



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

North Carolina Division

March 1, 2023

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In Reply Refer To:
HDA-NC

Mr. Hank Miller, Chairman
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
305 Chestnut Street, 4th Floor
Wilmington, NC 28401

Subject: Wilmington Urban Area MPO Federal Certification Review

Dear Chairman Miller:

This letter notifies you that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly certify the planning process for the Wilmington Urban Area MPO (WMPO) Transportation Management Area (TMA). This certification is based on the findings from the Federal Certification Review conducted on December 8, 2022.

The overall conclusion of the Certification Review is that the planning process for the Wilmington Urban Area MPO complies with the spirit and intent of Federal metropolitan transportation planning laws and regulations under 23 USC 134 and 49 USC 5303. The planning process at the Wilmington Urban Area MPO is a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process and reflects a significant professional commitment to deliver quality in transportation planning.

We would like to thank Mr. Mike Kozlosky, MPO Executive Director and the MPO staff for their time and assistance in planning and conducting the review. Enclosed is a report that documents the results of this review and offers 2 recommendations and 2 commendations for continuing quality improvements and enhancements to the planning process. This report has been transmitted concurrently to the MPO, WMPO, and NCDOT. As a final step of the Certification Review process, we offer to present these findings to the Wilmington Urban Area MPO Transportation Advisory Committee and other committees, at your discretion.

If you have any questions regarding the Certification Review process, the Certification action, and/or the enclosed report, please direct them to either Bill Marley, Community Planner of the FHWA NC Division, at (919) 747-7028 or John Crocker, Community Planner of the FTA Region 4, at (404) 865-5624.

Sincerely,

For John F. Sullivan, III, P.E.
Division Administrator

cc: Mike Kozlosky, Wilmington MPO
Abigail Lorenzo, Wilmington MPO
Behshad Norowzi, North Carolina DOT, Transportation Planning Division
Nazia Sarder, North Carolina DOT, Transportation Planning Division
John Crocker, FTA Region 4
Bill Marley, FHWA North Carolina Division
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Brandon Oliver, FHWA, North Carolina Division



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**Federal Highway
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Federal Highway
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Program Review

Wilmington, NC Metropolitan Planning Organization

REPORT

February 23, 2023

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Executive Summary

On December 8, 2022, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) conducted the certification review of the transportation planning process for the Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO). FHWA and FTA are required to jointly review and evaluate the transportation planning process for each urbanized area over 200,000 in population at least once every four years to determine if the process meets the Federal planning requirements.

Certification

The Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization's planning process is certified for four years from the date of this Report.

Previous Findings and Disposition

The previous certification review was conducted in 2020. The 2020 certification review findings and disposition are summarized below.

Review Area	Finding	Action	Corrective Actions/ Recommendations/ Commendations	Resolution Due Date
Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Development Regulation: 23 CFR 450.324	Commendation for using subject matter experts and a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to assist with the MTP update.	Commendation	The MPO is commended for using subject matter experts and a CAC to assist with its MTP update.	N/A
Public Outreach Regulations: 23 CFR 450.316 232 CFR 450.324; 23 CFR 450.326	Commendation for using new and innovative public outreach techniques which have resulted in increased public output.	Commendation	The MPO is commended for its use of new and innovative public outreach techniques which have resulted in increased public input.	N/A

Freight Planning Regulations:	Commendation for involving an extensive number of freight providers in freight planning, and for establishing a committee to inform the freight portion of the MTP update.	Commendation	The MPO is commended for involving an extensive number of freight providers in freight planning, and for establishing a committee to inform the freight portion of the MTP update.	N/A
Title VI and Environmental Justice (EJ)/Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Regulations: 23 CFR 450.220; 23 CFR 450.336	Need to analyze past projects to ensure that cumulative impacts of benefits and burdens are considered.	Recommendation	It is recommended that the MPO analyze past projects to ensure that cumulative impacts of benefits and burdens are considered.	June 2021

Current Findings

The current review found that the metropolitan transportation planning process conducted in the WMPO urbanized area meets Federal planning requirements. There are also recommendations in this report that warrant attention and consideration for follow-up, as well as areas the MPO is performing very well in that are to be commended.

