



# Project Readiness

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), New Hanover County, and the Wilmington Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) have collaborated successfully in the past to implement meaningful and effective projects. NCDOT Division 3 will be administering this project, and Division staff have been involved in the planning process to date. Additionally, there is explicit support from the County, WMPO, and Cape Fear Public Transit Authority (Wave Transit), indicating that the proposed LINK NC project will be implemented in a timely fashion and within budget and will greatly enhance the safety and connectivity of the US 421 Monkey Junction corridor.

## Environmental Risk

NCDOT is prepared to deliver LINK NC promptly and efficiently, confirming that the required approvals, permits, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) class of action, public involvement, right-of-way (ROW) acquisitions, and risk mitigation strategies are properly managed.

## State and Local Approvals Support

NCDOT has secured project support, evidenced by [Letters of Support](#) from New Hanover County, WMPO, and Wave Transit, indicating backing for this BUILD grant application.

## Permits

The project study area does not have significant environmental concerns but will require coordination with local agencies to confirm compliance with federal, state, and local regulations. The accessible sidewalk, multi-use path (MUP), signalization, median improvements, and transit stop improvements will be carried out on land primarily owned or controlled by NCDOT with the necessary ROW in place. The LINK NC budget and schedule responsibly account for any additional ROW easements that may be needed from private landowners.

# Planning and Constructability

## Planning and Design Status

The improvements proposed in LINK NC align with improvements in several adopted local planning documents, including WMPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) **Cape Fear Moving Forward** and the **New Hanover County Comprehensive Greenways Plan**. NCDOT has developed conceptual design and cost estimates for the various project aspects, which include sidewalk, MUP, median fencing, improved transit stops, and traffic signal improvements. Detailed design work will build from these concepts and will be initiated early in the next project phase.

### ROW Status and Acquisition Plan

ROW acquisition is anticipated and will be necessary primarily for installing new sidewalks and MUPs along the corridor. This acquisition will involve areas of parcel frontages along the project length and some temporary construction easements. In areas requiring acquisition, NCDOT will follow all applicable federal and state procedures for acquiring real property.

### Environmental Review and NEPA Class of Action

NCDOT anticipates LINK NC will be subject to a Categorical Exclusion (CE) review to satisfy NEPA requirements. This compliance will be conducted under the NCDOT Programmatic Agreement with FHWA for CEs as a Type I-A review. The NEPA analysis will be completed simultaneously with project design and will include consultations with relevant federal, state, and local agencies to address and mitigate potential impacts.

## Proposed Schedule

The requested BUILD funds are proposed to be used for the design and construction phases of the LINK NC project. Key milestones for LINK NC are displayed in Table 1, building off the anticipated timeline for a grant agreement and funds obligation.

Table 1 Key Milestones

Key Milestones	Start Date	End Date
BUILD Grant Agreement Finalization	Mid 2025	Late 2026
Grant Funds Obligation	Late 2026	Late 2032
Project Listed in STIP	Mid 2025	Early 2026
Preliminary Design Start	Early 2026	Late 2027
NEPA Compliance and Review	Early 2027	Late 2028
Final Design	Late 2027	Mid 2029
ROW Acquisition	Late 2028	Mid 2030
Construction	Mid 2030	Late 2032

Several studies and design efforts have already taken place, including a pedestrian safety study, public engagement to support visioning, and conceptual design development. Due to the amount of work that has gone into this project to date, NCDOT expects the implementation of LINK NC to be efficient and with minimal unforeseen circumstances. This is reflected in the more detailed schedule in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**, which displays an expedited expected delivery for each project phase and a padded contingency phase. Both timelines will deliver LINK NC well within the obligated September 30, 2034 timeline.

Table 2 Proposed Project Schedule

Expected Delivery
Contingency Schedule

	Pre-2025	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
<b>US 421 (Carolina Beach Road) Conceptual Design (Pre-BUILD)</b>	2022-2024								
<b>Notice of Award</b>									
<b>Agreement - Administration</b>									
<b>Project Inclusion in NCDOT STIP</b>									
<b>Preliminary Design</b>									
<b>Permits and Environmental Approval</b>									
<b>Public Engagement</b>									
<b>Refine and Finalize Roadway Designs</b>									
<b>Easement and ROW Acquisition</b>									
<b>Design and Bid Document Approval</b>									
<b>Bidding Phase</b>									
<b>Construction</b>									

## NEPA and Permitting

**NEPA Class of Action:** Programmatic Categorical Exclusion (PCE), Consultations

**NEPA Status and Milestones:** An NCDOT/FHWA Type I-A PCE was completed in December 2021. As documented in that administrative record, there are no notable adverse environmental impacts expected as a result of the LINK NC project, including those related to federally protected species, hazardous materials, and low-income and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations.

