

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln**  
**Metropolitan Planning Organization (GCLMPO) Board**  
**July 30, 2020**  
**Virtual Meeting**

The scheduled Board meeting of the Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization was held on Thursday, July 30, 2020 from 6:30 pm – 7:38 pm via GoToMeeting and conference call.

**Members Present**

Richard Atkinson	Town of Cramerton, Commissioner
Rick Coleman	Town of Dallas, Mayor
Robin Conner	Town of Ranlo, Commissioner
Martin Eaddy	City of Lincoln, Council Member
Ken Ervin	City of Lowell, Council Member
Allen Fraley	Gaston County, Commissioner
Tommy Greene	Town of Boiling Springs, Council Member
Charles McCorkle	City of Mount Holly, Council Member
Scott Neisler	City of Kings Mtn., Mayor, <b>MPO Vice-Chair</b>
Charles Odom	City of Gastonia, Council Member
Richard Permenter	Lincoln County, Commissioner
Jill Puett	City of Cherryville, Mayor Pro Tem
Becky Smith	Bessemer City, Mayor
Jennifer Stepp	City of Gastonia, Council Member
Martha Stowe	City of Belmont, Council Member
Reid Washam	Town of McAdenville, Council Member
Ronnie Whetstine	Cleveland County, Commissioner

**Staff Present**

Rusty Bost	City of Gastonia, Development Services Director, <b>TCC Chair</b>
Randi Gates	GCLMPO, Principal Transportation Planner
Jane Love	GCLMPO, Senior Transportation Planner
Julio Paredes	GCLMPO, Planner

**Guests Present**

Loretta Barren	FHWA, Planner
Dominique Boyd	NCDOT-TPD, GCLMPO Coordinator
Hannah Cook	NCDOT STIP Unit, Senior Program Engineer
Nastasha Earle-Young	NCDOT-TPD, Statewide Initiatives Engineer
Blake Guffey	NCDOT, District Engineer
Kusandra King	NCDOT-TPD
Dean Ledbetter	NCDOT, Program Dev. Branch, Corridor Dev. Engineer
Anil Panicker	NCDOT Division 12 Planner
Mark Stafford	NCDOT Division 12 Engineer
Jim Walker	Citizen
David Wasserman	NCDOT-TPD, STIP Western Region Manager

**Absences (x = Absent) / Not In Good Standing**

Member	July	Sept	Dec	2020 Jan	Mar	May	July
City of Belmont	-----	-----	-----	-----	X	-----	-----
City of Bessemer City	X	X	X	-----	-----	-----	-----
Town of Boiling Springs	X	X	X	-----	-----	-----	-----
City of Cherryville	-----	X	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Town of Cramerton	-----	-----	X	X	-----	-----	-----
Town of Dallas	-----	-----	X	X	-----	-----	-----
City of Gastonia (1/2)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
City of Gastonia (2/2)	-----	X	X	-----	-----	-----	-----
City of Kings Mountain	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
City of Lincolnton	-----	X	X	X	-----	-----	-----
City of Lowell	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
City of Mount Holly	-----	X	X	-----	-----	-----	-----
Town of Ranlo	-----	X	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
City of Shelby	X	-----	-----	-----	X	X	X
Town of Stanley	-----	-----	X	X	X	X	X
Cleveland County	-----	-----	-----	X	-----	X	-----
Gaston County	-----	-----	-----	X	-----	X	-----
Lincoln County	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NCDOT – Board of Transportation	-----	X	X	X	X	-----	X

**1. Introduction of Members & Guests**

*Presenter: Scott Neisler, MPO Board Vice-Chair*

Mr. Neisler welcomed all members and guests. Mrs. Randi Gates conducted a roll call.

**2. Set Agenda**

*Presenter: Scott Neisler, MPO Board Vice-Chair*

Mr. Neisler stated that it was time to set the agenda.

