

LAND OF SKY

RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Technical Advisory Committee
Hybrid Meeting with the Zoom Platform
October 19th, 2023 – 11:30 A.M.
Minutes

Attendance in Person:

Chair Matt Wechtel (Madison Commission) Vicki Eastland (RPO Coordinator)
Steve Williams(NCDOT Div 14) Asha Rado (OSRC Minutes)
Tristan Winkler (FBRMPO)

Attendance Remote via Zoom:

Alexius Farris (NCDOT, IMD)	Kevin Ensley (Haywood Commission)
Hannah Cook (NCDOT Div13)	Stephan Sparks (NCDOT Div 13)
Mac Morrow (City of Brevard)	Thomas Jablonski (Town of Marshall)
Troy Wilson (NCDOT)	Daniel Sellers(NCDOT, TPD)
Larry Chapman (Transylvania Commission)	

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Matt Wechtel called the meeting to order at 11:30 AM 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 August 2023 minutes, the TAC agenda and the PWP Amendment and the LOSRPO Public Involvement Plan Edits.

Larry Chapman moved to approve the agenda and the consent agenda, which included the August 2023 minutes, the TAC agenda and the PWP Amendment and the LOSRPO Public Involvement Plan Edits. Kevin Ensley seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.

LAND OF SKY RPO TAC BUSINESS

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 been working with NCDOT division staff on entering projects. The LOSRPO and FBRMPO combined to advertise our projects lists for public input. The LOSRPO DRAFT P7.0 Project can be viewed on the at www.landofskyrpo.org or by using the link below.

LOSRPO DRAFT SPOT7.0 Project List

Current schedule for P7.0.

P7.0 Schedule.

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 – October, 2023 ***
NCDOT Data Review and Scoring (Partner Rev. Feb 2024)	November 2023 – April, 2024
Project Prioritization Public Survey	Winter - Spring 2024
Alternate Criteria Deadline/LOSRPO Local Input Point Methodology Due	May, 2024

DRAFT Statewide Programmed Projects and SPOT Scores Released	End of May 2024
Regional Impact Local Input Points Window	June - August, 2024
DRAFT Regional Impact Programmed Projects Released	September, 2024
Division Needs Local Input Points Window	October – December, 2024
Program Division Needs Projects	January 2024 – February, 2025
DRAFT 2026-2035 STIP Released	End of February, 2025

Mac Morrow moved to approve the LOSRPO Prioritization P 7.0 Project List. Kevin Ensley seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.

Wildlife Crossings Identified Needs

Tristan Winkler, FBRMPO Director, will present a brief overview of a draft report *Potential Wildlife Crossings for the French Broad River MPO & Land of Sky RPO Planning Areas* (August 30, 2023). This report was completed by former MPO staff members Scott Adams.

Excerpt from FBRMPO Board agenda, prepared by Scott Adams

Two recent studies (Pigeon River Gorge, June 2022; NC Statewide Study, Fall 2022) have identified a number of potential sites in the Land of Sky RPO and French Broad River MPO areas where additional infrastructure for Wildlife Crossings (i.e. retrofit of existing bridges, culverts, plus possible new structures and fencing) need to be considered.

What's in the report?

*This report reflects an initial review of the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization (RPO) planning areas for potential wildlife crossing locations along area roads and highways. The MPO/RPO's primary goals of this report are to begin identifying specific geographic areas and wildlife crossing typologies (eg. Deflection Fencing) that can be incorporated into the larger transportation planning process, notably the state's **Strategic Prioritization Office of Transportation (SPOT)** project scoring process, and the **State Transportation Improvement Programs (STIP)**.*

These two processes identify specific projects, so the early identification of wildlife crossing needs, in addition to other design factors like bicycle/pedestrian accommodation and climate resilience, can reduce project scope and cost revisions later on. This effort stems from initial contact in December 2022 with members of Safe

Passage: The I-40 Pigeon River Gorge Wildlife Crossing Project. This project is an outgrowth of a June 2022 study by Wildlands Network and the National Parks Conservation Association. The Pigeon River study and some early pilot projects stemming from it (e.g. A new replacement bridge at I-40, Exit 7 [Harmon Den] designed with flat wildlife paths underneath it.) may provide a template for future projects across the region and state.

