

RURAL PLANNING RURAL ORGANIZATION

Technical Advisory Committee
Hybrid Meeting with the Zoom Platform
August 17th, 2023 – 11:30 A.M.
Minutes

Attendance in Person:

Chair Matt Wechtel (Madison Commission) Vicki Eastland (RPO Coordinator)
Daniel Sellers (NCDOT, TPD) Asha Rado (LOSRC Minutes)
Jon Barsanti (LOSRC FBMPO)

Attendance Remote via Zoom:

Troy Wilson (NCDOT Div 14) Alexius Farris (NCDOT, IMD)
Steve Williams (NCDOT Div 14) Kevin Ensley (Haywood
Commission)
Hannah Cook (NCDOT Div13) Stephan Sparks (NCDOT Div 13)
Larry Chapman (Transylvania Commission)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Matt Wechtel called the meeting to order at 11:33AM 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.

Chair Matt Wechtel called the roll and quorum was announced.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Chair Matt Wechtel requested approval of the agenda and the consent agenda, which included the June 2023 minutes, the TAC agenda and the Letter of Support for the NCDOT Div 13. Project Grant and the addition and approval of the Letter of Support for Multimodal Transportation.

Letter of Support for NCDOT Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Application

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

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Land of Sky RPO would like to express our strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

The interchange project on I-26, HE-0001, is critical to help alleviate the projected impacts of the new development along the corridor, enable freight access, and provide improved connectivity to our region.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

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

Letter of Support for NCDOT Div. 13 Protect Grant Application

The Protect Program was established in 2021 by the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, IIJA. IIJA established the **Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT)** It is a Formula Program to help make surface transportation more resilient to natural hazards, including climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters through support of planning activities, resilience improvements, community resilience and evacuation routes, and at-risk costal infrastructure.

NCDOT Division 13 proposed project is BLUE RIDGE (**Bridge Longevity Upgrades to Enhance Resiliency, Increase Dependability, and Grow Equity**). BLUE RIDGE Proposes replacement of (3) bridges in Buncombe County, replacement of (1) bridge in Madison County, and lining (3) culverts in Madison County. Details are provided in the included materials.

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Land of Sky RPO would like to express our strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program Grant application titled BLUE RIDGE (Bridge Longevity Upgrades to Enhance Resiliency, Increase Dependability, and Grow Equity) for the rehabilitation or replacement of five structures in Buncombe and Madison Counties.

These structures serve as critical connections for rural communities and residents to vital services such as employment hubs, educational institutions, and medical centers. Each structure is in critical need of rehabilitation or replacement due to reoccurring natural hazards such as flooding caused by climate change. Major structure improvements are necessary to increase the resiliency of the region, restore the natural environment, and ensure necessary accessibility to vital community services.

Should any bridge need to be closed due to its structural deficiencies or impacts from flood events, there are very few viable detour options to ensure continued access. The detours for these bridges are not all suitable for truck traffic, contain functionally obsolete bridges, and increase travel distance by an average 17 miles. This would significantly impact the nearby communities due to increased travel times and decreased access to vital services.

The mountainous terrain in Western North Carolina and the Land of Sky RPO present many challenges and limitations. The Appalachian Mountains and numerous rivers and streams that make Western North Carolina a unique and desirable location, also constrain the transportation network and limit system redundancy and connectivity. Throughout the region several communities rely on single or limited access points. Due to the increase of extreme weather events impacting our region, communities are at an elevated risk of being isolated due to potential transportation network failures in extreme weather events. Providing more resilient infrastructure is key to adapting our region to increasing natural challenges.

As a statewide transportation priority, the improvements to the five structures will provide reliable connectivity and increase the resiliency of the surrounding communities and the region, while repairing the surrounding natural environments. Thank you for your favorable consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,

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

** Amendment to consent agenda by adding in the Letter of Support for the Multimodal Project I-26. Added by Vicki Eastland

Larry Chapman moved to approve the Consent Agenda including the June 2023 Minutes, TAC Agenda and the Letter of Support for the NCDOT Div 13. Project Grant, plus addition of Letter of Support for Multimodal Transportation Project. Kevin Ensley seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.

LAND OF SKY RPO TAC BUSINESS

LOSRPO FY 2024 PWP Amendment

NCDOT Transportation Planning Division, the division that administers the Rural Planning Organizations, (RPO's) provided each RPO with a 15% funding increase to take effect July 1, 2023, SFY 2024. This amendment to the PWP reflects this increase in funding.

