

**TRIANGLE WEST
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION
GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING NEW
TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
PROJECT REQUESTS**

INTRODUCTION

The Triangle West Transportation Planning Organization (TW TPO) *Guidelines for Identifying Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Project Requests* describes the processes that the TPO will follow to identify projects that will be submitted for evaluation to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) during the Strategic Prioritization Office of Transportation's (SPOT) Prioritization process. This document is designed to address the federal requirement that the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) be consistent with the projects and investment priorities of the TPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) while being compatible with the state's STI process.

According to U.S. Code 23 Section 134, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are required to develop a TIP in cooperation with the state and public transportation providers through a performance-driven, outcome-based approach to planning. The TIP should contain projects consistent with the MTP and should reflect the investment priorities established in the current MTP. There should be an opportunity for public participation in developing the TIP including consultation, as appropriate, with state and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation.

Furthermore, as a Transportation Management Area (TMA), according to U.S. Code 23 Section 134, all federally funded projects within the MPO (excluding projects carried out on the National Highway System) shall be selected for implementation from the approved TIP by the MPO in consultation with the state and any public transportation provider or operator. Projects on the National Highway System shall be selected for implementation from the TIP by the state in cooperation with the MPO.

North Carolina's Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) legislation, passed in 2013, establishes a formula and process by which transportation funding is distributed across the state and across transportation modes. The outcome of the STI process is the draft State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STI legislation applies uniformly across the state regardless of the boundaries of MPOs. The STI legislation requires the identification and submittal of potential transportation projects by the NCDOT and the MPO, the evaluation of projects according to a NCDOT-developed quantitative scoring methodology, and the allocation of ranking points among certain projects by NCDOT and the MPO.

The TPO retains the authority to develop the TIP for the TPO area as required by federal regulations. Participation in the STI process through submitting projects for evaluation and/or allocating Local Input Points to projects does not require the TPO to include these projects in the TIP.

OBJECTIVE

This document is designed to address multi-modal transportation needs, ensure regional balance, and prioritize projects that are needed based on technical criteria. The goal is to produce a project priority ranking which satisfies MPO goals, is simple enough for project-level analysis without requiring unnecessary data collection, and is understandable by the public.

The TPO's Technical Committee (TC) will use this document to generate a list of priority projects to submit to the NCDOT SPOT for quantitative scoring. While this document is designed to comprehensively address the TPO's transportation needs, there will always be factors that are not easily measured but should still be considered in the development of the TPO's priorities. The TPO TC will make its technical recommendation for the prioritization of projects based on the considerations described in this document, and the TPO Board will then be afforded the opportunity to make changes with appropriate documentation. All public involvement for this process will be conducted in accordance with the TPO's adopted Public Participation Plan.

Steps and schedule for updating the Triangle West TPO's Guidelines for Identifying TIP Project Requests:

February 2025	TPO TC reviews the <i>Guidelines for Identifying TIP Project Requests</i> and forwards this document to the TPO Board for public release
February 2025	TPO Board releases the <i>Guidelines for Identifying TIP Project Requests</i> for public review and comment period
April 2025	TPO TC makes final review and recommendation to TPO Board
April 2025	TPO holds public hearing, approves the <i>Guidelines for Identifying TIP Project Requests</i> , and forwards for NCDOT Review Committee review

Steps and schedule for submission of Triangle West TPO projects to NCDOT for evaluation:

Spring 2025	TPO staff work with local jurisdiction staff to develop potential new projects for Prioritization 8.0; TPO staff review projects to ensure they meet minimum requirements and are in the MTP.
April 2025	TPO staff and Technical Committee review carryover projects and make recommendations to the Board to either have those projects scored in Prioritization 8.0 as is, propose changes to projects to then be scored in Prioritization 8.0, or remove projects from consideration; TPO Board reviews and provides input on potential new projects
June 2025	TPO staff performs analysis on proposed new projects; a Technical Committee sub-committee narrows the number of projects to a final recommended list for submittal
June 2025	TPO Board reviews proposed list of new projects for Prioritization 8.0; new project list is released for public comment
September 2025	TPO Board approves project submittals for Prioritization 8.0

