

LAND OF SKY

# RURAL PLANNING RURAL ORGANIZATION

**Technical Advisory Committee**  
Hybrid Meeting with the Zoom Platform  
January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – 11:30 A.M.  
**Minutes**

**Attendance in Person:**

Chair Matt Wechtel (Madison Commission) Vicki Eastland (RPO Coordinator)  
Steve Williams( NCDOT Div 14) Asha Rado (LOSRC Minutes)  
Aaron Haynie (Town of Marshall) Tristan Winkler (FBRMPO)

**Attendance Remote via Zoom:**

Kevin Ensley (Haywood Commission) Hannah Smith (NCDOT Div13)  
Stephan Sparks (NCDOT Div 13) Daniel Sellers( NCDOT, TPD)  
Mac Morrow (City of Brevard) Thomas Jablonski (Town of Marshall)  
Larry Chapman (Transylvania Commission)  
Ada Sloop (Safe Routes to School)

**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 October 2023 minutes, and the TAC agenda.

***Mac Morrow moved to approve the agenda and the consent agenda, which included the October 2023 minutes and the TAC agenda. Kevin Ensley seconded the motion which passed unanimously upon a roll call vote.***

## **LAND OF SKY RPO TAC BUSINESS**

### **Item 4A: LOSRPO DRAFT FY 2025 PWP**

LOSRPO staff has developed the DRAFT LOSRPO Planning Work Program, (PWP) and submitted the FY 2025 Draft PWP to NCDOT TPD for review. Like most years, the PWP is a continuation of ongoing RPO projects. The Transylvania County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) is being drafted and will be adopted in FY 2025 if it has not been by the end of FY 2024. There is a sizable percentage of the planning funds in the General Transportation category, LOSRPO staff serve on a few statewide work groups and committees, as well as ones with more regional significance, this is also the category that special studies such as the upcoming Safe Streets 4 All Regional Action Plan, potential SPR project, Regional Transit Plan and other general planning activities fall into. SPOT 7.0 will account for much funding this calendar year and requires a significant amount of funding. Data Collection, Project Development and Admin make up the bulk of the remaining funding except for RPO Direct charges, Travel, and indirect funds.

<https://landofskyrpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/LOSRPO-DRAFT-FY-2025-PWP.pdf>

Discussion did not occur.

**Information Only, PWP will come to the TCC and TAC once approved by NCDOT.**

### **Item 4B: Transylvania Co/Brevard SPR Grant App. Resolution of Support**

NCDOT Transportation Planning Division (TPD) holds an annual call for projects to MPO's and RPO's for State Planning and Research (SP&R) funding program. SP&R funds are only eligible to be spent on transportation planning projects and functions, not design or engineering. Funding available for this call for projects will be available for FY 2025.

Transylvania County and the City of Brevard are pursuing funding for a Downtown Brevard circulation study. This study would look at different scenarios to improve access

to downtown destinations for all modes of travel, and to provide more efficient through put for individuals and freight accessing destinations beyond downtown Brevard, such as Rosman, Lake Toxaway and other rural parts of Transylvania County.

Land of Sky RPO will be the applicant for SPR funds. These funds are only eligible to pay a consultant to do the requested work, there are no admin funds available with this funding. RPO planning funds must be used for RPO work on awarded projects.

SPR funds are federal funds and require a 20% match, however, like RPO planning funds, NCDOT will be a portion of the local match as stated below:

**\*For MPO/RPO's: In accordance with §136-214, matching funds for federal State Planning and Research Program funds:**

- **MPO's are only eligible if population is 500,000 or less, as determined by the most recent**

**census.**

- **Projects within an MPO/RPO with at least one representative from a Tier 1 County will require 5% local match and State funds will cover the remaining 15% match.**
- **Projects within an MPO/RPO with at least one representative from a Tier 2 County will**

**require 10% local match and State's funds will cover the remaining 10%**

- **Projects within an MPO/RPO with at least one representative from a Tier 3 County will require 20% local match.**

If funds are awarded, the notice to proceed will be issued in early July.

