



1 *Introduction*

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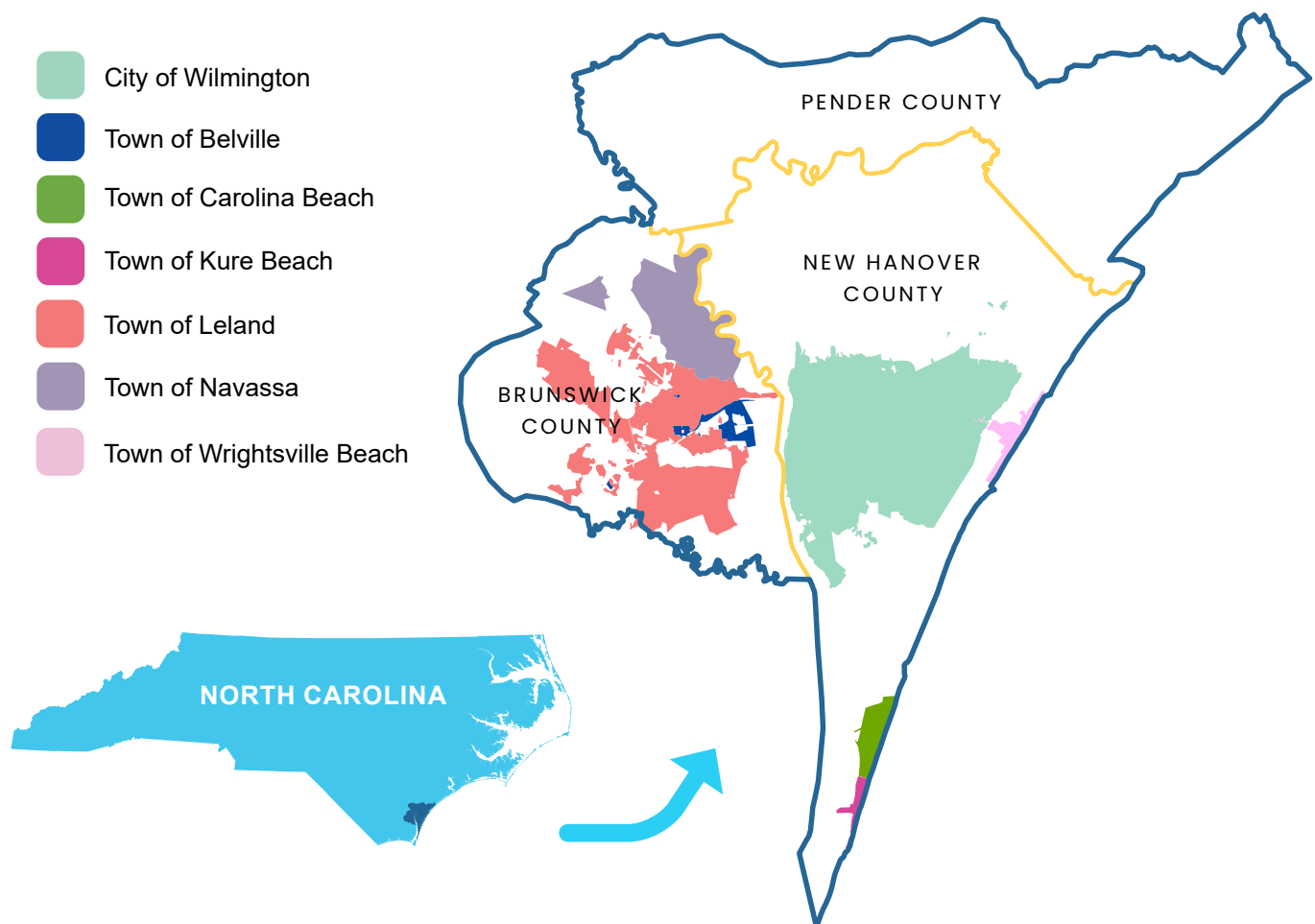
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What is an MPO?

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are federally designated regional transportation planning agencies that are responsible for conducting regional transportation planning in a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive manner. MPOs were introduced by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 and are required to represent localities in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000. The Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) is the MPO recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for the Wilmington Urban Area.