Review Area	Finding	Action	Corrective Actions/ Recommendations/ Commendations	Resolution Due Date
Metropolitan Transportation Plan 23 U.S.C. 134(c),(h)&(i) 23 CFR 450.324	Commendation for using subject matter experts and a CAC to assist with its MTP update.	Commendation	The MPO is commended for using subject matter experts and a CAC to assist with its MTP update.	N/A
Title VI and Environmental Justice (EJ)/Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Regulations: 23 CFR 450.220; 23 CFR 450.336	Commendation for providing a Degree of Impact Analysis map and scoring of its EJ communities.	Commendation	The MPO is commended for providing a Degree of Impact Analysis map and scoring of its EJ communities.	N/A

<p>Title VI and Environmental Justice (EJ)/Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Regulations: 23 CFR 450.220; 23 CFR 450.336</p>	<p>Need to incorporate into its EJ Plan an analysis of past projects' benefits and burdens specific to EJ communities.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>With the MPOs progress in the incorporation of EJ analysis into their MTP development, it is still recommended that the MPO incorporate past projects into this EJ analysis and these project benefits and burdens specific to EJ communities.</p>	<p>February 2027</p>
<p>Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Architecture 23 CFR 450.306(g); 23 CFR 940</p>	<p>Need to coordinate with NCDOT to update the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan and include stronger language directly connecting the Plan to the projects identified in the MTP.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>It is recommended that the MPO coordinate with NCDOT to update the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan, and that the MTP include stronger language directly connecting the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan to the projects identified in the MTP.</p>	<p>February 2027</p>

Background

Pursuant to 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) 134(k) and 49 U.S.C. 5303(k), the FHWA and the FTA must jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning process in Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) at least every four years. A TMA is an urbanized area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, with a population of over 200,000. In general, the reviews consist of three primary activities: a site visit, a review of planning products (in advance of and during the site visit), and preparation of a Certification Review Report that summarizes the review and offers findings. The reviews focus on compliance with Federal regulations, challenges, successes, and experiences of the cooperative relationship between the MPO(s), the State Departments of Transportation (DOT)(s), and public transportation operator(s) in the conduct of the metropolitan transportation planning process. Joint FTA and FHWA Certification Review guidelines provide agency field reviewers with latitude and flexibility to tailor the review to reflect regional issues and needs. Consequently, the scope and depth of the Certification Review reports will vary significantly.

The Certification Review process is only one of several methods used to assess the quality of a regional metropolitan transportation planning process, compliance with applicable statutes and regulations, and the level and type of technical assistance needed to enhance the effectiveness of the planning process. Other activities provide opportunities for this type of review and comment, including Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) approval, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), metropolitan and statewide Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) findings, air-

quality (AQ) conformity determinations (in nonattainment and maintenance areas), as well as a range of other formal and less formal contact provide both FHWA/FTA an opportunity to comment on the planning process. The results of these other processes are considered in the Certification Review process.

While the Certification Review report itself may not fully document those many intermediate and ongoing checkpoints, the “findings” of the Certification Review are, in fact, based upon the cumulative findings of the entire review effort.

The review process is individually tailored to focus on topics of significance in each metropolitan planning area. Federal reviewers prepare Certification Reports to document the results of the review process. The reports and final actions are the joint responsibility of the appropriate FHWA and FTA field offices, and their content will vary to reflect the planning process review, whether or not they relate explicitly to formal “findings” of the review.

To encourage public understanding and input, FHWA and FTA will continue to improve the clarity of the Certification Review reports.

