



MEMORANDUM

To: North Carolina Department of Transportation, State Transportation Improvement Program Unit

From: Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization Board

Date: February 11, 2015

Subject: DCHC MPO Board Comments on draft FY2016-2025 STIP

BACKGROUND

On December 4, 2014 the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) released the draft FY2016-2025 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Immediately following the release of the draft STIP, the NCDOT provided the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO a draft FY2016-2025 STIP Supplement that serves as the MPO's draft FY2016-2025 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

On January 5, 2015, the DCHC MPO Technical Committee (TC) convened a subcommittee to review and discuss the draft FY2016-2025 STIP Supplement and the development of the MPO's FY2016-2025 TIP. During the subcommittee meeting and in the days that followed, the subcommittee generated a list of comments and questions to discuss with the NCDOT during the Priority Review Meeting scheduled for February 11th, 2015.

The comments presented in this Memorandum were reviewed by the MPO TC and will be presented to the MPO Board for review, modifications, and approval during the February 11th, 2015 Board meeting.

GENERAL COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

1. Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) law

The DCHC MPO Board appreciates the NCDOT Division Offices for working collaboratively to understand and adhere to the new STI prioritization and scoring process. The DCHC MPO Board recognizes that NCDOT's collaboration was not required through STI, but feels that the collaborative scoring process led to a more effective draft TIP outcome.

The DCHC MPO Board does not necessarily agree that the STI process fully captured the priorities of the DCHC MPO. The DCHC MPO worked closely with NCDOT within the STI process but feels that improvements could be made to the STI process to better reflect the values and priorities of the DCHC MPO region. In the future, it is requested that the DCHC MPO be included in the discussions regarding projects in the Statewide Mobility Category to ensure better consistency with the goals of the DCHC MPO Board and consistency with other adopted long range plans for the DCHC MPO area.

2. Projects Programmed in the Developmental Program Years of the STIP

The DCHC MPO expresses concern regarding how many priority projects are programmed for the Developmental Program Years of the STIP. It is understood that many of the priority projects are programmed for later years in the STIP because feasibility studies and/or the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents need to be completed. The DCHC MPO requests that NCDOT provide a schedule of feasibility studies and NEPA documents for these high priority projects so that the projects can move forward as soon as possible and avoid being subject to reprioritization.

3. Programming of Related Project Schedules

The DCHC MPO emphasizes the importance of appropriately scheduling projects and phases of projects that are related to each other. Appropriate schedules should be communicated to the Transportation Planning Branch. For example, the S. Churton Street widening project (#U-5845) is currently and appropriately scheduled after the Orange Grove Extension project (#U-5848) and this schedule should remain. However, the Hillsborough Passenger Rail Station project (#P-5701) is scheduled before Orange Grove Extension project (#U-5848). The schedule for the Hillsborough Passenger Rail Station should be reviewed and potentially revised depending on whether station access is provided for in the scope for either project.

4. Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funding

According to a recent review of the draft FY2016-2025 STIP, specifically performed by the Piedmont Triad Regional Council (PTRC), “\$53 million of bicycle and pedestrian projects have been programmed, of which \$5 million are leftover Safe Routes to School funds from SAFETEA-LU. If annual allotments of \$23 million/yr for Transportation Alternatives continue over the 2016-2025 time period from FHWA, it appears there will be a significant gap of over \$150 million of federal funds that could be prioritized and funded through different methods to fully leverage local match commitments on bicycle & pedestrian projects.” (*Memo by Jesse Day, PTRC, dated December 16, 2014 is attached to this memo.*)

Related to the memo from PTRC, the NCDOT SPOT presentation dated July 2014 states, “NCDOT may program an estimated \$10 million of TAP funds on bike/ped projects per fiscal year.”

The DCHC MPO requests clarification on the programming and availability of TAP funding. If all TAP funding was **not** programmed in the draft STIP, why was it not all programmed? If all TAP funding was **not** programmed in the draft STIP will additional TAP funding be programmed by NCDOT, or made available on a competitive basis?

5. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program Funding

Similar to question #4 above, it is unclear how much SRTS funding was available to be programmed compared to what was actually programmed in the draft STIP, and if not all funding was programmed, what additional funding may be available. According to page six of the report released by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, *North Carolina Writing the Next Chapter of Its Transportation Legacy*, “Communities have become discouraged over the state’s slow handling of the Safe Routes to

School program.” Are communities in North Carolina no longer considering SRTS funding for some projects? The DCHC MPO requests clarification on the programming strategy and availability of SRTS funding. (*The report is attached to this memo.*)

6. Call for CMAQ Projects 2016-2017

On October 12, 2011, the DCHC MPO TAC approved a list of CMAQ projects for FY 2016 and 2017 (see bulleted list below). This action was taken in response to a CMAQ call for projects initiated by NCDOT. Subsequently, the DCHC MPO received a letter from Ms. Terry C. Arellano, NCDOT Systems Planning Group, dated February 25, 2014, stating that NCDOT “has postponed programming additional CMAQ projects until Federal funding uncertainty can be addressed.” Since this correspondence, at the request of Durham and the DCHC MPO, NCDOT has agreed to amend the STIP to add one of the 2011 approved projects, the West Ellerbe Creek Trail. The amendment is scheduled for approval by the NC Board of Transportation in March 2015.

