

DURHAM • CHAPEL HILL • CARRBORO
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS: Chatham County, City of Durham, Durham County, GoTriangle,
 NC Department of Transportation, Orange County, Town of Carrboro, Town of Chapel Hill, Town of Hillsborough



September 1, 2021

Joey Hopkins, P.E.
 Deputy Chief - Planning
 NC Department of Transportation
 1501 Mail Service Center
 Raleigh, NC 27699-1501

Dear Mr. Hopkins:

The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization Board (DCHC MPO) would like to thank North Carolina Board of Transportation Chairman Michael Fox and Division Engineer Brandon Jones for attending the August 11 MPO Board meeting to discuss the Board of Transportation's decision to discontinue SPOT 6.0 and the programming of the FY2024-33 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

As NCDOT and the Board of Transportation consider reprogramming the current STIP to create the FY 24-33 STIP, DCHC MPO would like to stress the importance of allowing MPOs, RPOs, and local communities to have input into which projects are prioritized in the new STIP. In many cases, local priorities have changed since projects were programmed as a result of previous SPOT cycles. MPOs and RPOs are well-positioned to convey local priorities, and are also well suited to conduct engagement with local communities to determine which projects in the current STIP should remain priorities in the FY 24-33 STIP.

Additionally, committed projects do not necessarily reflect the current priorities of MPOs and RPOs. DCHC MPO is open to delaying or deleting expensive highway projects if it means that non-committed, community-supported transit and bicycle and pedestrian projects, which support local and regional sustainability and equity goals, can be prioritized.

Although DCHC MPO understands that there is insufficient funding for projects that would have been selected through SPOT 6.0, DCHC MPO requests responses to the following questions about the impact of the discontinuation of SPOT 6.0:

- Chapel Hill's North-South Bus Rapid Transit (N-S BRT) is a planned 8.2-mile line along one of the town's busiest and most vital thoroughfares stretching from Eubanks Road to Southern Village. The project will improve multimodal connectivity, support equity by connecting to affordable housing, and meet local and regional sustainability goals through the use of electric buses and by supporting mode shift. DCHC MPO submitted the project to SPOT 6.0 in hopes that it would receive a state match of \$35 million. Without this potential local match, this project risks being removed from the federal Small Starts program, which is expected to provide \$100 million. How can NCDOT support efforts to leverage federal dollars for projects like N-S BRT in light of the discontinuation of SPOT 6.0?
- Relatively low-cost, uncommitted projects that improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure -- such as U-6120 NC 98/Holloway Street Safety Improvements and EB-5994 NC 54 Multiuse Path -- remain a high priority for DCHC MPO. Committed projects are severely over programmed in the current STIP, which puts uncommitted projects such as U-6120 and EB-5994, which may be a higher priority for DCHC MPO than currently committed highway projects, at risk of being removed from the

Joey Hopkins, 09/01/2021

reprogrammed STIP. How can the STIP reprogramming accommodate these uncommitted projects that have widespread community support and significantly lower cost implications than highway widening projects that have costs exceeding \$100 million?

- To what extent is increased funding associated with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, should it be passed into law, expected to alleviate NCDOT's current funding shortfall? Can any of the funding associated with this bill be used to address the revenue shortfall in the current STIP? How will NCDOT prioritize projects for new funding sources associated with this bill?

DCHC MPO looks forward to a response from NCDOT staff to these questions, and also partnering with NCDOT to determine how projects should be prioritized in the FY24-33 STIP.

Sincerely,

Wendy Jacobs, Chair
DCHC MPO Board

cc: Van Argabright, P.E., Director of Planning and Programming
Ray McIntyre, Assistant Director of STIP, Feasibility Studies, and Strategic Prioritization
Mike Stanley, P.E., Central Region STIP Manager
Jason Schronce, P.E., SPOT Manager

Joey Hopkins, 09/01/2021