Triangle West TPO GOALS FOR THE *GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING TIP PROJECTS*

The *Guidelines for Identifying TIP Projects* should result in a list of projects that are a subset of the Triangle West TPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). For this reason, the goals for this document are the same as the adopted goals for the 2050 MTP. The goals of the 2050 MTP are as follows:

- Protect the human and natural environment and minimize climate change
- Ensure equity and participation
- Connect people and places
- Ensure that all people have access to multimodal and affordable transportation choices
- Promote safety, health, and well-being
- Improve infrastructure condition and resilience
- Manage congestion and system reliability
- Stimulate inclusive economic vitality

PROCEDURE FOR IDENTIFYING PROJECTS FOR SUBMISSION TO NCDOT SPOT FOR EVALUATION

1) Submission of Local Priority Lists to the TPO

All TPO member jurisdictions and agencies will submit a local priority list to the TPO. The TPO requests that the TPO members apply initial screening criteria during the development of their respective lists. The initial screening criteria are listed below in this section. In addition to the initial screening criteria, TPO members may also want to consider reviewing Section 2 of this document for guidance on the NCDOT's SPOT scoring criteria. The TPO will apply the NCDOT's scoring criteria when considering new project requests from TPO member jurisdictions and agencies. If a project exists in more than one jurisdiction, all jurisdictions must be in agreement on the proposed scope and details of the project.

Initial Screening Criteria

- a) Regional Goals - How well does the project meet the adopted regional goals? Is the project an element of the current MTP? Does it implement community objectives? For the intrastate system, does it meet NCDOT mobility objectives? Does the project have a broad base of local support?
- b) Cost Effectiveness - How much benefit does the project offer compared to the estimated cost?
- c) Timing – Is the project needed within the TIP funding cycle? Is timing a critical element for the project (one-time opportunity)? Will the opportunity to do the project be lost if it is not in the current priority cycle?

TPO staff and the TC will review local priority lists for adherence to the initial screening criteria and apply the NCDOT scoring criteria listed in Section 2 of this document, before recommending the submission of these projects to Prioritization 8.0.

2) Submission of Projects to the STI Process

For the 2028-2037 TIP, the TPO will submit projects to NCDOT's SPOT office by September 2025 for the application of the NCDOT's quantitative ranking methodology. The TPO is limited in the number of new projects that may be submitted for each mode (highway, bicycle and pedestrian, public transportation, aviation, ferry and rail), but can submit an additional project for each existing project removed from the system. NCDOT Division Engineers can also submit projects for each of their Divisions but are also limited in the number of new projects per mode that may be submitted.

The TPO will combine the local priority lists into a list that the TPO will use to prioritize projects for submission. In the event that more highway, bicycle and pedestrian, public transportation, or rail projects are submitted to the TPO than the TPO is allowed submit to NCDOT, the TPO will work with a TC subcommittee to select projects based the NCDOT scoring criteria for each mode. For Prioritization 8.0 there are no ferry or aviation projects submitted within the TPO area. The TPO will request that the Division Engineers submit any additional projects that the TPO may not be able to submit because the TPO is limited in the number of projects that may be submitted.

Triangle West TPO Preliminary Project Selection

Highway Projects

Highway projects may be scored and funded by any of the three funding categories (Statewide, Regional, or Division), dependent on the criteria as set forth in the STI law. The SPOT Workgroup has developed a different highway project scoring process for each of the three funding categories.

For SPOT 8.0, highway projects have been broken out into two specific improvement types, modernization and mobility. Modernization projects have a different set of default criteria and weights, and primarily consists of roadway modernization projects and projects to upgrade freeways to interstate standards. All other projects are mobility projects, which add capacity to roadways.

