

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Transportation is the act or process of moving people or things from one place to another. The Charlotte Metrolina (Metro) area is growing fast, with approximately 120 people moving into the area each day. Access to a reliable, efficient and well-connected transportation system is one of the most important factors to ensure that everyone can benefit.

The mission of the Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (GCLMPO) is to plan for a system of transportation modes that are consistent with the development and growth desired for the jurisdictions that comprise the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The system of roadway, transit, freight, aviation, bicycle, and pedestrian travel modes will deliver safe and efficient movement of people and goods. The GCLMPO will strive to implement transportation choices and mobility that positively coexist with the natural and built environments and strengthen the economic prosperity of the region, while promoting community safety and health.

The 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the GCLMPO is the locally adopted, fiscally constrained, long-range transportation plan for Gaston, Cleveland, and Lincoln counties. The 2050 MTP defines the transportation network that will serve both present and projected volumes of vehicular traffic, public transportation use, bicycle, pedestrian, aviation and freight travel in and around the urban area through the year 2050. The MTP is based on the most accurate and complete information available including, but not limited to, population, economic development growth and land development patterns in and around the urban area. The MTP is fiscally constrained, meaning the MTP includes sufficient financial information to demonstrate that projects in the plan can be implemented using committed, available, or reasonably available revenue sources (federal, state, and local).

