

# IMD FEASIBILITY STUDY GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW



## — Program Background

In July 2022, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) was allocated \$2 million in one-time funding from the North Carolina General Assembly to establish a Paved Trails Feasibility Study Program. The Integrated Mobility Division (IMD) was also awarded \$500,000 in State Planning and Research (SP&R) funds to support sidewalk and shared-use path feasibility studies. The purpose of the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Studies Grant Program is to improve the pipeline of bicycle and pedestrian projects accessing state and federal funding, resulting in successful implementation of projects led by communities prioritizing multimodal infrastructure. This document is intended to guide grant applicants in understanding the purpose of a feasibility study, informing of project deliverables, and identifying the types of projects for which they can apply.

For responses to frequently asked questions, please visit: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/municipalities/PlanningGrants/Pages/IMD-Feasibility-Studies-Program.aspx>

## — Who Can Apply?

The following governmental entities and non-profit organizations can apply to the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Study Grant Program:

- Any municipality or county within North Carolina
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) in North Carolina
- Bicycle, pedestrian, and transit advocacy groups, Friends-of-the-Trail groups, and Land Conservancies

Due to limited funding, the following entities are ineligible to apply to the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Study Grant Program:

- Colleges or universities
- Other entities such as Business Improvement Districts

Applicants must re-apply each year to be considered within the current grant cycle. Please note that all applications and relevant documents will be accepted online at the program [webpage](#).



## — What is a Feasibility Study?

Feasibility studies bridge the gap between conceptual planning and programming of projects. They build upon higher-level planning efforts and take a comprehensive approach to identify possible route alternatives of multimodal corridors. The purpose of this type of study is to evaluate the technical feasibility of a project from a design, permitting, and constructability perspective. Input solicited from the local community and stakeholders help guide the development of recommended routes. Project types include paved trails, shared-use paths, sidepaths, greenways, and sidewalks. It is important to note that a feasibility study does not present a final design for construction.

The purpose of the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Study Grant Program is to improve the pipeline of multimodal projects to access to state and federal funding. The feasibility study program will produce well-conceived projects with demonstrated community support that will be competitive in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and for federal investment. Quantity-based preliminary cost estimates will be generated for route alignments to help inform further decision making, identify funding needs, and develop next steps for project implementation.

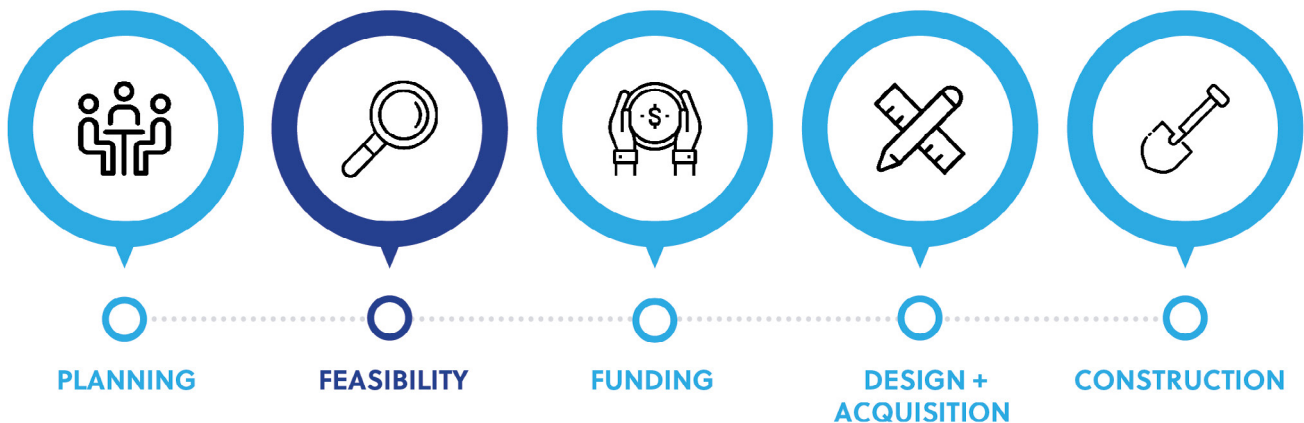
### *How Does a Feasibility Study Help Your Community?*

While a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan provides an overall framework for development of multimodal facilities, it is only the first step in a larger process. As a living document, recommendations and priorities outlined in a plan may evolve with changing development pressures, funding opportunities, and community growth trends. A community may need to conduct feasibility studies to understand the environmental conditions, routing challenges, and costs of priority corridors. Feasibility studies provide jurisdictions with the ability to examine routing alternatives, develop detailed cost estimates of preferred routes, partner with stakeholders to acquire corridors; program projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to receive design and construction funds; and advance projects to compete for federal investment. This detailed analysis allows design and right-of-way acquisition to be finalized, which is followed by construction. The bulleted text and infographic on the following page illustrate the steps in the planning-to-implementation process:



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- **Planning:** Types of plans consist of Comprehensive Transportation Plans, Metropolitan Transportation Plans, multimodal network plans, or bicycle and pedestrian plans. Plan elements include an existing conditions analysis, community engagement, the development of a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network, and the selection of priority projects.
- **Feasibility:** Types of feasibility studies consist of an analysis of various project corridors such as paved trails, shared-use paths, sidepaths, greenways, and sidewalks. Study elements include environmental analysis, route alignment analysis, community engagement, cost estimates, and an implementation action plan.
- **Funding:** Elements of this phase include submitting a project through the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) prioritization process to be programmed into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), applying for a federal grant such as Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE), applying for funding allocated at the regional level such as Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP) or other discretionary funding through a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), or allocating local funding sources.
- **Design + Acquisition:** Elements of this phase include environmental documentation, community engagement, 30% design, full design, right-of-way authorization, and land acquisition and easements.
- **Construction:** Elements of this phase include permitting, bidding and procurement, community engagement, and construction of the bicycle and pedestrian facility.



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## ***When to Choose this Type of Study:***

Feasibility studies provide guidance for communities as they advance priority projects developed through a comprehensive planning process. A jurisdiction may pursue a feasibility study to analyze route alternatives, develop detailed cost estimates, and determine the preferred alignment for a paved trail or sidewalk corridor. A jurisdiction that is interested in developing a comprehensive bicycle, pedestrian, or transit network should consider pursuing a bicycle and/or pedestrian plan or multimodal network plan through the [Multimodal Planning Grant Program](#).

## ***Feasibility Study Project Deliverables:***

- Recommended routes for a paved trails or sidewalk corridor.
- Design guidance, typical sections, intersection and road crossing treatments, trail/sidewalk amenities for the preferred route alignments.
- Cutsheets for preferred route alignments with detailed cost estimates, potential land acquisition needs, potential permitting needs, needed structures, and potential bicycle, pedestrian, and transit connections.
- Implementation strategies detailing partner roles, project phasing, funding resources, maintenance resources, and an action plan detailing implementation tasks through a 10-year project development horizon.

## ***Feasibility Study Eligibility Criteria:***

- North Carolina municipalities and counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs), and bicycle, pedestrian and transit advocacy groups, Friends-of-the-Trail groups, and Land Conservancies are eligible to apply for the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Study Grant Program.
- The proposed project must be identified in a locally/regionally adopted plan.
- A local match is not required but may be a factor in a competitive grant cycle.



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## — What is the Right Sized Study for the Project?

Project budgets are contingent upon corridor context and complexity. These guidelines are provided to help determine the scale of the project. The development of a small-scale study will differ from that of a large-scale study. The following should be considered in the development of a study:

- Cost
- Number of route alternatives
- Mileage range
- Jurisdictional range
- Corridor constraints
- Community and stakeholder engagement expectation

	SMALL-SCALE FEASIBILITY STUDY	LARGE-SCALE FEASIBILITY STUDY
<b>COST</b>	\$60,000 - \$80,000	\$80,000 - \$120,000+ Significantly more complex and extensive corridors may result in a higher plan cost
<b>NUMBER OF ROUTE ALTERNATIVES</b>	Up to 4 alternatives to be evaluated	Greater than 4 alternatives to be evaluated
<b>MILEAGE RANGE</b>	¼ mile to 3 miles	3 to 15+ miles
<b>JURISDICTIONAL RANGE</b>	Up to 2 jurisdictions along the corridor	2+ jurisdictions along the corridor (may require additional jurisdictional meetings/coordination)
<b>CORRIDOR CONSTRAINTS</b>	Minimal utilities Moderate topography Smaller FEMA studied streams (creeks and streams) Moderate roadway characteristics constraints (minor road crossings, moderate to high traffic volumes, moderate to high-speed limits)	Rail corridors/crossings Significant roadway characteristic constraints (controlled access roadways, major road crossings, high traffic volumes, high speeds) Larger FEMA studied streams (major water bodies – rivers, lakes) Moderate/significant utilities Significant topography
<b>COMMUNITY + STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATION</b>	3 steering committee meetings (virtual) 1 online survey 1 public meeting Up to 4 focused stakeholder (landowners, local businesses, underrepresented groups, etc.) meetings (1-on-1 or may include multiple stakeholders per meeting)	4-5 steering committee meetings (virtual) 1 online survey 1 public meeting Up to 8 focused stakeholder (landowners, local businesses, underrepresented groups, etc.) meetings (1-on-1 or may include multiple stakeholders per meeting)



## — Selection Criteria

The selection of grant awardees for the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Study Grant Program will be based on a competitive review process. However, an effort will be made to award grants based not only on the merit of the proposal but to achieve statewide geographic distribution as well. Consideration will be given to funding a cross-section of community types to ensure that projects are equitably distributed across the state.