A 13-member Board of Directors sets the policy and direction for the region and consists of representatives from the City of Wilmington, the Town of Wrightsville Beach, the Town of Carolina Beach, the Town of Kure Beach, the Town of Belville, the Town of Leland, the Town of Navassa, New Hanover County, Brunswick County, Pender County, the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). The WMPO's planning area is approximately 494-square miles and encompasses all of New Hanover County and portions of Brunswick and Pender Counties.

WMPO Boundary

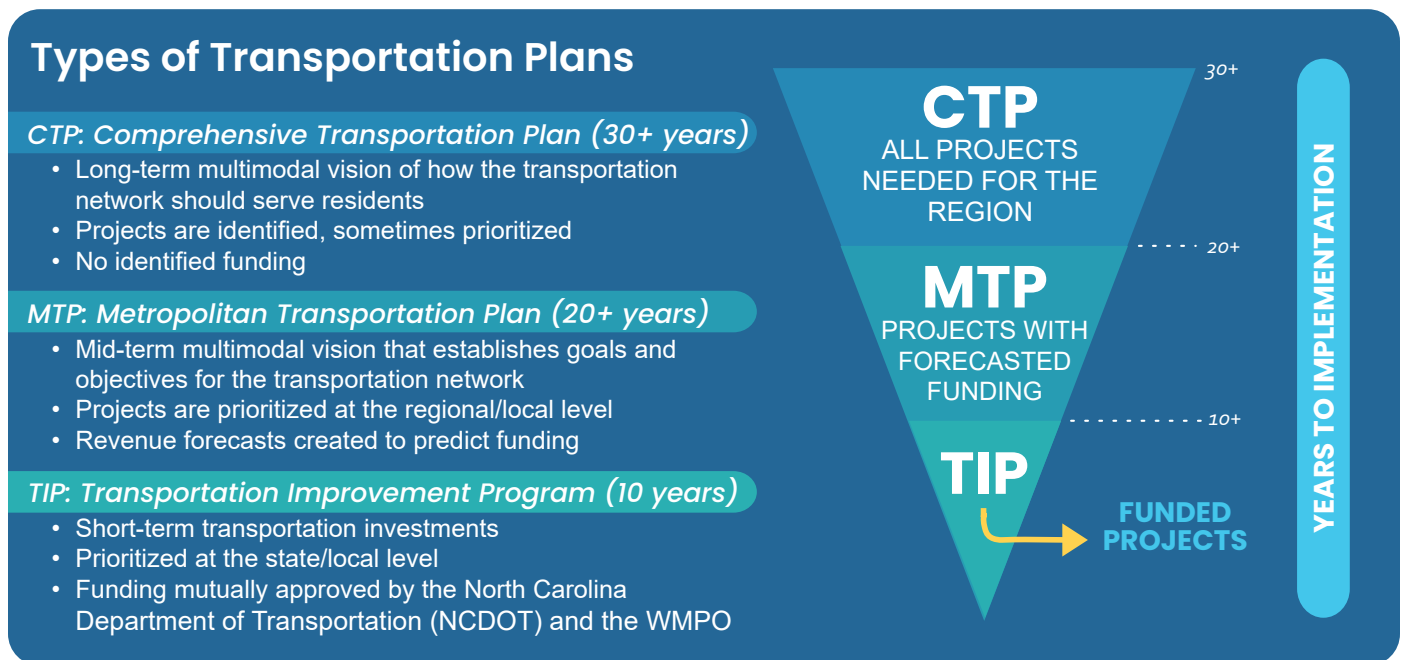


What is Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050?

Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 is the WMPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The plan identifies the Wilmington region's anticipated transportation direction and needs and provides a blueprint for the next 25 years.

