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I can't believe that another year has passed so quickly. As 2025 ends, I have reflected on the organization's accomplishments over the past year. I continue to be impressed by the WMPO team and the exceptional work the organization does in advancing the federal requirements and WMPO Board's key priorities and initiatives. A highlight of a few of these achievements is below:

### **Transportation Planning**

Transportation Planning provides the blueprint and foundation for our transportation network. The plans developed by the WMPO and our planning partners provide the roadmap for where we want to go in the future. Over the past year, the WMPO participated in several transportation planning efforts in partnership with these member jurisdictions and planning partners. In 2025, the WMPO Board adopted the Carolina Beach Bike/Pedestrian Plan, Downtown Trail Phases II and III Feasibility Study, Leland Comprehensive Safety Action Plan, and Island Greenway Feasibility Study.

A recommendation from WMPO's last FHWA/FTA certification review was for the WMPO to update our Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Plan. This plan was last developed in 2001 and there have been many advancements in this field since this plan was last developed. The WMPO, in partnership with NCDOT, developed the WMPO's Regional ITS Strategic Deployment Plan, which was adopted by the Board in October 2025.

The WMPO is required by federal law to develop and adopt a Metropolitan Transportation Plan every 5 years. This plan is required to be fiscally constrained and include a minimum 20-year planning horizon. The last Metropolitan Transportation Plan, *Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045*, was adopted in November 2020 and was set to expire on November 18, 2025. *Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050* was developed over the past 3 years through work with a Metropolitan Transportation Plan Steering Committee and in coordination with the WMPO Board; Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC); Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC); local elected officials, city, town, and county staffs; community stakeholders; subject matter experts; and the public. *Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050* was adopted by the WMPO Board on October 29, 2025.

### **Transportation Funding**

An outcome of good transportation planning is the funding of priority transportation projects in our towns, cities, counties, and regions. We utilize our long-range plans as the blueprint and then look to fund projects from these plans.

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Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

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

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In 2013, the General Assembly passed the Strategic Transportation Investments law (HB 817), which outlines how projects are funded in the State Transportation Improvement Program. MPOs are required to cooperatively adopt these State/Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs along with NCDOT. The State/MPO Transportation Improvement programs are updated every two years. In July, the North Carolina Board of Transportation and Wilmington Urban Area MPO Board both adopted the 2026-2035 State/MPO Transportation Improvement Program which identifies the projects that are funded by state and federal funds over the next 10 years.

With the adoption of the 2026-2035 State/MPO Transportation Improvement Program, the next prioritization cycle begins to develop the 2028-2037 State/MPO Transportation Improvement Programs. The WMPO has submitted projects by mode (roadway, rail, public transportation, ferry, aviation, and bicycle and pedestrian) for this next cycle.

The replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge remains the WMPO's top transportation priority. To support the continued rapid growth in population, jobs, and economic development, as well as address a bridge that is functionally obsolete, the bridge needs replacement as soon as possible. The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) successfully received a USDOT Large Bridge Grant in the amount of \$242 million for the 2024 replacement. The WMPO submitted the project as a toll facility in NCDOT's Prioritization 7.0 process, and as a result \$85 million has been programmed toward the project. In total, \$327 million has been committed. The price tag for the bridge replacement is estimated at \$1.1 billion, so a significant gap remains. In May 2025, the WMPO Board supported the continued consideration and pursuit of all possible funding options for the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, supported inclusion of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement as a toll facility in the 2026-2035 State/MPO Transportation Improvement Programs, and supported amending Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045 to include the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge as a toll facility. The WMPO is committed to exploring all potential funding options for the replacement of this important piece of transportation infrastructure.

As a Transportation Management Area, the WMPO receives roughly \$6 million annually that we disburse to our members through our Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP). In June, the WMPO Board approved a competitive process and scoring for the 2026-2030 LAPP. This past November, the WMPO Board approved funding for the City of Wilmington's Kerr Avenue Trail, New Hanover County's South College Road Trail, and for NCDOT to implement three traffic signals (Lanvale Road & Fletcher Road NE/Village Road, Sloop Point Road & Country Club Road, and Lake Park Boulevard & Federal Point Driveway). In addition, the WMPO Board provided additional funding for project cost increases to the Town of Kure Beach (K Avenue intersection improvements), Town of Navassa (Navassa Park Multi-use Path), City of Wilmington (Downtown Trail Phase I), and Town of Belville (Rice Hope Multi-use Trail and Belville Elementary Multi-use Trail).

### **Organizational Enhancements**

A focus area of the WMPO's adopted 2022-2026 Strategic Plan revolves around Organizational and Operational Effectiveness. Over the past year, the WMPO has made significant strides in growth, maturity, and improvement of our organization. In October, the WMPO Board approved an updated Lead Planning Agency (LPA) Agreement with the City of Wilmington that sets forth

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the legal and functional relationships between the two organizations. The WMPO Board approved the execution of a lease for 525 North 4<sup>th</sup> Street, which provides the dedicated office space for the WMPO. In addition, the WMPO updated our Core Values (Integrity, Community, Resilience, and Innovation). These core values were designed to strengthen the organizational culture, support staff alignment, and ensure these values are reflected in our engagement with our partners and the public.

**Looking Ahead**

It is hard to believe that 2025 is now in our rearview mirror. Instead of looking back, we must look forward to what 2026 will bring, and I expect that it is going to be another great year. We have several important initiatives in development, including the Safe Streets and Roads for All plan, an update to the WMPO’s Strategic Business Plan, Prioritization 8.0, and continued exploration of all potential options to fund the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, among others. I hope you will join us in making 2026 a year to remember.

Sincerely,

Mike Kozlosky