



# **Achieving a Seamless Transportation System for North Carolina**

*A Framework for Collaboration*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. Overview.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Goals.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. Vision.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>III. Guiding Principles.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV. General Responsibilities for the Partners.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>V. Primary Roles.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>VI. <i>Six in 2006</i>.....</b>	<b>13</b>

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# Framework for Collaboration

## MPOs, RPOs, NCDOT

### OVERVIEW

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) all share a common purpose. As the partners responsible for transportation planning in the state, the three groups recognize their primary mission is to create and maintain a high quality of life for all North Carolina citizens by ensuring a high level of mobility for people and freight. This strategic goal has one end in mind: to meet the needs of the citizens of North Carolina.

To accomplish this objective as we go forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, collaboration as well as communication is essential for the three partners to effectively carry out their objectives, both strategically and tactically. Recognizing differing needs and processes among the regions, the three partners have embarked on a collaboration project to establish how they can work together and thereby achieve a seamless transportation system for North Carolina.

This collaborative framework endeavors to set forth the guiding principles for successful collaboration and decision-making, both today and in the future. Each principle is designed to address a specific issue and strategically describe the steps needed for better success today as well as to establish a path for further improvements over the next several years. The resulting agreement will then be used going forward to reinforce and strengthen the principles and many resulting benefits of a strong and steadfast partnership between NCDOT and the state's 37 regional planning organizations (17 MPOs and 20 RPOs). The goals for this framework include the following:

### GOALS

- Clarify how NCDOT, MPOs, and RPOs will collaborate to achieve a seamless transportation system for North Carolina
- Establish principles of collaboration and cooperation
- Establish clear, common sense joint expectations of the communication flow. This includes the level of collaboration (joint or individual) and consultation (understanding stakeholder concerns prior to decision making) required.
- Identify the strengths of each organization and identify ways for the partners to collaboratively leverage those strengths
- Provide the foundation for evolving into a culture of continuous process improvements regarding roles, responsibilities, and rewards
- Achieve endorsement by senior leadership and ensure the principles are applied throughout all the respective organizations

The advantages of the three partners working together have tangible, direct benefits for the public with respect to transportation planning and infrastructure development. With an established framework for collaboration, the NCDOT, MPOs, and RPOs all understand the opportunity to leverage their strengths to create a seamless transportation system in North Carolina.

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## VISION

To achieve a lasting vision for North Carolina's transportation system, the agencies recognize the importance of a collaborative framework. Meeting the current and future needs of the state and its communities and regions is the joint objective of all parties. Successful collaboration will ensure a shared vision to include the following:

- A safe, efficient, well-maintained and environmentally sound transportation system
- Convenient choices for reaching destinations throughout our communities, regions, and the state, including a range of well-integrated intercity rail, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle linkages
- A transportation system that is consistent between jurisdictional and planning boundaries without arbitrary differences in system capacity and maintenance
- Transportation investment decisions linked to robust comprehensive transportation planning at the sub-regional, regional, and statewide transportation system tiers (good planning and technical data)
- Decision-making that emphasizes timeliness and cost effectiveness. Transportation investments that effectively address the needs of the and sub-regional, regional and statewide transportation system tiers
- MPOs and RPOs that effectively involve and represent the state's communities
- Comprehensive Transportation Plans at the MPO and RPO level that effectively integrate community land use and comprehensive plans that lead to a regional transportation investment strategy.
- MPO and RPO plans that are coordinated and consistent with the Statewide Transportation Plan, which sets a vision for future state investments and policy, and is developed in cooperation with the MPOs and in consultation with the RPOs.
- Integration of regional transit operators, such as PART, TTA, and CATs with the MPO and RPO coordinating bodies.
- A collaborative planning and decision-making structure where the strengths of all parties are recognized.
- Robust, on-going and meaningful public involvement
- Routine consultation among agencies

By recognizing and fostering the strengths and capabilities of each party, we can leverage the value that each party can add through closer working relationships, better understanding, and clearer, consistent communication. We will seek to develop and promote a clear understanding of the vision, principles, goals, and roles and responsibilities that form the foundation of this relationship. This document serves to articulate the planning partners' intentions to create a seamless transportation system for North Carolina through collaboration.