Transportation Plans

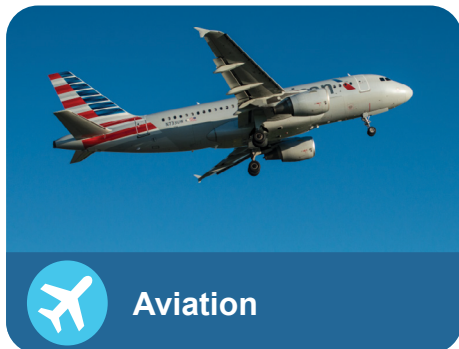
A transportation plan is essential for building an effective multimodal transportation system. The implementation of any transportation project often requires several years to complete from concept to construction. Once a community determines that a project is needed, there are many detailed steps to be completed including public involvement, environmental impact analysis, right-of-way-acquisition, design, funding, and finally construction. In southeastern North Carolina, a roadway project often takes between 20 and 25 years from planning to construction; however, depending upon the complexity of the project and the associated environmental, community, and economic impacts, a project could take as many as 30 years or more to complete. MPOs use a variety of plans to turn their transportation visions into a reality. These plans start out as documenting the transportation needs of the community which are eventually prioritized and funded as the scope of the plan narrows. The MTP is used as a fiscally constrained, long-term guide of regionally significant priorities that informs which projects can be programmed into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Program (MPO TIP).



Metropolitan Transportation Plans

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is used to help inform decisions needed for the preservation, expansion, or operation of the multimodal transportation system. The MTP defines the regional policies, programs, and projects to be implemented over a minimum 20-year planning horizon and is ultimately used to develop the MPO Transportation Improvement Program and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (MPO/State TIP), through which many projects are funded. This plan assesses the current state of, and contains recommendations for, the following modes of transportation:

The Six Modes of Transportation Evaluated in This Plan:



While a project might not be first identified in the MTP, it is within this plan that a project begins to develop support within the region. Being included in the MTP means a project has been recognized as a regional priority that has potential funding. This can be a critical step toward a project being included in the TIP and then constructed. Regions like Wilmington must develop their MTP at least every five years. MTPs must be adopted by the MPO Board and must be formally amended if regionally significant transportation investments are added, deleted, or modified.

The MTP is also federally required to have a financial plan component that is fiscally constrained. This means that projects in this plan have been prioritized, and anticipated funding has been identified for them to be programmed. This is done so that programmed project costs will not exceed anticipated funds over the life of the plan.

Additionally, being an urbanized area with a population over 200,000, the WMPO is designated as a Transportation Management Area (TMA). This designation is in recognition of the greater complexity of transportation issues in large urban areas. Additional planning tools are necessary to address these issues, such as a Congestion Management Process (CMP). The purpose of the CMP is to systematically and continually address traffic congestion as an integral part of the planning process, and implement strategies to reduce travel demand, increase capacity, and improve operations. The results and metrics of this process feed into the development of the MTP.



See Chapter 4 for more information on the financial forecast and fiscal constraint.



Federal Plan Requirements

The federal regulations that mandate the creation of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) also regulate the contents of, and process used for, the development of the MTP. Title 23 of the United States Code Chapter 1 – Federal-Aid Highways, Section 134 – Metropolitan Transportation Planning requires the plan development process to consider several critical factors:

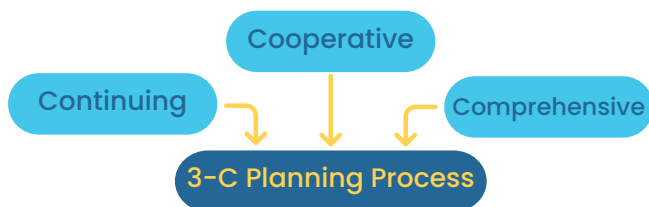
- Support economic vitality
- Increase safety
- Increase security
- Increase accessibility
- Protect and enhance the environment
- Enhance connectivity
- Promote efficient management
- Emphasize preservation
- Improve resiliency and reliability
- Enhance travel and tourism

The section also stipulates the contents of the plan to include consideration of the following:

- A vision that meets community goals;
- A multimodal approach that provides for alternative modes such as public transportation, walking, and bicycling as well as highway projects;
- A minimum 20-year planning horizon;
- A financial plan that balances revenues and costs to demonstrate that the plan is financially responsible and constrained; and
- A public involvement process that meets federal guidelines.

The 3-C Planning Process

Federal regulations require that the planning process be conducted utilizing the 3-C approach—Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive. A continuing planning process means that documents such as the MTP are updated on a four- or five-year cycle. A cooperative approach ensures all WMPO members participate with a regional perspective. Lastly, a comprehensive planning process ensures the inclusion of all transportation modes.



Performance-Based Approach

MPOs are required to establish and utilize a performance-based approach to decision making within the metropolitan transportation planning process. The performance-based approach must support national transportation goals, shown to the right.



National Transportation Goals are defined in Title 23 of the United States Code, Section 150.

