

MORE I-74

Maximizing our Rural Economy



**MPDG FFY 2023 and 2024
GRANT APPLICATION
AUGUST 2023**

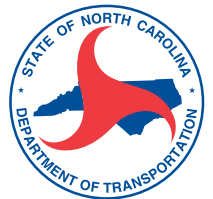




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Project Readiness

Environmental Risk

Upon approval for MPDG grant funding, NCDOT is ready for obligation as soon as the necessary documentation can be executed. Most of the proposed project components are located within an existing active highway corridor requiring minimal to no changes to the existing land use. The MORE I-74 Project will be developed through extensive planning with public consultation and through active coordination with all regulatory agencies. The Project can begin quickly upon obligation of grant funds, and grant funds will be spent expeditiously once construction starts.

Detailed Project Schedule

The proposed MORE I-74 project schedule is outlined in **Figure 1**, assuming funds are obligated in FY 2024. Environmental analysis and preliminary design stage is scheduled for completion by Q1 2026. The environmental schedule outlines the necessary timeline to complete key NEPA milestones, thus ensuring that construction begins within 18 months of award to sufficiently meet the statutory deadline to obligate funds by September 30, 2027, and begin construction by March 30, 2029.

Figure 1: Project Schedule

	2024				2025				2026				2027				2028				2029
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1			
Project Award	█																				
Complete Agreement		█	█	█																	
Project Development				█	█	█															
Procurement						█	█	█	█												
Right-of-Way										█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█		
Utilities										█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█		
Construction Begins																			★		

Required Approvals

NEPA Status of the Project

The NEPA process for the MORE I-74 Project corridor is underway as NCDOT STIP Project I-6055. Currently, the Project is in the data collection and scoping stage of the project development process. Final NEPA documentation is anticipated to be signed by Spring 2026.

Environmental Permits and Reviews

Based on project experience and preliminary environmental screening, it is anticipated that the I-6055 Project will be processed as an Environmental Assessment (EA) / Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). However, it is recognized that the Lead Federal Agency will make the final determination regarding the NEPA action required.

NCDOT’s participation in USDOT’s innovative environmental process and use of Project ATLAS to streamline environmental screening and data collection will help expedite project implementation. As part of the NEPA process, potential impacts to features in and around the project corridor will be reviewed and required regulatory agency approval from Federal and State agencies will be coordinated, listed in **Table 1**, as deemed necessary.

Table 1: Required MORE I-74 Project Reviews

<i>Project Feature</i>	<i>Agencies Providing Input and/or Approval</i>
Waters of the U.S.	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Carolina Division of Water Resources
Cultural Resources	North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Federal and State Tribes
Threatened or Endangered Species	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Marine Fisheries
Grant Agreement	Federal Highway Administration, North Carolina Department of Transportation

Environmental Studies

A Feasibility Study was previously completed that included in the MORE I-74 corridor in October 2017¹. The report lists the potential for impacts to right of way and recommends that consideration be given to a variable median width to mitigate these impacts, wherever possible. The study also lists the potential for noise impacts along the corridor and recommends that a detailed Traffic Noise Analysis be prepared during project development. However, the study determined that abatement measures will “likely” be required. In addition, the project was found to have impacts to wetlands, rivers and streams, flood plain areas, and high-quality waters / outstanding water resources. Agency coordination and mitigation efforts will be required.

There are no properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), public parks, recreation areas, or wildlife or waterfowl refuges in the project area qualifying for protection under Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act of 1966.

NCDOT Coordination

Since 1997, NCDOT has used the Section 404/NEPA Merger Process to develop projects. This environmental streamlining strategy “merges” decision-making for NEPA and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). In the Merger Process, a team of agency representatives meet at seven strategic decision (concurrence) points in the NEPA/SEPA project development and permitting process to discuss and concur on major project decisions. This process ensures that NCDOT will receive all permits necessary to implement a project in a timely manner, in addition to following the Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) program.

Public Engagement

The Project will aim to meaningfully engage and incorporate feedback from communities affected by the project, providing accommodations to make participation accessible regardless of race, national origin, disability, age, or gender. These equity considerations will be integrated into the

¹ connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/FeasibilityStudiesDocuments/FS-1508A_Feasibility-Study_Report_2017.pdf

project development process but will especially be important during the public involvement portion. NCDOT is planning to host one open-house public meeting and one public hearing with a formal presentation at an accessible point along the MORE I-74 corridor. Local residents will be notified via postcard and other notices will be advertised online on a project webpage. If deemed necessary, translated materials and/or a translator can be available at meetings. In addition, small group community-based meetings can be held in addition to the public meetings to solicit feedback from key groups, particularly with vulnerable populations and disadvantaged communities.

State and Local Approval

NCDOT has the authority to make decisions regarding the location, construction, maintenance, and repair of all roads in the counties within the project area. The project will be completed utilizing a data-driven planning process that will incorporate important transportation and environmental planning decisions, as well as encourage the participation of community members and underserved populations. All proposed MORE I-74 project components are currently programmed in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as STIP Project No. I-6055.

Federal Transportation Requirements Affecting State and Local Planning

NCDOT will coordinate with the applicable Federal, State, and local government to identify all necessary permits for the MORE I-74 Project. Public notices for all permit actions, as required by the FHWA, USACE, United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), and other relevant agencies will be executed by NCDOT as directed by the issuing agencies.

NCDOT, and other appropriate planning agencies, have completed planning efforts to identify and analyze the investment needs and service objectives of the MORE I-74 Project. The planning documents that have identified the project or components of the project are summarized below.