Mr. Fraley motioned to set the agenda. Mr. Hutchins seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

**3. Determination of Quorum and Good Standing**

*Presenter: Scott Neisler, MPO Board Vice-Chair*

Mrs. Gates determined that a quorum had been met.

**4. Ethics Awareness & Conflict of Interest Reminder**

*Presenter: Scott Neisler, MPO Board Vice-Chair*

Mrs. Gates read the ethics awareness and conflict of interest reminder.

**5. Approval of Minutes**

*Presenter: Scott Neisler, MPO Board Vice-Chair*

Mr. Neisler asked for a motion to approve the May 28, 2020 meeting minutes as presented.

Mr. Eaddy motioned to approve the May 28, 2020 minutes as presented. Mr. Ervin seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

**6. Public Comment**

*Presenter: Scott Neisler, MPO Board Vice-Chair*

Mr. Jim Walker thanked the Board for their continued support of the I-85 widening project and the Build a Better Boulevard projects.

## 7. Strategic Transportation Corridors Resolutions of Support

*Presenter: Nastasha Earle-Young, Statewide Initiatives Engineer, NCDOT-TPD*

Ms. Earle-Young noted that in 2015, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) identified a network of key multimodal transportation corridors called Strategic Transportation Corridors (STC) to support smart planning, help set long-term investment decisions, and ensure that North Carolina's economic prosperity goals are achieved. The STCs are intended to promote transportation system connectivity, provide high levels of mobility, and improve access to important state and regional activity centers. A key element in the advancement of the STCs is the development of corridor master plans to identify a high-level corridor mobility vision and associated corridor improvement action strategies.

The purpose of the master plan is to:

- Identify a mobility vision and broad improvement strategies for an entire corridor,
- Guide improvements and development in a manner that defines a long-term vision and performance level for the corridor, and
- Help protect the corridor's key functions as defined in the corridor profiles.

NCDOT has initiated the development of master plan visions for STCs D and U. Corridor D – US 321 runs from the South Carolina state line to the Tennessee state line and Corridor U – US 74 runs from I-26 in Polk County to US 117 in Wilmington. Both fall within the GCLMPO's planning area.

The first thing NCDOT looked at for the corridors was the facilities which are 106 miles on U.S. 321 with 67 bridges, some of which are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. NCDOT also looked at transportation plan recommendations along the corridor from the STIP, CTPs, MTPs and Feasibility Studies. Part of the public involvement that NCDOT conducted was a public survey which indicated that survey takers want to see fewer traffic signals, higher speed limits and bypasses around cities and towns. Additionally, 56.5% of survey takers were strongly in favor of the preliminary vision of a freeway from the South Carolina state line to Hickory. From Hickory to the Tennessee state line would be designated as an expressway. Items identified for further study include expressway improvements northwest of Boone, the Boone Bypass, freeway improvements south of Gastonia and multimodal connections. Lastly, Ms. Earle-Young noted that the Western Gastonia Bypass is already shown on the GCLMPO CTP as part of the proposed project that was once known as the Garden Parkway. This is an area that has been noted for further study. Mr. Hutchins asked why the Shelby Bypass is not shown on the maps for Corridor U in the packet. Mrs. Earle-Young explained that, because the Shelby Bypass is not open to traffic yet, it is not included but once open the map will be revised to include it.

In regards to the U.S. 74 STC, a facilities inventory noted 284 miles of highway which is currently a federally designated truck route with 304 bridges including six (6) that are structurally deficient and 91 that are functionally obsolete. After looking at several transportation plans it is recommended that most of this corridor be designated as a freeway with some segments in developed/urban areas classified as boulevard. Survey results for this corridor indicated that survey takers would like to see bypasses around cities, more travel lanes and fewer traffic signals and strongly support the preliminary vision of a freeway for this corridor. The recommended vision for U.S. 74 is an interstate from I-26 in Polk County to US 117 in New Hanover. This corridor does not stay on U.S. 74 the entire time. Once the corridor meets with I-85 in Gastonia it will continue along I-85 until I-485 and continues along the southern portion of I-485 until it connects to the Monroe Bypass. Following the Monroe Bypass, the corridor rejoins U.S. 74 to Wilmington. Items identified for further study along this corridor include multiple bypasses, military connections and multimodal connections. One area noted for further study along this corridor is the Southern Bypass shown on the GCLMPO's CTP.