Purpose

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. (i)(5) and 49 U.S.C. 1607, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must certify jointly the metropolitan transportation planning process in Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) at least once every four years. The Wilmington Urbanized Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) became a TMA, an MPO with a population of at least 200,000 as defined by the United States Census Bureau, with the 2010 decennial census. This review, and all other TMAs in the State, are being conducted only two years after the previous ones to allow more time between each review and subsequent report.

Methodology

The review consisted of a desk audit, a public comment period, including a Public Notice (see Appendix A), and an on-site/hybrid review that was conducted December 8, 2022. The agenda is included (see Appendix B). In addition to the formal review, routine oversight, such as attendance at meetings, day-to-day interactions, review of work products, and working with the MPO provide a major source of information upon which to base certification findings.

Statement of Finding

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) find that the WMPO metropolitan transportation planning process substantially meets Federal requirements and jointly certify the planning process. The review identified commendations, recommendations, and no corrective actions.

Details of the certification findings for each of the above items are contained in this report.

Certification

The Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization's planning process is certified for four years from the date of this Report.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the Review is to assess the extent of compliance with the Federal planning requirements, to recognize noteworthy practices, to identify problem areas, and to provide guidance and assistance, as appropriate. The Review consisted of a series of discussions on a variety of transportation planning topics with state and local transportation officials directly involved in the MPO's highway and transit planning activities. The Review also provided the public an opportunity to offer comments on the MPO's transportation planning process. This report contains the findings and recommendations of the Review Team.

Scope

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C.(i)(5) and 49 U.S.C. 1607, the FHWA and the FTA must jointly certify the Federal metropolitan transportation planning process in Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) at least once every four years. A TMA is an urbanized area with a population greater than 200,000, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Certification reviews generally consist of three primary activities: 1) an on-site visit; 2) review of planning products, both prior to, and during the Review; and 3) preparation of a certification review report, which summarizes the review and contains Findings, including commendations, recommendations, and corrective actions. Certification reviews address compliance with Federal regulations and challenges, successes, and experiences of the cooperative relationship between the MPO, State Department of Transportation (DOT), and Transit Operators in the conduct of the continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) metropolitan planning process. Joint FHWA/FTA certification review guidelines afford agency reviewers flexibility in designing the Review to reflect local issues and circumstances. Consequently, the scope of the Certification Review Reports varies from TMA to TMA.

Methodology

The FHWA North Carolina Division Office and the FTA Region 4 Office conducted a joint Certification Review of the Wilmington MPO's transportation planning process, which included a site visit on December 8, 2022. The Review was conducted in accordance with 23 CFR Part

450 and 49 CFR Part 613, which requires FHWA and FTA to jointly review and assess the transportation planning process for all TMAs at least once every four years. According to the 2010 and 2020 Census, the WMPO contains a population greater than 200,000, which makes it subject to the TMA transportation planning requirements. This is the third Certification Review conducted for this area.

The MPO staff worked with FHWA staff to develop a schedule for the Certification Review. A desk audit of the MPO's planning documents was conducted prior to the on-site review.

The topics addressed in this report document the regulatory basis, status, and findings. These terms are defined below.

Regulatory Basis – Defines where information regarding each planning topic can be found in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and/or the United States Code (USC) – the “Planning Regulations” and background information on the planning topic.

Status – Defines what the Transportation Management Area (TMA) is currently doing regarding each planning topic.

Findings – Statements of fact that define the conditions found during the review which provide the primary basis for determining corrective actions, recommendations, and/or commendations for each planning topic.

Commendation – elements that demonstrate innovative, highly effective, well-thought-out procedures for implementing the planning requirements. Elements addressing items that have frequently posed problems nationwide could be cited as noteworthy practices.

Recommendation – Items that, while somewhat less substantial and not regulatory, are still significant enough that FHWA and FTA are hopeful that appropriate TMA planning partners will consider taking some action. Recommendations involve the state of the practice or technical improvements, as opposed to solely being based on regulatory requirements.

