



2050

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN (MTP)



A PRODUCT OF THE

Western Piedmont

Council of Governments

CHAPTER 1

GOALS & POLICIES





A PRODUCT OF THE
Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

**Greater Hickory Metropolitan
Planning Organization**

1880 2nd Ave NW | Hickory, NC 28601
828.322.9191 | www.wpcog.org

Planning Factors, Goals, and Policies

To guide its decision making, the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Organization (GHMPO) has developed goals and policies from transportation guidelines at the local, state and federal levels. The GHMPO will implement these goals to provide the citizens of the GHMPO Planning Area with a safe and efficient transportation system for the movement of people and goods. These regional transportation options provide mobility choices, protect the environment and improve the quality of life within Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.

This Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) incorporates a wide range of federally mandated analyses and process steps. The most recent federal transportation legislation, known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, requires the Plan to address eight planning emphasis areas. The emphasis areas listed below overlap with key goals of the Plan.

1. Transition to a clean energy, resilient future.
2. Advance equity and provide support for underserved and disadvantaged communities.
3. Provide a safe transportation network for all users, including travelers of all ages and abilities.
4. Conduct inclusive public involvement that integrates virtual tools into the overall approach, while ensuring access by those without computers or mobile devices.
5. Coordinate the Strategic Highway Network with the US Government.
6. Leverage transportation opportunities to access and support the transportation needs of federally managed lands.
7. Implement planning and environment linkages as a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the planning process and informs the environmental review process.
8. Incorporate data sharing and consideration in the transportation planning process.

INTEGRATED MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Goal: Develop a high-quality, fully-integrated, multi-modal transportation network that provides transportation options that meet the short and long term transportation needs of residents and businesses in the Greater Hickory Area.

Policies:

- » Provide an integrated system of multi-modal transportation facilities in the GHMPO Planning Area.
- » Require improvements to be integrated with other transportation modes where practical to assure the opportunity for both multi-modal and inter-modal connectivity and efficiency.
- » Promote land use policies and infrastructure projects that support transit, walking, bicycling, rail and air in local and regional plans.
- » Create street patterns that encourage safe pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel, provide access to public transportation and ensure connectivity.
- » Improve mobility by planning facilities that enhance interconnectivity and accessibility to major regional destinations and activity centers.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Goal: Ensure adequate long-term funding for maintenance and construction of all modes of transportation facilities.

Policies:

- » Design a fiscally responsible transportation system.
- » Make the most efficient use of limited public resources.
- » Minimize the cost of implementing and operating transportation projects.

- » Develop transportation projects that enhance the local and regional economies.
- » Actively explore and consider a wide range of standard and innovative funding sources for transportation projects.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

Goal: Support an open, inclusive, and participatory transportation planning process.

Policy:

- » Improve communication and cooperation between the MPO and RPO governments, local, state and federal transportation agencies, freight carriers, law enforcement, emergency services and other stakeholders.

STREET AND HIGHWAY NETWORK

Goal: Designing streets and highways that are safe and efficient for motor vehicle drivers while accommodating public transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Policies:

- » Provide a street and highway network that will serve the population now and in the future.
- » Encourage ways to improving and enhance the existing regional road system along with building new facilities.
- » Enhance mobility by improving the connectivity of the existing street network.
- » Encourage plans to include policies for access management on existing and proposed streets.

LAND-USE AND TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION

Goal: Promote integrated development patterns and transportation networks that work together to support mixed-use, pedestrian friendly communities and active modes of transportation. Land-use and transportation decisions should be consistent and mutually reinforce each other.

Policies:

- » Develop a transportation plan that is integrated with local land use plans and development policies.
- » Promote land use patterns that combine a mixture of uses where practical.
- » Identify and recommend land use patterns and development policies that increase overall mobility.
- » Support local government policies that require right-of-way dedication, payments in lieu of construction and/or installation of transportation improvements when warranted for new development.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Create a safe effective bikeway, sidewalk, and greenway network that is integrated with the transportation system, links together resources and destinations, provides an alternative to automobile travel, increases recreational opportunities, advances healthy lifestyles and enhances the quality of life in the Greater Hickory Area.

Policies:

- » Provide a pedestrian and bicycle system that allows greater access to and links between public transit, schools, parks and other major activity centers.
- » Develop a system that integrates pedestrian and bicycle modes of travel with motor vehicle transportation, and connects inter-regionally with existing bike and pedestrian infrastructure (such as the Carolina Thread Trail).
- » Increase pedestrian and bicycling activity for both transportation and recreation to promote healthy, active living and improve public health.
- » Promote, through public education, the economic, environmental, and health benefits of walking and biking as practical modes of transportation.
- » Partner with local, county, and state agencies to encourage bicycling and pedestrian activities across different populations.