[LOSRPO FY 2024 PWP Amendment](#)

Vicki Eastland presented (including the PWPW-SPR Expense Report Revision, information but not voted on) Information Only.

Discussion occurred in regard to if there would be a change in the local match. Vicki Eastland explained that yes, that anytime there is a change in funding there will be a change in local match. State passed a law in their budget that the SPR is what funds the RPOs. If an RPO applied for special study in the RPO funding, the state was going to assist the rural counties if you have at least one tier 1 county, state provide 15%, local 5%, federal 80%. If you have tier 2 match would be 80/10/10. TPD also said that it could be carried over.

LOSRPO Prioritization 7.0 DRAFT Submittal List

Prioritization the process that NCDOT follows to determine most capital improvement projects utilizing both NCDOT state funds and NCDOT’s allotted federal funds in the development of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The prioritization process is governed by the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) Law of 2013. STI provides the framework for a more transparent data driven process utilizing local input.

from MPO’s, RPO’s and NCDOT Divisions. Prioritization 7.0, P7.0 (aka SPOT 7.0) indicates it is the seventh iteration of the prioritization process.

RPO staff has met with TCC and TAC reps from each county, along with MPO staff and NCDOT division. Carryover projects were reviewed as were projects lists from previous rounds. Based on input from these meetings, the LOSRPO DRAFT P7.0 Project was developed. There are still a few non-Highway projects to be added to the list, but the list will be complete before it is advertised for public comment.

https://landofskyrpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/LOSRPO_SPOT7.0-DRAFT-Project-List.pdf

Current schedule for P7.0.

Prioritization Task	Estimated Date
Prioritization Workgroup meets Done	October 2022 - June, 2023
NC Board of Transportation Adopts Methodology Done	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 vote needed.

Travel Demand TDM Update Presentation on Park & Ride, Park & Pool

Process of Selecting Potential Park and Ride Locations

- 1. Plan Review**
- 2. Literature Review**
- 3. Examined the Data**
- 4. Developed a Ranking System**
- 5. Applied the Ranking System**

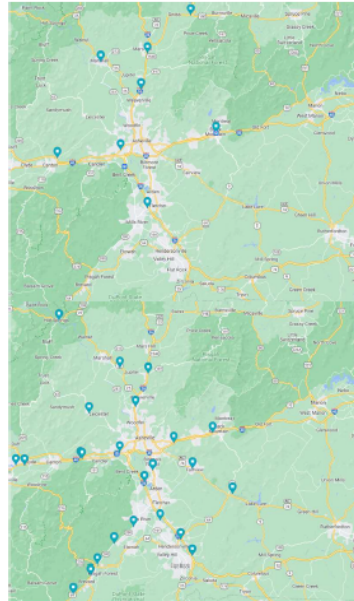
- Reviewed the Congestion Management Plan (2018)
- Reviewed the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2020)
- Researched documents from multiple sources including Virginia DOT and Florida DOT
- Collected Data from multiple sources
 - Environmental Justice Data
 - Census on the Map Data (Home to Work, Work to Home, Outflow)
 - Housing and Employment Data (Housing Units, Employees.)
 - Combined data into one spreadsheet
 - Analyzed the data

**Currently
have
Park & Ride
and
Park & Pool
Locations**

**Looking for
More of the
same plus
Park and Bike**

Park and Ride Possibilities

- Park and Pool locations at Waynesville, Canton, Weaverville, and Mars Hill.
- Park and Rides for Black Mountain, South Asheville, and Rosman.
- Unofficial Park and Charge and Ride at Asheville Outlet Mall
- Looking to add more locations to:
 - Reduce Congestion
 - Encourage Carpooling
 - Support Transit



See link for full presentation: <https://landofskyrpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/August-RPO-Presentation-PNR-Possibilities-20230919.pdf>

Jon Barsanti Jr. presented.

Discussion occurred around who would maintain the locations and how we can best market and share the ride sharing information.

Information only. No action required.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

REGULAR UPDATES

- | | |
|---|---|
| • NCDOT Division 13 and 14 updates
Most Recent Updates http://landofskyrpo.org/ | Hannah Cook/Steve Williams
(or designee) |
| • NCDOT Transportation Planning Division | Daniel Sellers, PE |
| • NCDOT Integrated mobility Division | Alexius Farris |
| • Staff Updates and Housekeeping | Vicki Eastland |

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Matt Wechtel called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12: 37PM.
Matt Wechtel moved to adjourn. Larry Chapman seconded the motion which passed unanimously.