

RURAL PLANNING RURAL ORGANIZATION

RPO Technical Coordinating Committee

Virtual October 8, 2020 – 10:00 A.M.

Minutes

Remote Attendance:

Chair William High	Vicki Eastland	Norris Gentry	Troy Wilson
Cole Sutton	Steve Cannon	Stephen Sparks	Forrest Gilliam
Brendan Merithew	Hannah Cook	April Alm	Kate Hayes
Steve Williams	Tristan Winkler	Chris Medlin	Cole Sutton
Marshall Williams	Erica Anderson	Aaron Bland	Daniel Sellers

In-Person Attendance at Land of Sky Office:

Zia Rifkin

WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING

Chair High called the meeting to order at approximately 10:00am, welcomed everyone attending remotely and in-person, and called the roll. A quorum was announced to conduct business.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were made.

CONSENT AGENDA

Steve Williams moved to approve the consent agenda, consisting of the agenda and the June 11, 2020 TCC minutes. Forrest Gilliam seconded, and the motion passed upon a roll call vote, and without further discussion.

RPO BUSINESS

Rural Transit Providers FTA 5310 Elderly and Persons Living w/ Disabilities Application RPO Letters of Support:

NCDOT Public Transit Division (PTD) requires public transit providers to reach out to their MPO/RPO planning partners for letters of support for their applications for Federal Transit Agency (FTA) Section 5310 funds. The (FTA) Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for seniors and Individuals with Disabilities provides funds for programs and projects that aim to improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by removing barriers to transportation services and expanding mobility options.

Due to several factors, COVID-19, CARES Act funds additional reporting burdens etc. The Grant filing deadline has been pushed back to December 1. This deadline is usually in November. Due to this delay, some systems do not have their grant request numbers finalized. The RPO TCC and TAC will not meet again before the December deadline. There is no action required today, this is just a reminder that RPO staff will provide the

transit systems and any other eligible applicant, i.e., the Land of Sky Senior Companion Program, with letters of support.

Information only. No action requested.

Resolution to Adopt the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan

Tristan Winkler, FBRMPO Director, provided a presentation to the TCC on the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan, which is a regional plan with a goal of documenting a vision of a connected trail system based on locally adopted plans stitched together, as well as a brand for the system.

The development of the plan was guided by the Regional Trail Workgroup comprised of the MPO's Prioritization Subcommittee and advocates appointed to represent Buncombe, Henderson, Haywood, Transylvania, and Madison counties. Additional local staff that play a major role in trail development in the region were invited to attend these meetings, as well as representatives from local governments and non-profits across the region

The workgroup developed, vetted and approved the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan, based primarily on locally adopted plans for greenways, multi-use paths, and other bike/ped facilities focused on paved trails but with exceptions for other infrastructure, where necessary. Sections of the Hellbender that do not currently exist in a locally adopted plan include the link from Weaverville to Mars Hill, a short section through Downtown Canton along Park Street, and a section from the Pigeon River to Lake Junaluska in Haywood County.

Due to COVID-19, traditional in person public meetings, workshops and presentations were not possible. The draft plan was emailed to various stakeholder groups and media outlets requesting groups share with their networks.

A total of 363 comments were received during the public comment period for the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan.

349 responses or (96%) expressed support. Common themes included: Health/wellness, community benefit, economic opportunities, tourism benefits, safety of users, environmental protection, congestion mitigation, increased connectivity/accessibility

9 responses or (2.5%) were impartial with questions of timeline/implementation, inclusion of local trail networks, preference for impervious surface, rails-to-trails questions, and inclusion of broadband connectivity

5 responses or (1.3%) disapproved or raised concerns citing Right-of-Way impacts, concerns about crime, degradation of environment and issues with name/branding.

At their September 2020 meeting, the FBRMPO Board approved the adoption of the Hellbender Regional Trail.



The Hellbender consists of four “lines” that connect the region:

The Orange Line- Mars Hill to Blue Ridge Community College (just south of Hendersonville)

The Gold Line- Hendersonville to Brevard

The Blue Line- Westfeldt Park to Rosman

The Green Line- Waynesville to Black Mountain

The Hellbender Regional Trail Plan provides our region a document that connects local plans into a regional system, highlights planned trails that would have a regional significance, and provides a vision for what a regional trail system could look like. Such a system could

provide residents and visitors options to get outside to recreate and exercise while also providing opportunities for environmental enhancements and economic development.

It is important to note that the Hellbender is a long-term vision. Currently there are 12 miles of the estimated 150 miles system on the ground. This is a major infrastructure project spread across multiple jurisdictions. Given current transportation funding policies and investment levels, a 50-year timeframe is realistic for completion of a system of this magnitude.

The adoption of the Hellbender regional Trail Plan is a first step. The Regional Trail work group, FBRMPO, and LOSRPO will continue to raise awareness of on-going activities and consider further marketing and partnerships to assist local and regional efforts for advancing the Hellbender Trail.

The Hellbender Regional Trail Plan is available here:
<http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/multimodal/>

RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE HELLBENDER REGIONAL TRAIL PLAN

WHEREAS, North Carolina General Statutes 136-211 enacted July 6, 2000, provides for the establishment of Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RPOs) to provide rural entities a cooperative and unified voice in project selection and funding, and enhance their involvement in integrated multi-model transportation planning; and

WHEREAS, the Transportation Advisory Committee is the duly recognized transportation decision-making body of the Land-of-Sky Rural Planning Organization; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Transportation maintains a Complete Streets Policy whose cost share formulas are based on planned bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure being documented in adopted plans; and

WHEREAS, numerous communities in the Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization (LOSRPO) and the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO) have developed bicycle, pedestrian, and/or greenway plans; and

WHEREAS the LOSRPO Transportation Advisory Committee supports safe transportation infrastructure for all modes and users.

