

*North Carolina Department of Transportation*

# Comprehensive Transportation Plan Prioritization



September, 2009



## Acknowledgments

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## **Introduction, Background, and Problem**

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Currently, there are far too many Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTPs) needs throughout the state for the limited resources that are available.

The current TPB geographic structure has caused supervisors to focus on their immediate geographic areas, little to no thought given to statewide transportation needs. It is possible that some limited resources may need to be focused on other areas outside of the supervisor's immediate geographic region.



Currently, each supervisor uses different criteria to assign new CTPs to employees, which may be based on, but not limited to the following:

- Local (RPO) priorities
- growth of the area
- date of the last CTP
- staffing expertise
- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP, or funded) projects underway
- whatever area is “screaming the loudest”

The Transportation Planning Branch (TPB), like many other departments within NCDOT, is facing a number of challenges, mainly dealing with economics. Demand for transportation services and other transportation related costs is rising while revenue is flat or declining. Overall, the NCDOT has difficulty attracting and retaining employees, so even when the department is able to hire, it difficult to compete with the private sector. Due to recent budget cuts, recently TPB has lost 15 positions.

Recognizing that there a limited number of employees to work on transportation plans and new employees are not likely to be added in the near future, the branch has developed a consistent way to prioritize upcoming CTPs, to match the limited resources with the most appropriate plans. A consistent and effective prioritization tool will make the decision process more open, transparent, and data driven, while addressing local priorities and long term statewide needs.

The purpose of this exercise is to develop the priority system. How it is implemented within the Transportation Planning Branch (assignments) has yet to be determined.

## Customers

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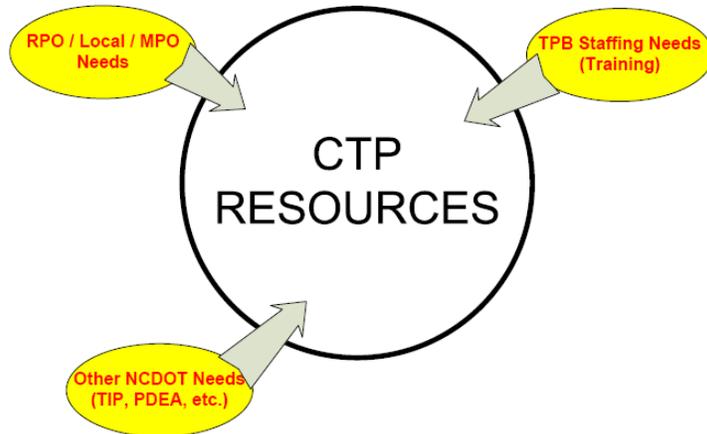
Development of CTPs best serves two groups of customers, external and internal customers.

External customers could be viewed as any entity outside of NCDOT. The main external customers are local governmental bodies such as:

- Municipalities and Counties
- Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs)
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

TPB works cooperatively with the appropriate entities in developing CTPs. Local governments use the CTP to guide development through actions such as right-of-way reservation, to request funding for specific project recommendations, to plan other government services, and other activities. MPOs and RPOs may use the plans on a more regional planning basis.

As the ultimate customer, the public would benefit from having limited resources optimized to maintain statewide transportation mobility.



Internal customers could be viewed as any group or branch within NCDOT. The main internal customers are groups such as:

- Transportation Planning Branch (TPB)
- Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch (PDEA)
- Division Offices

TPB uses plans for other activities such as traffic forecasting, air quality analysis, and citizen inquiries, which are other products and duties of the branch. TPB can even use studies as a training tool for newer staff. PDEA uses the information to work through the project development and environmental permitting process for project specific purposes. Specifically, the project recommendation information from the CTP serves as the starting point for scoping the project, documenting the purpose and need, and identifying alternatives to study in more detail. Optimally, the NCDOT Division Offices would use a CTP in helping make some local decisions such as driveway permits.

## Team Involvement

In order to develop a viable plan to improve the prioritization of CTPs, it was important to gauge the people who were most likely to be involved with its ultimate implementation. A working team was formed and was responsible for taking the key issue, identifying probable causes, identifying likely solutions, and developing an action plan for improvement.