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To establish the framework for collaboration and decision-making, this document will outline guiding principles to be used by NCDOT and the 37 regional planning organizations. These principles will serve as the starting point for going forward. The next step will be to identify the appropriate strategies to execute these principles.

### 1. Inclusive and transparent decision-making

- **Defined but flexible roles**

While sharing a common vision, each agency serves different constituencies and has different functions. The MPOs, RPOs, and NCDOT will clarify the overarching role of their agency (both regionally and statewide) and define their respective roles in fulfilling associated responsibilities. This will be done through an ongoing dialogue in a manner that is responsive to changing circumstances and evolving needs.

- **Collaboration across borders**

Coordination between NCDOT and the RPOs and MPOs has been an issue in the past. We will establish a framework for communicating among the agencies and establish broad, flexible standards for sharing information. This effort will result in improved communications, more effective working relationships, and a more continuous and consistent transportation network across local boundaries.

### 2. Routine consultation

- **Clear, open and timely communication**

Routine communication will convey mutual respect, prevent overlooking strategic and tactical issues and opportunities, and help each party to fulfill their mission on behalf of the state and its communities.

- **State to Regional Planning Organizations**

NCDOT will consult with MPOs and RPOs on policies, processes, and other departmental decisions that affect or involve the MPOs and RPOs.

- **Regional Planning Organizations to State**

The MPOs and RPOs will consult with the NCDOT on the development of Long Range Transportation Plans (in MPOs), Comprehensive Transportation Plans (in MPOs and RPOs), Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs (MTIPs), studies affecting the NCDOT system and on resource allocation decisions under MPO or RPO purview.

- **Between Regional Planning Organizations**

MPOs and RPOs will consult with one another to eliminate disconnects across borders, identify strategic issues and opportunities, and ensure that planning needs are being met through coordination.

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### **3. Well informed, transparent decision-making**

- **Information Flow**

Each agency will create processes to achieve a free flow of information, consultation between mutual stakeholders, and collaboration across borders. Shared information will be presented in an easy-to-understand format that is openly accessible to all parties involved.

- **Comprehensive transportation system plans**

Many comprehensive transportation plans require input from all agencies. These plans will be identified and MPOs, RPOs, and NCDOT will collaborate on achieving robust transportation system plans that meet sub-regional, regional, and statewide needs.

### **4. Balanced and Efficient Resource Allocation**

- **Comprehensive Transportation Planning**

The parties will focus on effective comprehensive transportation planning, including stakeholder consultation, to support the development of improvement priorities as well as project development and delivery. Comprehensive Transportation Plans in coordination with the Statewide Transportation Plan will serve as a primary basis for identifying and prioritizing needs and developing timely projects and programs to address those needs.

- **Budget allocation**

To ensure efficient allocation and maximization of resources, the agencies will collaborate on the utilization (including project development and delivery) of appropriate federal, state and local transportation funds.

- **Balanced Investment**

The agencies will work toward programs, plans, and project/service delivery issues to balance the multi-modal investment needs of roadways, public transportation, bicycle, pedestrian, and rail transportation.

The agencies will work toward a project delivery funding mix that effectively balances the needs of the sub-regional, regional and statewide tiers (as defined in the Statewide Transportation Plan).

- **Collaborative Decision-Making**

Routine consultation will be a standard practice in resource allocation.

- **Entrepreneurial Project Delivery**

Parties will actively seek opportunities to leverage resources to achieve timely project delivery and better results.

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## **5. Consistent standards among partners**

- **Standardization**

Each agency has its own character and operational differences. As part of the guiding principles, all 37 regional planning organizations and NCDOT will agree on best practice standards, expectations and implementation. The agencies will recognize inherent differences while agreeing upon set procedures, with appropriate flexibility.

## **6. Knowledgeable Partners and Staff**

- **Training**

Upon identifying the roles and responsibilities of the regional planning organizations, the agencies will identify how the role fits into the overall decision-making framework. Critical to the performance of partners and staff, training will be essential to ensure individuals have a baseline of knowledge for their role and how to interact within the overall structure. Planning organizations will collaborate in the training of staff and local officials through knowledge transfer and education programs.

