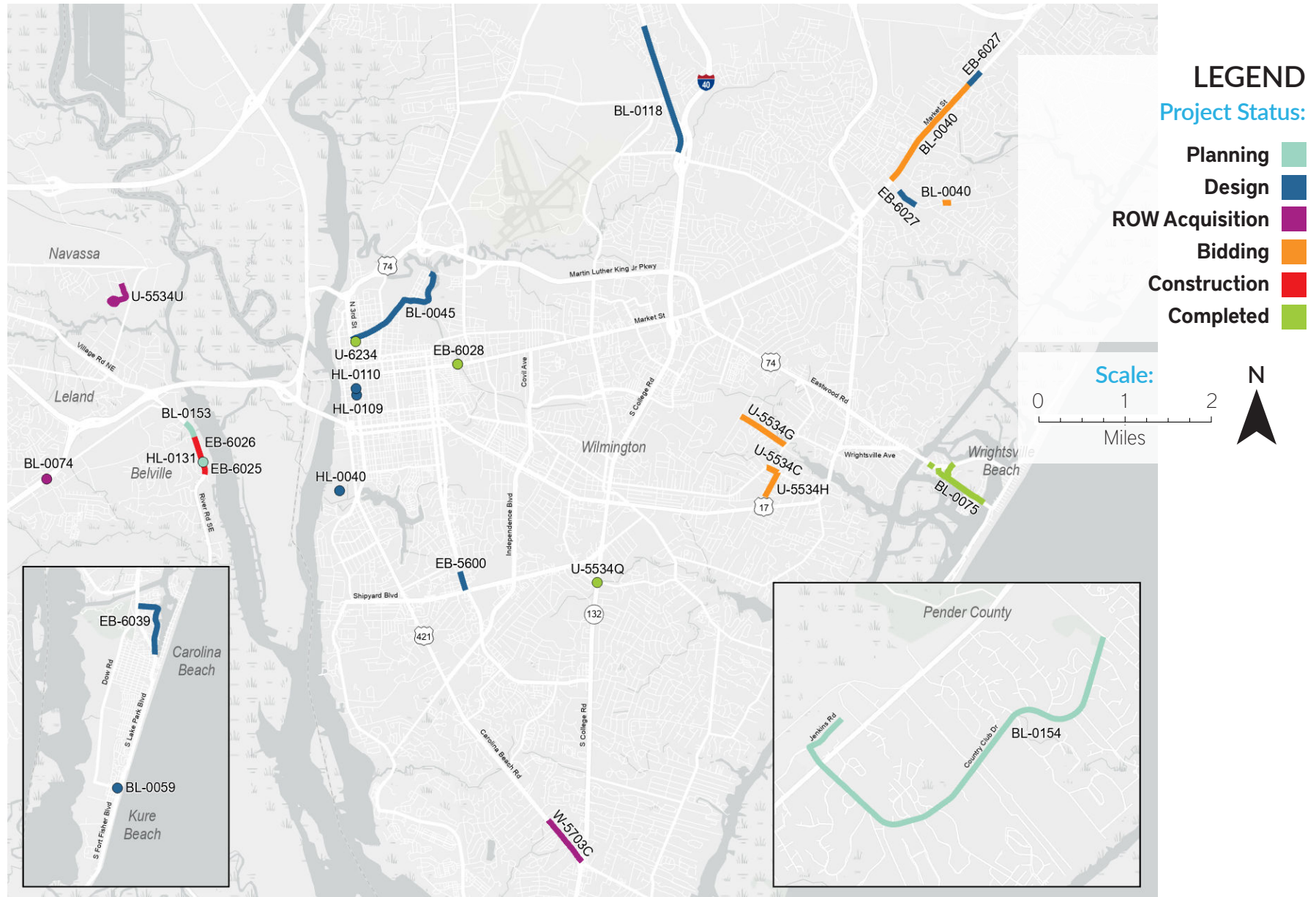
- Belville Elementary MUP **(EB-6026)**
- Rice Hope MUP **(EB-6025)**

### COMPLETE

- S College Rd and Holly Tree Rd Crosswalks **(U-5534Q)**
- Market St and 21st St Hawk Signal **(EB-6028)**
- Wrightsville Beach Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements **(BL-0075)**



# WMPO DIRECT ATTRIBUTABLE PROGRAM







## WILMINGTON URBAN AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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