Discussion occurred on how important the study was for the town and county.

***Thomas Jablonski moved to approve a Resolution of Support for the Downtown Brevard Circulation Study. Kevin Ensley seconded the motion which passed upon a roll call vote.***

## **Item 4C: Madison County Transit CRP App. Resolution of Support**

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)).

NCDOT has made the CRP funding for rural areas available for RPO's to submit projects for funding consideration. For the first round of submittals LOSRPO had three CRP projects. Tannery Park Greenway had designs and a recent cost estimate therefore it was submitted as the #1 priority. Funds to construct Tannery Park Greenway were awarded to the City of Brevard.

LOSRPO CRP List March 2023

<b>RPO Priority</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Submitter</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Costs</b>
1	Tannery Park Greenway	Brevard	Construction Ready	\$660,000.00 <b>FUNDED!</b>
2	TIMS Transit Shelters 2 shelters	Transylvania County	In development	Unknown
3	US 64 Ped crossing and sidewalks	Brevard	In development	Unknown

After the first round of submittals, it is an open call for projects. LOSRPO has been working with Madison County Transit for CRP funds to purchase two additional transit vehicles, with WC lifts and all required additional equipment including propane conversions. The approximate total CRP funds requested will be \$224,000.00. Because this is a transit project, the CRP funds will be flexed to FTA funds and administered by IMD, therefore there will be no 10% NCDOT Admin cost on this project.

***Matt Wechtel moved to approve the letter support for CRP funding for this project. Thomas Jablonski seconded the motion which passed upon a roll call vote.***

## **Item 4D: I 40 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lane Study Letter of Support.**

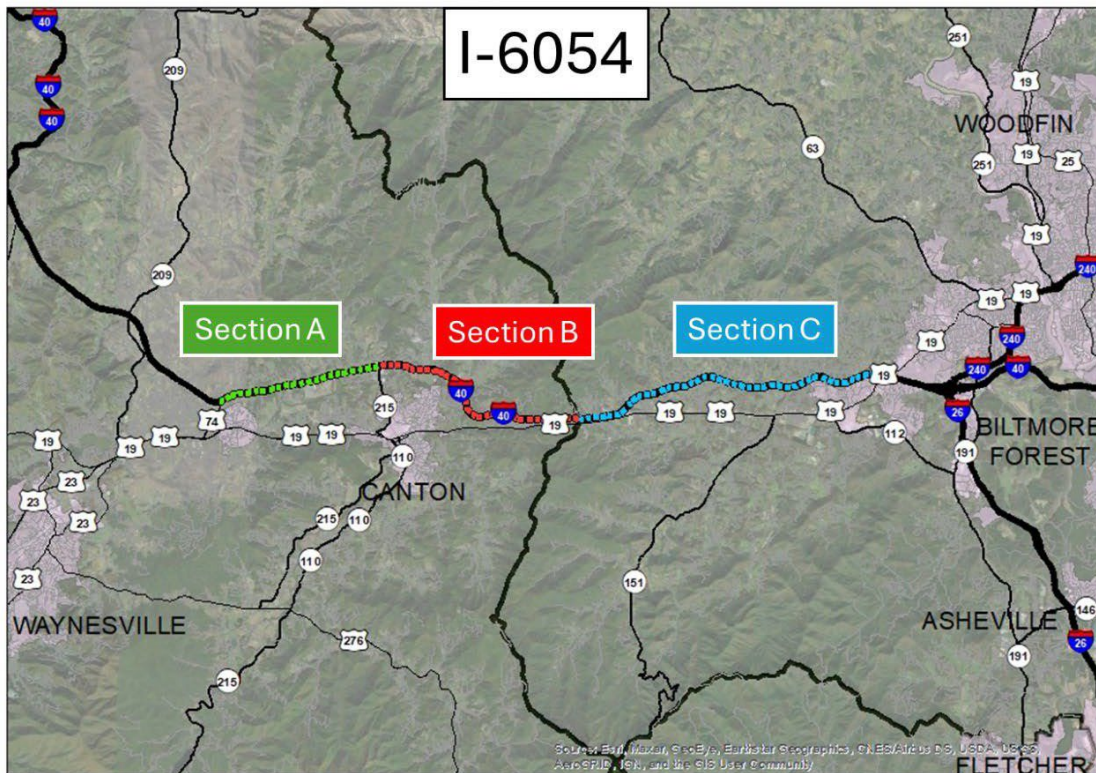
NCDOT has requested a letter of support for a study to look at the potential for High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes to be added as part of the planned (currently unfunded) widening of I-40 to the west of I-26.

