



# Florence Area Transportation Study

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*Metropolitan Planning Organization*

*Transportation Improvement Program Narrative*

## **Purpose**

The Florence Area Transportation Study (FLATS) is the designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) responsible for carrying out the transportation planning process for the urban Florence area. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) regulations require an MPO to develop a cooperative, comprehensive and continuing transportation planning process in order to qualify for federal funding of transportation projects. The FLATS MPO study area boundary (Figure 1) includes the City of Florence, Town of Quinby, City of Darlington, Town of Timmonsville and surrounding unincorporated areas of Florence and Darlington counties.

The three major work products developed by the FLATS MPO are to 1) a Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which is, at a minimum, a 25-year transportation vision for the planning area; 2) a financially constrained Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is the agreed upon list of specific projects for which federal funds are anticipated; and 3) a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which identifies in a single document the annual transportation planning activities that are to be undertaken in support of goals, objectives and actions established in the Long Range Transportation Plan. Opportunities for public input are advertised and public comments are actively solicited for each of these planning documents.

## **Structure**

The FLATS planning process is guided by a Policy Committee that is comprised of nine (9) voting members. This committee is comprised of elected and appointed officials representing local, state and federal governments or agencies having interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation planning. The Policy Committee is the official decision making body that establishes policies for the overall conduct of the FLATS, adopts plans and programs and approves study recommendations.

The Study Team, which is established by the Policy Committee, also participates in the planning process. They provide a forum for discussion and resolution of relevant issues and monitors technical activities including the development of the UPWP and the TIP for recommendation to the Policy Committee. In addition, the Study Team directs and considers for recommendation

to the Policy Committee all major studies and planning activities. The Study Team is made up of city and county staff, representatives from each jurisdiction within the FLATS urbanized area, along with representatives from the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and FHWA.

## **Amendment Process**

The TIP is the primary document that reflects all regionally significant and federally funded transportation projects. Although the TIP periodically undergoes a comprehensive update every four years, it is also amended and/or revised on a more frequent basis whenever a new project is added or a revision is requested in order to reflect changes in the funding of existing projects.

The process for amending the TIP involves staff evaluation, agency coordination, public review of the proposed action, and then approval by the MPO's Policy Committee. When these actions are completed, the amended document is then submitted to the South Carolina Department of Transportation for further evaluation and approval to be incorporated into the State Transportation Improvement Program.

It is important to note that not all changes to the TIP are approached in the same manner. For example, when a decision is made to commit new federal funds to support a project, it is treated as a TIP Amendment; and as such, is a more formal process that involves both staff evaluation and a public review period. These steps are established so that adequate time and opportunity is available to provide input as well as suggestions before such an action is finalized.

However, when a revision to the TIP is requested – which typically involves administrative and/or supporting programmatic changes, such actions are approached more as minor updates or corrections (i.e., changes in the schedule of a project; combining or separating phases of work to improve implementation, etc.). With this in mind, staff evaluation and coordination continues to be a part of this action, but a separate public review period is not generally involved, as this action was completed when funding was originally considered.

## **Project Ranking Process/Criteria (ACT 114)**

In 2007, the South Carolina Legislature established a statewide project priority list for all federal aid projects proposed for inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). It should be noted that all federally funded projects and/or categories of projects are required to be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) in order to be eligible for federal funds (Title 23 and Title 49, Chapter 53 of the United States Code).