Corrective Action – Items that fail to meet the requirements of the transportation statute and regulations, thus seriously impacting the outcome of the overall process. The expected change and timeline for accomplishing it are clearly defined.

Team Members

The Federal Review Team consisted of the following individuals:

- Mr. George Hoops, P&PD Manager, FHWA, NC Division
- Mr. Bill Marley, Community Planner, FHWA, NC Division
- Mr. Brandon Oliver, Community Planner, FHWA, NC Division

- Mr. Joe Geigle, ITS Engineer, FHWA, NC Division
- Mr. John Crocker, Community Planner, FTA, Region 4

Participants from the Wilmington MPO included:

- Mr. Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director
- Ms. Abigail Lorenzo, Deputy Director

Other participants included:

- Mr. Behshad Norowzi, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Transportation Planning Division (TPD)
- Ms. Nazia Sarder, NCDOT TPD

MPO Comments

The MPO stated that it currently includes a Director, Deputy Director, and other staff in the Planning and Technical Services Divisions. They generally agree with the data-driven approach to project selection, however, they believe that more coordination with NCDOT over project selection would be mutually beneficial. The NCDOT owns most of the roads in the State as there are no County-owned roads. While the relationship between the NCDOT Division Engineer and the MPO is cordial, the MPO stated that they would still benefit from a greater amount of interaction with the NCDOT Division Engineer and NCDOT staff. The relationship between the MPO and the NCDOT's Transportation Planning Division (TPD) MPO coordinator is good. The NCDOT MPO coordinator attends TCC and TAC meetings and manages the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) development and modeling for the MPO.

Organizational Structure and Policy Board Involvement

Regulations: 23 CFR 450.104; 23 CFR 450.310

Status

The Wilmington area was originally designated and established as an MPO in 1978. The MPO was designated a TMA in 2012. The City of Wilmington serves as the Lead Planning Agency (LPA). The MPO's urbanized area boundary grew per the recently published 2020 Census and the MPO retained its TMA status. No changes to the MPO's designation are currently being considered. All operators of major modes of transportation are represented on the MPO.

The MPO Board and Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) meet 11 times per year. The MPO's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishes that each member shall have one vote. Weighted voting has been discussed but is not supported. The MPO staff keep the Board

and TCC well informed. They provide “MPO 101” training for new Board members. The MPO staff work closely with the Board and TCC. The 3C planning process is robust.

The Wilmington MPO Board consists of voting members that act as a governing board of the WMPO. The MPO Board also includes non-voting members and advisory members who represent the agencies with interest in the transportation planning practices for the MPO region. Per the MOU, signed by all member jurisdictions, the MPO Board includes:

Pender County
Brunswick County
Town of Leland
City of Wilmington (2)
Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority (New Hanover County)
New Hanover County
Town of Kure Beach
Town of Wrightsville Beach
Town of Belville
Town of Carolina Beach
Town of Navassa
NCDOT Board of Transportation

Each of the above member agencies may also appoint an alternate, in accordance with the rules contained within the Wilmington Urban Area MPO Bylaws.

At the invitation of the Board, other local, regional, State, or Federal agencies impacting transportation within the Planning Area may serve as advisory, non-voting members of the Board. The Executive Director serves as secretary to the Board.

The Wilmington MPO TCC consists of transportation professionals from the member jurisdictions. The TCC is responsible for the review, guidance, and coordination of the transportation planning process. Voting members of the TCC include technical representatives from local and state agencies including:

MPO Executive Director
City of Wilmington
Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Coordinator
Town of Carolina Beach
Town of Kure Beach
Town of Wrightsville Beach
New Hanover County Planning Department
Wilmington International Airport
NC State Ports Authority
Town of Belville

Town of Leland
Town of Navassa
Brunswick County Planning Department
Pender County Planning Department
Cape Fear Council of Government
NCDOT
NCDOT TPD
Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority

Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary (MPA)

Regulation: 23 CFR 450.312

Status

The MPO's planning area is approximately 494 square miles and encompasses all of New Hanover County and portions of Brunswick and Pender counties. The MPO was designated a TMA following the 2010 Census. The current adjusted Urbanized Area Boundary (UAB) is based on the March 26, 2012, United States Census Bureau map that was adopted by the MPO on December 12, 2012.