There are three sections of the I-6054 project:

Section A: US 23/74 (Smokey Mountain Expressway) to NC 215 (Champion Drive)

Section B: NC 215 (Champion Drive) to Exit 37 (Wiggins Road)

Section C: Exit 37 (Wiggins Road) to Monte Vista Road



### **Topic for Discussion**

Each of these projects are currently in P 7.0 as carryover widening projects. NCDOT has requested a letter of support from the RPO to conduct a study on adding HOT lanes.

Conducting the study does not make any commitment to managed lanes but just looks at the feasibility of including them as part of the planned widening.

### **Information from FHWA:**

## What Are HOT Lanes?

Traditional high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes require passenger vehicles to have a minimum number of passengers. “HOT” lanes is short for “high-occupancy toll” lanes.

HOT lanes are HOV lanes that allow vehicles that don't meet occupancy requirements to pay a toll to use the lane. Variable pricing is used to manage the lane so that reliable performance is maintained at all times. HOT lanes have proven to be more efficient than traditional HOV lanes. In addition, in many cases the adjacent General Purpose lanes also benefit from the resulting reallocation of vehicles in the corridor. While communities may call them by different names, such as Fast Lanes or Express Lanes, the basic operation is the same—HOT lanes encourage carpooling and other transit alternatives while offering vehicles that do not meet standard occupancy requirements another option.

## What Are the Benefits of HOT Lanes?



### Future I-495 Express Lane, Virginia

HOT lanes provide mobility options for individual drivers while encouraging the use of transit and carpooling. Tolls collected from HOT lanes can supplement the operations, enforcement, and maintenance costs for the facilities. Even buses benefit from HOT lanes—research shows that communities with HOT lanes are often able to increase transit service as was the case with I-15 in San Diego. Solo drivers know they can count on getting where they need to be on time. For example, Minneapolis has increased the number of vehicles using the I-394 MnPASS lanes by 33 percent since the facility's opening in 2005 without degrading transit and HOV use. Furthermore, travel speeds of 50 to 55 mph have been maintained for 95 percent of the time in the lanes. Denver originally projected 500 toll payers during the peak hour travel along I-25 but in fact achieved 1,400 in the first year of operation. Use of the I-25 HOT lanes has grown by almost 18 percent since the HOT lanes opened in 2006 and the lanes remain uncongested. Additionally, transit ridership in the HOT lanes has remained high.

## Why Charge Travelers for Using Roadways?

By charging travelers for use of roadways, agencies can help mitigate traffic congestion while generating revenues to supplement operating costs. Common sense dictates that for a user to be willing to pay for a service, then he/she must benefit in some way from it. For priced facility users, this benefit is most likely travel-time savings or reliable travel. Often, a priced facility will offer a more reliable trip than an adjacent or nearby route. Drivers can choose to use the priced facility if they judge the travel-time savings worth paying the requisite toll.

## Do HOT Lanes Help the Environment?



### I-25 Express Lane, Denver

Like their HOV counterparts, HOT lanes have the potential to help improve air quality where they are implemented. High-occupancy lanes might help to reduce harmful impacts to the environment associated with congestion, especially by encouraging the use of multi-passenger vehicles or mass transit systems. On SR 167 in Seattle, general purpose lane speeds increased 10 percent and HOT lane speeds increased 7-8 percent and transit ridership increased 16 percent from the year before implementation of the HOT lane. As a result, the federal government allows HOV lanes to be considered a transportation control measure (TCM) for air quality conformity analysis.