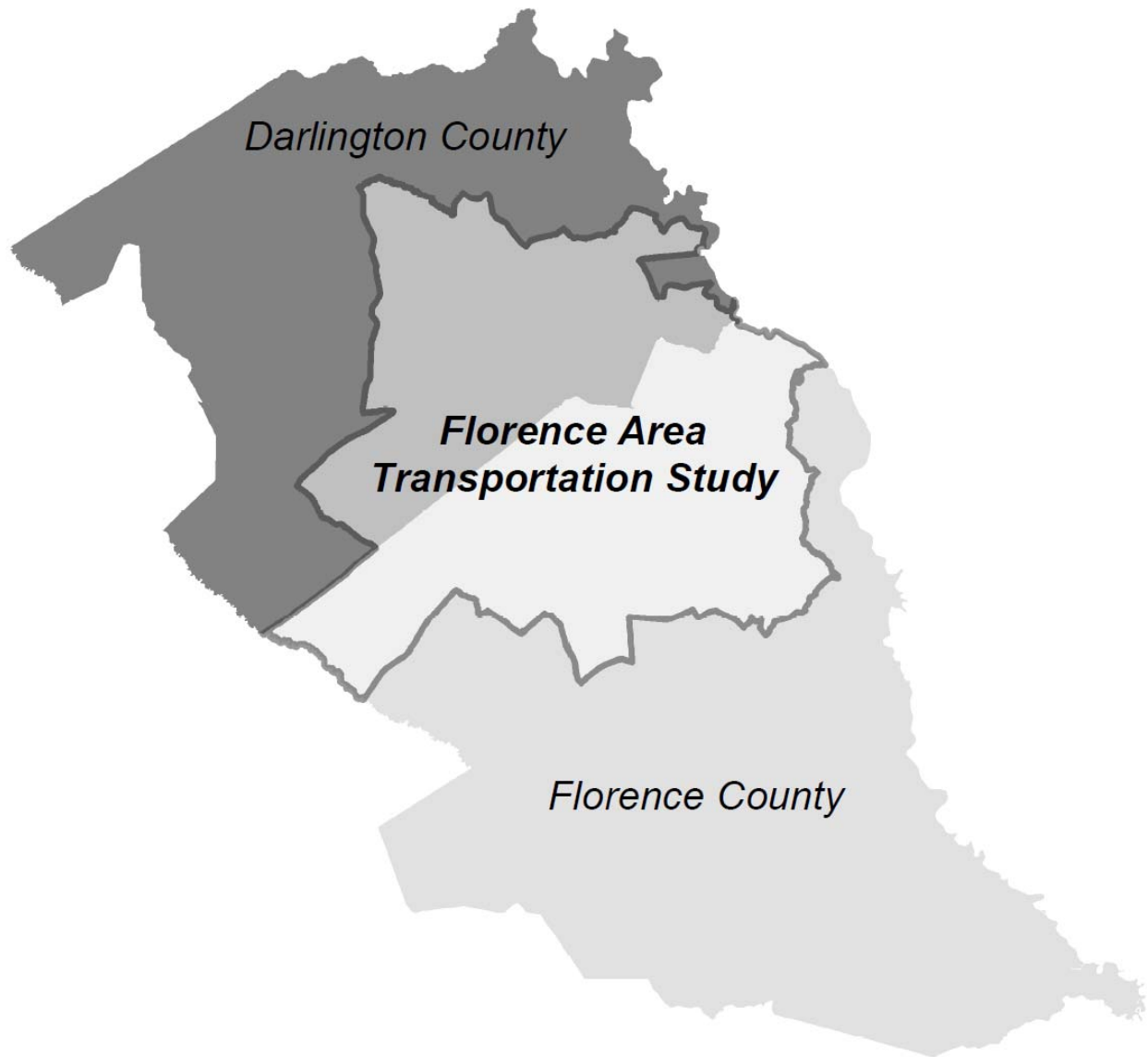
As a part of this action, the State Highway Engineer developed a ranking process for applying uniform and objective criteria applicable to all projects, except State Infrastructure Bank, local option sales tax projects and projects funded solely by C-Funds (County Funds). This ranking process is designed to serve as a useful decision-making tool to improve the overall transportation planning process.

Specifically, there are nine (9) evaluation points each project (road widening, intersection improvements and new alignments) must undergo prior to inclusion in the TIP: (1) financial liability; (2) public safety; (3) potential for economic development; (4) traffic volume and congestion; (5) truck traffic; (6) pavement quality index; (7) environmental impact; (8) alternative transportation solutions; (9) consistency with local land use.

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Figure 1. FLATS Study Area Boundary



## Long Range Transportation Plan

The Moving Ahead for Progress In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21), Federal Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill, mandates that MPO's have a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) which includes environmental, social and intermodal considerations. The LRTP must also provide a financially constrained 25-year vision of future transportation improvements.

The FLATS 2035LRTP was adopted in July 2012 and is required to be updated on a five year interval. Although this update is significant, the five year updates are focused on changing conditions and new planning principals. A transportation related project must be highlighted in the LRTP in order for Guideshare monies to be allocated towards it. As these funds are available, Guideshare projects (explained in the next section) are proposed and upon approval are listed in the TIP.

The process for undertaking major transportation studies, identifying short and long term needs and targeting major growth areas in the FLATS area for intensive study will strengthen subsequent programming for the TIP. The entire planning/programming/implementation process is specific and involves input by federal, state and local governments and the public in the early planning stages, and carries through into TIP programming.

## Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)

The 2014-2019 TIP for FLATS is a six year program of transportation capital projects together with a seven year estimate of transit capital and maintenance requirements. While the TIP is usually approved biennially, the document may be amended throughout the year. MAP-21, as well as the Metropolitan Planning Regulations mandates that a TIP comprise the following:

1. Identify transportation improvement projects recommended for advancement during the program years. The projects required are those located within the study area and receiving Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds;
2. Identify the criteria and process for prioritization for inclusion of projects in the TIP and any changes for past TIPs;
3. Groups improvements of similar urgency and anticipated staging into appropriate staging periods;
4. Include realistic estimates of total costs and revenue for the program period;

5. Include a discussion of how improvements recommended for the LRTP and congestion model were merged into the plan;
6. List major projects from previous TIPs that were implemented and identified and major delays in planning implementation.

The TIP may also include regional highway projects that are being implemented by the state, city and county for which federal funding is requested.

Six pieces of federal legislation significantly affect this TIP and the planning and programming of transportation projects. These laws include ISTEA, TEA-21, SAFETEA-LU, MAP-21, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and potentially the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA).

The majority of the projects in the TIP are aimed at increasing the efficiency and safety of the existing transportation systems rather than construction of new facilities. This, in part, reflects:

1. Transportation policies to implement low cost alternatives where feasible;
2. The limited funding resources available to meet the costs of new construction and improvements;
3. The increased concerns over congestion, the environment especially air quality;
4. The enhancement of freight movement and economic development;
5. The interest of bicyclists and pedestrians and public transit, and
6. The preservation of neighborhoods.

The TIP contains all Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration transportation projects in the Florence metropolitan area, which are expected to utilize federal, state and local funds within the next seven years.

### **Guideshare Funds**

Funds for road improvements are allocated by SCDOT through the Guideshare Program. The S.C. Highway Commission sets aside a specific amount of FHWA and SCDOT funds each year and distributes the money among the state's eleven MPOs and Councils of Governments (COGs) based on population and vehicle miles of travel in each region. The Guideshare sets the annual budget for highway improvements within each MPO or COG, and total project costs in any given year normally cannot exceed the Guideshare apportionment (a fiscally constrained TIP).

Road improvements may include constructing new roads, adding traffic lanes to existing roads, constructing paved shoulders, installing traffic signals, constructing sidewalks or bike lanes, or making safety improvements. However, minor maintenance activities such as resurfacing and

patching potholes are not funded through FLATS, but are handled directly by SCDOT or City maintenance units.

FLATS apportionment from the Guideshare Program is currently \$2.487 million annually. Of this amount, an average of \$900,000 per year is devoted to debt service. SCDOT developed an innovative financing plan in 1998 to accelerate construction of many projects that were built between 1998 and 2007, and issued bonds to fund the plan.

### **Transportation Alternatives Program**

In 1991, Congress passed a landmark transportation bill, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). The Transportation Enhancement Program, created by ISTEA which continued with SAFETEA-LU allocated a specific amount of annual funds to the MPO to be utilized for transportation enhancement projects. This program funded projects that had frequently been left out of highway improvement plans. Generally, the SCDOT Commission supported the use of these funds for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, public transit enhancements, and landscaping and scenic beautification of transportation facilities and rail corridor preservation.

The Transportation Enhancement Program has been eliminated under MAP-21 and replaced with The Transportation Alternatives Program. The Transportation Alternatives Program is a statewide competitive grant program. The eligible project categories authorized in this program and by the SCDOT Commission are pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, streetscaping projects and enhancement of public transit services if applicable. Exclusive landscaping and scenic beautification projects are not allowed under this program.

### **Federal Transit Administration**

MAP-21 provides the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) a specific authorization level amount annually for transit programs. MAP-21 expands several important goals of the Department of Transportation including safety, state of good repair, performance and program efficiency. MAP-21 grants the FTA significant new authority to strengthen the safety of public transportation systems throughout the United States. MAP-21 also puts new emphasis on restoring and replacing the Nation's aging public transportation infrastructure by establishing a new State of Good Repair formula program (5326) and new asset management requirements. The local transit agency for the FLATS area is the Pee Dee Regional Transit Authority (PDRTA). As the PDRTA is awarded FTA grants through various formula programs, before these funds are allocated, this information is required to be included in the FLATS TIP before inclusion in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). The formula programs that are included in the FLATS TIP for the PDRTA are as follows:



1. FTA Section 5307 Small Urban Program
2. FTA Section 5308 Clean Fuels Grant Program
3. FTA Section 5309 Capital Investment Program
4. FTA Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute Program
5. FTA Section 5317 New Freedom
6. FTA Section 5326 State of Good Repair

Additional public transportation systems within the FLATS Study Area Boundary that are awarded FTA grants are also listed in the Federal Transit Administration section of the FLATS TIP. The Florence Senior Citizens Association, the Florence County Disabilities and Special Needs Board and the Darlington County Council on Aging are eligible for grants under the FTA Section 5310 Special Needs of Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities formula program. The Darlington County Council on Aging is also eligible for grants under the FTA Section 5317 New Freedom formula program.

