



Elected Officials Guide to Transportation

NCDOT's Guide to Transportation Decision Making in Your Community



Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina

Transportation plays a fundamental role in communities across North Carolina. North Carolina's transportation system carries people and goods across the state to their destinations. The multimodal transportation infrastructure in North Carolina helps travelers, the economy, and the overall well-being of the state by providing a comprehensive statewide transportation system that includes all forms of travel. From highways, airports, trains, ferries, public transportation or pedestrian/bicycle facilities, the comprehensive, multimodal system allows North Carolina's citizens to connect to:



No matter where in North Carolina you live or what mode of transportation you use, YOU are able to help define your community's transportation priorities and share your ideas about what best serves your community.

Transportation agencies are required to provide public involvement opportunities. But, you don't have to wait for them to take the first step. In this toolkit, as an elected official, find out about NCDOT's transportation decision-making process and ways that you can influence transportation decisions at each step of the process.

Multi-modal transportation refers to a system in which users have the ability to use more than one way of traveling, such as by car, bus, bike, ferry, walking, train or plane.

This guide will help you:



Understand how transportation is planned, funded, designed, built and maintained



Understand your role in improving transportation in your community



Understand the public's role in improving transportation in your community



Recognize your NCDOT partners



Learn who to contact and where

PART 1

How an Idea Becomes a Transportation Project

WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION?

- The process of making transportation decisions
- Why it's important to get involved early
- The key aspects of each phase

NCDOT Project Process | Seven Phases

Division Engineers are an important part of this process. These regionally based NCDOT professionals develop and implement transportation projects. You can find out who your Division Engineer is by visiting this website www.ncdot.gov/divisions/highways/Pages/divisions.aspx

The process of prioritizing transportation projects is called Strategic Transportation Prioritization (also referred as SPOT). This process is done every 2 years.

Elected officials have a major role in determining what gets funded. To learn more about the funding process visit: www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/stip/Pages/strategic-prioritization.aspx

PHASE 1: PLANNING: How decisions are made about which project will be built in the future

NCDOT works with federal, state, regional and local agencies to develop a long-range transportation plan that looks at the multimodal transportation needs and priorities of a community over 20-30 years. Project proposals to meet the identified needs are first developed in these plans. The proposals are checked to ensure they meet the transportation needs and community vision that includes consideration of the natural and human environment. Public meetings and surveys are common methods for public input during this phase.

PHASE 2: PROGRAMMING: How transportation projects are prioritized

The identified transportation needs are then evaluated to help prioritize funding and construction. The prioritization process scores and ranks all the transportation projects based on criteria such as safety and congestion.

During this process, some projects discussed during the planning process may be programmed for development and design because they were ranked high enough. Projects not ranked high enough can be resubmitted in the next prioritization cycle.

PHASE 3: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: How potential alternatives are studied and chosen

After a project is funded, the project undergoes environmental studies to look at the community and environmental resources in the proposed project areas and examine any potential impacts. The design and traffic engineering studies are also prepared in this phase to analyze proposed alternatives. The alternatives are studied to see if they safely, efficiently and economically meet the transportation needs in the project area while causing minimal impact to community resources such as homes, churches, historical sites and wetlands.

NCDOT will inform the public about the proposed project and uses feedback from the public, and public agencies, to determine where and how proposed projects should be built.

PHASE 4: DESIGN: How ideas are turned into transportation projects

NCDOT determines how a project will be built using information gathered from previous phases. During the final design phase, detailed plans for the project are prepared.

PHASE 5: PROPERTY ACQUISITION: How NCDOT purchases land needed for projects

During the project development and design phases, NCDOT works to minimize the number of homes and businesses impacted by a project, but in many cases NCDOT must acquire a necessary amount of private property to build the project. The Right Of Way Unit is tasked with securing this private property. You can learn more about the right-of-way acquisition process here:

connect.ncdot.gov/business/ROW/Pages/ROW-Support.aspx

PHASE 6: CONSTRUCTION: How transportation projects are built

Once the final design is complete and any necessary right-of-way is acquired, NCDOT goes through the process of hiring a private contractor to build the project.