A change in the MPO's planning area boundary governing structure is likely following the 2020 Census. The MPO has discussed possible expansion into Brunswick County to include the cities of Southport, Boiling Springs Lake, Oak Island, Caswell Beach, Saint James, and Bald Head Island. The MPO has discussed possible expansion to include Surf City and Topsail Beach. To the north, the Jacksonville MPO has expanded its MPA to include all of Onslow County. The MPO has mapped several potential Metropolitan Area Boundary (MAB) expansions and will update the boundary based on the recently released 2020 Census urbanized area maps. Factors in determining future expansions will include population growth, business development, commuting patterns, land use patterns, and arrangements with the neighboring Jacksonville and Myrtle Beach Grand Strand Area Transportation Study (GSATS) MPOs. There are no Federal Lands or Indian Tribal lands within the MPO.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Development

Regulations: 23 CFR 450.308; 23 CFR 420.111

Status

The UPWP development process begins with a draft UPWP in December of each year. The member jurisdictions of the MPO are encouraged to identify projects, studies, or work tasks for special studies, corridor studies, bicycle/pedestrian plans, etc. that need to be included in the UPWP for the upcoming fiscal year. These tasks are determined through the projects requested

by the MPO members and approved by the TCC and the Board. The NCDOT Transportation Planning Division (TPD) and Integrated Mobility Division (IMD) calculate and inform the MPO how much Section 104(f) (PL) and Section 5303 transit planning funding is available for programming. The MPO coordinates with the Cape Fear Transit Authority, operating as WAVE Transit, on the use of the Section 5303 funding. The draft UPWP is completed by January. It is presented to the TCC and Board after which it is made available to the public for 30 days. It is sent electronically to NCDOT's TPD and IMD for review and comment. Any comments or changes are then incorporated into the draft UPWP, and a final UPWP is developed, reviewed, and approved by the TCC and Board in March. NCDOT provides a letter of approval to the MPO by July.

PL and DA funding are included in the UPWP for safety planning, performance planning, and Environmental Justice (EJ) planning, all of which are all Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs).

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Development

Regulation: 23 CFR 450.324

Status

The existing MTP was adopted November 18, 2020, with a horizon year of 2045. The MTP update will have a 25-year horizon year of 2050. Public outreach for the draft MTP update will begin in 2023. The MTP update will be developed with assistance of a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC will ensure that the update is developed in a manner that reflects the desires of the community. The MPO is commended for this. Subject matter experts have been integral to the development of the plan and associated planning factors. Subject matter experts will also be consulted to address tourism and stormwater issues. The MPO is also commended for this. Identification of roadway upgrades such as I-95 and I-40 as well as storm water and dredging projects have been identified by subject matter experts. The MPO Board developed a Strategic Business Plan in 2017 that identifies six priority projects/areas: 1) the Hampstead Bypass, 2) Independence Blvd Extension, 3) the Cape Fear Crossing, to include the Cape Fear Memorial bridge replacement, 4) the Wilmington Rail Realignment, 5) the reestablishment of rail trackage between Wallace and Castle Hayne, and 6) support for Wilmington International Airport to increase non-stop flights. The 2022-2026 Strategic Plan was adopted by the MPO Board on January 26, 2022.

The MTP is linked to land use plans within the region to support its goals. Consultation with local land use planners allowed socioeconomic and other assumptions for the MTP to align with the vision of local planning documents.

The MTP incorporates projects and policy recommendations for every major mode of transportation in the MPO planning area. The MTP update will incorporate updated travel demand model control totals, which will inform project selection. Updated socio-economic data and large projects are expected to greatly impact control totals.