Mr. Hutchins asked where U.S. 74 goes from freeway to boulevard and what the difference between the two (2) is. Ms. Earle-Young explained that the goal was to change the entire corridor to a freeway and would supersede the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) current designation. The difference between a freeway and a boulevard is that a freeway is a complete control of access meaning you can only access the road via ramps. A boulevard can be entered via driveway access and can contain traffic signals.

Mr. Hutchins motioned to approve the Resolutions of Support for STC D: US 321 and STC U: US 74.  
Mr. Ervin seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

#### 8. NCDOT Funding Update

*Presenters: Dean Ledbetter, Div. 12 Corridor Development Engineer, NCDOT STIP Unit*

*David Wasserman, Western Region Manager, NCDOT STIP Unit*

*Hannah Cook, Senior Program Engineer, NCDOT STIP Unit*

As people across North Carolina have taken lifesaving measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, traffic volumes have plummeted, causing at least a \$250 million budget shortfall for the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for FY 2020 and an expected \$500 million revenue loss for FY 2021. Additionally, there were other factors such as storm response/recovery and legal settlements, pre-COVID-19 that had depleted NCDOT's cash balance. To combat the overspending NCDOT delayed project lettings and reduced the capital program as well as decreased or suspended routine maintenance until June 1, 2020.

Because NCDOT revenue is fully funded through the Motor Fuels Tax, Highway Use Tax and DMV fees, this significant impact has forced the department to notify local governments, stakeholders and the general public that all but about 50 major projects scheduled to start in the next twelve (12) months are delayed. Projects moving forward are funded by GARVEE bonds, BUILD NC bonds and federal grants. These changes do not affect construction projects already underway or that have already been awarded. Plans to mitigate revenue loss include refraining from entering into major contracts until March 2021 as well as reductions in preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisitions, construction, operations, maintenance and modal spending.

The department is taking other significant steps to decrease expenditures, including:

- Allowing only mission critical purchases
- Laying off temporary and embedded consultants
- Suspending or decreasing many programs and services
- Hiring freeze (except for positions that impact public safety)
- Personal furlough for permanent employees
- Reprogramming and rebalancing the 2020-2029 STIP – proposed amendments will be available in the coming weeks

Issues of concern that remain are that the course of the COVID-19 pandemic is not fully known as well as the FAST Act expiring at the end of the fiscal year. Lastly, it is not possible to know how large NC's share will be in the August redistribution. In the past few years, NC has received upwards of \$100 million but it is still unknown what will happen this year.

Mr. Hutchins asked if the U.S. 74 Bypass (Shelby Bypass) project will be impacted by this funding deficit. Mr. Wasserman noted that year two (2) and three (3) BUILD NC bonds have to be sold this fall in order for this project to go forward according to plan. Assuming that happens, the project will move forward.

#### 9. GCLMPO Transportation Conformity Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

*Presenter: Randi Gates, Principal Transportation Planner*

Mrs. Gates noted that the purpose of a Transportation Conformity MOA is to ensure that interagency consultation procedures for transportation conformity are followed in each of the State's maintenance areas. The GCLMPO has done this for quite some time and this is an update of the existing MOA. The MOA outlines the responsibilities and processes that the MPO will follow to ensure that the transportation plans conform to the emissions budget set forth in the NC State Implementation Plan (SIP). MPO staff started working on the Draft revised MOA in February 2020 when the Division of Air Quality (DAQ) formally requested that each MPO conduct a preliminary review of the revised MOAs. As a result, the DAQ received several inquiries regarding the effect of adding a duty for MPOs to conduct project-level conformity analyses as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for MPO-sponsored federal projects. GCLMPO is already doing this but in case other MPOs that are currently in attainment ever come out the language needed to be there.