- » Recommend that new or widened roadways are designed to include the land on each side of the road with sufficient width to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian facilities safely.
- » Encourage the delineation of safe pedestrian ways and bicycle routes, emphasizing separation from vehicular areas when possible.
- » Recommend the installation of signage when bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities are integrated with roadways.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Enhance and expand public transportation into a system of buses, van pools, car pools and special population transit services that is efficient, convenient, safe and cost effective. Increase transit use through service enhancement, improved pedestrian and bicycle linkages, and transit supportive development patterns.

Policies:

- » Promote, improve and expand transit services.
- » Promote a convenient, accessible and affordable public transportation system, provided by public and private operators, that enhances mobility and economic development.
- » Assist the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA) in identifying public and private methods of funding to enhance and expand transit service.
- » Support the enlargement of the service area and increasing the frequency of transit service.
- » Minimize use of fossil fuels and vehicle operating costs by considering alternative fuels and alternative-fueled vehicles.
- » Develop and implement a new Regional Transit Plan.
- » Enhance the visibility and public image of the WPRTA and the services it provides.
- » Encourage development of a regional park and ride system for cars and bicycles to support transit services and encourage ridesharing.
- » Support a bus/van service to major population and employment centers to reduce dependence on and as an alternative to Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOV).
- » Promote a “Bikes on Buses” program for all public transit routes.

RAIL AND AIR TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Support policies and development patterns to make the establishment of a regional commuter rail service. In addition, support efforts to improve air service, promote economic development and provide transportation access to Hickory Regional Airport and Foothills Regional Airport.

Policies:

- » Promote rail and air passenger transportation opportunities.
- » Maximize the use of rail and air in the transportation of freight.
- » Create an efficient passenger rail service to and from the GHMPO Planning Area.
- » Support the Hickory Regional Airport and the Foothills Regional Airport’s long range plans.
- » Continue to support the development of passenger rail service for the Western North Carolina Rail Corridor.
- » Develop an inter-modal rail program that would move goods throughout the region in a more efficient manner.
- »

FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Provide a safe and efficient freight transportation system that improves existing levels of freight access and mobility, supports the region’s economic wellbeing and minimizes negative impacts on sensitive land-uses and the environment.

Policies:

- » Create a safe, efficient and coordinated transportation system for the movement of goods within and through the GHMPO Planning Area.
- » Consider congestion on heavily-traveled truck routes when developing plans.
- » Establish intermodal operations and facilities among transportation modes, focusing on mobility and access.

- » Establish and designate truck routes consistent with federal, state and local regulations and minimize exposure to neighborhoods, historic sites and cultural resources.
- » Develop streets and highways that are accessible and compatible with freight transportation.
- » Evaluate the impact of land use on the transportation system when development plans are adopted and policy decisions are made and, likewise, evaluate the changes in land use brought about by the expansion and construction of transportation facilities.
- » Improve and support transportation efficiency through compact, mixed-use, transit and pedestrian- friendly development.
- » Encourage regional and local land use plans to include policies for access management.
- » Promote coordinated multi-jurisdictional and intergovernmental land use plans.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Goal: Establish policies and programs to improve the efficiency of the roadway network, reduce congestion pollutant emissions, increase safety and improve efficiency.

Policies:

- » Promote, provide and continue to improve transportation safety and security of the transportation system within the GHMPO Planning Area.
- » Support the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority's (WPRTA) efforts to increase transit safety and security for riders and employees.
- » Ensure safety through public education, enforcement and engineering.
- » Improve safety by utilizing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to the maximum extent practical.

HUMAN AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Goal: Develop a multi-modal transportation system which provides access and mobility to all residents, while protecting the public health, natural environment, cultural resources and social systems.

Policies:

- » Develop a transportation system that preserves and coexists with the natural and built environment and minimizes pollution.
- » Promote better integration of land use and transportation planning to minimize pollution.
- » Support transportation projects that preserve and complement the MPO planning area's natural features.
- » Identify and protect environmentally sensitive, archaeological, historic and culturally valuable areas early in the transportation planning process.
- » Develop and support a transportation system and programs that maintain or improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gases, ozone, particulate matter and other pollutants.
- » Design transportation facilities that minimize transmission of traffic noise and dust to surrounding properties.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Goal: Identify and address the needs of minority and low-income populations in making transportation decisions.