The report introduces previous studies and research, provides an overview of the methodology used to identify recommendations, identifies Top Recommendations as well as additional recommendations by county.

The full report Can be reviewed on the RPO website
<https://landofskyrpo.org/documents-and-resources/>

Scott's Conclusion and Next Steps from the report
*Smart and proactive planning best occurs when data, stakeholders, and site conditions are consulted early and often. As such, locations identified in this report should be studied further for possible incorporation into the larger transportation planning process, notably the state's **Strategic Prioritization Office of Transportation (SPOT)** project scoring process, which then leads local and statewide **Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP)**.*

These two processes identify specific projects, so the early identification of wildlife crossing needs, in addition to other design factors like bicycle/pedestrian accommodation and climate resilience, can reduce project scope and cost revisions later on.

The French Broad River MPO and Land of Sky RPO can act as convening entities between wildlife crossing experts (eg. Wildlands Network, National Parks Conservation Association, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and local land trusts) and transportation experts (eg. staff from NCDOT Divisions 13 and 14, plus other construction and maintenance experts).

In addition to the existing Top Recommendations (noted previously in report and on next page), stakeholders should look for "right time, right place" opportunities for the incorporation of wildlife crossing features as part of the transportation network. NCDOT's existing Complete Streets Policy looks for opportunities for "routine accommodation" in both new construction and maintenance projects, so with the incorporation of data like Wildlife Vehicle Collision (WVC) counts and severity, plus asset management and maintenance/replacement schedules for transportation infrastructure, a similar approach can be taken for wildlife crossings.

Discussion surrounding effectiveness of types of crossings occurred. As well as clarification on where funding will come from for these additional projects.

Kevin Ensley moved to adopt Potential Wildlife Crossings for the French Broad River MPO & Land of Sky RPO Planning Areas Report. Larry Chapman seconded the motion which passed upon a roll call vote.