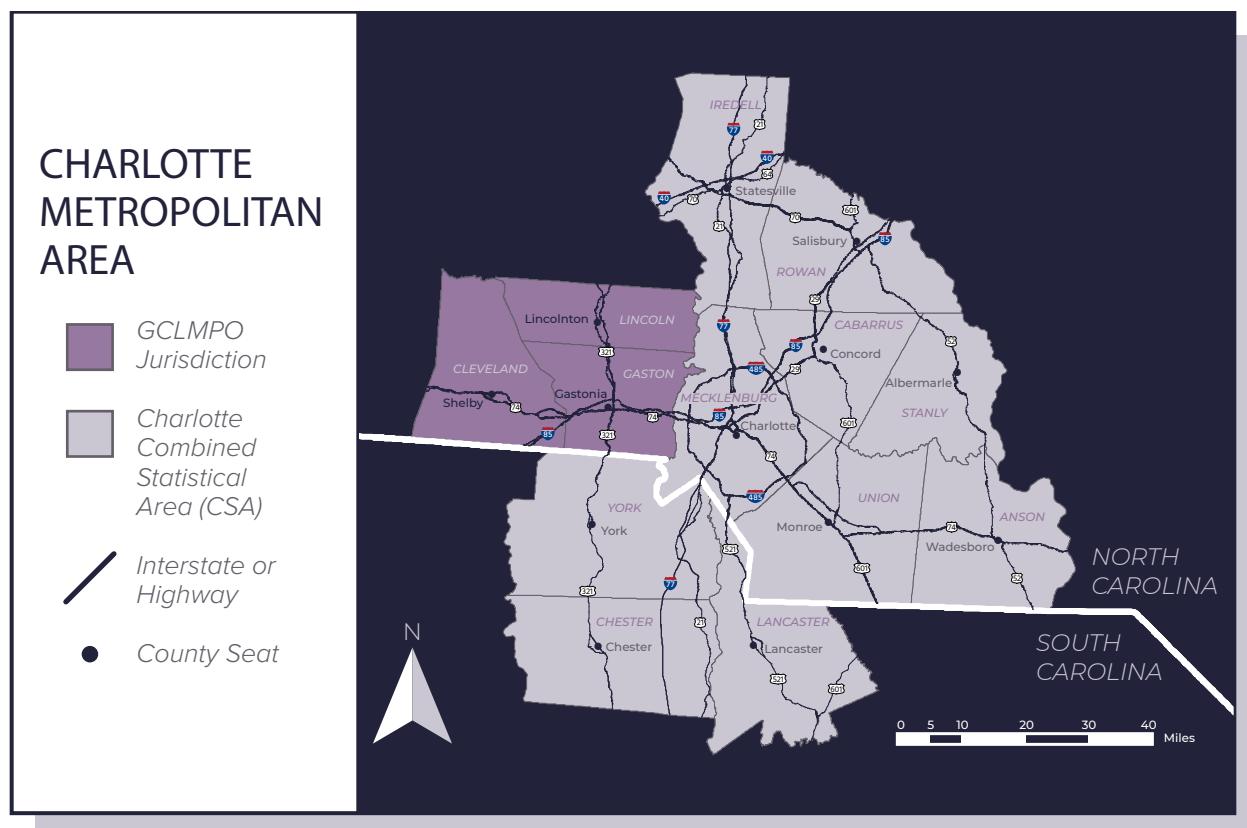


Figure 1-1: Charlotte Metropolitan Area

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

In the long range transportation planning process, goals describe characteristics of the desired future transportation system for the area and objectives identify steps that are expected to achieve the goals. The goals and objectives inform the process by which projects are prioritized as well as the evaluation of the performance of the transportation system.

MPOs are required to consider certain factors in the transportation planning process, of which the MTP is a key element. The following goals and objectives help to address the ten planning factors referenced in specific sections of Title 23 (Federal Highway Administration, or FHWA) and Title 49 (Federal Transit Administration, or FTA) of the Code of Federal Regulations, while also considering the characteristics of the GCLMPO planning area.

- 1. Provide a safe, reliable, and resilient transportation system for the movement of people and goods by multiple modes.**
 - a. Designate resources to preserve existing transportation systems and assets.
 - b. Designate resources to address known or potential high-crash areas for highway, transit, and non-motorized modes.
 - c. Support efforts and projects to increase walking, bicycling, and transit use in order to reduce the number of vehicles moving at high speeds.
 - d. Develop strategies and support projects that enhance the security of transportation systems and assets from threats including natural processes and disasters.
 - e. Encourage resiliency through support of environments, infrastructure, and services that provide redundancies and alternatives for the movement of people and goods.
 - f. Support the development and application of new technologies in the pursuit of safety, reliability, and resilience.



- 2. Enhance economic vitality and global competitiveness of the region, counties, cities, towns, and communities.**
 - a. Support strategies and projects that promote efficient travel environments and transportation systems, for people and freight.
 - b. Enhance travel and tourism by creating great destinations through investments in bicycle and pedestrian networks and environments as well as facilitating regional and interstate connections for other modes.
 - c. Support the use of efficient new technologies.
- 3. Provide and protect access and mobility for people and for freight.**
 - a. Integrate transportation planning with growth, land use, and economic development patterns to encourage

effective trip distribution to modes and networks.

b. Plan and promote intermodal connectivity for people and for freight.

c. Support innovations that equitably reduce barriers to access and mobility.

4. Enhance quality of life, protect the natural environment, and support the physical and mental health of communities.

a. Integrate transportation planning with land use planning to reduce pollution, reduce stormwater impacts, conserve energy, preserve resources, and increase access to healthy options.

b. Support projects and initiatives that reduce the need to travel using the single-occupancy vehicle, including options for transit modes and physically active modes, such as walking and bicycling.

c. Promote projects and services that are sensitive to the context of the built and natural environment.

5. Carry out transportation planning efforts and project development that provides equitable processes and outcomes for diverse groups, including the economically disadvantaged, minority, older, and disabled populations.

a. Support opportunities to provide the traditionally underserved populations with convenient transportation to employment, education, healthcare, fresh food options, and other essential services.

b. Develop strategies to engage and educate residents who have not been reached by the traditional transportation planning processes.

c. Identify transportation projects in environmental justice communities.

6. Engage in regional and statewide collaboration in support of all other goals.

a. Identify opportunities to develop joint goals and policies with other MPOs in the region and increase data sharing and coordination.

b. Participate in transportation-related planning efforts initiated by other agencies and organizations throughout the region (plans, initiatives, studies, etc.).

c. Lead and partner on planning efforts that cross multiple jurisdictions within GCLMPO's planning area.





FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

The MTP must meet certain federal requirements established by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). The 2050 MTP has been developed in compliance with these guidelines and regulations.