The other projects approved in 2011 are not in the current STIP or the draft FY2016-25 STIP. Derry Schmidt, NCDOT Systems Planning Group, told DCHC MPO staff in December that “in the next couple of weeks, we will begin a process to schedule the previously-submitted CMAQ proposals for funding in FY 2016 & 2017.”

The MPO requests any additional updates that may be available for the CMAQ funded projects listed below. While several of the projects remain a priority, other projects may need to be reconsidered due to changed conditions or priorities. **The MPO requests the following:**

1. That NCDOT hold a new Call for Projects or provide the MPO an opportunity to review the previous proposals and re-submit CMAQ project priorities for the MPO area.
2. That NCDOT provide clarification regarding the amount of CMAQ funding that is available to be programmed. Are the CMAQ funding estimates used in 2011 still accurate?

The FY 2016 and 2017 CMAQ projects approved in 2011 are:

- Triangle Travel Demand Management Program – continuation of CMAQ funding for the MPO’s share of this regional program administered by TJCOG
- West Durham Station Pedestrian Enhancements – sidewalk planning, R/W, and construction on Georgia Ave. (Club Blvd. to Hillsborough St.), Green St. (Carolina Ave. to Oakland Ave.), Oakland Ave. (Club Blvd. to Hillsborough St.) to increase access to proposed West Durham commuter rail and light rail stations
- Durham Station Pedestrian Enhancements – sidewalk planning, R/W, and construction on Pettigrew St. (Blackwell St. to Mangum St.) and Morehead Ave. (Duke St. to Blackwell St.) to increase access to proposed downtown Durham commuter rail and light rail stations
- Carrboro Downtown Multi-use Path – trail planning, R/W, and construction connecting Greensboro and Lloyd streets (within 3 mile bike-shed of UNC Hospitals Station)
- Durham Alston Avenue Station Pedestrian Enhancements – sidewalk planning, R/W, and construction on Pettigrew St. (Fayetteville St. to Driver St.) to increase access to proposed Alston Avenue commuter rail and light rail stations
- Durham Area Transit Authority – purchase of two replacement buses
- Chapel Hill Transit – purchase of two replacement buses

SPECIFIC PROJECT-RELATED COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Division 8

SR 1008 Mt. Carmel Church Road (#EB-5738) & SR 1532 Manns Chapel Road (#EB-5739)

The DCHC MPO requests guidance regarding the role of local governments in administering these two projects. The DCHC MPO requests confirmation of project costs including costs for right-of-way acquisition for these two projects from the NCDOT Program Development Branch. Are the project costs shown in the draft STIP final costs or estimated costs? These projects are programmed for construction within the first five years of the draft STIP. How soon after the adoption of the STIP will local governments be expected to pay the local match?

If the county contracts with NCDOT for program management, what is the process/cost to contract with NCDOT for right-of-way acquisition? Both Chatham County and the DCHC MPO are very interested in the process and timing of agreements and contracts.

Division 7

Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (#TE-5205)

The total project cost submitted through SPOT was \$1.8 billion, however the total project cost shown in the draft STIP is \$977,986. Why is only \$443,003 shown in the Post Year Unfunded category, and not the total remaining project cost? The DCHC MPO strongly recommends the programming for the construction phase be thoroughly reviewed with the DCHC MPO and Triangle Transit to ensure that the construction schedules for the part of the project in REG A and the part of the project in REG B reflect a rational construction schedule for the project. REG A is defined as, "UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Durham County Line." REG B is defined as, "Orange County Line to NC 55 (Alston Avenue) in Durham."

US 70 Bypass Bridge (#B-4962)

The area around the US 70 Bridge is a crucial connection for the Mountains-to-Sea Trail and for connecting to the Eno River State Park. As bridge design begins, coordination with the efforts to extend the Mountains to Sea Trail is needed. Specific comments on this project were sent to Ms. Brenna Poole, NDOT PDEA Branch from the Orange County Planning & Inspections Department in a letter dated October 27, 2009. It is requested that these comments be reviewed before design of the bridge begins.

Jones Creek Greenway (#C-5181)

The DCHC MPO requests guidance on any opportunities that may exist to increase the amount of funding for this project. Are TAP or CMAQ (State or MPO) funds available?

Orange County Bicycle Route 1 (#EB-5721)

The DCHC MPO requests that the funding for this project be reprogrammed for earlier years in the STIP. It is funded with SRTS funding and is currently scheduled for PE in FY2021 and Construction in FY2022. The DCHC MPO and the Town of Chapel Hill do not understand why SRTS funding would be programmed for FY2021 of the STIP if there is an unobligated balance of SRST funding available today. If the project is managed locally, could it be scheduled earlier?

Morgan Creek Greenway (#EL-4828)

The DCHC MPO requests that the funding for this project be programmed for FY2016 in the STIP. NCDOT is aware of the additional engineering work related to the creek crossings that is causing the delays in the project.

I-40 Widening (#I-3306)

The DCHC MPO requests clarification on the scope of improvements proposed in this project. The DCHC MPO requests confirmation that the requested interchange improvements at NC 86 are included as part of the project. The DCHC MPO also requests an explanation for why right-of-way is scheduled for 2023 if the CE will be completed in 2016. The DCHC MPO is concerned that the NEPA document could expire prior to 2023 and requests that the right-of-way and mitigation phases be scheduled during the first five years of the STIP.