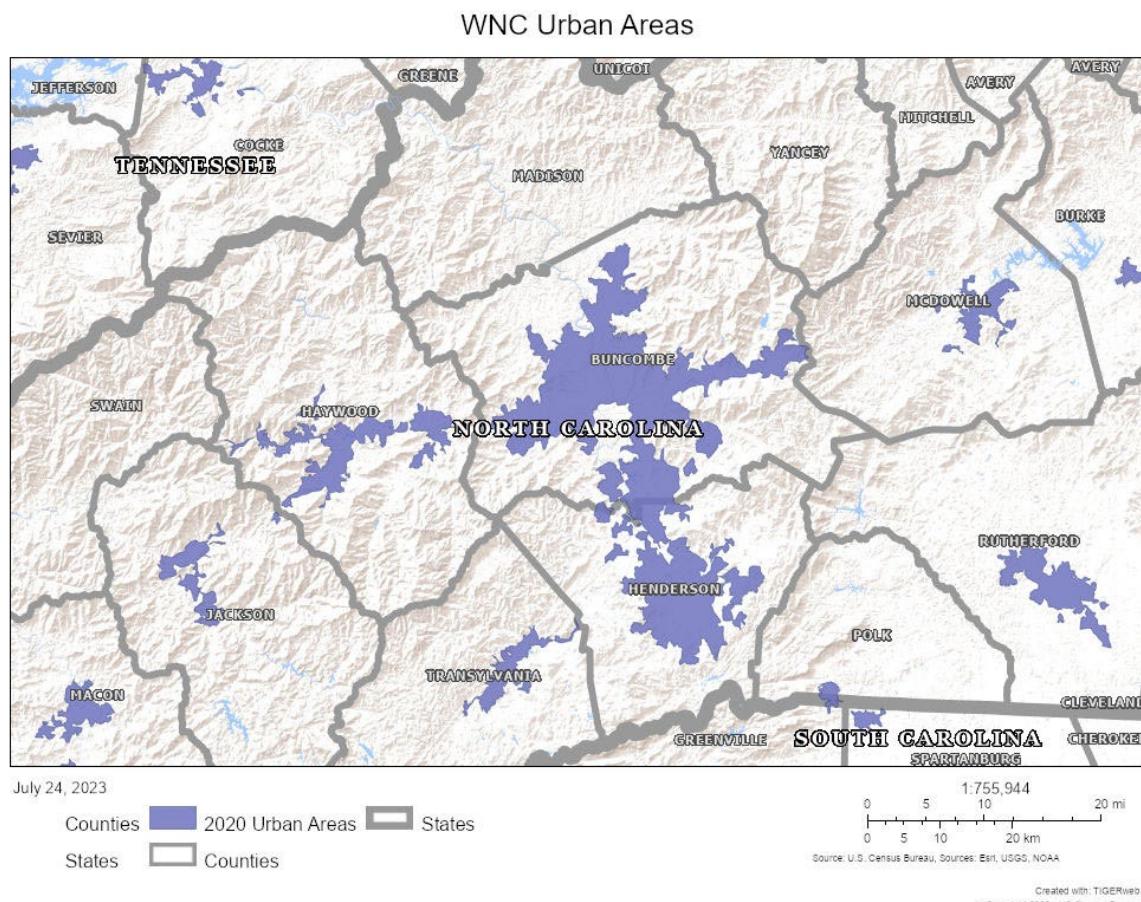
New FBRMPO LOSRPO Planning Boundary

MPO and RPO Planning Area Boundaries

FBRMPO staff has developed an updated Planning Area for the French Broad River MPO.

What Changed with the 2020 Census Urban Area?

A number of criteria used for determining the urban area were changed. For our area, the most significant change involved hops and jumps, which are considerations for bridging areas of urbanization. The hops and jumps were reduced and large areas of the 2010 Asheville Urban Area, including Haywood County and parts of Madison County, were removed from the 2020 Asheville Urban Area.



How Are MPO Planning Areas Determined?

The regulations require that the MPO Planning Area include the Urban Area as well as what is anticipated to urbanize in the next 20 years. Beyond that, there are not many requirements. In discussions with other MPOs from across the country, most MPO's tend to determine their planning boundaries by taking any census tract or census block group intersecting the urban area and make those census tracts/block groups their boundary.

How Was the Draft Planning Area Drawn for the French Broad River MPO?

Each of the counties in the region have been approached somewhat differently based on unique considerations but generally the planning area was determined pulling in any block group that intersects the Asheville Urban Area, Canton Urban Area, or Waynesville Urban Area (within Haywood County.)

Buncombe County

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Buncombe County

Henderson County

Situation: Henderson County elected to be fully within the MPO in 2010. The urbanized area changed somewhat within Henderson, but the County retains a significant amount of Asheville Urban Area.

Boundary Development: all of Henderson County is considered part of the MPO

Planning Area. **Changes:** No Changes

MPO Population: 116,281

Madison County

Situation: Madison County joined the MPO and Asheville Urban Area after the 2010 Census but fell out of the Asheville Urban Area in 2020.

Boundary Development: Madison County and the Town of Mars Hill requested to stay within the MPO. All block groups that intersect the Town of Mars Hill were added as well as an additional block group (371150106021) in order to keep P 7.0 submittals within the MPO. **Changes:** three block groups will move from MPO to RPO and the population within the MPO will be reduced by roughly 3,600. No changes in member jurisdictions.