The following selection criteria are proposed for the program and will affect project scoring:

- **How well the grant proposal addresses questions and key prompts listed in the application** - This criterion is the most important piece of the selection process. The following should be considered before applying to the Paved Trails and Sidewalk Feasibility Studies Grant Program:
  - **Study Corridor Considerations** – The scale of a project will influence the cost, number of route alternatives, mileage range, jurisdictional range, corridor constraints, and expectations for community and stakeholder engagement. Please refer to the section above to identify a scale that is appropriate for your project.
  - **Community Need** – Consider if your project has been included in an adopted plan. Also consider the outcomes of previous engagement efforts centered around your project.
  - **Proposed Community Engagement Strategies** – Community engagement should take place throughout the duration of a project and especially before any transportation decisions are made. Engagement and outreach should be inclusive and aim to educate and communicate the needs of the project, as well as its impacts on the community. Additional information on engagement standards and resources may be accessed in [NCDOT's Public Involvement Practitioner's Guide](#) and the [Statewide Public Involvement Plan](#).
  - **Project Management Experience/Project Implementation** – Consider who is best suited to lead your grant application. This may be a jurisdiction that is already familiar with the project or may assume maintenance responsibilities following future construction. It is important to note that successful project implementation will require collaboration and coordination with various entities to see a project successfully implemented.
- **Geographic Location** – NCDOT will support the equitable distribution of projects across the state.
  - **Inclusion in the Great Trails State Network** – IMD encourages jurisdictions to submit a project that has been identified as part of the statewide trails network. To determine if your project is part of the Great Trails State network, click on the following link to view an interactive ArcGIS webpage of the network: <https://ncdot.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?useExisting=1&layers=daecddb2e6374981b3ed122305d2baf5>.



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- **The extent to which the project may be able to mitigate transportation disadvantage**  
- IMD encourages jurisdictions to submit a project that may provide improved mobility in areas of potential transportation disadvantage. To support this evaluation, applicants may choose to use NCDOT's Environmental Justice (EJ) and Transportation Disadvantage Index Tool: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/EJ-TDI-maps.aspx>.
- **Inclusion of a local match** – A local match may be considered as part of the selection process in a competitive grant cycle.

## — Grant Award Process

During the initial application screening, IMD staff will conduct a preliminary review of all applications for completeness and general appropriateness. Following the preliminary review, eligible proposals will be reviewed by IMD staff with support from individuals with professional experience in developing, administering, and/or implementing paved trails and sidewalk feasibility studies. Recommended proposals will be forwarded to the NCDOT Board of Transportation for final approval. It is anticipated that the Board of Transportation will approve the selected jurisdictions in late winter / early spring 2023.

### *Firm Selection*

NCDOT will utilize prequalified on-call firms to prepare the studies. NCDOT will administer all payments to the consultant preparing the study. The planning process will begin once NCDOT has assigned a consultant to the project and negotiated the study's cost.

### *Agreements for Jurisdictions Providing a Local Match:*

The jurisdiction will submit a lump sum of their matching funds for this project with the signed agreement. NCDOT will then administer all payments to the consultant preparing the study. The study process will begin once (a) the agreement is executed, and a local match is received and (b) NCDOT has assigned a consultant to the project and negotiated the study's cost.



## — Eligible Projects Defined

- **Paved Trail:** Paved trail surfaces such as asphalt or concrete offer greater accessibility to accommodate bicyclists, pedestrians, and other non-motorized users of all ages and abilities. Asphalt pavement tends to be the most popular and cost effective for paved trails. Concrete pavement is more durable, but it typically costs more than asphalt pavement. Paved trails are typically 10-feet wide or greater can also be known as a “shared-use paths”, “greenways” or “sidepaths” depending on site context.
  - **Shared-Use Path:** A facility, which should be designed to meet ADA Standards, which may be used by bicyclists, pedestrians, and other non-motorized users. Shared-use paths are separated from the roadway by an open space or a physical barrier or within an independent-right-of-way and can also be known as a “multi-use trail”, “multi-use path” or “greenway.”
  - **Greenway:** A greenway provides a travel area separated from motorized traffic for bicyclists, pedestrians, and other non-motorized users. These facilities generally follow corridors of undeveloped land preserved for recreational use or environmental protection. These corridors are often utilized as buffers since they often separate and protect the natural environment from the built environment.
  - **Sidepath:** A specific type of facility, which should be designed to meet PROWAG standards, that is physically separated from the road but still located within the roadway right-of-way.
- **Sidewalk:** The portion of a street or highway right-of-way, beyond the curb or edge of roadway pavement, which is intended for use by pedestrians. Sidewalks are generally narrower than paved trails and are usually constructed of concrete pavement or pavers.