The working team included participation from people that have worked with CTPs: four TPB planning group supervisors (Wayne Davis, Sarah Smith, James Upchurch), one TPB forecasting supervisor (Mike Orr), two TPB staff (Alena Cook and Elina Zlotchenko), and four representatives from Rural Planning Organizations (Craig Hughes, Shelby Powell, Janet Robertson, Joel Strickland)

## Problem Solving Process

A survey was developed by the team and sent out (RPOs, TPB staff and supervisors) in March 2009 to gain input on this process.

CTP Needs Prioritization Survey Importance Criteria Summary															
#	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	AVG	Rank
<b>RPOs</b>															
1	Population Growth	8	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2.44	1
2	Date of last plan	4	3	2	1	0	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	4.31	2
3	Land Development	1	0	2	2	0	3	0	1	4	0	2	1	6.94	7
4	Local Comm Resour	0	5	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	4.75	3
5	Regional vs. smaller	1	1	1	2	1	0	3	3	1	1	0	2	6.69	6
6	ADT growth	0	1	5	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	5.50	4
7	V/C	0	3	2	0	2	0	4	2	1	1	0	1	6.06	5
8	Highway Mileage	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	6	2	2	9.19	12
9	Strategic Corridors	1	0	0	1	4	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	7.19	9
10	Upcoming TIP	0	0	0	3	5	0	1	2	0	3	2	0	7.00	8
11	Tourism Revenue	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	2	2	1	2	4	9.06	11
12	Adjacent to MPO	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	6	2	8.88	10
<b>TPB Staff</b>															
1	Population Growth	2	3	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3.64	1
2	Date of last plan	0	2	2	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	5.55	5
3	Land Development	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	5.91	6
4	Local Comm Resour	3	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	5.00	4
5	Regional vs. smaller	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	3	3	0	0	8.18	10
6	ADT growth	1	1	2	0	4	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	4.45	3
7	V/C	3	2	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3.82	2
8	Highway Mileage	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	1	1	2	7.73	8
9	Strategic Corridors	0	1	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	2	7.73	9
10	Upcoming TIP	0	0	1	0	4	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	6.82	7
11	Tourism Revenue	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	6	10.18	12	
12	Adjacent to MPO	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	3	2	2	0	9.00	11
<b>TPB Supervisors</b>															
1	Population Growth	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.14	1
2	Date of last plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	9.33	10
3	Land Development	0	1	2	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	4.71	3
4	Local Comm Resour	0	0	1	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5.43	5
5	Regional vs. smaller	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	5.57	7
6	ADT growth	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	5.43	6
7	V/C	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	6.71	8
8	Highway Mileage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	11.43	12
9	Strategic Corridors	0	1	0	2	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	5.00	4
10	Upcoming TIP	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3.29	2
11	Tourism Revenue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	11.14	11	
12	Adjacent to MPO	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	0	8.57	9

The survey participation was as follows:

- RPOs – 16 of 20 participated (80%)
- TPB Staff – 19 of 42 participated (45%)
- TPB Supervisors – 8 of 15 participated (53%)

All three groups had their number one criteria as population growth. Afterwards, the survey revealed huge differences between the three groups, which can be found in the Importance Criteria Summary to the left.

After four working meetings, and considerable discussion and debate, five evenly weighted categories were finalized based on the survey data, which are discussed in later sections.

Each of the five criteria could score a maximum of 20 points, for a possible total of 100 points.

### **Prerequisites to the Ranking of a CTP Request**

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During the development of the categories, it was felt some criteria shouldn't be part of the ranking, but some criteria should be required prior to any resources devoted to development of a plan. The following two items **MUST** occur prior to a plan started by the branch.

- **Land Development Plan Requirement.** G.S. §136-66.2 requires that a local government have an adopted land development plan within the last five years or be in the process of CTP have a land development plan that is less than 5 years old before a CTP can be mutually adopted. For a plan proposal to be submitted, the local area (county, municipality, or combination) must meet at least ONE of the following:
  - A land development plan 5 years old or less, or
  - A land development plan that can be readopted as current if more than 5 years old, or
  - A land development plan that is in process of creation and will be adopted locally PRIOR to CTP adoption.

An area **SHOULD NOT** be ranked for CTP Prioritization if the area can not meet one of the above criteria.

- **Established Transportation Committee that can meet with 6 weeks.** Previous experience has shown that areas with established transportation groups (afterwards referred to as a steering committee) that can work on a CTP start the planning process months faster than areas without these committees. Several studies have been delayed for 3-4 months while local representatives received feedback and permission to establish a CTP steering committee.