## Why Are Variable Tolls Used for HOT Lanes?

Congestion pricing, or “variable pricing,” changes the amount charged for road use based on demand. On a typical roadway, a flat toll would not be the optimal toll

throughout the day. During off-peak periods it may be too high for drivers to benefit from paying it. Conversely, during times of peak demand, the toll may not be high enough to make optimal use of the facility. Variable pricing offers a solution to this problem by increasing the toll during periods of peak demand and reducing it during off-peak times.

### Who Is Implementing HOT Lanes?

Communities around the nation are installing HOT lanes in response to increased congestion. There are 10 HOT lanes currently operating in eight states:

- I-15 FasTrak in San Diego, California
- US 290 Northwest Freeway QuickRide HOT Lanes in Houston, Texas
- I-394 and I-35W MnPass in Minneapolis, Minnesota
- I-25 Express Lanes in Denver, Colorado
- I-15 Express Lanes in Salt Lake City, Utah
- SR 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project in Seattle, Washington
- I-95 Express Lanes in Miami, Florida
- I-680, Alameda County, California
- I-85, Atlanta, Georgia



## Where are HOT Lanes Operating?



**HOT lanes have been implemented in eight states.**

There are currently ten operating HOT lane projects for a total of over 100 miles in the U.S., and many states have projects in the planning stages. All of the operating projects were conversions of HOV lanes to HOT lanes, although some have extended the HOT lanes. The average length is approximately 12 miles.

## How are the Current Projects Operating?

The operating projects are either one- or two-lane facilities in each direction. Most strive to maintain speeds of at least 45 miles per hour. The variable toll ranges from \$0.25 in the off-peak to \$9.00 in heavily congested periods.

## What does the Public Think about HOT Lanes?

The operating projects enjoy support from both users and non-users. While most people don't use the HOT lane every day, research shows that travelers like having a choice in their travel options. On I-25 in Denver, 62 percent of survey respondents say they use the Express Lanes because it saves time. Likewise in Houston, focus group respondents thought that using the HOT lane saved them as much as 50 percent of total commute travel time. Reliability is also often cited as a benefit of the HOT lane. In San Diego and Miami, users there want the projects expanded.

## What about Equity? Are HOT Lanes More of a Burden on Lower-Income Drivers?



### I-394 MnPass

Research on I-394, SR 167, and I-15 indicates that drivers of all socioeconomic backgrounds support HOT lanes. In fact, data from the San Diego Association of Governments indicate that the lowest income group expressed stronger support from the project than the highest income group. Research shows that people of all income levels support HOT lanes. Users of all incomes see the value in having a reliable trip when they need it. A 2004-2006 longitudinal panel survey of I-394 residents in Minnesota found support levels at over 60 percent for the congestion priced HOT lane. This number varies only slightly when sorted by income levels, gender, and education levels, suggesting that the arrangement is perceived as equitable. I-15 in San Diego had a 77 percent approval rating after opening with nominal differences between high-

and low-income users. Specific focus groups of low-income travelers in Washington found that low-income drivers are typically as supportive, if not more supportive, of the HOT lanes concept than other drivers.

### Other Examples on I-40

One point of discussion at the MPO's Prioritization Subcommittee was the fact that there are currently no managed lanes on I-40 in the United States. However, there are several projects currently under development or consideration, including projects in North Carolina, Tennessee, Arizona, and California.

### (All content taken from FBRMPO TCC agenda)

Discussion occurred around what the cost of the study would be and if the responsibility of cost would be solely on NCDOT. Study will go along way with cost mitigation for the widening of I-40. This is an NCDOT and staff recommendation.

***Mac Morrow moved to approve providing a Letter of Support for HOT Lanes study on I-40. Kevin Ensley seconded the motion which passed upon a roll call vote.***

## **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/>

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

NCDOT Staff

Daniel Sellers

Alexius Farris

Vicki Eastland

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Matt Wechtel called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:23PM.  
***Mac Morrow moved to adjourn. Thomas Jablonski seconded the motion which passed unanimously.***