The FLATS program supports each of the above referenced public transportation systems and provide any information or data necessary to assist in their efforts to service their clients.

## Capital Sales Tax Projects

In 1997, as a result of a local Referendum, Florence County implemented a one-cent sales tax program to improve the infrastructure County roadways. The Referendum called for a combination of the one-cent sales tax and the South Carolina Transportation Infrastructure Bank's (SCTIB) match 2:1. The local tax contribution to this program was anticipated to generate approximately \$148M, with the SCTIB's initial allocation of \$250M to match funds raised by Florence County. Fourteen projects were selected and prioritized by the residents of Florence County, with hopes that the first six projects could be completed as a result of this Referendum.

In 2013, it became apparent that the total funds the program would generate potentially would only be able to fund the first five projects. The SCTIB allocated an additional approximate \$90M to the program to hopefully be able to complete all six projects. This section is listed in the TIP to inform the public as the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) allocates funds for preliminary engineering, right-of-way and construction.





## Projects Exempt From Guideshare

Projects within the FLATS Study Area Boundary and Pee Dee area that are funded as a result of other State and Federal programs are listed in this section of the TIP. Funding categories currently listed for projects in this section are as follows:

1. Interstate Maintenance (IM)
2. SAFETEA-LU Earmarks
3. Apportionment Earmarks
4. ARRA
5. Special Apportionments
6. Federal-Aid (STP)
7. Safety
8. Pave/Reconstruction

## Title VI Compliance

Investment made in the TIP must be consistent with federal Title VI requirements. Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, income and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. Public outreach to and involvement of individuals in low income and minority communities covered under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and subsequent Civil Right Restoration Act, and series of federal statutes enacted pertaining to environmental justice, are critical to regional planning and programming decisions. The fundamental principles of environmental justice include:

1. Avoiding, minimizing or mitigating disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations;
2. Ensuring full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and
3. Preventing the denial, reduction or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income communities.

The decision process by which new projects are selected for inclusion in the TIP must consider equitable solicitation and selection of project candidates in accordance with federal Title VI requirements.

## Financial Constraint

The TIP must be financially constrained, meaning that the amount of funding programmed must not exceed the amount of funding estimated to be available. In developing the 2014-2019 TIP, FLATS has taken into consideration the transportation funding revenues anticipated during the six years of the TIP (federal FY 2014-2015 through federal FY 2018-2019), and has found the 2014-2019 TIP to be financially constrained.

Should an action occur in the future that significantly affects the funding of programmed projects in the TIP, FLATS along with its partners and the project sponsors would review the impact to the TIP. Appropriate action, such as potential amendments to the TIP, to address the funding of affected projects would be taken at that time.

## TIP Period

The number of years of programming included in the TIP varies by funding source. All six years of programming in the 2014-2019 TIP, fiscal years (FYs) 2014-2015 through 2018-2019, will be officially adopted by the state as part of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan. In the case of some projects, carryover funding from prior TIPs is included and noted as “Previous STIPS.” In addition, estimated funding for projects in future years is included for information under the heading “Remaining Cost (2020+).”

## Public Participation Process

Engaging the public often and early in the planning process is critical to the success of any transportation plan or program in addition to being required by various federal and state laws. Such legislation reinforces the necessity of public involvement, calling on MPOs such as FLATS to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation and other stakeholders with a reasonable opportunity to participate and comment on plans and programs.

## How the TIP relates to Federal and State Transportation Programs

Just as each MPO is required to develop a TIP, each state is required to compile a Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) as a requirement of federal regulations. The STIP includes all federally funded transportation projects from throughout the state. In South Carolina, MPO TIPs are included in the STIP once approved by the relevant metropolitan planning organization (i.e. FLATS in the Florence Area) and after the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) make their required

financial constraint and air quality findings (as necessary). Projects must be in the STIP before funding authorities, such as FTA, FHWA, or the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) can obligate or commit monies to contracts and therefore, before sponsors can actually spend any of these funds.

## Conclusion

The proactive cooperation of the FLATS committee members, membership governments and staff will continue to contribute to better transportation infrastructure and mobility in the Florence area. With the completion of the projects contained in the TIP and those projects yet to come, the region can look forward to improved connectivity between modes, improved air quality and mobility as well as improved infrastructure and safety.

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**Transportation Improvement Program Narrative approved by FLATS  
Policy Committee: August 26, 2013**

