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METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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March 8, 2023

TO: DCHC MPO Board
 FROM : Kelly Fomenko, LPA Staff
 SUBJECT: FY24-33 STIP Draft Swaps Public Comments

Summary

On April 25, 2022, NCDOT released the first version of the Draft FY2024-2033 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Due to fiscal constraints in the state's transportation budget, the Draft STIP did not include any new projects from the Prioritization 6 (SPOT 6) process that concluded in July 2021. Instead, the Draft STIP programmed existing projects in a manner that met with NCDOT's current fiscal situation. This resulted in the removal of many projects from the ten-year Draft STIP.

In July 2022, the North Carolina General Assembly adopted, and the Governor signed, a new state budget that provides an influx of new funding for transportation, thereby providing additional revenue for the STIP. On August 4, 2022, NCDOT released a revised Draft FY2024-2033 STIP that takes this new revenue into account. Several projects are now also in the Draft FY2024-2033 STIP that are not in the recently adopted DCHC MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

The protocol established by the SPOT Workgroup, and approved by the North Carolina Board of Transportation, for approval of the Draft STIP remains in place. MPOs can request to "swap" STIP projects. This would allow projects to either be moved up within the STIP, or for projects that were not included in the ten-year STIP to be moved into the STIP, provided that other projects of similar cost and tier were removed. MPO staff has been working with local staff to determine if any swaps are desired based on the revised Draft STIP.

The new deadline for submission of STIP swaps is March 17, 2023. Depending on the updated cost analysis for the proposed U-5774B/U-5304F swap, U-6118 could be swapped into the STIP with regional tier funding as opposed to division tier funds.

Public Comment

The draft recommendations were released on February 13, 2023 for a 21-day public comment period. This public notice was distributed through the DCHC MPO website and social media, as well as through a press release and emailed to subscribers on the DCHC MPO listserv. The public were asked to email or call with comments, or complete a survey. Survey respondents were also given the opportunity to self-identify to measure equitable engagement.

Public Comments Received

Comment #	Comment	Response
1	Project U-5720B US Hwy 70 should be a top priority providing enhanced connectivity between Durham and Raleigh. Please do not deprioritize U-5720B in Durham County.	<i>We appreciate your feedback and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
2	The US 70 project is already funded and drawings completed by NCDOT for a freeway. MPO wants a boulevard. At the engagement sessions, participants did not want the boulevard option. Leadership told us that if they don't get a boulevard (which Campo is doing) they will recommend doing nothing. This is really a sad display of not caring what the people most affected want.	<i>We appreciate your feedback and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
3	I have the following concerns which seems to be stripped funding of STIP U-5720B (US70 improvements) needed in SE Durham for a number of projects near the Durham / Chatham county border. Direct access via I-85 south via US70 to RDU and Raleigh has been planned. This was prompted by the planned freeway and extension of Aviation Hwy to US70. Many residents traveling from Oxford, Roxboro and even southern Virginia use this route for direct access. This is a major US Highway and not a local municipal roadway. Traffic on US70 is seen as a more direct route and also will ease traffic on I-40 between I-885 and I-540 which is one of the most heavily traveled roads in the state. Since I-885 has opened there is additional traffic congestion and spillage of the City of Durham traffic which used Ellis Rd previously to get to US70 is now using direct access to US70 via I-885. The previous DCHC MPO had a number of projects to be linked together as part of this plan for traffic management and now this boulevard is not addressing the traffic congestion issue that is building. U-5720B is part of a series of related NCDOT projects, and was to start in the 2020's and, hopefully, to be completed by 2030. This change in direction will cause a greater delay and need. With 10,000 new homes to be built in the SE Durham area, increased traffic to RDU and the more residents traveling to Raleigh from the northern counties and southern Virginia, the previously priority project is sorely needed. Please do not deprioritize U-5720B as this was prioritized and it is still needed even more.	<i>We appreciate your feedback and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>The U-5720B project is included in the <u>US 70 corridor study</u>, which is still ongoing. The proposal to swap this project out of the committed window does not strip the project of all funding. Rather, the project will receive funding for preliminary engineering; this is the same funding level as project <u>U-5720A</u>, which connects to the <u>U-5720B</u> segment. This will allow both projects to go through the design process together as the corridor study is completed.</i>

