

Cape Fear RPO

P7.0 Local Input Prioritization Methodology

NCDOT approval 4-15-24

CFRPO RTAC approval 4-12-24

INTRODUCTION

The Cape Fear RPO (CFRPO) is required by state law to develop a local input methodology for prioritizing all transportation projects (aviation, bicycle and pedestrian, ferry, highway, public transportation, and rail) within the RPO boundary that compete for state and federal funding, and to submit the methodology to the NC Dept. of Transportation for approval. This Local Input Prioritization Methodology applies within the Cape Fear RPO planning boundary, which includes the counties of Brunswick (partial), Columbus, and Pender (partial).

The RPO has developed this prioritization methodology in an effort to satisfy the quantitative, data-driven requirements of the STI (Strategic Transportation Investments) law while protecting the discretion of local officials by incorporating subjective, qualitative local input where possible. STI establishes a funding formula which allocates available revenues based on data-driven scoring and local input. It is used to develop NCDOT's State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which identifies the transportation projects that will receive funding during a specified 10-year period.

Transportation projects competing for funding through STI are divided into three tiers based on project characteristics as follows:

Statewide Mobility: Projects in this tier compete statewide. Eligible projects include:

- Interstate highways and designated future interstates, including I-40 and Future I-74;
- National Highway System highways and STRAHNET highways, including US 17, US 74 and US 76; and
- Freight capacity and safety improvements to Class I freight rail corridors, including the CSX rail line in Brunswick and Columbus counties and the abandoned Wallace-Castle Hayne line in Pender County.

Regional Impact: In the Cape Fear RPO region, projects in Brunswick and Pender counties compete in Region B with eligible projects throughout the 14 counties in NCDOT Divisions 2 and 3, including the cities of Wilmington, Jacksonville, Greenville, New Bern, Kinston, and Morehead City. Projects in Columbus County compete in Region C with eligible projects throughout the 12 counties in NCDOT Divisions 5 and 6, including the cities of Raleigh, Durham, Fayetteville, Cary, and Lumberton. Eligible projects include:

- Statewide Mobility projects not funded at the Statewide Mobility tier;

- US and NC highways not eligible at the Statewide Mobility tier, including US 117, US 421, US 701, US 17 Business, US 117 Business, US 701 Business, NC 11, NC 50, NC 53, NC 87, NC 130, NC 210, NC 211, NC 214, NC 410, NC 904, and NC 906; and
- The State-maintained ferry system, excluding passenger vessel replacement, including improvements and expansions to the Southport-Ft. Fisher ferry.

Division Needs: In the Cape Fear Region, projects in Brunswick and Pender counties compete with eligible projects throughout NCDOT Division 3, including the cities of Wilmington and Jacksonville. Projects in Columbus County compete with eligible projects throughout NCDOT Division 6, including the cities of Fayetteville and Lumberton. Eligible projects include:

- Statewide Mobility projects not funded at the Statewide Mobility or Regional Impact tiers and Regional Impact projects not funded at the Regional Impact tier;
- State-maintained secondary routes and federally funded municipal road projects, including E Boiling Spring Rd, Gilbert Rd, Old Lake Rd, Hallsboro Rd, Shaw Hwy, Penderlea Hwy, and Malpass Corner Rd;
- General aviation airports, including Cape Fear Jetport (SUT) near Southport, Columbus County Airport (CPC) near Whiteville, and Henderson Field (ACZ) in northern Pender County;
- Community public transportation systems, including Brunswick Transit, Columbus Transportation, and PAS-TRAN;
- Standalone bicycle and pedestrian transportation projects, including sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use paths; and
- Replacement of ferry vessels, including those on the Southport-Ft. Fisher route.

This methodology describes the process by which the Cape Fear RPO evaluates transportation projects and assigns local input points to qualifying transportation projects according to local priorities. The Cape Fear RPO has 1300 local input points available for assignment to eligible projects at both the Regional Impact and Division Needs tiers. Projects may receive no more than 100 total points from local transportation planning organizations (MPOs and RPOs); therefore, the Cape Fear RPO will assign points to a minimum of 13 transportation projects at both tiers.

DESCRIPTION OF CRITERIA

The following scoring criteria will be used to generate a total project score for each CFRPO transportation project, regardless of mode. Each project will receive a total project score at the Regional Impact tier and/or Division Needs tier according to its eligibility.

1. **PRIORITIZATION 7.0 QUANTITATIVE SCORE (QUANTITATIVE):** The Cape Fear Area RPO believes that the Prioritization 7.0 Quantitative Score (“P7.0 Score”) is the best criterion to maximize the funding potential of the transportation projects in the RPO area.

Projects that do not score well by the P7.0 Score will have difficulty competing for funding. The criterion is defined as the project's P7.0 Score for the corresponding tier.