I-40 Pavement Rehabilitation (#I-5822)

The DCHC MPO requests that this project be coordinated with I-3306 to avoid duplicative paving and repaving costs.

South Greensboro Street (#U-4726 DX)

The DCHC MPO requests that the funding for this project be programmed for FY2016-2017 in the STIP.

US 15/501 (Fordham Boulevard) (#U-5304)

Break D of this project is described as NC 54 (Raleigh Road) Interchange Improvements. However, Break A of the NC 54 project (#U-5774) is the NC 54 and US 15/501 interchange upgrade. The DCHC MPO requests clarification for the costs of the NC 54 and US 15/501 interchange. Are the costs of the NC 54 and US 15/501 interchange included in both projects and there for duplicated?

NC 54 (#U-5774)

The DCHC MPO requests additional time to review the impacts of converting the existing at-grade intersection of NC 54 and Barbee Chapel Road to a grade separated interchange before expressing support for this improvement.

SR 1009 South Churton Street (#U-5845)

This project calls for the widening of S. Churton Street at the interchange with I-85 (exit 164). The Town of Hillsborough had previously been advised that I-85 widening project needed to be scheduled first and that the interchange improvement could not be constructed independently. Has there been a change of opinion on this or is there some other way that the interchange improvement will be incorporated into the widening project?

SR 1772 Greensboro Street (#U-5846)

Are there local match requirements or other local requirements for this project? Will NCDOT design and manage this project?

SR 1010 West Franklin Street/East Main Street (#U-5847)

Are there local match requirements or other local requirements for this project? Will NCDOT design and manage this project?

Orange Grove Road Extension (#U-5848)

In addition to overlapping with U-5845, this project overlaps with P-5701. The timing and scope of all three projects are connected and needs to be considered in the scheduling of these projects. Additionally, there is a small project the town and county have identified at the intersections of Eno Mountain Road and Mayo Streets with Orange Grove Road that would ideally be added to this project scope. This is an off-set intersection that cannot accommodate signalization in its current configuration. The town and county have funded and completed some preliminary investigation to identify a realignment. Any ability to pursue the realignment further and discuss this project scope would be greatly appreciated.

Norfolk Southern H Line (train station) (#P-5701)

The DCHC MPO requests details on the exact scope of work for this project. This project relates directly to #U-5848 (Orange Grove Road extension). These projects may overlap or create the opportunity to shift costs to different sources as the extension of Orange Grove Road is intended to provide access to the train station. It is the intent and desire of the Town of Hillsborough to go **under** the railroad due to site topography. This concept has been shared with the North Carolina Railroad Company on multiple occasions.

Chapel Hill Transit Project (#TA-4726)

The DCHC MPO requests that the project description to be changed from articulated to regular buses.

Chapel Hill Transit Bus Rapid Transit (#U-5119A)

The DCHC MPO requests that the second phase of the BRT project be programmed into the STIP. Near the end of 2015 the North-South Corridor Study will be completed and a potential Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) will be recommended by the Chapel Hill Transit Partners and then further adopted by the Town of Chapel Hill and the DCHC MPO. The next steps in the planning process would be to forward this LPA to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for acceptance into the Small Starts Project Development Program and for environmental work to proceed on the LPA. This work would be the second phase of the project of ultimately designing and constructing a Bus Rapid Transit project in the North-South Corridor. ***The second phase would include the environmental work and engineering, with a total cost estimate of about \$3.5-\$4million.*** Work and the associated costs for implementing the project would include the following major task items.

- In 2016 – submission of a Small Starts Project Development Application to the FTA at the cost of \$20,000
- In 2016 – starting and completing an Environmental Assessment under Federal NEPA rules with the expected outcome of a signed Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by the FTA at the cost of \$550,000 to \$700,000 depending on the level of transportation analysis and Cultural Resource Analysis
- In 2016 and until the project is constructed (assume 2020) – annual required planning and FTA submittals including the update of Small Starts documentation and required documents including (but not limited to) Project Management Plan, Public Involvement Plan, BRT Comprehensive Operations Analysis, BRT Fleet Management Plan, Basis of Design, and Work Breakdown Structure at the cost of \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually
- In 2017 and 2018 – initiation and completion of engineering (preliminary and final) at the cost of \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million depending on the LPA cross-section

Division 5

Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (#TE-5205)

The total project cost submitted through SPOT was \$1.8 billion, however the total project cost shown in the draft STIP is \$977,986. Why is only \$443,003 shown in the Post Year Unfunded category, and not the total remaining project cost? The DCHC MPO strongly recommends the programming for the construction phase be thoroughly reviewed with the DCHC MPO and Triangle Transit to ensure that the construction schedules for the part of the project in REG A and the part of the project in REG B reflect a rational construction schedule for the project. REG A is defined as, “UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Durham County Line.” REG B is defined as, “Orange County Line to NC 55 (Alston Avenue) in Durham.”

LaSalle Street (#EB-5703)

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019.

Raynor Street (#EB-5704)

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019.

NC 54 (#EB-5708)

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019.

US 501 Bypass (North Duke Street) (#U-5715)

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019.

Bryant Bridge Trail (#EB-5720)

The DCHC MPO requests that the PE for this project be scheduled for FY2016 and Construction be scheduled in FY 2019.