Requirements for RPOs for the steering committee:

- The steering committee needs to be able to be convened within six weeks after the CTP start of study letter. If the committee cannot be convened within that timeframe, resources will be reallocated to other studies.

It is important that the RPO makes sure this requirement can be met by working with locals and DOT staff prior to assignment to avoid reallocation of resources.

For example, if Hoke County is a high priority for the RPO, and is a top statewide CTP priority, the Lumber River RPO should work with County Commissioners and other officials to establish a steering committee to assist with CTP development several months before the study is assigned.

- The steering committee must include representation from all participating jurisdictions, but doesn't mean that there must be one member per jurisdiction.

It is encouraged, but not required, that the steering committee consist of a wide range of citizens and groups (for example, try to avoid having a committee mostly of one type of group, such as business people, elected officials, or staff). A wide variety of views can make a more robust plan. Also, having some elected officials involved may make for an easier final adoption.

It is hopeful that the prioritization process will identify top CTP priorities so local resources can be allocated wisely to the identification of steering committees. RPOs should not expend resources to form steering committees for lower statewide priority studies. A study that is not assigned for many years after the formation of a steering committee may diminish the process locally.

### **Minor Updates / Studies Underway**

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CTP prioritization is meant for full studies, not a minor update such as adding/deleting a road, or adding an interchange. Simple changes to a CTP should be accommodated on an as needed basis and NOT prioritized.

CTP studies that have been started and currently being worked on by staff need not be prioritized.

### **Prioritization Category #1: Growth Data**

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Based on survey results, the growth of an area was the most important factor for prioritizing CTPs. The use of the Office and State Budget and Management website provides a non biased source of information concerning the rate of population growth. Two maps will be used to combine points for this category. Points are awarded based on how the county is designated for either year. These points are awarded based on county totals, even if the proposed CTP is a municipal study.

### 2000 - 2010 Growth

[http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts\\_and\\_figures/socioeconomic\\_data/population\\_estimates/demog/20002010growthmig.pdf](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates/demog/20002010growthmig.pdf)

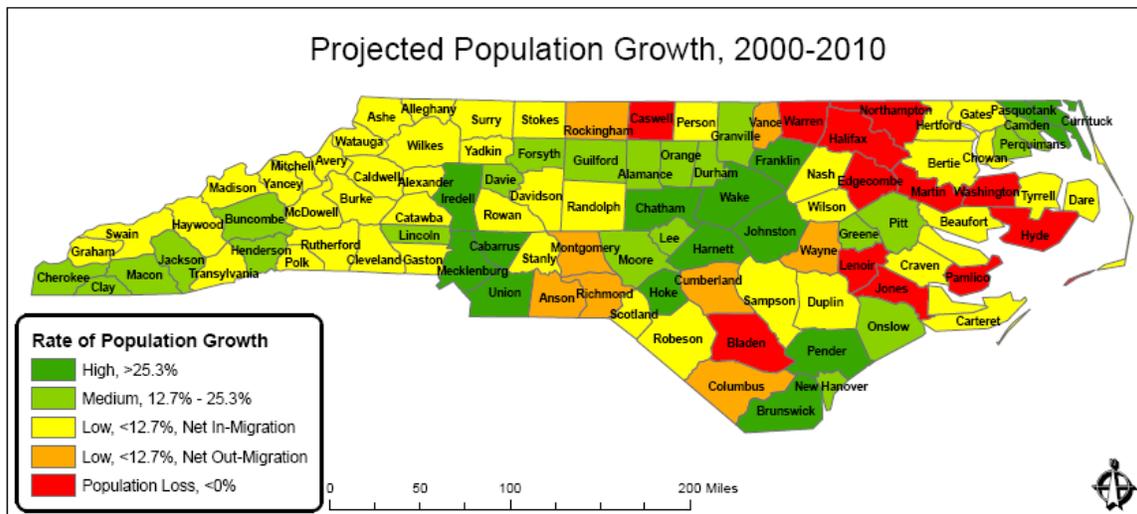
- 10 Points – High
- 6 Points – Medium
- 3 Points – Low (either scenario)
- 0 Points - Loss

### 2010 – 2020 Growth

[http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts\\_and\\_figures/socioeconomic\\_data/population\\_estimates/demog/20102020growthmig.pdf](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates/demog/20102020growthmig.pdf)

- 10 Points – High
- 6 Points – Medium
- 3 Points – Low (either scenario)
- 0 Points - Loss

An example of one of the two maps is below.