3C PLANNING PROCESS

In 1962, Congress enacted a federal law that first established Metropolitan Planning Organizations and initiated a requirement that a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) multimodal transportation planning process be established for all urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more in order to qualify for federal transportation funds. This law is Title 23 of the United States Code Section 134 and reads as follows:

(a) Policy —*It is in the national interest—*

(1) to encourage and promote the safe and efficient management, operation, and development of surface transportation systems that will serve the mobility needs of people and freight, foster economic growth and development within and between States and urbanized areas, and take into consideration resiliency needs while minimizing transportation-related fuel consumption and air pollution through metropolitan and statewide transportation planning processes identified in this chapter; and

(2) to encourage the continued improvement and evolution of the metropolitan and statewide transportation planning processes by metropolitan planning organizations, State departments of transportation, and public transit operators as guided by the planning factors identified in subsection (h) and section 135(d).

(c) General Requirements —

(1) Development of long-range plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) —

To accomplish the objectives in subsection (a), metropolitan planning organizations designated under subsection (d), in cooperation with the State and public transportation operators, shall develop long-range transportation plans and transportation improvement programs through a performance-driven, outcome-based approach to planning for metropolitan areas of the State.

(2) Contents —

The plans and TIPs for each metropolitan area shall provide for the development and integrated management and operation of transportation systems and facilities (including accessible pedestrian walkways, bicycle transportation facilities, and intermodal facilities that support intercity transportation, including intercity buses and intercity bus facilities and commuter vanpool providers) that will function as an intermodal transportation system for the metropolitan planning area and as an integral part of an intermodal transportation system for the State and the United States.

(3) Process of development —

The process for developing the plans and TIPs shall provide for consideration of all modes of transportation and shall be continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive to the degree appropriate, based on the complexity of the transportation problems to be addressed.

As required by federal law, the 3C process in each urban area is carried out by its MPO. The GCLMPO is the federally designated regional transportation planning entity for the Gaston, NC-SC Urbanized Area, which includes Gaston, Cleveland, and Lincoln counties of North Carolina. GCLMPO has the primary responsibility for citizen input into the 3C transportation planning process for the three-county area.