Below is a summary of the revisions made to all MOAs during this renewal cycle:

- Updated the DEOs name;

- Updated cross-references and definitions;
- Revised “Long Range Transportation Plan” to “Metropolitan Transportation Plan”;
- Revised “emissions factors” to “emissions modeling results”;
- Updated the inputs needed to generate emissions modeling results;
- Revised conformity determination timelines concurrent with current practices;
- Added a duty for 10 MPOs to conduct project-level conformity analyses as a part of the National Environmental Policy Act process for MPO-sponsored federal projects. The introduced language originated from Section 2.1.6 of the Capital Area MOA and should have been incorporated into the MPOs duties for all other MOAs during the last revision cycle. Project-level conformity is required for all areas that are nonattainment/maintenance; however, the addition of this duty to areas that have attained the NAAQS for over 20 years is for contingency purposes;
- Removed the term “particulate matter” under the DEQs duties for determining whether a project is an air quality concern since the MOA incorporates 40 CFR, Part 93, by reference and for the fact that 15A NCAC 02D .2000, Transportation Conformity, specifies the specific provisions to follow for particulates;
- Added language in the “Modifications of Agreement” Section allowing the DEQ to make administrative amendments; and
- Removed the “Termination and Renewal” Section to reduce the administrative burden for renewing the MOAs with each Party and completing a formal SIP revision on a cyclical basis.

**Mr. Ervin motioned to approve the revised GCLMPO Transportation Conformity Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Mrs. Stowe seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

#### **10. Other Business**

- a. Catawba Crossings Feasibility Study Update** – Mrs. Gates noted that the study kicked off on May 5, 2020 and a contract was awarded to Gannett Fleming. The funding is an SPR Federal Grant with a State match and local matches from Gastonia, Belmont, Cramerton and Gaston County. This study will be heavy on community engagement and hopes to show a purpose and need for an additional crossing(s) over the Catawba River within the general vicinity of the Catawba River, south of the existing US 74 crossing and connecting NC 279 to I-485. The purpose and need information will be used to develop concept-level planning for the number, type and location of crossing(s). In addition, the Feasibility Study will analyze the feasibility of an NC Route designation for this proposed facility (per NCDOT State Traffic Engineer guidelines), as well as determine the appropriate timeframe to extend the project further west from its current anticipated terminus at NC 279 to I-85 or US 321. The project timeline is 16-18 months, completing the study in September 2021 in time to submit Catawba Crossings for P7.0. Next steps include data collection, background research, stakeholder interviews, a virtual public meeting and traffic forecast development. At this time there is an in-person open house meeting scheduled for April 2021 but there are going to be multiple contingency plans in place to ensure the safety of the public who wish to engage. Presentations to local government funding partners, the TCC and Board and to CRTPO TCC and Board are also planned for September 2021.

Mr. Hutchins asked why this is moving forward and being paid for when other projects have been suspended. Mrs. Gates explained that this funding is planning related and not construction. The project will have to be submitted during the next round of prioritization to compete for funding to construct.

**b. NCDOT Update – Division 12 Staff and TPD MPO Coordinator**

Mr. Stafford noted that ongoing projects are still moving forward. Additionally, an INFRA Grant was awarded to NCDOT for US 74 west of the Shelby Bypass to upgrade US 74 to a freeway with an interchange at Lattimore Road. The project is a design build project with a fiscal year of 2022. Resurfacing and mowing has restarted through one (1) round.

**c. Transit Systems Ridership** – For information only.

#### **11. Adjournment**

There being no further business Mr. Hutchins motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. McCorkle seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 7:38 pm.