US 70 Glenwood Avenue (#U-5518)

This project is currently located in Wake County but in the future the US 70 and SR 3067 TW Alexander Drive intersection may be located in an area that is annexed by the City of Durham. REG B of this project is the conversion of the at-grade intersection to an interchange with cost participation by the City of Durham. Would cost participation by the City of Durham result in a bonus allocation or some kind of reimbursement through STI? If it would result in a bonus allocation, which jurisdiction would receive the bonus allocation?

Woodcroft Parkway Extension (#U-5823)

The existing portion of Woodcroft Parkway is classified as a Major Collector. Would the extension also be classified as a Major Collector? If the extension project is classified as a Major Collector, would it be eligible for federal funding? Would the extension project be a state-maintained roadway or a locally-maintained roadway? Given that this extension would attract traffic away from a highly congested Major roadway, i.e., NC 751, can federal funding be used for the extension? If not, what other options (if any) exist for using federal funds to fund the extension project?

Acquisition of rail corridors for use as bicycle and pedestrian trails, Durham (Previous STIP #EL-4999)

The DCHC MPO requests that the Federal HP earmark be reprogrammed in the draft STIP. It is understood that #EL-4999 was removed from the FY2012-FY2018 STIP because after several years of on-going negotiations for right-of-way acquisition, a cost could not be agreed upon by all parties and there was no longer county or statewide interest in the new project extents that were limited to downtown Durham. This project has remained a priority for the residents and City of Durham. The City of Durham was recently awarded 2014 TIGER VI planning grant funds to develop a Duke Belt Line Trail Master Plan for the approximately two-mile inactive rail corridor in downtown Durham.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK RECEIVED DURING FEBRUARY 11, 2015 DCHC MPO BOARD MEETING:

2nd DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

December 16, 2014

To: Lance Metzler, Rockingham County Manager
From: Jesse Day Senior Regional Planner PTRC
Re: North Carolina Transportation Alternatives Program Summary (MAP-21)

Transportation Alternatives funding is a part of the MAP-21 program authorized by the US Congress in the summer of 2012. The following page (*MAP-21 Cheat Sheet*) summarizes funding amounts and categories for the different programs of MAP-21, which expired on October 1, 2014. The program is now operating on a continuing resolution (CR), which has been continued through at least March of 2015.

NC Transportation Alternatives Authorization: ~\$23 million/yr (\$46 M left over from 2012 and 2014)

This allotment includes 50% based on population (Category A: <5,000 pop, B. 5,000-200,000 pop, C. >200,000 pop) and 50% is flexible.

NC Transportation Alternatives Obligation: ~\$3.6 million has been obligated or transferred to date since 2012. Approximately \$3.2 million was transferred to project ER-5600, “VEGETATION MANAGEMENT - CLEAR ZONE IMPROVEMENT AND MANAGEMENT STATEWIDE.” The remainder (~\$400,000) has been obligated to areas with over 200,000 pop.

The remaining funds are slated to be programmed and obligated through the Strategic Transportation Investments Process or through the large MPOs (>200,000 pop) and their local competitive grant process. There will be a delay in obligating funds until the projects come online through an adopted STIP.

A cursory look at DRAFT 2016-2025 STIP (\$14.7 Billion including 2015 projects) shows \$53 million of bicycle and pedestrian projects have been programmed, of which \$5 million are leftover Safe Routes to School funds from SAFETEA-LU. If annual allotments of \$23 million/yr for Transportation Alternatives continue over 2016-2025 time period from FHWA, there will be a ***significant gap of over \$150 million of federal funds*** that could be prioritized and funded through different methods to fully leverage local match commitments on bicycle & pedestrian projects. Some of the \$150 million gap will be prioritized through the large MPOs in a competitive grant process. However, that amount directly attributed to large MPOs currently is about \$5 million/yr (\$23 million/yr). The large MPO grant process could lower the above Transportation Alternatives gap to ***over \$100 million of federal funds*** once the large MPO funds are programmed and obligated.

Note: Information provided here is intended for discussion and is draft (Sources: NCDOT, AASHTO, FHWA)

MAP-21 Cheat Sheet (From [Transportation Issues Daily](#)) (Credit: AASHTO)**Expires:** October 1, 2014

Total funding: There are different numbers being reported, but it appears total funding is \$118 billion over 27-months – roughly \$105 billion per year (FY 2013 & '14) in addition to several months of FY 2012. *Update: The Congressional Budget Office predicts the HTF will be insolvent in both the Highway Account and the Mass Transit Account by FY 2015.*

Effective date: The revenue provisions take effect immediately, but most of the policy provisions will not take effect until **October 1, 2012**. The majority of new policy and regulatory provisions in the bill apply only to FY'13 and FY'14.