The TW TPO will use the scoring processes developed by NCDOT to preliminarily rank projects to be submitted to NCDOT SPOT for evaluation. A project that is eligible for the Statewide funding category but is not funded under that category can cascade down to the Regional category for evaluation and possible funding. If the project is not funded under the Regional category, the project may cascade down to the Division category for evaluation and possible funding.

The NCDOT SPOT process limits the number of projects that MPOs may submit. In the event that more new project requests are received than the TPO can submit, the TPO will prioritize projects based on the scoring criteria developed by the SPOT 8.0 Workgroup that were submitted to the NCDOT Board of Transportation in summer 2024. In addition to the SPOT criteria, TW will also consider subcommittee member input, public input, local priority, and funding availability. Each of these criteria will be weighted equally at 20%, and projects with the highest scores were submitted to NCDOT for quantitative evaluation.

For Prioritization 8.0, the default weights were used by all Divisions within the TW TPO boundaries. Alternate criteria are not an option for non-highway projects.

Public Transportation Projects

Public Transportation projects may be scored and funded within the Regional or Division funding categories. Different types of public transportation projects (vehicle, passenger facility, administrative/maintenance/operations facility, and fixed guideway) have different scoring processes for the Regional and Division categories.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects

Bicycle and pedestrian projects are scored and funded within the Division Needs funding category; therefore NCDOT utilizes only one scoring process for bicycle and pedestrian projects. The TPO will use the scoring processes developed by the P8.0 Workgroup to preliminarily rank projects to be submitted to NCDOT SPOT for evaluation.

The NCDOT SPOT process limits the number of projects that TPOs may submit. In the event that more new project requests are received than the TPO can submit, the TPO will calculate preliminary scores based on the scoring criteria developed by the SPOT 8.0 Workgroup that were submitted to the NCDOT Board of Transportation. This will provide a set of preliminary scores that can be used to rank projects.

Rail Projects

Rail projects may be scored and funded within any of the three funding categories (Statewide, Regional, or Division). The TPO will coordinate closely with the NCDOT Rail Division on the identification, prioritization, and submission of rail projects. **The TPO will utilize the Rail Project Decision Tree, a tool to help submitters determine what qualifies as an eligible rail project and what STI code it goes under.**

Public Involvement

All public involvement for this process will be conducted in accordance with the TPO's Public Participation Plan. As is the TPO's standard practice for all TPO Board and TC agenda items, all relevant materials, documentation of this process, and TC and TPO Board meeting materials and minutes will be posted on the TPO's website, www.trianglewest.org.

The TPO Public Participation Plan sets a minimum 30-day public comment period for this process and requires a public hearing at a TPO Board meeting. This public comment period and public hearing will be advertised in accordance with the Public Participation Plan. Public comments will be documented, summarized, and responses will be provided. In addition, all TPO Board and TC meetings are public meetings and include the opportunity for public comment. Comments provided at any meeting will be considered.

The TPO web site will include the following for the FY2028-2037 TIP web page:

- Link to the NCDOT STI Prioritization Resources web site
- Updated drafts of this document as they are available
- Schedule for adoption of this document
- Schedule of milestones in this process
- **Scoring Criteria for Preliminary Project Selection**

TPO will follow the schedule below for public comment and adoption of this document:

February 2025 – Draft Guidelines reviewed by the TPO TC (materials published online for public review); TC recommends that the TPO Board release the draft document for public comment

February 2025 – TPO Board reviews the draft and releases for 30-day public comment period

April 2025 - TC has second review and makes recommendation to the Board

April 2025 – Board holds public hearing, reviews public comments, and adopts this document (including any changes based on public comment); TPO staff submits this document to NCDOT Review Committee; TC reviews comments from NCDOT Review Committee and recommends changes to this document, if necessary

June 2025 – Board adopts revised guidelines, if necessary

Material Sharing

Comments on the TPO's *Guidelines for Identifying TIP Project Requests* or any information contained within may be submitted in writing to the TPO using the contact information below. Comments may also be offered during any TPO Board or TPO TC meeting. All meetings are open to the public and meeting schedules are available on the TPO's website www.trianglewest.org.

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