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## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE PARTNERS

### NCDOT

#### Transportation Planning Branch

- Administer Planning Funds to RPOs and MPOs
- Review Quarterly and Annual Performance Reports
- Review annual work programs to ensure that yearly work tasks are being performed
- Provide guidance on State and Federal policies to the RPOs and MPOs
- Assist RPOs and MPOs with special studies and project review
- Develop and coordinate the development of travel demand models for appropriate areas
- Perform air quality analysis and review conformity reports
- Assist with project prioritization and TIP development
- Provide and/or assist with the "continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative" (3C) planning process, including assisting with LRTP (for MPOs)
- Communicate consistently with MPOs and RPOs
- Coordinate with other branches and divisions within NCDOT

#### Other Branches

- Coordinate on public transportation planning and investment (Public Transportation)
- Coordinate between Highway Divisions and regional and local planning agencies
- Coordinate on rail issues and investments (Rail Division)
- Coordinate on project development (PDEA), and construction (Divisions)
- Coordinate on the Statewide Transportation Plan (Secretary's Office/Board of Transportation)

#### RPOs

- Coordinate, assist and/or develop local and regional plans
- Provide the primary forum for public participation in the transportation planning and implementation process
- Develop and prioritize projects the organization believes should be included in the State's Transportation Improvement Program
- Provide transportation related information to local governments
- Coordinate regional issues between contiguous MPOs, RPOs and other regional organizations

#### MPOs

- Conduct a (3C) planning process
- Meet federal transportation planning requirements for MPOs, with additional requirements and responsibilities for Transportation Management Areas (TMAs - >200,000)
- Develop and prioritize projects the organization believes should be included in the State's Transportation Improvement Program
- Represent communities and regions in transportation planning and project delivery
- Coordinate regional issues between contiguous MPOs, RPOs and other regional organizations
- Provide the primary forum for public participation
- Integrate local plans, priorities, and community involvement into the area-wide transportation planning process
- Develop and approve long range and comprehensive transportation plans
- Develop and approve metropolitan transportation improvement programs



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- Direct resources as available (Surface Transportation Program Direct Apportionment (STP-DA) funds for TMAs, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) where applicable) to MPO priority projects
  - Coordinate local project development and funding capabilities and state and federal resource opportunities as appropriate

## **PRIMARY ROLES FOR THE PARTNERS**

### **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**

The TIP provides funding for specific transportation projects. Developing TIPs should be a consultative process between NCDOT and the 37 regional planning organizations.

#### **NCDOT-Primary Role:**

- Share project selection with MPOs and RPOs and provide funding
- Incorporate MPO project priorities into final project selections
- Consider RPO project priorities and incorporate RPO projects where applicable when making project selection decisions

#### **MPOs Primary Role**

- Develop and share project selection with NCDOT
- Communicate & coordinate MPO actions including project selection (TMAs – STP DA, CMAQ where applicable)
- Adopt MTIP
- Coordinate and conduct local community and public involvement activities

#### **RPOs Primary Role**

- Develop and communicate local priorities to NCDOT
- Provide comments on the TIP
- Conduct local community and public involvement activities

### **Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**

The comprehensive transportation plan is the overall vision for a planning area. The MPOs CTP includes a LRTP that provides a fiscally constrained 20-year plan for future investment. Regional planning organizations should proactively coordinate on boundary related issues.

#### **NCDOT Primary Role**

- Provide technical support to MPOs
- Develop the CTPs for areas within RPOs as requested and dependent on resources
- Approve the CTP maps

#### **MPO Primary Role**

- Develop and approve the CTP process, which incorporates the LRTP process in MPOs.
- Approve and adopt the CTP and the LRTP

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**RPO Primary Role**

- Assist in, and/or develop CTPs in coordination with NCDOT
- Prioritize CTP study needs for the region

**Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and Planning Work Program (PWP)**

The Unified/Planning Work Program is the annual 'to do' (budget) list which shows how MPOs and RPOs will carry out their planning programs.

**NCDOT**

- Serve as administrator for the planning funds and monitor that they are spent in accordance with federal and state guidelines
- Review and approve work programs, while making sure goals are realistic and products follow applicable guidelines

**MPO**

- Develop and implement annual work plan
- Share work products with planning partners

**RPO**

- Develop and implement annual work plan
- Share work products with planning partners

**Project Development Process ("SEPA/NEPA")**

The project development process is a collaborative planning effort between several entities to usher projects through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/401 merger process.