PHASE 7: MAINTENANCE: How NCDOT maintains projects once they are built

After a project is built, NCDOT continues to maintain the project, helping to prolong the life of the project. For roadway projects, you can help report on issues here:

www.ncdot.gov/contact/Pages/default.aspx

To find out more about the NCDOT process click here:

www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/how-road-gets-built/Pages/planning.aspx

DESIGN BUILD CONSTRUCTION

Design-build is an alternative process used to help complete projects faster and save taxpayer money through innovative approaches to design and construction. The design-build method allows the design, environmental permitting, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation and construction to take place under one contract, reducing overall construction time, helping NCDOT avoid cost inflation, lessening environmental impact and alleviating driving delays for motorists.

PART 2

How Decisions Are Made

WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION?

- Common transportation decisions and how they are made
- The agencies involved in the transportation planning process and what they do
- Types of transportation plans
- What is environmental justice and why it is important

Agencies Involved in the Transportation Planning Process

NCDOT is the state agency responsible for most transportation infrastructure in North Carolina. NCDOT has modal divisions dedicated to multiple ways of travel including:



Part of the Integrated Mobility Division

Regional Transit Agencies

NC is unique in that all 100 counties are served by some form of transit. Transit agencies have their own projects and planning processes that provide opportunities for public input. Find your local transit provider here: <https://www.ncdot.gov/divisions/integrated-mobility/public-transit-services/Pages/local-transit-search.aspx>.

Regional Agencies



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Transportation by bus, rail (commuter or light), ferry or other transport, either publicly or privately owned, which is provided to the public or specialty service, on a regular and continuing basis.

N.C. BOARD OF TRANSPORTATION

The North Carolina Board of Transportation is composed of 20 people from across the state. Each member represents a specific transportation division or is an at-large, state-wide member. All members work with the Secretary of Transportation and team to make decisions about transportation priorities. Learn more about the NCBOT here: www.ncdot.gov/about-us/board-offices/boards/board-transportation/Pages/default.aspx

Local Governments

Local agencies are an important part of the transportation process. Municipalities and transit agencies often develop their own plans and fund projects, for which your input is also needed. These projects can range from roadway improvements on local streets to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure or proposed transit improvements. If you notice an issue or problem, reach out to your local planner or engineer to discuss your concern with them. You can also visit your local municipality's or transit agency's website to find out how you can get involved.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

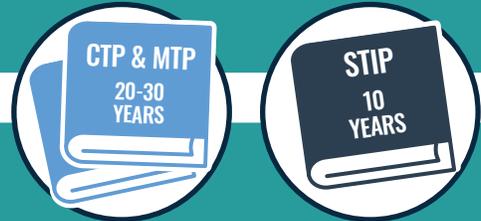
In North Carolina, there are 19 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). MPOs represent urban areas of 50,000 or more residents and are organizations that make transportation plans and policies at the regional level. They must have a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive ("3C") transportation planning process. MPOs have the responsibility for making decisions about federal transportation funding. MPOs provide the following services:

- Develop long-range plans, called Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTP) and Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP)
- Conduct their own studies about transportation needs
- Develop and prioritize projects the region believes should be included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
- Rely on public input to help guide transportation decisions in and around your community

To find the MPO in your area click here: www.ncampo.org/mpos/

COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANS (CTP) & METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANS (MTP)

Both CTPs and MTPs are long-range transportation plans that incorporate all modes of transportation, including transit, bicycle, pedestrian, rail, aviation, ports and ferries. These plans have a 20-year minimum planning horizon, but may forecast out 25 to 30 years in the future. CTPs are developed for MPOs and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs). They are needs-based plans that identify future project proposals needed to meet identified needs in the planning time frame. MTPs are only required for MPOs. They must be updated every four to five years and are fiscally-constrained, meaning only projects that can reasonably be expected to be funded within the planning period are included.



STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)

The N.C. Department of Transportation's transportation plan – called the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) – identifies the construction funding and schedule for projects over a 10-year period. The STIP is updated every two years. The data-driven process to update the STIP is called Strategic Prioritization. During this process, NCDOT divisions and local planning organizations start gathering public feedback on projects, which are submitted for evaluation and scoring. Projects are evaluated based on their merit through an analysis of the existing and future conditions, the benefits the project is expected to provide, the project's multi-modal characteristics and how the project fits in with local priorities. An interactive map showing all the projects including the current STIP can be found here: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/pages/state-transportation-improvement-program.aspx>

Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs)

In North Carolina, 18 RPOs serve the counties not represented by the MPOs. Like MPOs, RPOs help to guide the transportation planning process and provide opportunities for public participation. RPOs provide the following services:

- Coordinate, assist and develop local and regional plans including Comprehensive Transportation Plans, and bicycle, pedestrian and greenway plans
- Provide a forum for public participation in the transportation planning and implementation process
- Develop and prioritize projects the organization believes should be included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
- Provide transportation related information to local governments and the public

To find the RPO in your area click here: www.ncarpo.org/about-us.html.

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC) AND TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE (TCC)

The TCC consists of staff members from local government members, agencies and NCDOT. The TCC provides guidance and recommendations to the TAC, or also referred to as the Executive Committee. This committee consists of local elected officials and a North Carolina Board of Transportation member. It establishes the goals, priorities and objectives of the MPO/RPO, reviews and recommends changes to comprehensive transportation plans within its boundaries, reviews and approves an annual plan of work, and reviews and prioritizes transportation improvement projects for submission to NCDOT.