Example #1: Based on the above maps, Nash County would receive 3 Points for being designated “Low” for 2000-2010, and an additional 6 points for being designated “Medium” for 2010 – 2020. So Nash County would receive a total of 9 points for the Growth Data Category.

Example #2: If Troy (in Montgomery County) was being prioritized (and is not part of a county study), it would be based on Montgomery County growth. Since the county rates as “Low” for both maps, Troy would receive a total of 6 points (2 x 3 points) for the Growth Data Category.

## **Prioritization Category #2: RPO Points**

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The committee felt that there were four areas that points should be awarded, each awarding 5 points each. RPOs should focus on the areas that are high on their local request list to make sure that these items are addressed. They are:

- **RPO Priority.** The top 5 RPO CTP priorities can earn up to 5 points based on the local RPO rank.
  - The #1 RPO priority earns 5 points.
  - The #2 RPO priority earns 4 points.
  - The #3 RPO priority earns 3 points.
  - The #4 RPO priority earns 2 points.
  - The #5 RPO priority earns 1 point.
  - The #6-10 RPO priorities do not earn any points.
  
- **Locally adopted Bicycle Plan.** To earn the five points to this category, an area must have a bicycle plan that is more detailed than a locally adopted CTP map or Statewide Bicycle Routes. Studies created from bicycle planning grants should qualify for these points. To earn the points the area must meet the following requirements:
  1. Exceeds the standards of the CTP. Examples of exceeding could include: more detail on road improvements, analysis on demand or policies, educational components, etc.
  2. A locally adopted current plan that is actively implementable or in process of being developed.

For countywide studies, if one jurisdiction participating in a multi-jurisdictional study meets this requirement, all points are awarded.

- **Locally adopted Pedestrian Plan.** To earn the five points to this category an area must have a pedestrian plan that is more detailed than a locally adopted CTP map. To earn the points the area must meet the following requirements:
  1. Exceeds the standards of the CTP. Examples of exceeding could include: more detail on sidewalk improvements, analysis of demand, types of needs, policies, and construction estimates, etc.
  2. A locally adopted current plan that is actively implementable or in process of being developed.

For countywide studies, if one jurisdiction in a multi-jurisdictional study meets this requirement, all points are awarded.

- **Unified County Plans.** Previous experience has shown that countywide CTPs that include multiple jurisdictions do a better job of addressing regional travel concerns and are more cost effective.

To earn the five points in this category, an area must agree that ALL non-MPO areas within the county will participate in a CTP effort. For a countywide study, that means all (non-MPO) municipalities and the county are working together to develop a plan.

If a single municipality does not want to participate in a countywide effort, no points will be awarded.

Single municipal plans or other plans that do not address an entire county (outside of MPOs) cannot earn points from this category.

### **Prioritization Category #3: Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Growth By County**

The group felt that Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in a county was a good indicator of the increases in traffic. This data is gathered yearly from the NCDOT Traffic Survey Unit (Universe File) and is calculated from the Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts on a countywide basis.

A 10 year growth rate is calculated based the most current data and the data from 10 years ago. The yearly change is multiplied by 600 to come up with a point value. The multiplier of “600” gives an average of nearly eight points, which is close to the midpoint of the point value range (0 to 20).

Negative numbers are increased to zero and twenty points is the maximum value. The 2008 example of some counties is shown that was used in the development of the process.

In this example, Brunswick County was rounded down from 21 points to 20 (since 20 is the maximum) and Beaufort County was increased from -3 points to zero points.