Each MPO must establish performance measures and targets in order to track progress toward the achievement of its goals and objectives. Performance measures are specific, measurable attributes of performance which are used to assess implementation strategies. Performance measures can be monitored and tracked to determine progress toward a goal. Performance targets identify a desired level of performance by defining specific critical amounts of progress expected over a designated time frame. Performance measures and targets are coordinated with public transportation providers as well as the NCDOT to the maximum extent possible to ensure consistency and are adopted by the WMPO.

Examples of Performance Measures and Targets	Performance Measures for Safety	Performance Target for Safety
	Number of crashes Number of fatalities	Reduce the number of crashes that result in fatalities by 20% each year



See Appendix B for more information on federal regulations.

How Will This Plan Be Used?

Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs) provide a financially realistic framework for implementing regional visions for multimodal transportation systems. *Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050* will be the plan used by federal, state, and local governments to guide transportation projects in our region over the next 25 years. The plan will play a significant role in decision-making, including:

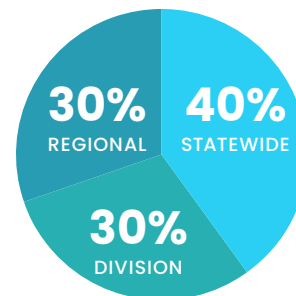
Selecting Projects for Construction

Only projects recommended by an MTP may be included in the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for funding. The TIP outlines efforts from the MTP that are planned to be implemented over the next 10 years that involve state or federal funding.

The MTP bridges the gap between the regional comprehensive plan and the MPO and State TIP. The TIP is prepared through a process called Prioritization, governed by the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) law. The law, passed in 2013, allows NCDOT to use its funding more efficiently and effectively to enhance the state's infrastructure, while supporting economic growth, job creation, and a higher quality of life. NCDOT and the WMPO use a transparent, data-driven method for prioritizing transportation investment decisions. In Prioritization, projects are scored and ranked at the statewide mobility, regional impact, and division needs funding levels based on mode and facility classification. The highest scoring projects are programmed into the TIP based on project costs and estimated revenues. Like the MTP, the TIP is required to be fiscally constrained.

PRIORITIZATION PROCESS

REVENUE DISTRIBUTION:



PROJECT TIERS:

STATEWIDE MOBILITY
ADDRESS SIGNIFICANT CONGESTION AND BOTTLENECKS

REGIONAL IMPACT
IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN REGIONS

DIVISION NEEDS
ADDRESS LOCAL NEEDS

Informing Project Development

MTPs chiefly address larger transportation facilities with regional impact. The projects in this plan represent the WMPO's suggested cross sections for these facilities. This information will be used during the project development process. Communities can then use this larger network as a framework to connect to when planning local streets and other transportation facilities.

Making Land Use Decisions

In addition to allocating resources for specific transportation investments, local, state, and federal agencies will utilize this plan to ensure that land is preserved for these investments, and to coordinate land use and development decisions with planned transportation infrastructure.

Identifying Projects for Further Plans and Studies

Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 will be used by various agencies to identify future projects and investments that may require more in-depth plans and studies. While the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) outlines all of the transportation planning efforts the region would eventually like to implement, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) outlines those efforts which are financially feasible within the horizon of the plan. *Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050* has a 25-year planning horizon and includes lists of projects to guide future transportation infrastructure priorities in the region for the duration of that time frame. The MTP also includes policies to guide action on transportation-related issues within the region for the next 25 years. The plan will be used to allocate resources for specific aviation, bicycle and pedestrian, ferry, rail, public transportation, and roadway projects listed, as well as Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO).



Clockwise from top left: In Wilmington, Drysdale Dr. extension; Barclay development; Construction for Gordon Rd. widening and multiuse path project.

Sources

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<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/fastact/>
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<https://connect.ncdot.gov/project/planning/TPB%20Documents/MASTER-15Apr24-CTP-Guidance-POSTED2.pdf>
- United States Code of Federal Regulations, Title 23: Highways, Part 450.306: Scope of the Metropolitan Planning Process
- NCDOT Prioritization Resources
<https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/PrioritizationResources.aspx>
- NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program Development: P6.0 Fact Sheet
<https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/stip/development/Documents/p6-fact-sheet.pdf>
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021)
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3684>