Annual Funding: Roughly \$52 billion (basically level with current funding with a slight bump for inflation) (SAFETEA-LU average annual funding: \$50.1b; TEA-21: \$34.1b)

Highways/Transit funding split: current 80/20 (roughly) split maintained

Highway funding: about \$40.4b in FY 2013, and about \$41b in FY 2014 (contract authority)

Transit funding: about \$10.5 billion for FY 2013, about \$10.7b for FY 2014

Distribution of highway funding: formulas eliminated, state distribution based on a state's 2012 share of funding

Non-transportation funding/offsets to fund bill: about \$18 billion

Nat'l Highway Traffic Safety: \$670 million in FY 2013 and \$680 in FY 2014

Commercial Safety: \$561m in FY 2011, \$572m in FY 2014

Research: \$400m annually, authorizes 35 competitive grants for University Transportation Centers

New Starts: \$1.9b in each fiscal year. Enables more bus rapid transit projects to be funded. Also authorizes a new "core capacity" funding criteria that gives existing systems some additional spending flexibility

Mega-projects program: \$500m FY 2013 competitive grant program (Projects of National and Regional Significance). Applicants restricted to States, tribal governments and transit agencies. Subject to being funded through Appropriations.

TIFIA: increased from current \$122m/year to \$750m in year one and \$1b in year two

Enhancements program: merges with Safe Routes to School, Recreational Trails, Scenic Byways to become new program, "Transportation Alternatives"

Transportation Alternatives funding: Initial analysis indicates funding drops from \$1m annually to \$700m. Adds eligible expenses such as truck stop electrification, HOV lanes, turning lanes, and diesel retrofits. 50% of funds are directed to MPOs; all funds to be distributed through competitive grants

Local funding: Increase allocation to MPOs to about 14% of highways funding from current approximate 12.5%

Tolling: expands tolling authority if road capacity is increased, though there must be more free lanes than tolled lanes.

North Carolina

Writing the Next Chapter of Its Transportation Legacy



Safe Routes
to School
**National
Partnership**



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The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life for kids and communities by promoting active, healthy lifestyles and safe infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking. We advance policy change; catalyze support for safe, active and healthy communities with a network of more than 700 partner organizations; and we share our deep expertise at national, state and local levels with those who are helping propel our mission forward. Founded in 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's mission is to advance safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of America's children and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities.

For more information visit www.saferoutespartnership.org.

Support for this document was provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



North Carolina: Writing the Next Chapter of Its Transportation Legacy

Introduction

In the early-to mid-1900s, North Carolina was once deemed the “Good Roads State” due to its state-of-the-practice transportation investments aimed at linking disconnected reaches of the state and fostering a sense of community.¹ In more modern times, the adoption of North Carolina’s Complete Streets policy in 2009 was championed as a new era for the Department of Transportation (NCDOT) as the agency promised to embark on more focused consideration of the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists in all of its investments.²

However, in 2013, North Carolina shifted gears. With the passage of *Strategic Transportation Investments* law (House Bill 817), North Carolina made a statement that it considers motorized transportation to be its primary transportation priority. This law prevents any state dollars from funding projects that are solely to improve conditions for bicycling and walking.

In September 2014, Governor Pat McCrory unveiled a new vision for transportation in North Carolina, *Vision25*, which offered a glimmer of hope for improved conditions for walking and bicycling. It states that “transportation infrastructure can’t be improved with a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach” and that North Carolina must “expand bicycle and pedestrian routes” because it is part of “what people look for when making the decision where to move or where to relocate a business.”³

Unfortunately, the state has a long way to go to achieve Governor McCrory’s vision. Pedestrians and bicyclists are dying at a rate of one person every 46 hours in North Carolina,⁴ and the state sits on a stockpile of more than \$14.9 million in unspent Safe Routes to School funding meant to make it safe for children to walk and bicycle to and from school.

As of September 2014, NCDOT had obligated only 52 percent of its federal Safe Routes to School funds (\$15.9 million of \$30.7 million), the third worst rate among all southern states. Only Louisiana (47 percent) and Tennessee



(51 percent) rank worse than North Carolina while Alabama, Florida and Georgia have obligated more than 90 percent of their allocation. Neighboring Virginia is dramatically outpacing North Carolina with 87 percent of its funds obligated.⁵

We have work ahead of us in North Carolina to once again live up to the “Good Roads State” moniker and ensure that everyone in the state—whether driving, taking transit, walking or bicycling—can safely use our transportation systems and create healthy, prosperous communities.

Why Safe Places to Walk and Bicycle Matter in North Carolina

North Carolina’s Board of Transportation adopted *WalkBikeNC*, the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s (NCDOT) Statewide Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, in December 2013. The plan states “there has never been a better time than the present to build on prior achievements and define the future for walking and bicycling.”⁶

Now is the time to act. North Carolina is the seventh most populous state, but is ranked 42nd and 41st in walking and bicycling commute rates, respectively.⁷

North Carolina’s demographics are changing and the trends indicate those changes will require the state to become more supportive of walking and bicycling in order to remain



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competitive. By 2040, 75 percent of North Carolinians are projected to live in urban areas.⁸ Urbanites have always been the most inclined towards walking and bicycling. Similarly, younger generations have reduced car usage in favor of a mix of walking, bicycling and public transportation. At a time when the state should be preparing for more walking and bicycling, the state has created barriers to that need.