The MTP incorporates future revenue forecasts for federal, state, and local funding. All identified future transportation network improvements in the MTP are balanced by identified and realistic projected revenue sources. Tolling is proposed for the Cape Fear River Crossing. A 25-cent local option sales tax for public transportation was placed on the November ballot but failed to pass.

The MPO also created a TDM Committee and a Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee, which meets six times per year, to inform the MTP update. Another committee, Go Coast, was created to develop transportation alternatives, provide policy recommendations, and identify projects.

The MPO has recently hired a GIS Analyst to work with issues related to storm surge such as the occurrence of flooding on NC 133.

NCDOT developed a strategic highway initiative for US 74 from I-26 to Wilmington, and an NC 211 corridor study is underway. Safety performance measures were adopted in November 2022. A public safety audit will be conducted in advance of the 2050 MTP. The MPO is proposing to apply for a Safe Streets for All grant and has obtained a funding commitment from NCDOT. The MPO has also partnered with NCDOT to develop a Walk Wilmington Pedestrian Plan.

Commendation:

The MPO is commended for using subject matter experts and a CAC to assist with its MTP update.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Development/Project Selection

Regulations: 23 CFR 450.326; 23 CFR 450.330; 23 CFR 450.332; 23 CFR 450.328

Status

The TIP is the product of a cooperative prioritization process defined by the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) legislation and managed by NCDOT's Strategic Office of Prioritization (SPOT). This process evaluates all capital transportation projects for funding using one process with multiple formulas. Local MPOs, RPOs, and Division Engineers have an opportunity to submit a set number of projects for review through this process every two years. Each project is evaluated through a set formula published by the state. Projects are then programmed into the STIP/TIP based on their scores. Public input is encouraged during local input processes. The MPOs and RPOs are required to develop local input methodologies reviewed by the public and approved by the MPO Board and the state to guide the local input that is provided as part of the project score for regional impact and division needs projects. Through the State-legislated STI process, specialized criteria have been created to evaluate each mode of transportation for a total of 14 formulas with different component criteria. Criteria used to evaluate public transportation projects include: 1) access, 2) system safety, 3) impact, 4) cost

effectiveness, 5) market share, 6) age, 7) ridership growth, 8) mobility, 9) economic development, and 10) congestion relief.

The MPO adopted the TIP Amendment and Modification guidelines contained in the MOA between the NCDOT, FTA Region IV, and the FHWA North Carolina Division. TIP Amendments require a 30 to 60-day public comment period. Administrative modifications are only acceptable when changes occur to projects already programmed in the STIP and TIP to: 1) change costs below predetermined thresholds, 2) move project phase dates within the 4-year STIP time window, 3) change the project scope or description in a way that does not significantly diminish the ability to achieve the original project intent, and 4) to change traditional (non-AC) project funding sources. Administrative modifications are streamlined and do not require public review or comment or additional demonstration of fiscal constraint. The NC Board of Transportation and Wilmington MPO adopt administrative modifications without a public comment period. The TIP is updated in accordance with NCDOT's SPOT prioritization process, which is planned to occur every two years.

Public Outreach

Regulations: 23 CFR 450.316 232 CFR 450.324; 23 CFR 450.326

Status

The Wilmington MPO Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was adopted in 2019 and amended in 2020 to include virtual participation for the TCC and TAC meetings. The overall public participation plan was developed to seek input from the public using a variety of methods and techniques and is in conformity with federal requirements. The MPO acknowledged that its outreach efforts are evolving and that they are making improvements to its public involvement plan to ensure that they are effectively engaging the public throughout the transportation planning process. The MPO understands that there is a barrier to effectively engage the public when discussing MTP processes and will seek out other MPOs to determine the best approaches to specifically target communities of concern. To adhere to Title VI guidance (Executive Order 13166), the MPO translates meeting notices and project advertisements into Spanish to meet the demand for growing Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations. The MPO determined that strategic partnership outreach through community organizations such as churches, community centers, and language/multicultural centers to disseminate information, has been one of the most effective methods for public outreach.