NC Moves 2050 Plan

The NC Moves 2050 Plan² is the strategic transportation plan that focuses on shaping the future of transportation in North Carolina to connect communities and support the economy and quality of life in North Carolina. It includes an Implementation Plan that provides actionable steps to complete in the near future. The Plan identifies project components of the MORE I-74 Project, including multiple Tier 1 actions that should be prioritized over the next ten years across the State's roadway system. These actions include:

- Investing in infrastructure capacity and connectivity to relieve freight bottlenecks and disperse freight demand, thus enhancing network efficiency, and;

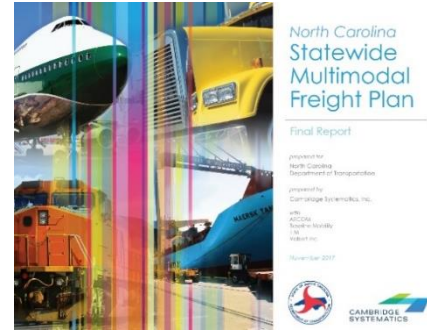


²NC Moves 2050 Plan [Plan Results \(ncdot.gov\)](https://www.ncdot.gov/ncmoves)

- Identifying and prioritizing multimodal transportation improvements that enhance system performance and reliability.

NC Statewide Multimodal Freight Plan

The NC Statewide Multimodal Freight Plan³ is the State's first multimodal freight plan. The Plan sets the goals and strategies to improve economic competitiveness, increase jobs, and enhance quality of life in North Carolina by enhancing the State's freight transportation system over the next 25 years. The Plan provides compelling freight-specific recommendations and identifies project components of the MORE I-74 Project, including:



- Enhancing freight system safety and security by reducing fatality and crash incidents rates and reducing economic loss due to transportation crashes, and;
- Improve freight infrastructure conditions and the preservation of transportation assets by maintain, preserve, and extending the service life of transportation infrastructure, and;
- Enhancing economic development opportunities and competitiveness by improving access to freight-related industries, intermodal operations, and industrial sites.

NC Strategic Transportation Corridor Policy

North Carolina's Strategic Transportation Corridors form the core network of multimodal passageways. These 25 corridors move large volumes of people and freight across the regions of the state and to key markets outside the state. The NC Strategic Transportation Corridor Policy⁴ outlines the vision and goals for these corridors to provide essential system connectivity, facilitate high volume inter-regional mobility for both people and goods, and support efficient transportation logistics and economic development throughout the state. The transportation facilities and services within the corridors connect centers of economic activity of statewide and regional significance. Preserving the physical condition of these facilities and the quality of the service they provide supports North Carolina's goals for economic development and will guide long-term planning at statewide, regional and corridor levels. These strategic corridors are considered the State's highest priority when analyzed within the framework of regional or local transportation plans. The MORE I-74 Project includes the US 74 Route, which is currently designated as a Strategic Transportation Corridor by NCDOT.

Assessment of Project Risk and Mitigation Strategies

NCDOT, who will administer the project, has successfully completed work similar to the proposed project and experienced no procurement delays of any significance. The project site is currently utilized for highway purposes and is located on an active transportation corridor in the state, which may reduce many potential risks. NCDOT will identify and plan for risks toward successful

³ NC Statewide Multimodal Freight Plan [Statewide Freight Plan \(ncdot.gov\)](https://www.ncdot.gov/Statewide-Freight-Plan)

⁴ NC Strategic Transportation Corridor Policy [Microsoft Word - STC Policy Final v1_030915.docx \(ncdot.gov\)](https://www.ncdot.gov/STC-Policy-Final-v1-030915.docx)

delivery of the MORE I-74 Project. Based on preliminary observations and prior work completed in the project area, a potential risk strategy is presented in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: MORE I-74 Project Risk and Mitigation

<i>Potential Risk</i>	<i>Avoidance, Minimization, Mitigation Strategies</i>
Threatened and Endangered Species and Jurisdictional Waters	According to a screening-level analysis, there are no critical habitats present in the project area. NCDOT will conduct surveys to determine potential impacts to federal threatened and/or endangered species and jurisdictional waters, where applicable, to determine potential impacts in the project area.
Farmland Protections Policy Act Soils	NCDOT will conduct a screening-level farmland analysis to determine potential impacts to active farmland and protected farmland soils. If necessary, complete a Farmland Conversion Form and submit to USDA.
Permitting & Approvals	NCDOT will conduct early and frequent coordination with federal and state agencies as part of the NEPA Process.
ROW Acquisition	The MORE I-74 Project will be constructed within existing right-of-way to the extent possible. Where applicable, new right-of-way requirements are limited to either undeveloped or portions of undeveloped properties.
Title VI and Environmental Justice Populations	The MORE I-74 Project will be constructed adjacent to known Environmental Justice populations. Minimization of impacts to these populations will be a priority throughout final design. If necessary, a comprehensive Public Engagement Plan will be developed to ensure that no person, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability, be subjected to discrimination under any programs, activities, or services.
Public and Stakeholder Input	Multiple stakeholders and project partners have been identified in anticipation for the MORE I-74 project. Early public engagement and outreach will be conducted to ensure full and fair participation of all potentially affected communities in the decision-making process. Any potential community impacts that may arise before, during, or after construction will be mitigated through continuous communication with the community.
Noise and Air Analysis	If necessary, a Traffic Noise Analysis will be conducted in accordance with 23 CFR 772 to determine all noise-sensitive land uses. If necessary, a qualitative Air Quality Analysis will be conducted to determine any air toxic emissions and analyze Mobile Source Air Toxics.

Technical Capacity

NCDOT is ready to successfully deliver the MORE I-74 Project in compliance with any applicable local, State, and Federal requirements, including but not limited to, Buy America provisions, ADA regulations, Civil Rights requirements, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS), and/or the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR). The Department has received and managed numerous discretionary grant awards successfully and has proven its technical experience and ability to dedicate resources to projects with a similar scope.

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