Even more concerning and immediate is the state's poor record on safety, resulting in needless deaths of people walking and bicycling. Despite ranking in the bottom 20 percent of states for bicycling and walking, North Carolina ranks in the top 20 percent for pedestrian and bicyclist fatality rates. Inadequate infrastructure for walking and bicycling was the most commonly cited safety issue at the 2011 Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Summits hosted across the state. Yet we know what works: a study of Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements found they reduced pedestrian injury by 44 percent.⁹

In addition to addressing concerns over safety and demographics, North Carolina needs to invest in viable infrastructure for active transportation to help reverse rising obesity rates. North Carolina has the 25th highest rate of obesity in the country, with 29 percent of adults obese. More concerning is that North Carolina has the 18th highest rate of childhood obesity in the nation, with 16 percent of young people ages 10 to 17 obese.¹⁰ North Carolina has cause to be worried about the health of its population—particularly its young people.

The obesity rates among children are alarming for the future of the state's health care system and health care spending. However, these statistics also impact our nation's military readiness, a major economic driver for North Carolina, as the state boasts the fourth-largest active duty military population in the United States.¹¹ Mission: Readiness, a nonpartisan national security organization made up of retired admirals and generals calling for smarter investments in America's children, notes that 1 in 4 young adults are unable to serve in the military due to excess weight.¹² In North Carolina, 26 percent of high school students obese or overweight.



"Creating active transportation options impacts national security," Mission: Readiness said in its report, *Walking, Biking and National Security*. They recommended "securing increased funding for infrastructure improvements to the routes children use to walk and bike to school...and programs that promote safety and increased physical activity."

Every child should have the opportunity to achieve the 60 minutes of recommended daily physical activity, and a proven strategy for achieving that goal is to incorporate physical activity into normal routines, such as walking or bicycling to and from school. A recent study found that comprehensive, sustained Safe Routes to School programs can increase walking and bicycling rates by 43 percent.¹³



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How are North Carolina Communities Improving Conditions for Walking and Bicycling?

Despite the slow spending of bicycle and pedestrian funding, NCDOT and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services have partnered to promote safety and increase physical activity. Together they have launched a new program, called Active Routes to School (ARTS), organized to help North Carolina utilize a portion of its unspent Safe Routes to School funding on non-infrastructure efforts, such as walking school buses, bicycle education and more. The agencies placed a coordinator in each of the state's 10 health regions to provide one-on-one coordination with school programs aimed at educating and encouraging walking and bicycling activities.

The desire among North Carolina communities to have more robust walking and bicycling networks was evident as soon as ARTS coordinators were deployed. The ARTS program has seen successes in 2014, many of them demonstrating how Safe Routes to School initiatives contribute to overall efforts to expand bicycling and walking. However, a shortcoming of the three-year ARTS program is that it is aimed only at educating and encouraging students about walking and bicycling to school. It will not fund safety improvements for walking and bicycling, such as sidewalks, crosswalks and bike paths.

Laurinburg

Let's take a stroll down to Laurinburg, a city of 15,500 in North Carolina's Sandhills Region. Laurinburg's Covington Street Elementary is one of North Carolina's shining new success stories when it comes to promoting active living among its student body.

The school, which is located in a city with an African-American population of more than 43 percent, has grown a once-a-year walk to school day into a weekly event through the assistance of the ARTS program. The "Running Redbirds" program has buses and parents drop off students at a local church 0.6 miles from the campus and the kids walk to school from there. The Running Redbirds are tracking their total mileage walked this year with a goal to walk the

equivalent mileage of Laurinburg to California. They are tying the mileage chart to the school's history curriculum with special lessons about the places along their route.

Durham

A hundred miles to the north of Laurinburg, the city of Durham, population 245,475, has transformed its once-gritty image to become one of the most recognized, livable cities in the South. Much of this transformation can be attributed to a dedicated emphasis on increasing options for bicycling and walking, which has contributed to a 100 percent increase in bicycle commuting from 2007 to 2012.

Durham has five elementary schools actively engaged in Safe Routes to School programs and has adopted Complete Streets policies and guidelines. Its Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee developed a travel survey for local schools, provided input to more than 250 development site plans, and has contributed to more than 30 miles of new bicycle lanes across the city.¹⁴

Brevard

In Western North Carolina, the city of Brevard (population 7,600) has also transformed its community through investments in bicycling and walking and is seeing direct benefits through increased tourism and economic development. Brevard was one of the first recipients of North Carolina's Safe Routes to School funding initiatives and used the program to construct the Gallimore Road multi-use path in 2008. The path has led to an increase in bicycling and walking to school as more than 60 percent of Brevard Elementary students now arrive via active modes.

Since the investment, the Brevard City Council has stepped up with an annual funding allocation to continue to promote walking and bicycling to school. The city allocated \$15,000 in 2015, and four schools provide encouragement in the form of a weekly walking school bus, bicycle rodeos, a springtime Safe Routes to School outdoor festival and a poster contest. The nearby mountain bike trails in the Pisgah National Forest and DuPont State Forest have made the community a hub of mountain biking in the southeast and generated new industries for mountain biking, in addition to spurring interest in converting an old rail line to a multi-use trail.



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Elsewhere around the state

Beyond these cities and small towns, more than 20 communities across the state have established their own pedestrian, bicycling, Complete Streets and/or Safe Routes to School committees. Many of the state's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have organized their own active transportation or Complete Streets committees. And more than a dozen cities, towns and MPOs have taken NCDOT's lead and adopted their own Complete Streets policies.