COUNTY NAME:	2008 Total VMT	1999 Total VMT	Yearly change	Points
ALAMANCE	3812.4	3479.3	0.92%	6
ALEXANDER	626.2	635.14	-0.14%	-1
ALLEGHANY	249.5	251.54	-0.08%	0
ANSON	786.5	814.2	-0.35%	-2
ASHE	611.7	594.48	0.29%	2
AVERY	519	536.03	-0.32%	-2
BEAUFORT	1111.6	1162.27	-0.44%	-3
BERTIE	810.7	742.41	0.88%	5
BLADEN	1094.6	1108.4	-0.13%	-1
BRUNSWICK	3540.4	2521.09	3.45%	21
BUNCOMBE	6285	5716.18	0.95%	6
BURKE	2378.2	2519.42	-0.58%	-3
CABARRUS	4326.8	3548.69	2.00%	12
CALDWELL	1759.9	1697.63	0.36%	2
CAMDEN	327.2	275.11	1.75%	10
CARTERET	1752.8	1664.2	0.52%	3
CASWELL	591.8	592.44	-0.01%	0
CATAWBA	4751.3	4299.36	1.00%	6
CHATHAM	1793.1	1616.22	1.04%	6
CHEROKEE	735.8	682.62	0.75%	5
CHOWAN	370.9	301.55	2.09%	13
CLAY	236	218.71	0.76%	5
CLEVELAND	2591.7	2487.85	0.41%	2
COLUMBUS	1748.7	1624.08	0.74%	4
CRAVEN	2747.7	2144.08	2.51%	15
CUMBERLAND	7689.3	7383.05	0.41%	2
CURRITUCK	961.2	727.76	2.82%	17

#### **Prioritization Category #4: Upcoming Program & Resource Plan Projects**

The group felt that upcoming projects are an important indicator of the need for a plan. Having a mutually adopted plan can help during the traffic forecasting and environmental process.

Points will be awarded for the following types of projects identified in the *NCDOT Program and Resource Plan* (6-10 year plan) that are **NOT** maintenance related.

- 10 points – New Location (or potential new location) roadway sections of greater than 0.5 Mile.
- 1 point for each 5 miles of adding additional automobile lanes. (centerline miles not lane miles)

There is a maximum of 20 points for this category, but 2 or more separate projects could be combined up to 20 points. For example, 2 New Location projects could be combined for a total of 20 points.

Segmented projects should be combined for a single project for purposes of points. For example, a bypass project segmented into an A and B section in the Program and Resource plan should count only once.

For projects that cross county or municipal lines, only the distance within the CTP study area should be counted.

#### **Prioritization Category #5: Date of last study**

During the survey, an important element to the RPOs was the date of the last plan. It was suggested and agreed by the committee that an upcoming CTP study would get a point per year (up to 20) for each year since the last plan had been *attempted*, not necessarily adopted. Occasionally, CTPs are developed for areas that are, for whatever reason, not adopted locally. It was felt that an attempted plan was a more accurate representation of allocated resources that have been devoted to the area.

- One point is earned for each year since adoption or the last study attempt, to a maximum of 20 points.
- Areas that have never had a plan would receive the maximum of 20 points.
- Since many counties have not had unified plans over the years, the portion of the study that would earn the highest points for a countywide effort would be the earned points. This would encourage counties to work together as by working together, they could earn more points.
- Areas inside an MPO wouldn't count towards points.

Example #1: Edgecombe County wants to start a study that includes all the non-MPO areas for a unified study. Includes these areas:

- Edgecombe County – last plan adopted in 1996
- Tarboro/ Princeville – last plan adopted 1979
- Balance of Edgecombe County is in Rocky Mount MPO (doesn't count)