Title VI and Environmental Justice (EJ)/Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Regulations: 23 CFR 450.220; 23 CFR 450.336

Status

The Wilmington MPO provided a comprehensive update on its Environmental Justice efforts and communicated their interest to enhance its EJ analysis tools. The MPO mapped its EJ populations using data from the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS). From the resulting information, the MPO created a visualization map to assess the Degree of Impacts within census block groups. The MPO is seeking a better understanding of transportation projects in which underserved communities have an interest. Though various partnerships with community organizations have proven to be effective, the MPO will review larger state MPOs' EJ planning documents to determine how to further enhance its EJ initiatives and strategies. The MPO has made progress in determining and evaluating benefits and burdens to EJ communities resulting from transportation projects and expressed an interest in having FHWA engage with them in the analysis of benefits and burdens from projects in its updated MTP.

Commendation

The MPO is commended for providing a Degree of Impact Analysis map and scoring of its EJ communities.

Recommendation

With the MPOs progress in the incorporation of EJ analysis into their MTP development, it is still recommended that the MPO incorporate pass projects into this EJ analysis and these projects' benefits and burdens specific to EJ communities.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Architecture

Regulation: 23 CFR 450.306(g); 23 CFR 940

Status

In review of the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) component of MTP, the MPO highlighted the importance and role of these types of projects. However, it was difficult to see a connection between the federally required ITS Regional Architecture and the ITS projects identified in the MTP. It is recommended the MTP include stronger language directly connecting the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan to the projects identified in the MTP. Also, given the age of the current Regional Architecture, it is recommended the MPO coordinate

with NCDOT to update the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan. Implementing these recommendations will ensure ITS projects continue to be eligible for federal funding.

Recommendation

- It is recommended that the MPO coordinate with NCDOT to update the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan, and that the MTP include stronger language directly connecting the Regional ITS Architecture/Strategic Deployment Plan to the projects identified in the MTP.

List of Obligated Projects

Regulations: 23 CFR 450.334; 23 CFR 450.314

Status

NCDOT conveys information on the annual obligations to the MPO through its TIP Programming Unit. This information is transmitted annually at the end of the federal fiscal year. The information is posted on the MPO's website. NCDOT produces a report with information on every obligated project for every county in the MPO that includes each project's Division, County, Project Number, Description, Type, Amount, and whether it is federally funded or state funded. The listing is not included in the TIP or MTP. It is transmitted as an independent document. No public comments have been received on the listing. The public can request a copy or download both documents from the MPO's website to compare the fiscal funding year column in the TIP to the list of obligated projects.

Consultation and Coordination

Regulations: CFR 450.316; 23 CFR 450.324

Status

In developing the MTP, the WMPO utilized the expertise of subject matter experts by creating subcommittees for Transportation Demand Management, the Congestion Management Plan, Roadway, Mass Transportation, Bicycle, Pedestrian, Aviation, Ferry, and Freight. The subcommittees were comprised of individuals who are experts, citizens, and public servants representing the community and state and local agencies. During subcommittee meetings, the MPO initiated group discussion by presenting pertinent information, such as public surveys and data.

The MPO provides opportunities for agency consultation in the planning phase, through MTP prioritization and development, project development, and permitting. The MPO maintains a list of agencies contacted, including names and addresses, of agencies responsible for natural resources, land use, economic development, environmental protection, and paratransit.

Documents produced from the Interagency Coordination Protocol for North Carolina's Transportation Planning Process provides a comprehensive contact list and data resources for a planning process that includes developing a vision, conducting a needs assessment, analyzing alternatives, developing the final plan, and adopting the plan. It is recommended that the MPO utilize TPD's agency contact list to consult with agencies early in the project identification process to screen out alternatives before including projects in the MTP.

