

NCDOT Multimodal Planning Grant Initiative Overview

Program Background

Communities throughout North Carolina have begun to place more emphasis on providing facilities for travel options beyond single-occupancy vehicle travel. A desire for better modal choices, the demand for more walkable and bikeable communities, and a focus on smart growth initiatives have combined to highlight the need for better, more complete multimodal, bicycle and pedestrian transportation systems. Comprehensive planning documents are an integral part of developing these systems and can guide both local and state efforts to improve conditions for multimodal connections and bicycling and walking.



Figure 1 NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Studies Outcomes, 2011-2020

To encourage the development of comprehensive local bicycle plans and pedestrian plans, the NCDOT Integrated Mobility Division (IMD) and the Transportation Planning Division (TPD) created a matching grant program to fund plan development. This program was initiated through a special allocation of funding approved by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2003 along with federal funds earmarked specifically for bicycle and pedestrian planning by the TPD. The planning grant program was launched in January 2004 with 244 plans awarded through 2021. Between 2011-2020, 112 municipal and county plans have been completed, 250 projects submitted through STI Prioritization for funding, and 79 projects funded in the 2020-2029 State Transportation Improvement Program. A total of approximately \$7.5 million has been allocated.

In 2022, the program underwent some changes to better accommodate the shifting needs in North Carolina and to better integrate public transportation and active transportation modes as part of multimodal planning studies. This document is intended to guide grant applicants in identifying the types of planning studies that might be the best fit for them.

Who Can Apply

The following local government entities are eligible to apply for multimodal planning grants:

- Any North Carolina municipality is eligible to apply for a bicycle, pedestrian, or multimodal planning grant
- Municipalities less than 10,000 in population are also eligible to apply for a project acceleration study
- Counties with population less than 100,000 may also apply on behalf of incorporated communities and/or unincorporated areas within their jurisdiction for a bicycle, pedestrian or multimodal planning study.

Due to the limited amount of funding, the following entities are not eligible to apply for a multimodal planning grant:

- Counties with populations greater than 100,000
- Colleges/universities
- Other entities such as Business Improvement Districts
- Bicycle, pedestrian, and transit advocacy groups (although those organizations may provide a letter of support for a municipality or county applying for a grant)
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) may not apply for this type of multimodal planning grant; however a resolution of support from the appropriate MPO or RPO is expected as part of the application package from a county or a municipality

Applications submitted and received for previous grant cycles do not carry over — municipalities/counties must re-apply each year to be considered within the current process. Please note that all applications and relevant documents will be accepted online at the [program webpage](#).

A comprehensive **Bicycle or Pedestrian Network Plan** allows a municipality to set a vision for bicycle or pedestrian transportation in their community, plan for a bicycle or pedestrian network, and identify priority bicycle or pedestrian projects in addition to policy recommendations. Municipalities (and counties with populations of less than 100,000) who currently have bicycle plans and/or pedestrian plans, either previously funded through this grant program or otherwise, may also apply to update their plan provided it is at least five years old. Smaller municipalities (below 10,000 population) are eligible to apply for a joint bicycle and pedestrian plan, but still have the option of applying for a stand-alone pedestrian or a stand-alone bicycle plan.

Municipalities/counties with populations of 10,000 and over may choose to apply for funding to undertake either a multimodal plan, a bicycle plan, or a pedestrian plan in any given fiscal year. Municipalities/counties may apply for funding for the other type of plan in subsequent years. Funding is intended to support the development of a multimodal network plan or a comprehensive bicycle or pedestrian transportation plan. If neighboring municipalities wish to file a joint application, please contact IMD for instructions and guidance.

Multimodal Network Plans are intended to go a step further beyond the combined bicycle and pedestrian plans to take into account the interaction between existing transit systems and bicycle and pedestrian transportation networks. A multimodal network plan is not intended to replace a Transit Development Plan/Transit Master Plan that would evaluate potential changes to transit routes and other major transit operations changes. A multimodal network plan is also not meant to replace a Comprehensive Transportation Plan or address roadway capacity issues and roadway mobility recommendations.

In addition to the traditional bike and pedestrian plans and multimodal network plans, IMD also offers funding support for **Project Acceleration Studies**. Available for municipalities with a population of 9,999 or less, these abbreviated plans offer a shorter study schedule and primarily focus on priority project identification and project implementation. Project acceleration plans are intended to evaluate potential red flags and barriers to project implementation and ensure that the top priority projects identified have the required data needed to submit a project for funding through STI prioritization.