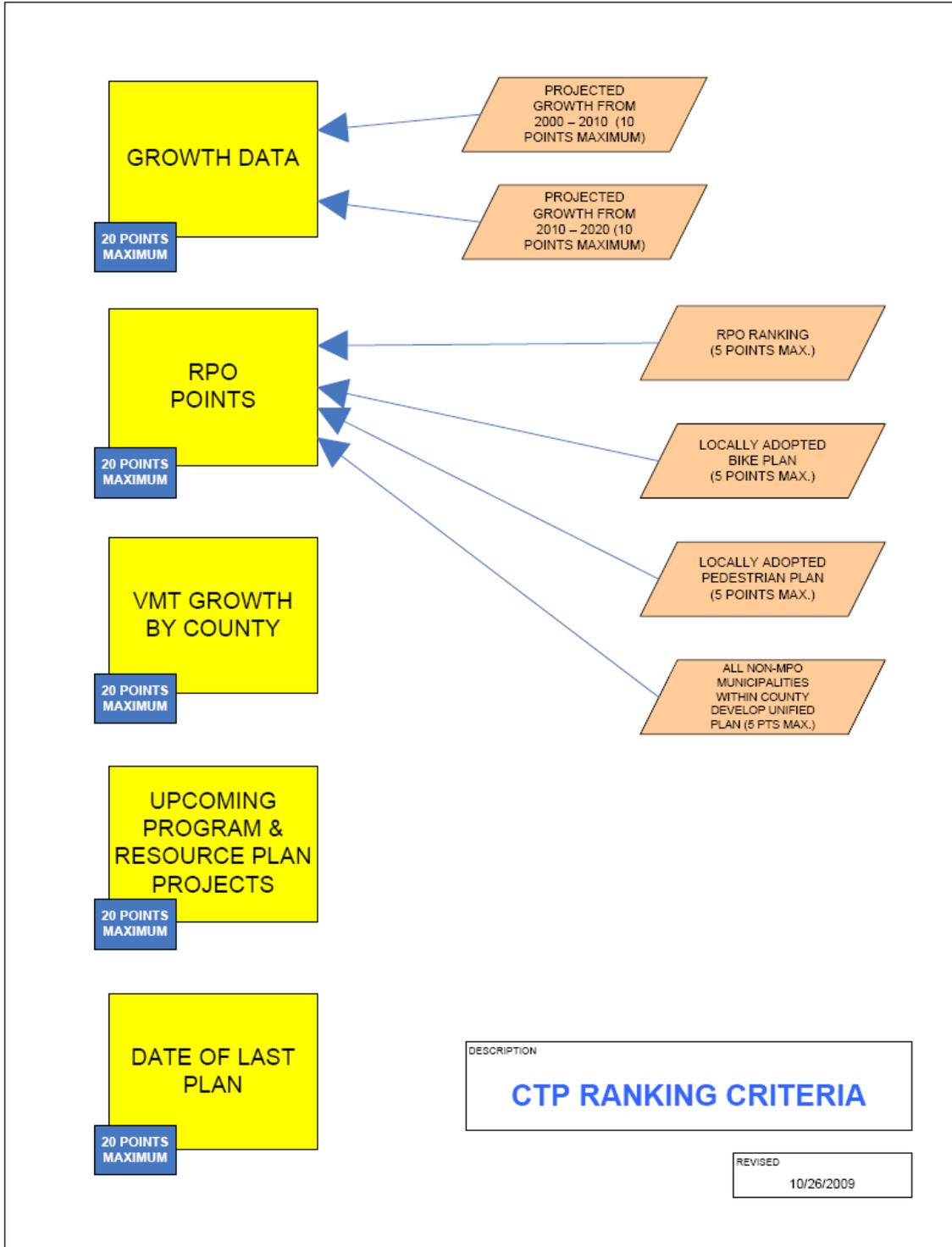
Since Tarboro has a plan that is 30 years old, *20 points* are earned for this category for an Edgecombe County study, since 20 points is the maximum for this category.

Example #2: Harnett County is working with the Capital Area MPO and Fayetteville MPO and is including all municipalities to develop a plan. Includes these areas:

- Angier (in CAMPO, doesn't count)
- Coats – 1983 adopted plan, but attempted in 1996, not adopted
- Harnett County – last plan adopted in 1995
- Lillington – 1982 adopted plan, but attempted in 1998 and not adopted
- Balance of County is in MPOs (doesn't count)

The oldest qualifying study is 1995, and is 14 years old (based on 2009). *14 points* are awarded for this category.

Example #3: Beulaville in Duplin County wants to do a plan by themselves. They have never had a plan. They would earn *20 points* for this category.



This is a graphical representation of the CTP Prioritization System.



feedback from their members, they need to submit the completed spreadsheet by the appropriate date (outlined below). The spreadsheet is created with lookup tables and drop down menus for ease of use, so, with proper information, the entire process should take less than 30 minutes.

Remember, to be eligible for a CTP, each area must have a land development plan approved within the last five years, or be willing to undertake a land development planning process in conjunction with the CTPs. Studies that are active do not need to be submitted. Areas that cannot convene a transportation committee within 6 weeks after start of the study should not be submitted.

A proposal on a priority list does not guarantee that the study will be assigned or initiated in the near future.

### **Finalization – Next Steps**

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It is recommended that the first iteration of the prioritization be considered a “trial run”, and reconsidered in January-February 2010. This is to check the trial ranking criteria for reasonableness. If the evaluation shows that the tool is reasonable, then it can be fully implemented for the branch. The target date for full implementation is June, 2010, but it could be earlier based on feedback and prioritization results.