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Land-of-Sky Rural Planning Organization Transportation Advisory Committee hereby endorses and approves the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan.

ADOPTED: This the 22nd day of October 2020.

Commissioner Matthew Wechtel, Chairman, Land-of-Sky RPO TAC

ATTEST:

Vicki L. Eastland, Land-of-Sky RPO

Discussion occurred regarding how the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan ties into the Great State Trail Plan. Tristan Winkler communicated that the State group is looking for routes of regional significance. Vicki Eastland shared that there are areas in the region that do not have local plans in place and the adoption of the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan could supplement those areas and improve funding assistance.

Norris Gentry moved to recommend the LOSRPO TAC adopt the resolution for the Hellbender Trail Regional Plan at their October 22, 2020 meeting. Steve Williams seconded and the motion carried upon a roll call vote, and without further discussion.

NCDOT STIP Revision/NCDOT Funding:

Due to several factors influencing NCDOT revenues, a revised 2020 – 2029 STIP was presented to the North Carolina Board of Transportation (NCBOT) at their September meeting. The NCBOT voted on this revised document at their October 7 meeting.

Hannah Cook, NCDOT Senior Program Engineer- Western STIP Region, provided a presentation explaining the factors affecting revenues and the project scheduling impacts for LOSRPO projects. She communicated that even before the pandemic, the State was already facing budget issues due to storm response and legal settlements. With the addition of the COVID response, revenues were devastated. With the enactment of HB-77, STIP related changes included shifts in revenue, the allowance of a \$700M Build NC Bond sale in FY 21, an increase in the amount of GARVEE Bonds available, which could lead to an estimated \$2B increase in the NCDOT budget.

Concerning project cost increases; there have been over \$3B in cost increases since September 2019, primarily from projects selected in P3.0 and P4.0. There has also been a large increase in right-of-way estimates, especially in urban areas. Improvements underway include reviewing all cost estimates in the STIP, updating many estimates, and improving internal processes to ensure latest cost data is known for projects.

Project schedule changes include many projects that have been paused due to cash-flow issues. Those will take time to restart, possibly up to a year or more. She also shared that relocating utilities can be a complex and lengthy process and the importance of programming enough time in the STIP for those activities. NCDOT needed to reprogram the STIP to meet federal requirements (and not jeopardize federal funding), provide realistic delivery schedules, and to update projects funded with BUILD NC and GARVEE Bonds due to HB- 77. The reprogramming process includes starting with a revised STIP budget and the programming of \$700M in FY21 BUILD NC Bonds first, which could be used on active construction projects and frees up traditional revenue sources for other projects. Constraints that had to be considered included annual fiscal constraint and STI law constraints. Reprogramming parameters considered included active USDOT grant commitments, realistic project delivery status, and recent substantial cost increases. Prioritization scores were considered, where possible to help determine funding priority for already committed projects across the NCDOT Divisions.

Hannah Cook reiterated that the reprogrammed STIP was a good starting point. Adjustments can be made as long as constraints are met. This process is similar to the typical draft STIP development. She noted that the schedules in the draft STIP, presume \$700M of BUILD NC Bonds sold in Fall 2020. The FAST Act expired September 30, 2020, so likely a continuing resolution will happen that would keep funding flat for the coming fiscal year. Additional costs increases are anticipated and the full effects of COVID is not known at this time.

Hannah Cook reviewed the status of some of the key projects in the LOSRPO region including A-0010AA, R-5837, and R-5799, R-5800, R-5919 and R-5921, which have all had their schedules pushed out, sometimes into unfunded years of the STIP. These are not all of the projects shifted and she invited LOSRPO members to reach out with questions about specific projects.

Discussion occurred regarding the potential sale of the BUILD NC Bonds and NCDOT staff shared that the sale of those has been approved to move forward. Additionally, the FAST Act funds, which were set to expire September 30, 2020, have been extended for one-year and the intention is to take up reauthorization during the Spring 2020 session of Congress.

Information only. No action required.

SPOT6.0 Update:

Vicki Eastland provided an update on potential changes to the Prioritization 6.0 timeline and process. She reviewed the available funding for P6.0 as of July 17, 2020, noting that the funding levels presented do not take into account cost increases received since July 17. Vicki Eastland shared that additional costs increases have led to both the Regional and Division Needs tiers in each Division being overspent. A comparison of available funding for P5.0 versus P6.0 was provided and it was noted that the SPOT

Workgroup was provided with some options, including not making any changes, to pause/re-assess after quantitative scoring, to push out the STIP by one-year, or to push out the STIP by one-year with a second submittal window. Vicki Eastland also noted that currently, consultants are not onboard to do the work. She provided an updated P6.0 schedule, noting that more information should be available in the coming months. Vicki Eastland shared a breakout of HB 77, providing the dollar amounts allocated for different NCDOT funding categories. She concluded that funding was grim due to the COVID situation and the gas tax due to vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

Discussion occurred regarding funding allocations to the Divisions for Regional Impact projects and NCDOT staff noted that the level of funding committed in prior rounds of prioritization also needs to be taken into account when looking at the level of funding overspent. Vicki Eastland noted that high-dollar projects in the region were cascaded into the Regional Impact tier. She encouraged TCC members to confer with their elected officials about cascading projects and how that might not be the best idea moving forward.

Information only. No action requested.

REGULAR UPDATES

NCDOT Division 13 and Division 14 provided updates.

The TPD provided an update.

Vicki Eastland shared Legislative Updates.

Vicki Eastland provided a staff update.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

ADJOURNMENT-

Chair High adjourned the meeting, as there was no further business.