2. **DIVISION PRIORITY (QUALITATIVE):** Projects will not be competitive at the Regional Impact or Division Needs tier unless they have the support of the Division Engineer and rank well by the Division Engineer's scoring criteria. The Cape Fear RPO will request that Division Engineers or their designees assign each project a HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW, or NONE priority classification for each tier at which the project competes. Division Engineers should assign priority classifications such that projects are distributed with an approximately equal number of projects in each classification. Projects will be given 100, 50, 25, or 0 points according to their classification. Where projects are located in both Divisions 3 and 6, Division Priority points will be allocated based on the share of the project in each division.
3. **COUNTY PRIORITY (QUALITATIVE):** Projects should have local support. County RTCC representatives are expected to collaborate with other county staff, county elected officials, staff, and elected officials of municipalities within their boundaries, and other stakeholders representing county transportation modes or systems, as deemed appropriate by each county's RTCC representative, to develop county priorities. Each county RTCC representative will assign every project within the county a HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW, or NONE priority classification for each tier at which the project competes. County RTCC representatives should assign priority classifications such that projects are distributed with an approximately equal number of projects in each classification. Projects will be given 100, 75, 50, and 0 points according to their classification. If a project is prioritized by more than one CFRPO county, it will be assigned the average of the points received.
4. **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT (QUALITATIVE):** Projects that have had significant planning or development activities completed are eligible for additional points to distinguish them from projects that are simply conceptual. Points will be given cumulatively to projects for each of the following criteria as indicated for a maximum of 100 points: a feasibility study has been completed or a corridor plan or other project-specific plan has been adopted [10 pts.]; preliminary design or engineering has begun [10 pts.]; project was programmed in a prior STIP or otherwise was in the development/merger process [10 pts.]; right-of-way attainment has begun, was previously completed, or is otherwise not expected to be required [10 pts.]; project sibling is funded in the current STIP or has been completed [20 pts.]; project is programmed in the current STIP [40 pts.].

TOTAL PROJECT SCORE AND RANKING APPROACH

Project rankings will be developed at each tier using the total project scores of eligible projects. Project scores will be calculated as follows:

Regional Impact tier score

$$= (0.50 \times P7.0 \text{ Score for tier}) + (0.20 \times \text{Division Priority points for tier}) \\ + (0.20 \times \text{County Priority points for tier}) + (0.10 \times \text{Project Development points})$$

Division Needs tier score

$$= (0.30 \times P7.0 \text{ Score for tier}) + (0.30 \times \text{Division Priority points for tier}) \\ + (0.30 \times \text{County Priority points for tier}) + (0.10 \times \text{Project Development points})$$

POINT ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

Preliminary Point Assignments: Preliminary points will be assigned at both the Regional Impact and Division Needs tiers based on the project ranking. Preliminary points may be assigned to any project eligible to receive points at the respective tier if it has not been fully funded at a higher tier. Preliminary point assignments will take into consideration the share of the project within the RPO and point sharing opportunities.

Any project that crosses the RPO boundary will be eligible for local input points in excess of the percentage of the project within the RPO boundary, up to 100 points, if the adjacent MPO/RPO provides less than their full share of points. Any project entirely beyond the RPO boundary will be eligible for up to 100 local input points to be shared with the adjacent MPO/RPO if the project has benefits to a primary route between the RPO area and major destinations outside of the RPO area. The Cape Fear RPO will endeavor to accept points shared by adjacent MPO/RPOs for projects crossing the RPO boundary that would otherwise not receive Cape Fear RPO points according to the point assignment process unless doing so is determined to jeopardize the funding potential of a higher priority Cape Fear RPO project. If points sharing is approved, both the Cape Fear RPO and the adjacent MPO/RPO must agree to the number of points donated and provide this arrangement in writing to NCDOT's Office of Prioritization.

Preliminary points will be assigned until all 1300 available points are assigned at each tier as follows:

1. The top two scoring highway projects in each RPO county will be eligible for 100 points each (600 points max).
2. The top three scoring non-highway projects will be eligible for 100 points each, regardless of non-highway mode or location (300 points max).
3. Remaining points cascade to the next highest scoring projects, regardless of mode or location, up to 100 points each.

Preliminary point assignments will be posted to the Cape Fear RPO website. If time permits, the RTCC will recommend and the RTAC will approve preliminary point assignments. Otherwise, the RPO staff will approve preliminary point assignments.

Local Input Point Flexing Policy: The Cape Fear RPO has the option to apply the Local Input Point Flexing Policy. This means that up to 500 Local Input Points can be transferred from one category (Regional Impact or Division Needs) to the other. If the organization chooses to flex Local Input Points, Cape Fear RPO will provide written documentation to the SPOT Office prior to assigning Regional Impact Local Input Points.