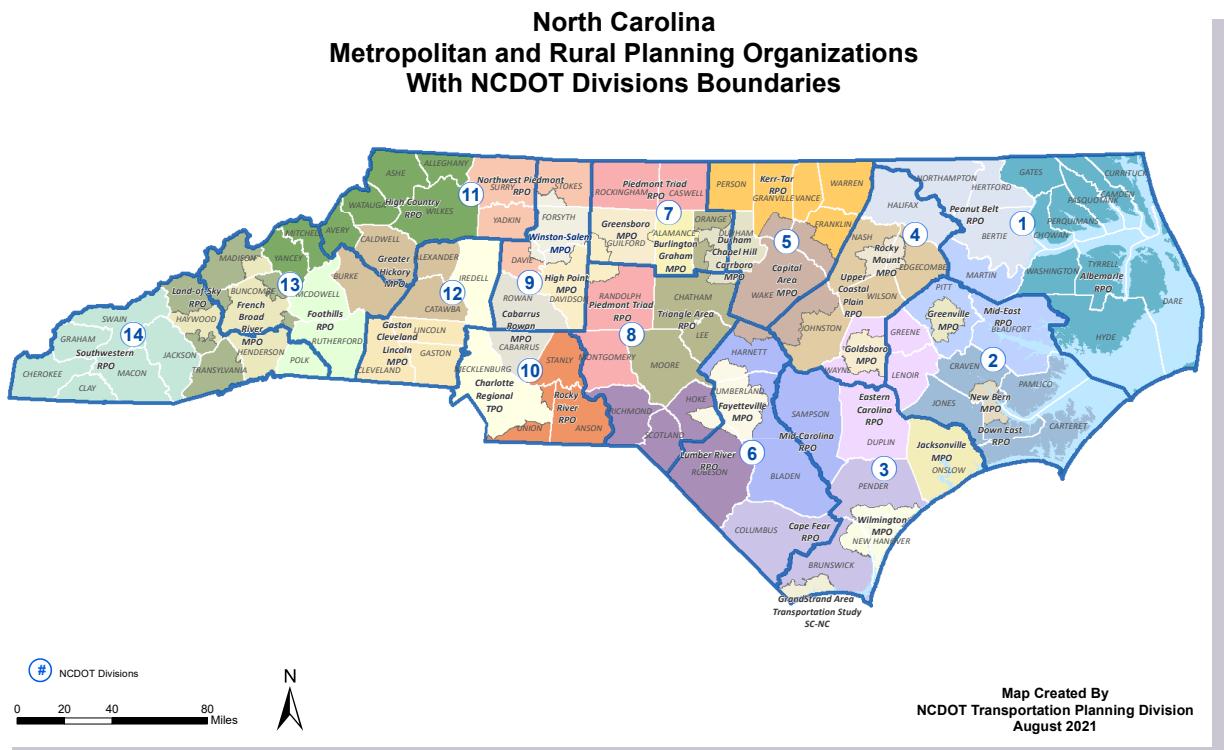


Figure 1-2: North Carolina Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations with NCDOT Division Boundaries

COORDINATION WITH FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING REGULATIONS

Each of the nineteen (19) North Carolina MPOs, in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), shall develop a MTP. Federal law (20 CFR Part 450 Subpart C) mandates that the MTP be fiscally constrained, have at least a twenty-year planning horizon and be updated every four years in air quality nonattainment and maintenance areas. The last MTP, the 2045 MTP, was adopted in 2018.

At a minimum, MTPs shall include (per 20 CFR Part 450 Subpart C):

- The current and projected transportation demand of persons and goods in the metropolitan planning area over the period of the transportation plan;
- Existing and proposed transportation facilities (including major roadways, public transportation facilities, intercity bus facilities, multimodal and intermodal facilities, and nonmotorized transportation facilities) that should function as an integrated metropolitan transportation system, giving emphasis to those facilities that serve important national and regional transportation functions over the period of the transportation plan;
- A description of the performance measures and performance targets used in assessing the performance of the transportation system;
- A system performance report evaluating the condition and performance of the transportation system as it relates to the performance targets;
- Operational and management strategies to improve the performance of existing transportation facilities to relieve vehicular congestion and maximize the safety and mobility of people and goods;
- Assessment of capital investment and other strategies to preserve the existing and projected future transportation infrastructure, provide for multimodal capacity increases based on regional priorities and needs, and reduce the vulnerability of the existing infrastructure to natural disasters;

FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION LEGISLATION

"The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, signed into law in 2015, is the federal transportation legislation that outlines the regulations for the metropolitan transportation planning process, requiring the planning process to consider projects/strategies to: improve the resilience and reliability of the transportation system, stormwater mitigation, and enhance travel and tourism.

In September 2021, President Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) into law, which reauthorizes the nation's surface transportation legislation for federal fiscal years 2022 through 2026. The IIJA includes \$110 billion for road, bridges, and major infrastructure projects, \$39 billion for public transportation, \$66 billion for rail, and \$25 billion for aviation.

Due to the timing of the IIJA being signed into law, additional funding from this reauthorization has not been included in this 2050 MTP. In addition, the GCLMPO will monitor the IIJA for any new transportation planning requirements as it relates to future MTP updates or amendments.

- Transportation and transit enhancement activities;
- Detailed project descriptions;
- A discussion of types of potential environmental mitigation activities; and
- A financial plan that demonstrates how the transportation plan can be implemented.

More information on the planning factors and performance management can be found in Chapter 2.

AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY

The Clean Air Act requires the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set limits on how much of a particular pollutant can be in the air anywhere in the United States. National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) are the pollutant limits set by the EPA; they define the allowable concentration of pollution in the air for six different pollutants – Carbon Monoxide, Lead, Nitrogen Dioxide, Particulate Matter, Ozone, and Sulfur Dioxide.

The GCLMPO is a part of the Charlotte Metrolina Area, which historically has had issues with air quality, primarily from ground-level Ozone. In 2004, the EPA designated the Metrolina Area, including Gaston and Lincoln counties, as moderate non-attainment for ozone NAAQS under the 1997 8-hour standard. With significant improvements, in 2013 the EPA redesignated the Metrolina Area as attainment for the 8-hour ozone standards. In May 2008, the EPA revised the ozone NAAQS to provide increased protection of public health and welfare, especially for children and “at risk” populations. With the new 2008 standards, the Metrolina Area was designated by the EPA as marginal nonattainment.