Actions Speak Louder Than Words

While towns and cities have worked hard to improve walking and bicycling, the state has allowed almost \$90 million worth of funding for walking and bicycling investments to go unspent. Over the past decade NCDOT failed to spend much of the funding it was allocated through federal transportation laws for walking and bicycling, which has cost the state more than 2,600 jobs.¹⁵

Specifically, from 2005 to 2012, the federal Safe Routes to School program provided North Carolina with \$30.7 million in funding to “enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school, to make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing; and to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety, and reduce traffic.”¹⁶ Although no additional funding has been allocated specifically to Safe Routes to School since 2012

(when the program was merged into the new Transportation Alternatives Program), North Carolina is still sitting on 48 percent—or \$14.9 million—of its federally-allocated Safe Routes to School funding that accumulated over the seven-year program.¹⁷ In addition, North Carolina allowed more than \$74 million in Transportation Enhancements funding to go unspent, and those funds were ultimately reclaimed by the federal government.¹⁸

Letting North Carolina's share of funds from federal programs for bicycling and walking go unused is a sad trend in the state. In June 2011, the *Durham Herald-Sun* chronicled how NCDOT was allowing \$66.3 million to revert back to the federal government and for those returned funds “opted to target monies typically used at the local level to fund things like sidewalks, greenways and intersection improvements.” NCDOT staff responded “we have more than enough money in the budget to cover” these projects and “this is truly excess” funding.¹⁹

The irony is that we already know of countless projects that were identified through bicycle and pedestrian planning grants that NCDOT awarded in 2011 to nearly 120 communities.²⁰ Those plans generated recommended improvements along hundreds of miles of streets across the state. Today, more than 155 communities are seeking to identify funding to make improvements outlined in their state-funded bicycle and pedestrian plans while funds for projects just like these were returned to the federal government or sit unspent.

School-aged children have been waiting a decade for NCDOT to create safer conditions around their schools but will have to wait for many more years. As North Carolina still has \$14.9 million of unallocated Safe Routes to School funds, the state is executing a four-year plan to expend those funds. While other states had expended the majority of their funds by 2012, North Carolina's target is to expend its Safe Routes to School funds by 2018.

Communities have become discouraged over the state's slow handling of the Safe Routes to School program. Charlotte will no longer consider Safe Routes to School funding for infrastructure projects due to NCDOT's low project cost caps and project oversight requirements that have resulted in short sidewalk projects taking five years to construct.



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In early 2014, NCDOT sent the state's Safe Routes to School Coordinator to each of NCDOT's 14 Division offices to identify candidate projects to help spend down the remaining funds prior to the new Strategic Transportation Investments law taking effect. Many communities had worked for years to develop relationships with schools, principals and parents to develop an understanding of what projects should be the highest priority. Schools that had been working on action plans and project lists over the years were not informed or included in these meetings, leading to concerns that their projects will not be prioritized for funding.

Impacts of the Strategic Transportation Investments Law

House Bill 817,²¹ also known as the Strategic Transportation Investments Law, was signed by Governor McCrory in June 2013. It was precipitated, in part, by a desire to streamline projects to better spend NCDOT funds in an era of shrinking revenue streams. It was also created to advance the state's job creation programs, with highway investments seen as a catalyst for job growth. It created a new method for NCDOT to identify and fund the most-needed transportation projects. While the full ramifications of the Strategic Transportation Investments Law are still unclear and changes to the process are expected during the 2015 Long Session of the General Assembly, one major impact is clear: pedestrians and bicyclists are not given equal consideration when it comes to how North Carolina prioritizes transportation investments. The law took funding that NCDOT used to support walking and bicycling projects and redirected responsibility for this to "Powell Bill" funds, a program that contributes a portion of

the state's gas tax revenues to more than 500 municipalities to supplement maintenance costs.²²

Before this change, NCDOT used the funding (an average of approximately \$1.5 million per year) to supplement the non-federal share of bicycling and walking projects to help communities match their local funding. For example, a \$500,000 project using federal funds to build sidewalks between Main Street and a nearby neighborhood could require \$100,000 be paid with non-federal funding, and NCDOT would contribute a portion of the required \$100,000 match.

Cities and towns were thrilled to have NCDOT as a partner on the project and appreciated the state's help in alleviating the financial burden placed upon the municipality. Further, most of the walking and bicycling investments funded through this program were along NCDOT-managed roadways, so it made sense for NCDOT to be a funding partner. One of the last projects funded prior to the new law going into effect added bikeable shoulders along a stretch of US Highway 74 in Jackson County, North Carolina—a route identified for upgrades through one of NCDOT's regional bicycle plans.

Under the new law, the \$1.5 million is now divided among more than 500 municipalities. The average allocation of \$3,000 per city or town is roughly the equivalent of building one sidewalk curb ramp on one corner of one intersection. Raleigh officials called the move "an empty promise," noting that "most cities use up Powell Bill money to take care of basic resurfacing needs, so it's kind of backhanded."²³

While \$1.5 million may seem insignificant within a transportation budget that exceeded \$4.4 billion in 2013-2014,²⁴ it allowed NCDOT to leverage at least \$8 million per year in federal funding by partnering with municipalities on bicycling and walking projects. Based on figures from NCDOT's national affiliate, the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), this created almost 140 jobs annually.²⁵ The effect is a major decrease in availability of resources to build bicycle and pedestrian improvements around the state.