Final Point Assignments: Preliminary point assignments may be modified by the RTAC to provide local oversight to the data-driven process, to compensate for situations where the methodology does not accurately reflect the RTAC's priorities, and to ensure appropriate projects at the relevant tier. Justifications for modifying preliminary point assignments include project cost, point sharing arrangements, estimated points required for funding, geographic equity, modal distribution, new information, methodology failures, potential reconsideration of the limits of a programmed project, and public comment. The justifications for any final point assignments that deviate from published preliminary point assignments will, at minimum, be noted in the final point assignment worksheet and documented in the meeting minutes. In the event that projects receiving final point assignments become unexpectedly uncompetitive due to any last-minute deviations in actual or expected point assignments by NCDOT Division Engineers or other transportation planning organizations (MPOs or RPOs), the RTAC delegates to its chair the power to modify final point assignments to maximize project competitiveness. Any such modification and accompanying justification will be noted in an amended final point assignment worksheet, which will be posted to the RPO website.

SCHEDULE

The following schedule is subject to change for a variety of reasons, many of which are beyond the control of the RPO. Any change to the schedule will be updated on the RPO website and in this document, which will be also available on the RPO website; however, modification to the timeline will not require public notice or comment, nor adoption by the RTAC, nor approval by NCDOT.

1. Draft prioritization methodology will be developed by RPO staff. [Winter/Spring 2024]
2. Draft prioritization methodology will be submitted to the RTCC for recommendation and to the RTAC for preliminary approval. [February 2024]
3. Draft prioritization methodology will be revised as necessary to conform with NCDOT guidelines, posted to RPO website, and submitted to NCDOT for conditional approval. [March 2024]

4. Conditionally approved methodology will be recommended for final approval by the RTCC and approved by the RTAC. Approved methodology will be posted to the RPO website once approved by NCDOT and the RTAC. [April 2024]
5. RPO staff will determine **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT** points for all projects eligible to compete at the Regional Impact tier. [May – August 2024]
6. The RTCC representative from each RPO county will assign a **COUNTY PRIORITY** to each project within the county competing at the Regional Impact tier according to the Description of Criteria. [June/July 2024]
7. NCDOT Division Engineers will assign a **DIVISION PRIORITY** to each project competing at the Regional Impact tier according to the Description of Criteria. [June/July 2024]
8. RPO staff will discuss point sharing with staff of other MPO/RPOs. [June/July 2024]
9. Regional Impact project scores, rankings, and preliminary point assignments will be generated according to the Point Assignment Process. [July 2024]
10. RTCC will recommend and RTAC will make final Regional Impact point assignments at their August meetings. RTCC and RTAC meetings are public meetings where public comment on point assignments will specifically be sought. [August 2024]
11. Final Regional Impact tier point assignments will be entered into SPOT On!ine and posted to the CFRPO website. [August 2024]
12. RPO staff will determine **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT** points for all Division Needs tier projects. [September – November 2024]
13. The RTCC representative from each RPO county will assign a **COUNTY PRIORITY** to each project within the county competing at the Division Needs tier according to the Description of Criteria. [October/November 2024]
14. NCDOT Division Engineers will assign a **DIVISION PRIORITY** to each project competing at the Division Needs tier according to the Description of Criteria. [October/November 2024]
15. RPO staff will discuss point sharing with staff of other MPO/RPOs. [October/November 2024]
16. Division Needs project scores, rankings, and preliminary point assignments will be generated according to the Point Assignment Process. [November 2024]
17. RTCC will recommend and RTAC will make final Division Needs point assignments at their December meetings. RTCC and RTAC meetings are public meetings where public comment on point assignments will specifically be sought. [November 2024]
18. Final Division Needs point assignments will be entered into SPOT On!ine and posted to the CFRPO website. [November 2024]

PUBLIC OUTREACH


This process is intended to be open and transparent. As such, all meetings of the RTCC and RTAC are open to the public and public comment is a recurring item on all meeting agendas. In addition, RTCC and RTAC meeting dates and, as available, agendas and minutes are available on the RPO website at <http://www.capefearrpo.org>. Relevant documents, including this methodology and preliminary and final point assignments, will also be posted for public review at the RPO's website. Public comment is specifically sought on preliminary point assignments during the 30 days prior to final point assignment by the RTAC and during the public comment period for the RTAC meeting where final points are assigned, currently scheduled for August 16, 2024 for the Regional Impact tier and November 15, 2024 for the Division Needs tier. Meeting date changes and accompanying changes in public comment periods will be posted to the RPO website. Additionally, instructions for submitting public comments outside of official meetings will be provided on the RPO website. At minimum, comments may be submitted in person, by telephone, or via email. Comments will be collected by RPO staff and distributed to the RTCC and RTAC as part of their normal meeting materials.

MATERIAL SHARING

The following information, at minimum, will be made available on the Cape Fear RPO website:

- A link to the NCDOT STI Prioritization Resources website;
- The adopted Cape Fear RPO P7.0 Local Input Prioritization Methodology;
- Highlights of schedule milestones, including public comment periods and public meeting schedules; and
- Preliminary and final local input point assignment sheets, including justifications of methodology deviations.

APPROVED BY THE CAPE FEAR RPO TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON **04/12/2024**.



Frank Williams, Chair



Sam Boswell, Secretary