Selection of these planning projects 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 municipality types.

The eligibility criteria for the plan types are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Types of Planning Studies and Eligible Applicants

Jurisdiction Type	Stand-Alone Pedestrian Plan or Bicycle Plan or Plan Update	Multimodal Network Plan	Project Acceleration Study
Town or City with Population <5,000	V	V	V
Town or City with Population between 5,000 and 9,999 and no transit	V	V	V
Town or City with Population between 5,000 and 9,999 and existing transit	V	V	V
Town or City with Population >10,000	V	V	
Counties <100,000	V	V	
Counties <100,000 with fixed or deviated fixed transit		V	

How Does a Plan Help Your Community?

Planning is the first step of the implementation process for all transportation projects. A community seeking to implement a multimodal improvement project would typically undertake the following steps:

- Planning: a Comprehensive Transportation Plan, Metropolitan Transportation Plan, multimodal network plan or bicycle and pedestrian plan are some examples of planning studies
- Prioritization for Funding: this could include an application for state funding through STI Prioritization, applying for funding allocated at a regional level such as STBG-DA or other discretionary funds through an MPO, or allocating local funding sources
- Programming: once funding is identified, a project needs to be reflected or programmed in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) or local Capital Improvement Program (CIP) with funding source and timeframe noted
- Project Development: this step involves project design and environmental permitting, building up to right-of-way acquisition phase
- Implementation: bidding and construction

See Figure 2 below illustrating some of the generalized steps in the planning-to-implementation process. For a more detailed description of project development process in North Carolina, please refer to the latest NCDOT Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) guidance¹.



Figure 2: From Planning to Implementation

While transportation planning has traditionally focused on planning for vehicles and reducing congestion, creating a multimodal plan allows a community to focus on planning for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit. In a multimodal plan, a community sets out its vision for enhancing its transportation network across all modes to improve access, mobility, and safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users of all ages and abilities. In the plan, this vision is supported by mapping a multimodal network and by identifying high priority multimodal projects in the community.

¹ NCDOT Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) Project Delivery Network, June 2021 version available at [NCDOT ProjectDeliveryNetwork Version 2.0.pdf](#). Later versions may be available at the time of the grant application cycle.

The local agency can then work with its Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Rural Planning Organization (RPO) to submit identified multimodal projects to the state prioritization process (Strategic Prioritization (STI) or SPOT) for funding. The Strategic Prioritization Process is a data-driven method the state uses to prioritize transportation projects, and it is used to develop the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) which is a programmed list of projects that will be funded across the state during a 10-year period. Apart from seeking funding in the STIP through STI Prioritization, a local government project sponsor may also have the option to apply for locally-administered federal grant funding sources such as STBG-DA (Surface Transportation Block Grant-Directly Attributable) or CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program) through the regional MPO process. And some bicycle, pedestrian, and transit stop improvement projects may be funded through local funding sources including Powell Bill funding amounts passed on to municipalities from the state, local transportation bond referendums, Capital Improvement Programs, or additional sources such as economic development grants, a portion of local hotel/motel occupancy tax, or with support from public health foundations and other community non-profit foundations.

As of 2019, NCDOT updated its Complete Streets Policy to require planners and designers to consider and incorporate multimodal facilities in the design and improvement of all appropriate transportation projects in North Carolina. This policy update means that when a roadway project is being developed, planned multimodal recommendations for the corridor must be considered for inclusion. The jurisdiction's adopted Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) is considered the primary multimodal plan, but locally adopted plans, like multimodal network plans and bicycle and pedestrian plans, are also considered. Localities with existing multimodal plans have an advantage in coordinating complete streets improvements on roadway projects because they have already identified what types of multimodal facilities or accommodations they would like and in which locations.

What is the Right-Sized Plan for My Community?

To help navigate the plan types available through this program, a brief overview of each plan type, which types of communities it might be a good fit for, and end products are outlined below. Please refer to Table 1 above for a summary of what communities may be eligible for what types of plans. Some communities may benefit from multiple plan types, in which case they should choose the plan type that meets the community's greatest needs. A multimodal network plan is considered to be the preferred plan type for communities where existing transit is present, and it is generally recommended that a community completes a multimodal network plan before undertaking more narrowly focused plans.