The Clean Air Act requires the GCLMPO to demonstrate that the fiscally-constrained metropolitan transportation plan and the transportation improvement program conform to the State Air Quality Implementation Plan, and not cause new air quality violations, worsen existing violations, or delay timely attainment of the NAAQS.

In response to the 8-hour ozone (O₃) non-attainment designation of “marginal” by the EPA, a new set of projections for the region’s travel demand model has been developed for the Charlotte Metrolina Area. The regional travel demand model has been developed through coordination and collaboration with federal and state regulatory agencies, as well as GCLMPO’s regional partners including the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO), Cabarrus – Rowan MPO (CRMPO), and the Rocky River Rural Planning Organization (RRRPO) in North Carolina and the Rock Hill – Fort Mill Area Transportation Study (RFATS) in South Carolina. The GCLMPO has successfully demonstrated transportation conformity for the 2050 MTP. More information on the transportation conformity process can be found in Chapter 2.



MTP UPDATES

Although the MTP is only required to be updated every four years, amendments during the interim years are common and ensure the MTP contains relevant information in response to changing conditions. In particular, amendments to the MTP are often the result of new projects being funded or significant changes in project scope or schedule. In addition, the MTP may need to be periodically amended to incorporate updated performance targets. MTP amendments require public outreach, a demonstration of fiscal constraint, and must also be approved by the MPO Board.

ABOUT GCLMPO

The Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (formerly the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization) was established in 2013 following the release of new Urbanized Area delineations, based on 2010 US Census data. The Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) expanded at that time based on input and a request from Cleveland and Lincoln counties to be represented by one transportation planning organization. Based on the consolidation of these two counties into the Gaston County-based MPO, the GCLMPO grew from 12 member jurisdictions to 17. The MPO now includes the municipalities of Belmont, Bessemer City, Boiling Springs, Cherryville, Cramerton, Dallas, Gastonia, Kings Mountain, Lincolnton, Lowell, Mount Holly, Ranlo, Shelby, and Stanley and the counties of Gaston, Cleveland, and Lincoln. There are several smaller municipalities within the MPO area that are not voting members of the MPO, but may have a representative serve as non-voting members.

The GCLMPO total population is 414,272 based on the 2020 Census. The three county MPO area includes seventeen (17) member governments and a total of thirty-four (34) jurisdictions.