The MPO responds to questions or proposals either directly, via phone or email, or in a summary. Statewide consultation is coordinated by maintaining a strong relationship with the NCDOT. The NCDOT's Transportation Planning Branch representative is a member of the TCC, and the North Carolina Board of Transportation has a representative on the Board.

Public Transit Planning

Regulation: 49 USC 5303

Status:

Transit service in the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization is provided by Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority, doing business as Wave Transit, Pender Adult Services, and Brunswick Transit System. Wave Transit is an independent organization governed by a nine (9) member board of directors consisting of members appointed by the City of Wilmington, New Hanover County, and WMPO with day-to-day operations managed by an Executive Director. Brunswick Transit System is incorporated as a non-profit under North Carolina State Law. Wave Transit is represented by an appointee to the MPO Board. The MPO also has a representative on WAVE's Board. Wave Transit operates fixed route bus, micro-transit, vanpool, and paratransit service throughout New Hanover County and the City of Wilmington and, per the 2021 National Transit Database report, operates 24 fixed route buses, 1 vanpool and 25 paratransit vehicles in maximum service. Average daily weekday unlinked trips were 1,866 with an annual 565,064 unlinked trips on 1,728,353 annual passenger miles. Brunswick Transit operates 7 demand response vehicles in maximum service with 12,133 unlinked trips annually.

Through MPO agreements, cooperative development of the planning products, coordination activities, and implementation of transit projects, Wave Transit and Pender Adult Services (PASTRAN) and Brunswick Transit are full partners in the MPO's planning process.

The MPO's transit activities substantially satisfy the federal requirements as outlined in 49 CFR 613.100 as well as the transit supportive elements outlined in 23 CFR 450.

Action Plan

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) North Carolina Division Office will work with the Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to address recommendations identified in this Report.

Appendix A

Public Notice



305 Chestnut Street
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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: November 16, 2022

Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Certification Review- Public Comment Opportunity

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) continues to mandate the certification of the transportation planning process in Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) at least once every four years by the U.S. Department of Transportation. The purpose of the certification review is to determine if the transportation planning process being conducted in the area meets the Federal requirements as listed in 23 CFR 450 Part C.

The Federal certification review team will consist of staff from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) North Carolina Division Office and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Region 4 office. The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) may also participate in the review. The on-site visit review will be conducted on Thursday, December 8, 2022, in Wilmington, NC. The review team will be available after 1:00 p.m. on December 8, 2022 and will also hold a short debriefing in the Technology Conference Room located on the 4th floor of 305 Chestnut Street in downtown Wilmington to summarize some of the findings at the conclusion of the on-site visit.

An important part of the certification review is providing the public with an opportunity to comment. The public comment period will be open from November 16, 2022, until 5 pm on December 7, 2022. All comments can be e-mailed to mike.kozlosky@wilmingtonnc.gov or via U.S. mail to:

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director
Wilmington Urban Area MPO

PO Box 1810
Wilmington, North Carolina 28402-1810

For more information, please contact Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director of the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization at 910-342-2781 or mike.kozlosky@wilmingtonnc.gov.

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

Appendix B

Certification Review Agenda

WILMINGTON MPO PLANNING CERTIFICATION REVIEW

9:00 - 9:10	Introductions and
9:10 – 9:20	Overview of Risk Based Certification Review
9:20 – 9:30	Organizational Structure
9:30 – 9:40	List of Obligated Projects
9:40 – 9:50	UPWP - Planning Emphasis Areas
9:50 – 10:20	MTP and Planning Factors
10:20 – 10:30	Public Outreach
10:30 – 10:40	Agency Outreach
10:40 – 10:50	TIP Amendment and Modification Process
10:50 – 11:00	Break
11:00 – 11:30	Public Transit
11:30 – 11:40	ITS Architecture
11:40 – 12:20	Title VI, Environmental Justice, and LEP
12:20 – 12:50	Opportunity for WMPO to Comment
12:50 – 1:00	Summary and Next Steps