4	I am strongly opposed to any funding for any projects that expand the capacity of Interstate 40 or any other "freeway" (such as U-5720B). I would prefer that any and all transportation funding be used to expand public transportation or, in lieu of that option, then improvements to bike and pedestrian usage. So U-6021 should be KEPT in plan. Item U-6118 should be SWAPPED OUT.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
5	1. On what basis have these projected swaps been based? It's not possible to make an informed comment without data, and I'd hope that the recommendation for this swap was informed by supporting data, including forecasts, to support it 2. If there is data, why isn't it being shared? 3. Why would we give-up 30,000,000 dollars of state money, some of which would be spent on Durham residents? 4. What are the quantified differences in how the public benefits from the options? 5. I can comment on the need for NCDOT's funded and engineered plan for making HWY 70 a freeway connecting 885 with the MPO approved highway connecting to 540. 1. I don't like my granddaughter having to breathe the fumes of cars when I'm stuck in traffic. 2. I don't think it's a good idea to divert revenue from Durham businesses by presenting traffic congestion to Durham and a clear sailing freeway toward Raleigh. 3 The MPO's "preferred plan" is for a boulevard. All evidence shows that there are more accidents/mile on boulevards v. freeways, more pollution from boulevards than freeways, less traffic capacity on boulevards v. highways. 4. There isn't any public transportation or alternative routes to serve the fastest growing section of Durham. 6. I most value informed input. What does NCDOT, the acknowledged experts in transportation have to say, and why aren't there comments included to help the electorate make an informed decision?	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>The project swap rationales and benefits can be found through the DCHC MPO website under the <u>FY24-33 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</u> page. The \$26 million difference is expected to decrease as updated costing estimates develop for project U-5304F. As part of the swap process, NCDOT must agree with the proposed swaps and have indicated their support.</i>

6	For swap in U-5774F, does the scope of work and cost estimate include constructing the Triangle Bikeway adjacent to NC 54 including the bridge over Interstate 40, as shown in the Triangle Bikeway Study? For swap in U-6118, does the scope include a sidewalk or multi use path on both sides of NC 55 for the length of the project? There is a sidewalk gap in this area, and this is a bus route and lots of pedestrian activity related to businesses in the corridor. What is the benefit of moving funds from Durham County to Wake County?	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> The <u>U-5774F</u> project scope includes interchange improvements at I-40/NC-54. The <u>Triangle Bikeway</u> and associated bridge are not explicitly stated in this scope, however this project is subject to <u>NCDOT's Complete Streets Policy</u>. Project U-6118 includes transit safety improvements on this short stretch of road. This project does not explicitly include multiuse paths; however, it is also subject to NCDOT's Complete Streets Policy. Funds diverted to Wake County rail projects will improve overall rail commute times between Raleigh and Durham, to promote efficient multi-modal transportation options in the region.
7	These swaps are positive overall, but I am disappointed that the vast majority of funding is directed towards roadway improvements. I-6006 sounds preferable to U-5774F to me, and the main result of U-5304F seems to be increased carbon footprint, reduced safety, and lower quality of living. Instead, capacity could instantly be improved on 15/501 if one lane in each direction was designated bus-only, and the \$53 million was spent on services that run with < 10 minute headways.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>

8	Durham must make improvements to Hwy 70 as previously funded. With all the new developments going up near that already-congested corridor, it's imperative that Hwy 70 be improved to accommodate increased traffic and congestion.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
9	Please do not repurpose these funds; please leave funding in place as is. With almost 9000 new homes approved for the area, US 70 needs the work done to handle the vehicle traffic. If I could vote, I would vote NO.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
10	With the limited amount of data I have access to, I have to say No!	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>For more information on these projects, please visit the <u>FY24-33 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</u> page on the DCHC MPO website.</i>

11	I live in east Durham/Brier Creek area - fast growing with inadequate transpo infrastructure. Why would we want to “surrender” over \$200mm for a US 70 solution?	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>The U-5720B project is included in the US 70 corridor study, which is still ongoing. The proposal to swap this project out of the committed window does not strip the project of all funding. Rather, the project will receive funding for preliminary engineering; this is the same funding level as project U-5720A, which connects to the U-5720B segment. This will allow both projects to go through the design process together as the corridor study is completed. This funding would then be used for projects that can more readily use the funding.</i>
12	On what basis have these projected swaps been based? and Why would we give-up 30,000,000 dollars of state money, some of which would be spent on Durham residents?	<i>Note: This appears to be a duplicate of comment #5. Please see above.</i> <i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
13	For the people and businesses that use HWY 70 as a vital link from Raleigh to Durham, major improvements must be made. It simply cannot handle the traffic it has now, much less the estimated volume for five years from now. Stick to the original DOT plan.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>

