

LAND OF SKY

RURAL PLANNING RURAL ORGANIZATION

Technical Advisory Committee
Hybrid Meeting with the Zoom Platform
February 16, 2023 – 11:30 A.M.
Minutes

Attendance:

Chair Matt Wechtel (Madison Commission)
Jane Pies (minutes)
Troy Wilson, (NCDOT Division 14)

Vicki Eastland (RPO Coordinator)
Steve Williams (NCDOT Division 14)

Remote Attendance:

Mac Morrow (Brevard Council)
Kevin Ensley (Haywood Commission)
Larry Chapman (Transylvania Commission)

Hannah Cook (NCDOT Division 13)
Nikki Robinson

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair, Matt Wechtel called the meeting to order at 11:32 and welcomed attendees. He read the Ethics Statement, and inquired if there were any conflicts, which could preclude TAC members from participating in and voting on any business items, to state such for the record, and to refrain from participation in the matter. No conflicts were heard from the TAC members.

Vicki Eastland called the roll and quorum was announced.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Wechtel opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were received.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Chair Wechtel requested approval of the agenda and the consent agenda, which included the October 20, 2022 minutes, the Letter of Support for the City of Brevard Greenway Feasibility Study, the Letter of Support for Active Routes to School and the Letter of Support for the Ecusta Trail RAISE Grant Application. **Larry Chapman moved to approve the agendas. Matt Wechtel seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.**

Resolution of Support – City of Brevard Greenway Feasibility Study Grant through the NCDOT IMD Feasibility Studies Grant Program

The City of Brevard is pursuing an IMD Feasibility Study Grant through the NCDOT IMD Feasibility Studies Grant Program for a feasibility study for a shared use path along SR 1504 (Old Hendersonville Road) from SR 1512 (Ecusta Road) to US 64/276 (Asheville Hwy) A resolution of support has been requested from the Land of Sky RPO TAC Chair

RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR THE CITY OF BREVARD TO PERSUE AN IMD FEASIBILITY STUDY GRANT THROUGH THE NCDOT IMD FEASIBILITY STUDIES GRANT PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the NCDOT has developed a new discretionary grant program to aid in bridging the gap between conceptual planning and programming of projects through the IMD Feasibility Studies Grant;

WHEREAS, the NCDOT has appropriated \$2.5 million for the IMD Feasibility Studies Grant for FY24;

WHEREAS, the IMD Feasibility Studies Grant requires the project to be identified in a locally or regionally adopted plan;

WHEREAS, the SR 1504 (Old Hendersonville Hwy) Shared Use Path is Identified in the City of Brevard Pedestrian Plan (updated 2018) and the Transylvania County Bike Plan, 2019, as a Transylvania County/Brevard interface project, and in the City of DRAFT Brevard Bike and Pedestrian Plan,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that be it resolved that the TAC of the Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization hereby support the City of Brevard submitting a grant application for an IMD Feasibility Studies Grant through NCDOT.

ADOPTED and approved this the 16th day of February 2023

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

Letter of Support – Land of Sky Regional Council Active Routes to School

NCDOT has made "non-infrastructure" funds available for organizations to apply for Safe Routes to School Coordinators and related activities. This is a position that generally works with schools and students to provide education and encouragement activities while also coordinating with community partners and NCDOT to help improve roadway engineering and traffic enforcement in needed areas. Land of Sky Regional Council is currently planning to apply for three years of funding for a position that would cover Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. There currently is not a dedicated position that covers any communities in those counties. In the past, these positions have provided walking and biking training, held events to celebrate and encourage walking and biking to school, and have coordinated Road Safety Audits with local governments, NCDOT, and other partners to help improve transportation safety.

A letter of support has been requested from the Land of Sky RPO TAC Chair

2/16/2023
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1 S. Wilmington St.
Raleigh, NC 27601

To Whom It May Concern:

Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization, (LOSRPO) offers our support for Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) to apply for funding to secure a Safe Routes to School Coordinator, through NCDOT's Safe Routes to School Program, for the five-county region that includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. We support this grant application and the focus of improving the safety of students and their families accessing our region's schools.

Land of Sky RPO believes strongly in creating an environment that promotes safe, healthy, and equitable transportation for our student population. Tens of thousands of children access schools across Western North Carolina, many of whom face walking and biking conditions that can be less-than-ideal or dangerous. Providing greater training for kids to increase their awareness and confidence to make more trips by walking and biking has been proven to have positive impacts in academic performance as well as safety.

With a Safe Routes to School Coordinator in the region, more children will have the opportunity to have education and encouragement activities for walking and biking that is not currently available. This position will not only work with students and parents to improve individual awareness and confidence, but also work with community partners and NCDOT to improve walking and biking conditions where necessary. We believe that having a dedicated coordinator to facilitate the planning, education, and encouragement of active transportation to schools in our region will help improve the well-being of our students and residents and the community's quality of life.

Land of Sky RPO supports LOSRC's request for funding for a Safe Routes to School Coordinator through the Safe Routes to School Program.