**NCDOT**

- Responsible for the overall project development process representing local interests in the process
- Responsible for guiding a project through the process
- Responsible for obtaining permits at the process conclusion

**MPO**

- Provide local input, data and plans and serve as a partner in the merger process
- The MPO and/or member governments may develop projects and coordinate the merger process as applicable.

**RPO**

- Provide support to the project development process through local input, data and plans, and in some cases serve as a partner in the merger process.

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## **Project Construction**

Success factors here include clear communication with neighboring regions on border issues related to a specific project.

### **NCDOT**

- Fund, let and construct projects, monitor environmental commitments and provide long term maintenance

### **MPO**

- Provide local coordination and representation at appropriate points including communication of local issues or requests
- Administer or construct projects as applicable

### **RPO**

- Provide local coordination and representation at appropriate points including communication of local issues or requests

## **Statewide Transportation Plan**

The Statewide Transportation Plan is a 25-year plan, which lays out NCDOT's investment strategies and policies for its transportation system. This plan is technically sound, and is developed in cooperation with the MPOs (for metropolitan areas) in consultation with RPOs (for non-metropolitan areas) and with opportunities for participation by interested parties.

### **NCDOT**

- Develop, implement and update the Statewide Transportation Plan (STP)
- Provide updates on specific implementation actions to MPOs and RPOs

### **MPO**

- Serve as a key stakeholder in the development, implementation and update of the STP
- Provide overall needs to NCDOT for use in preparing STP updates

### **RPO**

- Serve as a key stakeholder in the development, implementation and update of the STP
- Provide overall needs to NCDOT for use in preparing STP updates

## **Training**

Training enables the partners to effectively carry out their core duties and responsibilities.

### **NCDOT**

- Provide training and guidance on pertinent issues and serve as a client or participant on training

### **MPO**

- Provide guidance on pertinent issues and serve as a client on training

### **RPO**

- Provide guidance on pertinent issues and serve as a client on training

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## **Policy and Structure – Policy changes and procedures that directly impact MPOs and RPOs**

Used to help clarify the process for making decisions on policy and structure changes.

### **NCDOT**

- Interpret policy, provide guidance and carry out collaborative decisions
- Consult with partners regarding pending policy issues that affect all partners

### **MPO**

- Interpret policy, provide guidance and carry out collaborative decisions
- Provide feedback on pending policy issues that affect all partners

### **RPO**

- Interpret policy, provide guidance and carry out collaborative decisions
- Provide feedback on pending policy issues that affect all partners

## **Air Quality Conformity**

Process for carrying out the conformity process in non-attainment areas

### **NCDOT**

- Provide draft and final TIP information for analysis
- Participate in Statewide Interagency Consultation Meetings (SICM) that support the conformity process
- Make conformity determination for rural areas

### **MPO**

- Primary partner, responsible for making conformity findings and following the process
- Participate in SICM

### **RPO**

- May endorse TIP and conformity finding
- Participate in SICM

## **Special Studies:**

Special studies support the planning process. An ingredient for success is to recognize local issues and to look outside regional boundaries as necessary.

### **NCDOT**

- Identify potential special studies
- Collaborate on identifying study needs

### **MPO**

- Conduct, partner or request specific studies

### **RPO**

- Conduct, partner or request specific studies

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## **Six in 2006**

As the partners move forward toward creating a seamless transportation system in North Carolina through collaboration, six key issues have been identified as critical next steps to address in 2006, along with possible action steps. These six key issues are:

### **1. Charting Current and Future Collaboration**

*Potential Action Steps:* Develop 'future perfect' vision for roles and responsibilities; complete the detailed partner responsibilities document; RPO one-on-one meetings with Board members

### **2. Training for Partners**

*Potential Action Steps:* Survey and prioritize staff training needs

### **3. Educate New Officials**

*Potential Action Steps:* Survey local officials to understand training needs; approach Institute of Government to host a class.

### **4. Boundary Issue Discussions**

*Potential Action Steps:* Discussion relationship of planning boundaries to NCDOT operational boundaries

### **5. Clear, consistent communication**

*Potential Action Steps:* Develop communications protocol and develop communications 'master' list and distribute; encourage communication to division engineers

### **6. Coordination and Sharing of Data**

*Potential Action Steps:* GIS 5-year action plan; prioritize needs, conduct gap analysis and produce standards