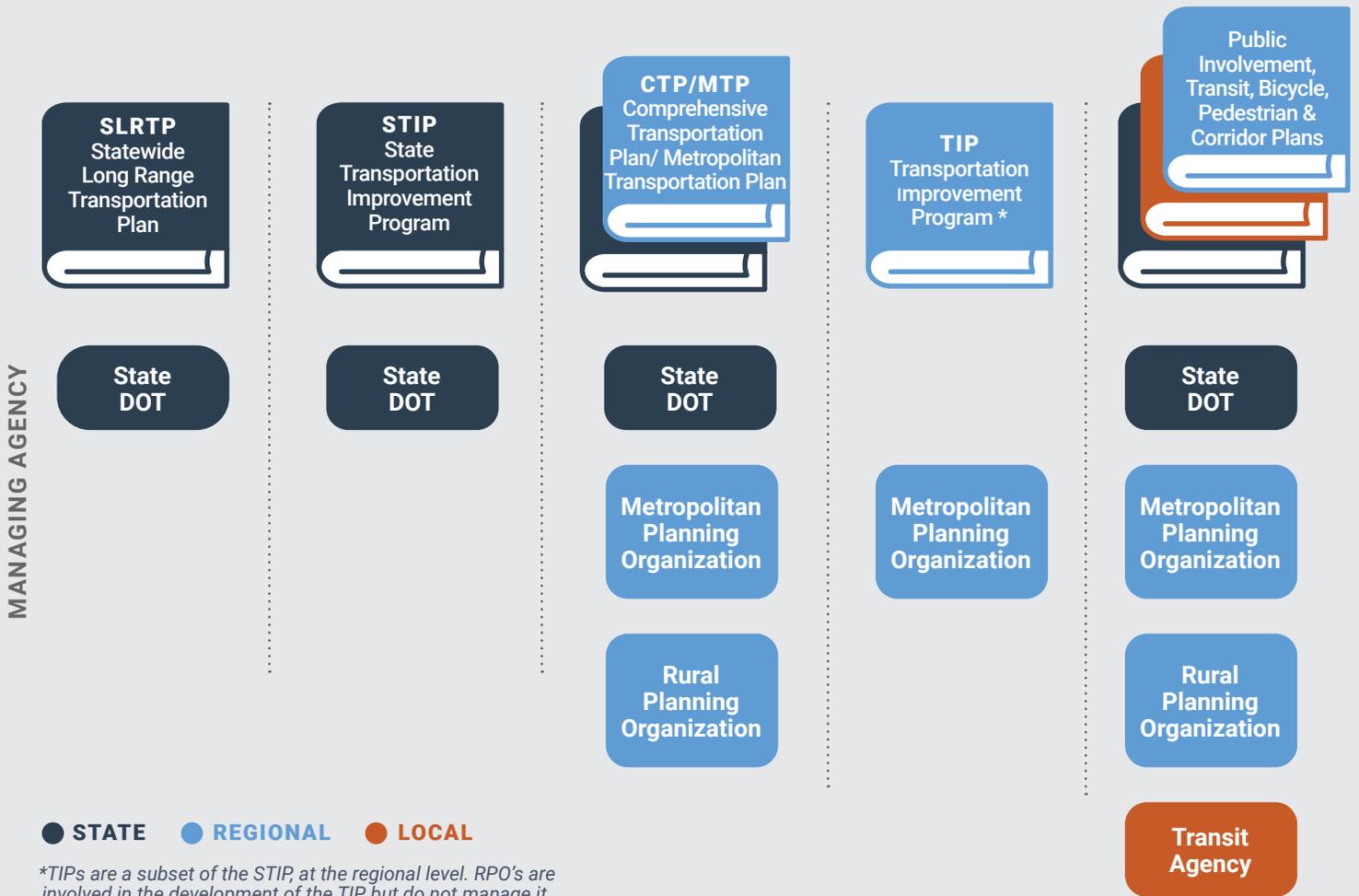
Types of Transportation Plans

Getting involved at the local, regional and state level can give you the opportunity to provide feedback at different steps of the processes, plans and projects, hear the feedback of people in your community to help guide the development of

the plans, and help educate the residents about transportation issues. The chart below gives an overview of different types of transportation plans and which agency (local, regional, or state) is involved.

Which Agencies Manage Which Plans

TYPE OF TRANSPORTATION PLAN





Equity and Civil Rights in the Transportation Planning Process

NCDOT is committed to ensuring everyone can participate in the transportation project process. The Office of Civil Rights promotes and ensures equal access and equal opportunity for customers and employees participating in North Carolina transportation programs that receive federal and/or state funding.

Civil rights laws and policies ensure that decision-makers—including those in transportation—consider the needs of all, including groups that have historically been underrepresented and underserved by past and current transportation programs, facilities or services. This includes racial and ethnic communities, low-income communities and people with disabilities. In your role, you can help to educate, advocate for and identify communities or individuals to ensure their needs are met.

- **Title VI / Nondiscrimination** is part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin. This applies to any project that receives federal funding; however, it is a NCDOT best practice to use this on all projects.

- **Environmental Justice (EJ)** is an executive order (No. 12898) rooted in Title VI that directs agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse environmental and health impacts on low-income populations, and racial and ethnic communities.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and ensures equal opportunity and access for this community. Accessible transportation systems further the goal of independence for people with disabilities.
- **Limited English Proficiency (LEP)** is an Executive Order (No. 13116) that prohibits discrimination based on national origin by ensuring that individuals who do not speak English as their primary language may receive language assistance in order to have meaningful access to government programs and activities.

For more information about these policies, visit www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/access-for-all/nondiscrimination-program/Pages/default.aspx

How do ADA, Title VI and EJ help you get involved?

Americans with Disabilities Act

Title VI

Limited English Proficiency

Environmental Justice

WHAT ARE AGENCIES REQUIRED TO PROVIDE?

- Accessible buildings, buses, trains, sidewalks and more
- When agencies provide transportation options, they must be accessible for persons with disabilities
- Equity during participation

- Title VI plan to outline the agency's requirements, roles, method of administration and analysis
- Notice to the public of upcoming projects and methods to participate

- LEP Plan outlining reasonable steps to serve and communicate effectively with LEP populations
- Notice to the Public
- Translations of materials and interpreters at public meetings

- Meaningful public participation

WHERE CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Through state or local disability councils
- By filing a complaint with a local, state or federal agency if something is not accessible
- Contact the agency

- At public meetings/ events when governmental organizations do transportation planning
- At public meetings throughout the NEPA process for a project
- By filing a complaint with a local, state or federal agency if you feel that a project discriminates
- Contact the agency

- At public meetings for projects affecting your community
- Contact the agency

- At public meetings for projects affecting your community
- Contact the agency

PART 3 Help Shape Your Community as a Transportation Leader/Ambassador

WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION?