The data will be tabulated by the six TPB planning groups. The final product will be called *Study Needs By Planning Group*.

Please remember that the *Study Needs By Planning Group* list is a guide. The final decisions on the allocation of any resources will be made by DOT management.

### **2009 – 2010 “Trial run” of the new prioritization system**

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- By October 29, 2009, TPB will distribute:
  - *Draft guidance on the prioritization process*
  - *Draft spreadsheet.*
- On November 4, 2009, this material will be presented to the RPO Association.
- By December 31, 2009, each RPO will submit their CTP Priority List using the *current* procedure and spreadsheet.
- By January 31, 2010 each RPO will submit the same CTP Priority List (with a maximum of 10 priorities), with appropriate points calculated to TPB in the new spreadsheet format (the new procedure). This list should be the same as the list submitted in December, just in the new format. In this initial run, it should be sent to both the TPB RPO Coordinator and the TPB Senior Coordinator (currently Elina Zlotchenko).

- Since the *NCDOT Program and Resource Plan (6-10 year plan)* is not yet available, use the funded *2009-2015 Transportation Improvement Program* for qualifying projects. Projects should the Prioritization Criteria outlined above (meaning maintenance, resurfacing, bridges, do not count towards points).
- *CTP requests e-mailed after January 31, 2009 will not be ranked.*
- *CTP requests not in the approved spreadsheet format will not be considered for prioritization.*
- By February 10, 2010, TPB will compile the RPO lists and created a draft *Study Needs By Planning Group* and distribute to the Prioritization committee for a reasonableness review and comment. If it is unreasonable or there is a substantial problem, the following dates may be delayed.
- By February 19, 2010, a draft draft *Study Needs By Planning Group* will be distributed for a one week comment period internally and to RPOs. TPB Coordinators will check for accuracy. All criteria will be included for the comment period.
- By March 1, 2010, TPB will release the final *Study Needs By Planning Group* of CTP studies. NCDOT's new year of work plans starts on April 1, so this will be information that can be used for new assignments.
- If necessary, the CTP prioritization committee will reconvene or the above deadlines extended to discuss results and adjust where necessary.

### **Responsibilities / Due Dates (beyond April 1, 2010)**

The following dates are outlined assuming a successful trial run with only minor changes to the procedure.

- On September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, TPB will distribute the latest prioritization guidance and spreadsheet.  
Although it is anticipated the process will stay roughly the same, some links will change and the growth rate values based on VMT will change.
- On December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, the RPOs will submit **up to 10** CTP priorities, with appropriate points calculated to TPB in spreadsheet format. It should be sent to both the Group TPB RPO Coordinator and the TPB Senior RPO Coordinator (or other designated staff as directed on the spreadsheet).
  - *Priorities not in the approved spreadsheet format will not be considered for prioritization.*
  - *CTP Priorities e-mailed after December 31<sup>st</sup> will NOT be considered until the FOLLOWING year. This will be strictly enforced.*

- By February 15<sup>th</sup> of each year, a draft *Study Needs By Planning Group* list will be distributed for a one week comment period. All criteria will be included for the comment period.
- By March 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, TPB will release a Final *Study Needs By Planning Group* list.

Please remember that the *Study Needs By Planning Group* list is a guide. The final decisions on the allocation of any resources will be made by DOT management.

### **How improvement will be evidenced if implemented**

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At this time, we are unable to measure which resources should be going to most appropriate CTP studies. As of now, we can only assume that TPB is not optimizing resources. After the tool is implemented, it should be easier to measure improvement based on the studies that were started before the tool was implemented, and after the tool was implemented.

The success of the tool could also be measured by **competent performance**, meaning the tool does what is supposed to do, and it solves the problem.

**Baseline:** Using the CTP prioritization tool, calculate the percentage of plans completed in the past three years that would have been ranked in the top 20% of needs within the branch.

**Measure:** Improve the percentage of plans started after plan implementation that would have been ranked in the top 20% of needs within the branch.

### **Conclusion**

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The goal of this project was to begin a process of ranking CTPs to lead to an improvement of how resources are allocated within the Transportation Planning Branch. With the help of the working team, a plan of action that will ultimately lead to a better use of limited resources in the Transportation Planning Branch has been developed.

### **Questions?**

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