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Walking, Bicycling and Equity

North Carolina's Complete Streets policy has been highlighted as a model by national organizations. The policy states that NCDOT is committed to ensuring that the "safety needs of motorists, transit users, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities are safely accommodated."

We applaud North Carolina for creating a strong policy, but actual infrastructure investments to make those words a reality are lagging. WalkBikeNC—the statewide pedestrian and bicycle plan adopted by NCDOT December 2013—states that a survey of 16,000 North Carolina residents revealed the "most commonly reported safety issue for walking and bicycling was inadequate infrastructure."²⁶

Through the Strategic Transportation Investments law most of the responsibility for improving conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists has been passed onto municipalities, even as more than 62 percent of pedestrian fatalities and more than 72 percent of bicyclist fatalities occur on NCDOT-managed streets and highways.²⁷

More disconcerting is the state's safety statistics for pedestrians and bicyclists in minority and low-income communities, in which minorities are significantly more at risk of death. While approximately 22 percent of North Carolina's population is African-American, more than 40 percent of the state's pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities are African-Americans.²⁸

Statistics within some North Carolina cities are even more alarming. In Wilmington—a community that is 19.9 percent African-American—black children age 15 and younger comprise nearly 72 percent of the city's 114 child pedestrian crashes.²⁹

In suburban Cary, which has the seventh-highest population among North Carolina cities, African-Americans represent 8 percent of the city's population but account for nearly 16 percent of bicycling crash victims and 15 percent of pedestrian crash victims.³⁰

These troubling statistics are not just confined to North Carolina's urban areas. A study conducted for southern Franklin County and large undeveloped areas in unincorporated northeast Wake County revealed that



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African-Americans represent 41 percent of pedestrian crash victims despite making up only 20 percent of this rural area's population.³¹

NCDOT has begun addressing some of these issues with its *Watch for Me NC* campaign which aims to "reduce pedestrian and bicycle injuries and deaths through a comprehensive, targeted approach of public education and police enforcement."³² However, without infrastructure improvements, education can only do so much to reverse these alarming statistics.

North Carolina should take a hard look at its troubles with equity in transportation. It is a serious problem when minority children have twice the rate of pedestrian fatalities as their share of the population. Unfortunately, North Carolina's 2009 Complete Streets policy and related guidelines have yet to translate into safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycling facilities across the state for people of all races and ethnicities.

Does *Vision 25* Offer Hope?

In September, Governor McCrory released a 25-year transportation vision for North Carolina to address the state's growing transportation demand and associated funding challenges. The report acknowledges the lack of certainty in federal funding and the decreasing reliability of the state's gas tax, stating that North Carolina "must find new ways to strategically invest in our transportation network to meet growing demands."³³

The vision is explicit in its support for expanding the bicycle and pedestrian network across the state through implementation of recommendations contained in the statewide pedestrian and bicycle plan *WalkBikeNC*. It also supports continued implementation of NCDOT's Complete Streets policy and creation of statewide and regionally significant bicycle and pedestrian systems.³⁴ But, to actually achieve this reality, *Vision 25* would require the state to make a commitment to actually fund active transportation investments.

So far, *Vision25* appears geared toward funding major highway investments through the issuance of more than \$1 billion in bonds as a way to "kick-start" projects in rural areas.³⁵ There is no project list or breakdown of potential funding allocation by mode or region.

The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), based in Chapel Hill, offered an opinion on the Governor's vision in a column in the *Raleigh News & Observer*. Kym Hunter of SELC wrote that they agree that "bicycle and pedestrian options are essential to turn [North Carolina's] major metropolitan areas into vibrant communities and attract businesses... But it's not enough just to say so... If non-highway options are a priority, let's fund them."³⁶





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Conclusion

The NCDOT and the General Assembly are responsible for determining how transportation funds are allocated in North Carolina. Given the alarming and inequitable safety statistics in North Carolina, combined with the demonstrated demand for bicycling and walking infrastructure throughout the state, North Carolina officials must consider how to invest in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements at a scale where the investments can yield measurable benefits.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership specifically recommends:

- North Carolina should evaluate the impact of the restriction of \$1.5 million from a bicycle and pedestrian investment fund and moving that responsibility to Powell Bill funds.
- North Carolina should expedite the spending of the remaining Safe Routes to School program funds, including on infrastructure improvements. The state has dragged its feet for almost a decade to use its Safe Routes to School funds, putting the funds at risk in times of fiscal austerity. Four more years is too long for our children to wait for safe infrastructure for walking and bicycling.
- North Carolina should dedicate a percentage of all future federal Transportation Alternatives Program funds specifically for Safe Routes to School projects to help ensure a continued focus on improving safety for children.
- Finally, North Carolina must take a hard look at its policies and standards of operation to identify solutions to the gross disparities that exist today in safety for minorities. It is inexcusable that an African-American child is twice as likely to be killed by a car as a white child. The state could choose to prioritize Safe Routes to School or Transportation Alternatives Program grants to lower-income communities or invest more state safety dollars into making improvements in communities where these disparities exist.

Following these recommendations would ensure that actual spending on safe walking and bicycling networks would align with existing policies. By re-examining its funding priorities, the state could then live up to its celebrated Complete Streets policy and NCDOT's mission to connect "people and places safely and efficiently, with accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy, health and well-being of North Carolina."³⁷



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