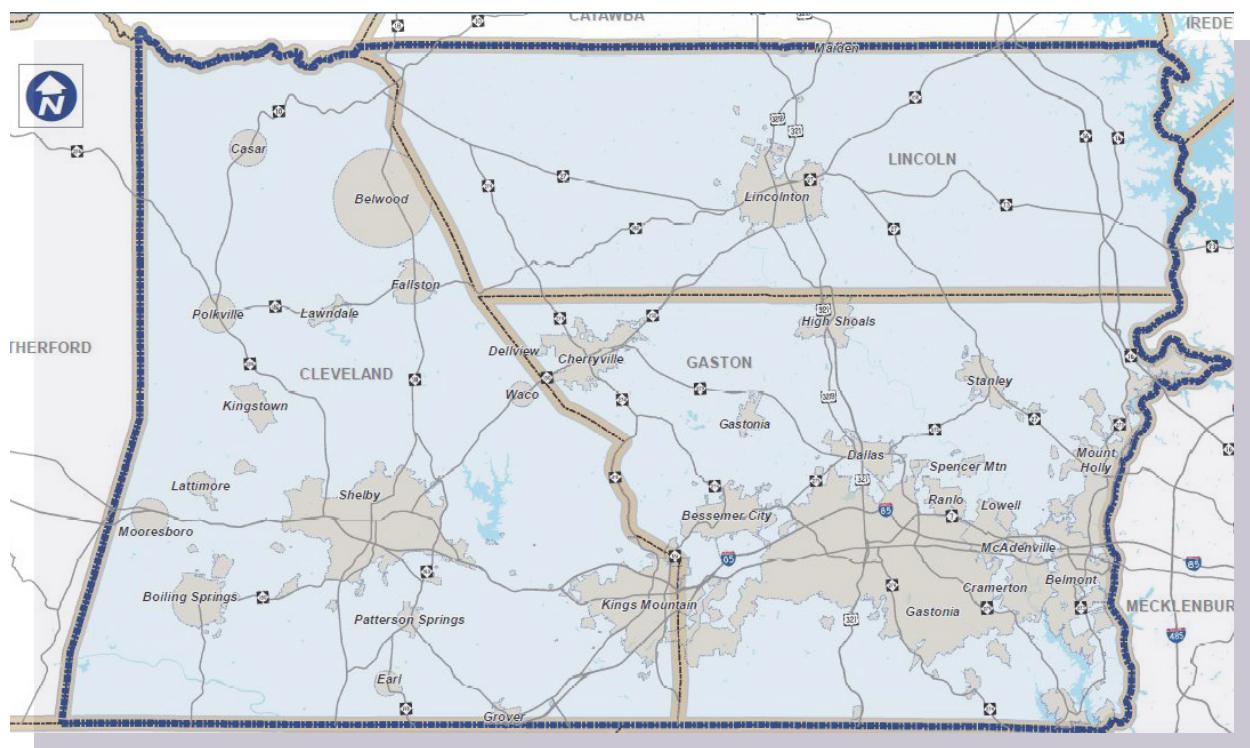


Figure 1-3: GCLMPO Planning Area.

GASTON COUNTY

Gaston County is located in the Piedmont Region of North Carolina just west of the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, NC. It is bounded on the east by the Catawba River and Mecklenburg County, on the west by Cleveland County, on the north by Lincoln County and on the south by York County, South Carolina. Gaston was formed from the lower portion of Lincoln County in 1846, during which time the county was experiencing an industrial boom in textiles.

Gaston County is conveniently located along Interstate 85 and is midway between Atlanta, GA and North Carolina's Research Triangle in Raleigh, NC. Made up of fifteen (15) incorporated municipalities, Gaston County is home to Crowders Mountain State Park to the west and Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden to the east.

Gastonia is the largest city within Gaston County, and is also the county seat. The City of Gastonia serves as the Lead Planning Agency (LPA) for the GCLMPO.



CLEVELAND COUNTY

Cleveland County is nestled in the rolling piedmont of the southwest portion of North Carolina and is situated in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The county lies equidistant from Asheville and Charlotte and is centered between two rapidly urbanizing metropolitan areas along the I-85 corridor: Charlotte, NC and Greenville/Spartanburg, SC.



Cleveland County's easy access to Interstate Highways 85, 40, 26 and 77 assures that goods and services flow freely to their destinations from one of 250 trucking firms located throughout the area. More than half of the nation can be reached by automobile within 24 hours.

Shelby is the largest city in Cleveland County. Affectionately known as the "City of Pleasant Living", Shelby was incorporated in 1843 and named for Colonel Isaac Shelby, a Revolutionary War hero at the nearby Battle of Kings Mountain. The Uptown Central Business District is a nationally registered historic district by the US Department of the Interior. Shelby is also home to the annual American Legion Baseball World Series.

LINCOLN COUNTY

Lincoln County lies to the north of Gaston County. The county was formed in 1779 from the eastern part of then-Tryon County. It was named for Benjamin Lincoln, a general in the American Revolutionary War.

Lincoln County's transportation network includes Highways 321 and 16 – both interstate-grade divided highways that connect to Interstates 40, 85, 485 and 77. With easy access to multiple interstates, people and freight can get to destinations such as Atlanta, GA and Nashville, TN in less than a day.



Lincolnton was established in 1785 and is the only municipality in the county and serves as the county seat of Lincoln County. It was laid out with a central courthouse surrounded by a grid plan of streets, blocks, and lots with four primary streets—East Main, West Main, North Aspen and South Aspen—leading from the courthouse and dividing the town into quadrants.

TRANSPORTATION BOARDS

In North Carolina, each urban area's MPO is defined as an “umbrella” organization which includes all member local governments, NCDOT, USDOT, and any other providers of transportation services, such as airports, and transit operators. The MPO organizational structure has the following components:

MPO BOARD

The MPO Board is the decision-making policy board for the GCLMPO. The membership includes elected officials from each member local government, as well as the Division 12 representative from the North Carolina Board of Transportation. The MPO Board provides policy direction for the planning process, facilitates communication and coordination among the member jurisdictions and guides the development of a comprehensive multimodal transportation program for the urban area. The MPO Board directs the 3C process through its annual review and approval of the Unified Planning Work Program, the MPO’s Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program, and through review and approval of changes to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. MPO Board meetings are typically held bi-monthly on the fourth Thursday of the month beginning in January.

TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE (TCC)

The TCC is comprised of staff representatives of the various member governments, NCDOT, FHWA, and other agencies with an interest in transportation planning. The TCC has the responsibility of supervising and coordinating the 3C process by making technical recommendations to the MPO Board on decisions required pertaining to that process. TCC meetings are typically held bi-monthly on the second Wednesday of the month beginning in January.

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In addition to the federal and state required components, the GCLMPO implemented a participatory memorandum of understanding to be a party of the Charlotte Regional Alliance for Transportation, a regional organization that was established in 2001. Through CRAFT, neighboring transportation planning organizations within the Charlotte metropolitan bi-state region work together in a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive regional transportation planning process. Members of CRAFT include the Cabarrus-Rowan Metropolitan Planning Organization, Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization, Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization, the Rock Hill-Fort Mill Area Transportation Study, and Rocky River Rural Planning Organization. CRAFT's role is to enhance communication among jurisdictions, promote awareness of regional concerns, and to provide an educational forum that addresses significant common transportation issues.

Greater Charlotte Transportation Planning Organizations

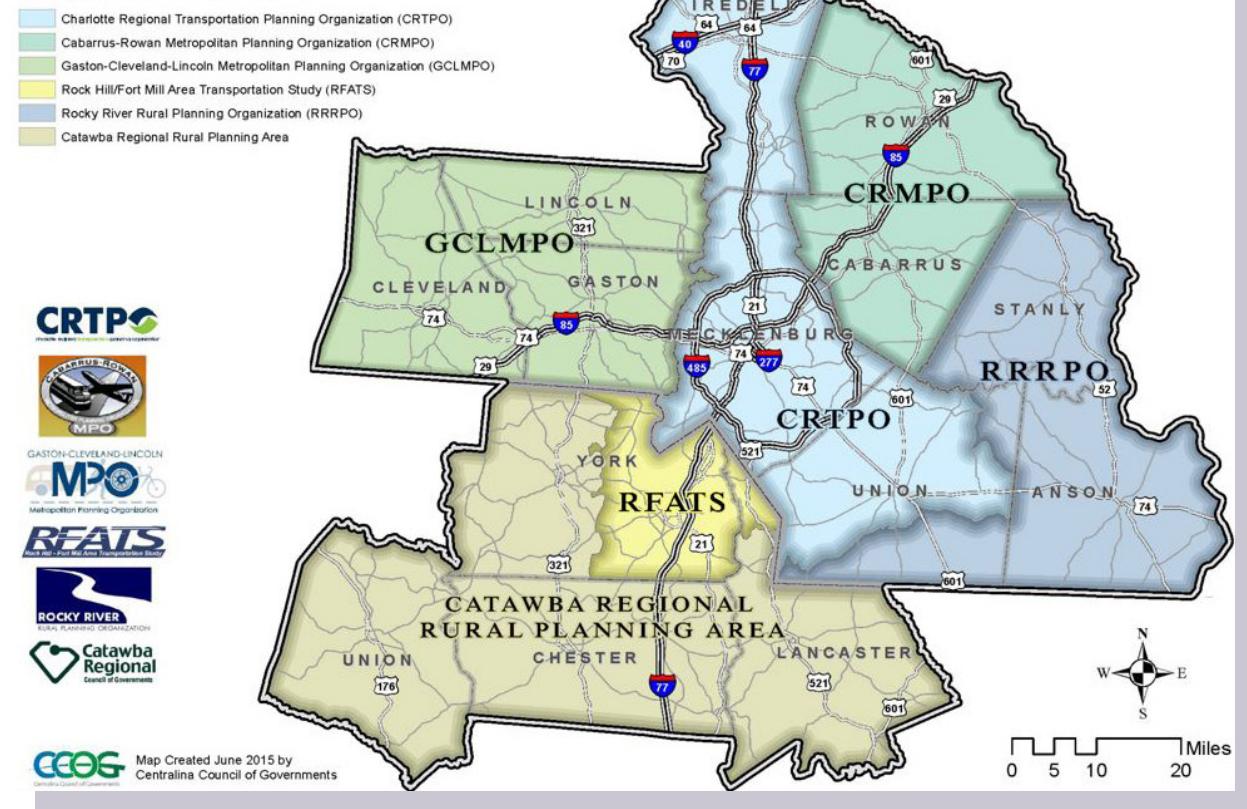


Figure 1-4: CRAFT Map

NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF TRANSPORTATION (NCBOT)