14	I am fully in support of project U-5774F on NC54 and I40. The southbound exit lane from I40 on to NC54 is always backed up, as vehicles line up in two lanes (for right or left turns) despite it technically being only one lane until it reaches the light. Tight space and dangerous as vehicles exit I40 at faster speeds than they should. In addition, I am supportive of projects P-5734 and P-5736, especially as they are related to improvements for rail commute times and grant opportunities for more rail. Thank you!	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
15	Not enough of this is focused on improving bike and pedestrian access and accommodations. This is not going to make our area more usable or livable.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
16	The rationale for dropping project U-6021 is "Though there would be bike/ped accommodations in the project, the American Tobacco Trail parallels this section of Fayetteville Street and provides a safe alternative for those users." However, this does not take into consideration that residents living along Fayetteville Rd and east of Fayetteville Street have difficulty accessing the American Tobacco Trail (ATT). If U-6021 is dropped there needs to be funding for the following from the City, MPO, and/or NCDOT: - Safe bicycle and pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Fayetteville St and Pearson/Wortley Dr. This will also improve safe access to Pearsontown Elementary. - Safe bicycle and pedestrian access between the Fayetteville / Ebon Drive intersection and either Juliette Drive or Cook Rd {or both}. - Pedestrian crosswalks and pedestrian signals at the Fayetteville / Cook and Fayetteville / Juliette intersections. - Safe bicycle and pedestrian access between the Fayetteville / Obie intersection and Woodcroft Parkway - Safe bicycle and pedestrian access between the Fayetteville / Hemmingwood intersection and Woodcroft Parkway	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>

17	It makes sense to swap U-5774B for U-5774F as congestion mitigation is needed more there. What are the design details associated with these locations, and how do they compare to original discussions with developing these areas?	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>For more information on DCHC MPO projects, visit our <u>project database</u>. Staff will follow up to answer additional project questions.</i>
18	I'm disappointed to see that the money that was designated to be spent on converting US-70 into a freeway (U-5720B) is proposed to be swapped out. We should move forward with NCDOT's plan to turn US-70 into a freeway that will connect I-885 with I-540. I realize that the MPO wants to turn this into a boulevard, but as someone who travels up and down this stretch of road regularly I think that is a bad idea. Evidence shows that there are more accidents per mile, more pollution, and less traffic capacity on boulevards than on freeways. With the rapid pace of development happening in this area of the County we should be planning for a lot more cars to be driving this stretch of road soon, and NCDOT is correct in thinking that it should be converted into a freeway to accommodate the needs of future drivers who will be living and commuting here.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
19	I am not in favor of diverting funds away from converting US-70 into a freeway. This section of the road would be better served as a freeway than a boulevard and we should listen to NCDOT's recommendations to institute those changes because there are more cars on this section of road every single day and congestion is only going to continue to increase. Please do not scrap the US-70 freeway project. Durham's residents need it!	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
20	Need to focus on improving congestion on highways 70 project that includes miami and sherron intersection	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>

21	Would like to see that the u-5720 US 70 corridor direction whether a freeway or boulevard is needed to improve the congestion. Hate seeing that money not spend on improving US 70 and SE Durham since that is the highest growth area and with growth comes more congestion, more accidents, more frustration.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
22	I have several concerns regards the proposed FY24-33 STIP Swap recommendations which divert Funds Away From US-70 Improvements. It is important to get moving on US-70 improvements as soon as possible based on growth in the US-70 corridor. I am trying to understand on what basis have these projected swaps been based? It's not possible to make an informed comment without data, and hopefully the recommendation for this swap was informed by sufficient data to support it. What are the forecasts for the future in regards to traffic? Is there data available to be shared? Is there quantified information on how the public benefits from each of the options? Additionally why would we give up \$30 million in state money? There are several reasons to move forward with NCDOT's funded and engineered plan for making US-70 a freeway connecting 885 with the CAMPO-approved highway connecting to 540: The MPO's "preferred plan" is for a boulevard. Evidence shows that there are more accidents per mile on boulevards vs. freeways, more pollution from boulevards than freeways, and less traffic capacity on boulevards vs. highways. The area surrounding US-70 is the fastest growing area in Durham - and needs improvement to US-70 as soon as possible.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>Rationales for the swaps can be found through the DCHC MPO website under the <u>FY24-33 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</u> page.</i>
23	Plans & funding for upgrading US 70 to a freeway must continue forward without any more delay. US 70 is a major thoroughfare between Durham and Raleigh as well as other cities on either side. The traffic volume and congestion on US 70 must be recognized for the safety of motorists with the planned upgrade to a freeway. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>

24	I do NOT agree with the swap of the us 70 project due to the growth in this area and the congestion that exist	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
25	Why is this being proposed? What is the data you are using to support this? Why a boulevard when is shown they have more accidents and create more air pollution? Why is SE Durham being ignored? Highway 70 is in desperate need of renovation and with the enormous amount of development that is being allowed to be built highway 70 needs to be addressed now!! Not later!	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>Rationales for the swaps can be found through the DCHC MPO website under the <u>FY24-33 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</u> page.</i>
26	I don't understand why the process reaches the 11th hour and with no information, a diversion from the plan is proposed. We've seen no data as to why this makes sense. For that reason I support the continuation of the Route 70 freeway improvements.	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i>
27	Informed input is important. What does NCDOT, the acknowledged experts in transportation have to say, and why aren't their comments included to help the electorate make an informed decision?	<i>We appreciate your feedback, and your comments will be shared with the DCHC MPO Board.</i> <i>Rationales for the swaps can be found through the DCHC MPO website under the <u>FY24-33 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</u> page.</i>