- How you can be an effective transportation ambassador in and for your community
- Important links and contact information

You can get involved at many points in the transportation planning process — and getting involved early and often is best. Some routine and emergency repair projects can move quickly, while other complicated projects may need significant planning and phased funding. Recognize that your involvement may need to take place over months or even years it can take to proceed from a plan to a project.

- Identify and get to know your MPO/RPO and NCDOT representations.
- Review all proposed projects and plans in your area and through your governing body, submit comments.
- Find out where public meetings are announced and held in your community, and to sign up for information updates and opportunities for involvement.
 - Visit: www.ncdot.gov/news/public-meetings/Pages/default.aspx.
- Familiarize yourself with the policies and programs of NCDOT's Office of Civil Rights, who help ensure equal access to transportation programs.
 - Visit: www.ncdot.gov/about-us/board-offices/offices/civil-rights/Pages/default.aspx.

- Follow news about transportation issues and stay informed. Follow NCDOT and your local transportation agencies' social media pages for updates and sign up to receive newsletters or emails.
- If you notice a safety problem, notify the responsible agency right away. This agency might be your local government, transit agency or NCDOT. NCDOT allows you to report issues, like potholes or malfunctioning traffic lights, on their website: www.ncdot.gov/contact/Pages/default.aspx.
- Volunteer to be on an advisory group, commission or committee that details with transportation issues.
- Be ambassadors in your community. Share the Residents Guide and encourage public engagement in transportation projects.
- Communicate with your internal staff AND externally to the public to share information.
- To help your constituents, remind them before purchasing real estate to check with their local planning and zoning office to learn about future transportation projects planned in their area.

How Can I be Involved as a Project is Getting Implemented?

Often there are tradeoffs when a new project is being implemented, so it is important for you to be able to talk about the **impacts** and **benefits** of the project. Here are some ways to help best understand those potential tradeoffs and how to communicate them.

When the process does not yield the result you want:

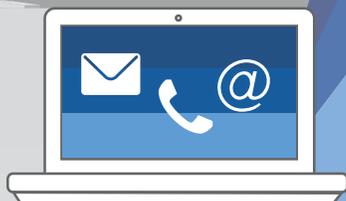
- Attend public meetings and talk with NCDOT staff to understand the potential impacts and schedule of projects. Help communicate the potential impacts and schedule to your constituents as the project moves along.
 - It is also important to understand what transportation projects might be upcoming in the next decade and how those projects interact with developments that your governing body/agency may approve.

- Review NCDOT's "Complete Streets" policy that considers and incorporates several modes of transportation when building new projects or making improvements to existing infrastructure. Familiarize yourself with the policy and any local match requirements for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure here: <https://www.completestreetsnc.org/>
- Continue to communicate with NCDOT staff as the project moves along and provide updates to the public.

Important Links / Contact Information

You can find out about NCDOT's current long range studies here:
www.ncdot.gov/projects/Pages/long-range-studies.aspx

You can find out about upcoming NCDOT public meetings here:
www.ncdot.gov/news/public-meetings/Pages/default.aspx



Find your local MPO here www.ncampo.org/mpos/

Find your local RPO here. www.ncarpo.org/about-us.html

USDOT Departmental Office for Civil Rights
www.transportation.gov/civil-rights
www.ncdot.gov/about-us/board-offices/offices/civil-rights
Phone: 202-366-4648

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) www.faa.gov/
Phone: 866-835-5322

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) railroads.dot.gov
Phone: 202-366-4000

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) www.transit.dot.gov/
Phone: 202-366-4043

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) NC Division Office . Phone:
919-856-4346

For more information contact:
Environmental Analysis Unit
919-707-6000
1598 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1598