Plans Types

Multimodal Network Plan

What is it? A comprehensive multimodal network plan allows a municipality to set a vision for multimodal transportation in their community, plan a multimodal network, and identify priority multimodal projects. Creation of a multimodal network plan is the first step to implementation of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements and fosters a more walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly environment.

How is it helpful? Having a plan for a multimodal network and identified projects allows the municipality to better communicate and coordinate their multimodal needs with regional planning organizations and NCDOT during transportation planning and project development.

Who is it for? This type of plan is a good option for municipalities that do not have an existing multimodal plan or would like to update their previous multimodal or bicycle and pedestrian plan.

Products:

- List of short-term and long-term multimodal improvements and implementation plan
 - Improvements could include point projects such as pedestrian crossing improvements and bus stop improvements
 - Linear project recommendations could include sidewalk improvements, shared-use path improvements and on-road bicycle improvements
- Multimodal network map
- Cutsheets for priority projects with additional detail and planning level cost estimates for top 4-6 projects

When to choose this type of plan? A local government would pursue a multimodal network plan rather than a bicycle or pedestrian plan when fixed route or deviated fixed route transit service is present, so that access to transit issues may be explored. A bicycle and pedestrian project acceleration study could be selected in place of a multimodal network plan when a local municipality with population under 10,000 has limited time and budget and would like an abbreviated process to zero in on the top priority projects most likely to move forward to implementation.

Bicycle or Pedestrian Network Plan/or Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan Update

What is it? A comprehensive bicycle or pedestrian network plan allows a municipality to set a vision for bicycle or pedestrian transportation in their community, plan for a bicycle or pedestrian network, and identify priority bicycle or pedestrian projects. Creation of a bicycle or pedestrian network plan is likely to be the first step to implementation of bicycle and pedestrian projects and supports a more bicycle-friendly walk-friendly environment.

How is it helpful? Having a plan for a bicycle or pedestrian network and identified projects allows the municipality to better communicate and coordinate their active transportation needs with regional planning organizations and NCDOT during transportation planning and project development. A bicycle or pedestrian planning process also helps with review of existing land use policies to encourage consideration of potential changes to realign local development standards with desired walk-friendly and bicycle-friendly outcomes.

Who is it for? This type of plan is a good option for municipalities that do not have an existing bicycle or pedestrian plan, or their previous plan is at least five years old, and they would like to update it.

Products:

- List of short-term and long-term bicycle and pedestrian improvements and implementation plan
 - Improvements could include point projects such as pedestrian crossing improvements and addressing intersection safety for bicyclists

- Linear project recommendations could include sidewalk improvements, shared-use path improvements and on-road bicycle improvements
- Bicycle or pedestrian network map
- Cutsheets for priority projects, with additional detail and planning level cost estimates for top 4-6 projects

When to choose this type of plan? A local government would pursue a bicycle or pedestrian network plan rather than a multimodal network plan when no fixed route or deviated fixed route transit service is present. A full bicycle or pedestrian network plan allows a municipality to go through more detailed steps in data gathering and stakeholder public engagement as compared with a project acceleration study, so that a larger list of potential projects is considered more fully. A municipality may also select this plan when their existing bicycle or pedestrian plan is more than five years old, and the municipality would like to refresh its priority projects list, account for local growth or changes, and explore new programs and policies to promote walking and bicycling.”

Project Acceleration Plan

What is it? A project acceleration plan is an abbreviated plan that focuses on priority bicycle, pedestrian, and multimodal project identification and project implementation.

How is it helpful? Project acceleration plans focus on efficiently identifying multimodal projects and implementation steps to foster a more walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly environment in communities that might otherwise have difficulty resourcing or funding a multimodal network plan.

Who is it for? A project acceleration plan is meant for municipalities with a population of 9,999 or less.

Products:

- Recommended project inventory organized by category, with cost estimates.
- Prioritized list and maps of short-term and long-term multi-modal improvements.
- 5 to 10 priority project cutsheets.
- Implementation Plan.

When to choose this type of plan? A project acceleration study could be selected in place of a multimodal network plan when a local municipality with population of 9,999 or less has limited time and budget and would like an abbreviated process to zero in on the top priority projects most likely to move forward to implementation. This could also be a good fit for a municipality that has recently completed extensive planning and public and stakeholder engagement and transportation needs evaluation as part of another study (i.e. a comprehensive plan or a CTP) but would like to identify and further prepare for implementation priority bicycle, pedestrian and multimodal projects.