MPO Population: 5,834

Transylvania County

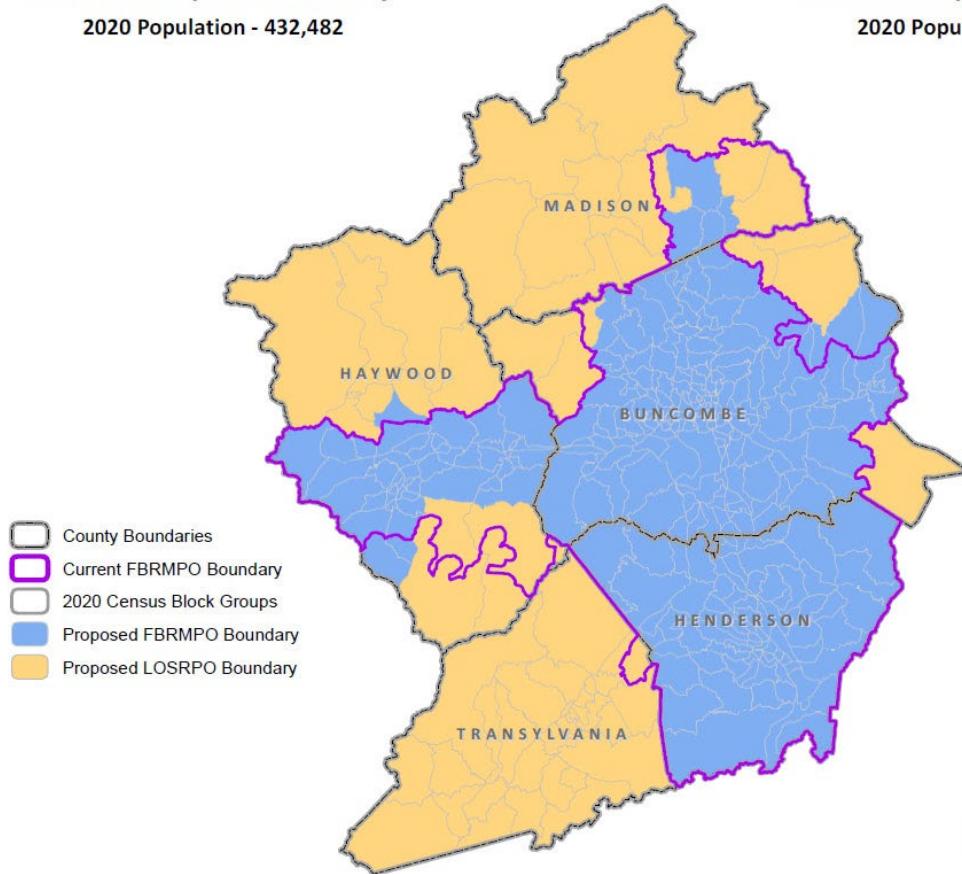
Situation: Transylvania County is currently a non-voting member of the MPO due to a small enclave from the Asheville Urban Area in the 2010 Census. This enclave was removed from the Asheville Urban Area in 2020.

Boundary Development: Transylvania County was removed from the MPO Planning Area. Changes: no part of Transylvania County is part of the MPO Planning Area. One block group with approximately 1,100 residents will switch from MPO to RPO.

MPO Population: 0

FBRMPO Proposed Boundary

2020 Population - 432,482



LOSRPO Proposed Boundary

2020 Population - 69,519

French Broad River
Metropolitan Planning Organization
RURAL PLANNING
ORGANIZATION

Information Only.

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

<https://landofskyrpo.org/division-13-updates/>
<https://landofskyrpo.org/division-14-updates/>

NCDOT Staff

- Transportation Planning Division updates
- NCDOT Integrated mobility Division
- Staff Updates

Daniel Sellers
Alexius Farris
Vicki Eastland

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Matt Wetchtel called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:41 PM.

Matt Wetchtel moved to adjourn. Thomas Joblanski seconded the motion which passed unanimously.