Policies:

- » Ensure environmental justice by providing transportation facilities that do not disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations.
- » Enhance the MPO's analytical capabilities to ensure that the long-range transportation plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) comply with Title VI.
- » Identify residential, employment and transportation patterns of minority and low-income populations so that their needs can be identified and addressed, and the benefits and burdens of transportation investments can be fairly distributed.
- » Evaluate and improve, where necessary, public involvement processes to eliminate participation barriers and engage minority and low-income populations in transportation decision making.

CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

Goal: Establish policies and programs to improve the efficiency of the roadway network and reduce congestion.

Policies:

- » Improve mobility by utilizing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to the maximum extent practical.
- » Develop an efficient street and highway network capable of providing an appropriate level of service for a variety of transportation modes.
- » Maximize transportation system efficiency and safety by promoting alternatives to adding general- purpose traffic lanes.
- » Enhance mobility by improving the connectivity of the existing street network.

PROGRESS FROM 2045 MTP GOALS

The following goals were previously included in the 2045 MTP Update. It is recommended that these performance goal areas be maintained in the 2050 MTP, as part of the Goals and Objectives Chapter of the 2050 MTP update. Moving these goals from the Performance Measures Chapter to the Goals and Objectives chapter serves as a means for drawing distinction between adopted Performance Targets and adopted Performance Goals, as the two have very different reporting requirements and implications. While performance targets require quantitative progress reporting, it is recommended that progress for performance goals be reported qualitatively.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Expand public transit into all four counties	Number of submitted grant applications and additional identified funding sources; additional public transportation service routes in the region	Greenway public transit currently operates in Caldwell, Alexander, Burke, and Catawba Counties. Recent progress includes micro-transit expansion in Burke County, and the Catawba re-route.
Infrastructure improvements for new ADA accessible sidewalk projects to make pedestrian facilities more viable for transit stops	Number of applications for ADA sidewalk projects; increase in ADA compliant stops	American Disabilities Act plans in both The City of Conover and the Town of Sawmills have resulted in a plan for further progression towards ADA compliant stops in the GHMPO.
Encourage greater public transit access to Census Tracts with high Title VI and Environmental Justice concentration areas	Identify high needs areas and assess transit routes accordingly	The 2021 Local Coordinated Plan identified high need areas within the context of public transit.
Increased Greenway Transit ridership	Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT); Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT)	Decrease in ridership based on NTD data from 2018-2020.
Encourage mixed-use communities centered around public transportation	Create a list of possible locations and criteria for transit- oriented developments	Local Coordinated Public Transit Plan Updated in 2021 which identified possible transit expansion areas conducive to development.
Promote using public transit in the region	Attend festivals and other events in the region targeting potential ridership; increase in passenger miles traveled (PMT) and unlinked passenger trips (UPT)	Decrease in both PMT and UPT from 2018 to 2020 according to National Transit Data.

A transit system is in a state of good repair when the following criteria is met:

- » Possesses and maintains a comprehensive list of its capital assets and rolling stock
- » Possesses an asset management plan which is integrated into the management processes and practices of the agency

STATE OF GOOD REPAIR MEASURES SET BY GREENWAY TRANSPORTATION

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
50% of assets are within their articulated useful life and remaining assets are performing at their designed for function.	Number of submitted grant applications and additional identified funding sources; additional public transportation service routes in the region	Greenway public transit currently operates in Caldwell, Alexander, Burke, and Catawba Counties. Recent progress includes micro-transit expansion in Burke County, and the Catawba re- route.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Increase sidewalk/greenway connectivity	Identify gaps in existing networks; identify potential new greenway segments; encourage project applications to a variety of funding sources; number and location of successful project applications	Walk audits conducted in Long View to identify gaps in existing networks. Meetings with all 4 counties and municipalities to identify Bicycle and Pedestrian goals.
Increase bicycle and pedestrian facilities to high Title VI and Environmental Justice concentration areas	Complete assessment of bicycle and pedestrian need in Title VI and Environmental Justice areas in the region; LAPP applications	Completion of a Title VI plan update for the GHMPO, including suggestions to focus on Title VI areas.
Encourage local governments to form a regional bicycle and pedestrian task force	Creation of bicycle and pedestrian task force	In 2019, the GHMPO formed the Movability Advisory Committee (MAC).
Encourage bicycling mode share	American Community Survey data on bicycling to work	Reflective of a nationwide trend, total bicycling rates across the county declined from 2010-2020.
Encourage new bicycle and pedestrian project applications and evaluate success rate	Number of applications submitted through LAPP, SPOT and CMAQ; notify local governments of additional identified funding sources	Continued administration of LAPP, SPOT, and CMAQ funding. The GHMPO also continues to research and notify governments of potential funding sources.
Identify locations needing sidewalk safety improvements	Applications for new ADA accessible sidewalk projects	The GHMPO continues to provide ADA services to GHMPO area governments to improve ADA accessibility. Recent walk audits conducted in Conover, Saw Mills.
Support low collision exposure projects	Using annual daily traffic rates, sidewalk projects will score higher in areas with higher traffic counts	The GHMPO continues to use collision exposure as a scoring metric considered in the prioritization of projects.