Since that documentation was approved, the project scope has changed slightly, reducing the length of the proposed MUP and including transit stop improvements at two locations. Due to the change in scope and expiration of the original PCE, a Right-of-Way Consultation will be completed to satisfy NEPA. The consultation review and documentation phase will start in 2027 and will be completed by the end of 2028 in coordination with the start of the ROW acquisition stage being in early 2029. Based on project

timing, a Construction Consultation will also likely be needed within 6 months of the start of construction to confirm the documented impacts are still accurate based on the final design plans.

**Anticipated Project Impacts and Mitigations:** Property owners should expect minimal impact due to the planned usage of existing ROW and minimal needed construction easements. Updated surveys for federally protected species (approximately 15 potentially located within the project area) will be conducted; however, biological conclusions of “No Effect” are expected. Potential impacts to existing culverts along the project length will be reviewed for compliance with all permitting requirements. As US 421 serves as a primary route to/from the NC Port of Wilmington and daytime traffic volumes on the corridor are high, some nighttime and off-peak construction is expected and accounted for in the project construction schedule and budget.

**Permit Types and Approvals:** Local construction permits and possible environmental coordination permits are expected.

**Federal Lead Agency:** FHWA

## Project Support

### Public and Agency Involvement Process

NCDOT, WMPO, Wave Transit, and New Hanover County have all been involved in the development of the LINK NC vision between 2016 and today, establishing a clear safety improvement need and connecting planning staff from each agency to align goals of the project with local and regional short- and long-range planning objectives. In 2019, FHWA became involved in the project development through supporting a Road Safety Assessment (RSA) for the Monkey Junction area, further defining safety deficiencies, the lack of connectivity, and the frequent pedestrian crossings in this high-risk area. Efforts to directly engage the residents of the area have not yielded notable feedback, so NCDOT has taken extra steps to thoughtfully craft a project design that meets the observed needs of the area and is confident that the proposed project will support the goals of the local community and deliver an effective solution for area residents. When implementing the project, NCDOT will use the [project web site](#) to promote the project and offer additional opportunities for residents to voice concerns or support for the project.

### Public and Agency Involvement Results

Support for LINK NC is strong from partner agencies and elected officials. NCDOT project champions have secured the support of elected officials and consulted with partner agencies to align on the project vision. Documentation of this support, including letters of support, is [attached for referenced](#).

## Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Based on local knowledge, coordination with NCDOT, and a high-level analysis, a risk register has been developed and will continue to be updated and reviewed to proactively identify solutions. A summary of risks identified to date and mitigation strategies to address each risk is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Project Risks and Mitigation

Risk	Mitigation
Federal Process Compliance	NCDOT Division 3 has extensive experience complying with federal processes, including grants, NEPA, and permitting. Coordination efforts with agencies will continue throughout all phases of the LINK NC project. A previously completed PCE (2021) indicates that delays related to NEPA compliance are unlikely for this project.
Community Buy-in	Community outreach is a key part of every project phase to ensure that the public understands the purpose and benefits of the project. Additional public engagement beyond the initial visioning will be conducted during the final design stage.
Post-Construction Facility Maintenance	Because the project is located on the outskirts of the Wilmington City limits in unincorporated New Hanover County, NCDOT will secure a maintenance agreement with the county that establishes maintenance responsibilities for the new multimodal facilities constructed, such as the MUP. This is standard practice for NCDOT Division 3 and agreements are in place for other similar projects in New Hanover County.
Cost Overruns	Contingency costs have been built into the budget for landscaping, lighting, ROW acquisition, final design, and environmental documentation. NCDOT is prepared to cover any cost overruns, if needed.
Schedule	The proposed schedule provides flexibility for unforeseen delays or potential issues to ensure funds are obligated and activities completed in compliance with the grant requirements.

## Technical Capacity Assessment

NCDOT will serve as the BUILD 2025 applicant and recipient responsible for administration of the grant if selected for award and will provide program management and oversight of project delivery. NCDOT will lead the administrative requirements of grant management and will conduct reviews during the design and construction submittal processes. NCDOT will also oversee the Construction Engineering and Inspections (CEI) process. For day-to-day management, a project manager will be assigned for all construction-related issues, and a grant coordinator will be assigned for grant-related tracking and compliance. Working in close collaboration with its partners and the design and construction teams, NCDOT will be a successful manager and steward of these funds. NCDOT will leverage its extensive experience completing successful TIGER, BUILD, RAISE, NSFLTP, and INFRA projects and administering federal transit and rail funding to reduce and mitigate risk. NCDOT will also leverage its expertise in understanding USDOT’s requirements and maintains the records and accounting systems that will allow it to comply with the BUILD program’s reporting and administration requirements. To deliver LINK NC, NCDOT will work closely with New Hanover County, Wave Transit, and WMPO to deliver an effective project that enhances safety and quality of life for residents of Monkey Junction.

NCDOT's technical capacity, previous experience with federally-funded projects, and comprehensive planning have the LINK NC project well-positioned to meet all requirements and deadlines required for this grant award. The project schedule is realistic, with strategies in place to address risks, engage the community, and comply with environmental and regulatory standards.