Besides local and regional involvement, there is a statewide Board that oversees the transportation infrastructure in North Carolina. In 1931, North Carolina took ownership of all county and local roads in order to construct, manage, maintain and plan for a transportation network. At that time, the state established the State Highway Commission to control and take responsibility as the governing body for the transportation network. In 1973, the name was changed to the NC Board of Transportation. Each Highway Division has a member on the Board to represent their area.

The Governor of the State of North Carolina appoints the BOT. The BOT adopts the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the ten-year investment program determining how state and federal transportation funds will be spent statewide. They set policies for state maintained and operated transportation systems regardless of mode. The BOT is comprised of nineteen members from across the state. Each member represents a specific transportation division or at-large area of interest and works with NCDOT staff members to make decisions about transportation priorities. The BOT meets monthly in Raleigh, typically the first Thursday of each month, with subcommittee meetings held the first Wednesday.

NCDOT DIVISION 12

The GCLMPO works very closely with NCDOT Division 12, which serves Alexander, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, and Lincoln counties. The Division serves as the NCDOT liaison for local transportation issues and works with the GCLMPO to fund transportation projects through the Strategic Transportation Investment (STI) law. Because funding regions do not always align with MPO boundaries, the Division serves as the common thread to ensure projects for the entire Division are appropriately funded. In addition, the Division maintains the state highway system, oversees the design and construction of all highway projects within the Division's boundary, administers smaller funding programs and works directly with local governments to fund projects through these funding programs, among other things.



MPO RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the MTP, there are other required documents that the MPO must follow: the annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The UPWP describes all of the tasks and projects that the MPO will embark on each fiscal year, including the amount of funds allocated to each work task. The TIP is established through NCDOT's Board of Transportation to allocate funds to highway, transit, congestion management, bicycle and pedestrian, transit and other transportation programs within immediate funding cycles. Required by North Carolina legislation, the CTP is also a multimodal transportation plan and represents a community's consensus on the future transportation system (including the existing system and improvements) needed to support anticipated growth and development over the next 30 years. The CTP is not fiscally constrained.

TITLE VI

It is the policy of GCLMPO, as a federal-aid recipient, to ensure that no person shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, Limited English Proficiency, sex, age, or disability, (and low-income, where applicable), be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any of our programs and activities, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Orders 12898 and 13166, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and other pertinent nondiscrimination authorities.

If any person feels that they have been subjected to discrimination, they have the right to file a complaint. Allegations of discrimination should be promptly reported to the GCLMPO's Title VI Coordinator.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

For a complete list of previous and current planning activities visit www.gclmopo.org.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the GCLMPO website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "MPO Members", "TCC Members", and "Meetings". On the far right of the top bar are icons for "Select Language" and a magnifying glass for search. Below the top bar, the logo for "GASTON-CLEVELAND-LINCOLN MPO" is displayed, featuring a stylized blue "MPO" with a car and bicycle icon. To the right of the logo is a photograph of a city street with people walking, cycling, and driving. The main menu bar below the logo includes links for "Home", "About Us", "Plans, Programs, & Studies" (which is highlighted in gold), "Transportation Projects", "How to Get Involved", "Resources", "Links", and "Contact". A search icon is also part of the main menu. To the left of the main menu is a sidebar with a white van image and a list of links: "Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)", "Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ)", "Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)", "NCDOT Prioritization", "Performance-Based Planning & Programming" (which is highlighted in gold), "Public Involvement Plan (PIP)", "Roadway Functional Designs", "Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)", "Transportation Plans and Studies", "Welcome", and "Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)". To the right of the main menu is a map showing the three county area (Lincoln, Cleveland, Gaston) with various transportation infrastructure and land use patterns. A small North arrow is located in the top right corner of the map area.

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GCLMPO MTP CHAPTER TWO

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