Project-specific bicycle and pedestrian improvements can be found in the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan, as well as the Bicycle and Pedestrian chapter of this plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND TITLE VI

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Support highway and bicycle and pedestrian projects that improve economic mobility and quality of life in Title VI and Environmental Justice areas.	SPOT points earned for projects that benefit Title VI and Environmental Justice concentration areas; identified Title VI and Environmental Justice concentration areas	As a local project scoring authority, the GHMPO does assign SPOT points in local quantifiable scoring for projects that impact Title VI and Environmental Justice areas. Local prioritization scoring is allowed to award up to 5 points specifically for Title VI and EJ for Highway, Transit, and bicycle and pedestrian projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Educate municipalities about sensitive environmental issues surrounding road projects	Number of educational talks and lectures	The GHMPO continues to focus on improved environmental stewardship. The addition of an environmental outreach coordinator that serves the WPCOG Planning Department is notable progress towards educating the GHMPO on environmental issues.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Improve public outreach in Title VI and EJ communities	Number of public meetings held in high Title VI and EJ concentration areas; availability of public outreach documents in Spanish and other languages	The GHMPO has worked towards improving public outreach in Title VI and EJ communities in two main ways. The first is the addition of an outreach coordinator made available to the GHMPO. The second is the constant effort made by communications staff to overcome language barriers in public communications such as the impact report.
Improve public outreach methods	Number of Facebook and Twitter posts/website metrics – website views	In an effort to progress towards this goal, the GHMPO made 77 transportation related posts on the WPCOG Facebook and 16 on the WPCOG Twitter.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Promote transportation projects that provide a link to major nodes (central business districts, shopping centers, parks, hospitals, or major employers)	List of updated viable transportation projects and identification of linkage projects; provide points in SPOT for projects that promote regional economic development	To continue to progress towards these goals, the SPOT process awards points to projects regionally and divisionally based on their economic development impacts.
Assist municipalities who want to improve downtown streetscapes and sidewalks	Number of plans developed by local governments, amount of grant funds applied for streetscape and sidewalk improvements	Development of both Comprehensive Plans, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans for municipalities in the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Area, resulting in an increase of potentially fundable projects.
Use public transit assets to encourage economic development	Encourage Transit Oriented Developments in plans	Transit expansion in the GHMPO planning area aiding in total interconnectivity of the region.

HIGHWAYS

Performance Goal	Metric	Progress
Identify/analyze congested areas and times in the region	NCDOT's PDAS/RITIS data/Travel Demand Model	The GHMPO has progressed towards identifying and analyzing congestion areas by both implementing a congestion management process in the 2045 MTP, and by implementing an updated process in the 2050 MTP. The GHMPO also recently update Traffic Analysis Zones for the travel demand model.
Ensure good fiscal management	Additional points given in SPOT for projects with low cost and high impact	In order to ensure continued commitment to good fiscal management, the SPOT process awards points based on benefit/cost of projects.
Identify gaps in the highway network on routes to prime locations	List of updated viable transportation projects; identify list of prime locations (schools, parks, major employers, hospitals, etc.)	Progress towards connectivity is continuous as a result of the GHMPO's maintenance of transportation improvement planning.
Develop transportation projects that rank well in NCDOT's project prioritization system	List of updated viable transportation projects using prioritization methods approved by the Transportation Advisory	Reflective of a nationwide trend, total bicycling rates across the county declined from 2010-2020.
Encourage transportation projects that upgrade mobility	Projects submitted; estimated travel time savings through the travel demand model	Progress towards the next travel demand model focused on updating employment and housing data for the GHMPO by updating Traffic Analysis Zones.