Sincerely,

**Mathew Wachtel, Commissioner Madison County, NC,
Chair, Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization**

Letter of Support – City of Brevard in partnership w/ Henderson County RAISE Grant

The City of Brevard in partnership w/ Henderson County, Hendersonville and NCDOT is pursuing a *Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity* (RAISE) grant through the US Department of Transportation to construct the ECUSTA Rail

This project represents a potential transformational change for our region, connecting multiple communities from Brevard to Hendersonville. The Ecusta Trail will provide recreational opportunities for users of all ages and abilities, active transportation options to job centers and schools, and opportunities for neighborhood revitalization and tourism-related economic development.

The Honorable Pete
Buttigieg Secretary
U.S. Department of
Transportation 1200 New Jersey
Avenue, SW Washington, D.C.
20590

RE: FY2023 RAISE Grant Application – Ecusta Trail: An Engine for Reimagining Rural
Mobility and Economic Recovery

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization (LOSRPO) strongly supports the RAISE grant application “Ecusta Trail: An Engine for Reimagining Rural Mobility and Economic Recovery,” which is the result of a collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), City of Brevard, Henderson County, City of Hendersonville, Friends of the Ecusta Trail, Conserving Carolina, and other local stakeholders.

The Ecusta Rail Trail will provide an active transportation and recreation corridor that improves access to jobs and public resources for several growing communities; increases opportunities for rural, low-income communities; and connects to the Pisgah National Forest. The trail is part of a statewide and regional greenway system identified in the NCDOT Great Trails State Plan.

By supporting this effort, USDOT can showcase a project that aligns closely with the Biden Administration's objectives, including:

- Enhancing access to opportunities for historically marginalized communities,
- Creating a more equitable and safe transportation system,
- Creating jobs and economic opportunity in an area where the local paper mill industry has declined,
- Revitalizing aging and unmaintained rail infrastructure into a major community asset, and
- Transitioning to a more environmentally conscious transportation network that prioritizes non- motorized users.

In summary, the Ecusta Trail will serve as an engine—powering healthy, climate-friendly, resilient, and integrated transportation and recreation options and an economic driver for this region.

Thank you for considering our application for RAISE Program

funding. Sincerely,

**Mathew Wachtel, Commissioner Madison County, NC,
Chair, Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization**

LAND OF SKY RPO TAC BUSINESS

Carbon Reduction Program Update

The Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) establishes the Carbon Reduction Program (CRP),

Carbon Reduction Program Overview

- States are to develop **Carbon Reduction Strategies**
- **\$6.4 Billion** in formula funding for Fiscal Years 2022 through Fiscal Years 2026
- Funding for **projects to support transportation emissions reductions.**

***Transportation Emissions** means carbon dioxide emissions from on-road highway sources of those emissions within a State (23 U.S.C. 175(a)(2)).

North Carolina's Suballocation

- Funds are available to FY26
- NC has already received FY22 and FY23 amounts
- 35% of funds may be obligated in any area of the State
- 65% of funds apportioned to a State for CRP obligated by population:
 - Urbanized areas over 200,000;
 - Urbanized areas from 50,000 to 199,999;
 - Urban areas from 5,000 to 49,999;
 - **\$4 Million currently available**
 - Other areas less than 5,000.
 - **\$15 Million currently available**
 - \$100,000 minimum project cost
 - 80/20 Plus 10% NCDOT Administration
 - REIMBURSEMENT program, Awarded applicant must fund the project and invoice NCDOT for reimbursement.
- The deadline to submit CRP projects in this first call for projects is March 17th.
- After this call, funds will be available on a rolling call.

CARBON REDUCTION CALCULATOR	
Project Name	i.e., Left Turn Lane Main/First Street
Estimated project Cost	100000
NCDOT Admin Cost 10%	10000
Estimated Overall Cost	110000
Federal Grant 80%	88000
Local Match 20%	22000

Currently LOSRPO has one project for this round, a section of greenway in Brevard. The greenway crosses property owned by Brevard, the engineering and design are complete along with up-to-date cost estimates.

RPO staff is working with Transylvania County planning staff developing cost estimates for the purchase and installation of two transit shelters for their transit route. RPO Staff is also talking with Mountain Projects, Haywood County Transit staff about some potential software upgrades and other transit related purchases. Madison County Transit was considering CRP funds for propane conversions, but they submitted that as 5311 Capital request to NCDOT, IMD. These projects along with your requests now will be developed and submitted in the rolling call for projects.

RPO Staff are also consulting with NCDOT Division's 13 and 14 on projects to be submitted by them for the 35% spend anywhere funds.

Final submissions will be presented in March along with resolutions of support.

Vicki Eastland presented the Carbon Reduction Program update. Going forward, projects may be submitted on a more quarterly basis, rather than on an annual basis.

Information only. No action required this meeting.

Prioritization SPOT 7.0 Update

NCDOT's Strategic Prioritization Process, P7.0 or SPOT 7.0 is underway. The statewide Prioritization Workgroup, made up of representatives from NCDOT, MPO's, RPO's, the League of Municipalities, Metro Mayors, NC Rural Center, and others has been meeting since October 2022. The workgroup is developing recommendations on the weights and measures for project scoring to send to the Board of Transportation for their review and adoption.

The number of project submittals and local input points will be approximately the same as in prior rounds. LOSRPO will have 16 project submittals in each mode and 1,200 local input points in both Regional Impact and Division Needs tiers. Population numbers could potentially impact these numbers.

Any projects that were previously funded in the 2020 – 2029 STIP that lost their "Funded" status due to the NCDOT STIP re-programming, brought about by NCDOT financial challenges, will be considered CARRYOVER projects, and automatically be entered into P7.0. There is also potentially a one-time opportunity for each RPOs and MPOs to select three NEW SPOT6.0 project submittals, that did not get an opportunity to be considered for funding because SPOT6.0 was halted, to be entered into SPOT7.0 as CARRYOVER projects. These three projects also will not count as a submittal. This will be determined at the February 14th workgroup meeting.

RPO Staff will be setting up meetings with local partners and NCDOT Division staff to review previously submitted projects and develop LOSRPO's SPOT7.0 project list.

Below is the current schedule for SPOT7.0. As always, the schedule is subject to change.

P7.0 Schedule.

Prioritization Task	Estimated Date
Prioritization Workgroup meets	October 2022 - June, 2023
NC Board of Transportation Adopts Methodology	June, 2023
SPOT Online Go-live Project submittal window opens	July 2023 – September, 2023
NCDOT Data Review and Scoring (Partner Rev. Feb 2024)	October 2023 – March, 2024
Project Prioritization Public Survey	Winter - Spring 2024
Alternate Criteria Deadline/LOSRPO Local Input Point Methodology Due	April, 2024
DRAFT Statewide Programmed Projects and SPOT Scores Released	End of April 2024
Regional Impact Local Input Points Window	May - July, 2024
DRAFT Regional Impact Programmed Projects Released	August, 2024
Division Needs Local Input Points Window	September – November, 2024
Program Division Needs Projects	December 2024 – January, 2025
DRAFT 2026-2035 STIP Released	End of January, 2025

Vicki Eastland presented.

Information only. No action required.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Update

In recent years, LOSRPO has requested NCDOT program CMAQ funds allocated to the RPO for non-attainment of air quality standards in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) to the Land of Sky Clean Cities and Clean Vehicles Coalition to be used for regional education and outreach program in the GSMNP adjacent region. This year, the RPO is working with Clean Cities/Clean Vehicles to provide funding for a DC fast charger in the Town of Waynesville. Waynesville is developing the project estimate. There will be a resolution of support for the project at the March TCC and TAC meetings.

Vicki Eastland presented.

Information only. No action required until the March meeting.

Wildlands Network's Wildlife Connectivity

In Western North Carolina, a group of stakeholders convened to address wildlife and motorist safety concerns specifically in the region of Great Smoky and Blue Ridge mountains. In June of 2022, Wildlands Network and the National Parks

Conservation Association released "[Road Ecology Research and Mitigation Strategies to Improve Wildlife Connectivity and Human Safety along I-40 in the Pigeon River Gorge.](#)" One of largest road ecology research projects ever completed in the eastern United States, the report provides 20 detailed mitigation recommendations along Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge.

Wildlands Network, also released a scientific study in September 2022, identifying 20 of the highest-priority wildlife crossing sites across North Carolina. This study identified I-40 through the Pigeon River Gorge as the number one priority.

Protecting wildlife from roadway collisions is critical for our state's infrastructure, human safety, and our natural ecosystems. Mitigating wildlife vehicle collisions is complex and expensive, and timing is everything. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes unique opportunities for wildlife crossing construction, and NCDOT is supportive of these efforts.

Wildlandsnetwork.org

Nikki Robinson shared that three main goals of the Wildlands network are to support competitive grant applications for federal wildlife crossing funding, to direct those efforts to the places in NC with the most urgent need for increased wildlife connectivity and driver safety and to support land conservation strategies to protect quality wildlife habitat, ensuring effective connectivity and wildlife crossings' long-term success.

Nikki Robinson is interested in ways LOS RPO can assist in securing federal dollars for regional wildlife crossings and if the group can adopt the Pigeon River Gorge recommendations into future transportation planning.

Vicki Eastland shared that there are four more bridges in RPO section of I40 to be replaced in coming years which will include wildlife amenities. Discussion occurred about the importance of wildlife connectivity in our region.

Information only. No action required.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

REGULAR UPDATES

NCDOT Divisions 13 and 14 updates were presented and at www.landofskyrpo.org
NCDOT Transportation Planning Division updates were presented
NCDOT Integrated Mobility Division updates were given
LOS RPO Staff provided updates

ADJOURNMENT

Matt Wechtel called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:30PM. **Mac Morrow moved to adjourn. Larry Chapman seconded the motion which passed unanimously.**