**FLORENCE AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (FLATS)**
**POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**
May 14, 2025
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**SEVEN VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mayor T. Ashby Gregg (Quinby), Mayor Lethonia Barnes (City of Florence), Mayor Pro Tem George Jebaily (City of Florence), FLATS Chairman, Representative Phillip Lowe (District 60), Senator Mike Reichenbach (District 31), Florence County Council Chairman C. William Schofield, SCDOT Highway Commissioner Sel Hemingway, Jr. (District 7).

**TWO VOTING MEMBERS ABSENT:** Vice-Chairman Rev. Waymon Mumford, Mr. Ronald Burley (Florence CTC)

**ONE NON-VOTING MEMBER PRESENT:** Shawn Brashear (Florence Co.)

**THREE STUDY TEAM MEMBERS PRESENT:** Brian Dix (SCDOT), Jim Walden (SCDOT), Yiyun Zou (SCDOT)

**THREE FLATS STAFF PRESENT:** Ethan Brown, Caroline Dunlap, Holly Smith

**FIVE OTHERS PRESENT:** Christina Lewis (AECOM), Jeselle Toledo (Flo. Co. Planning), Cierra McFadden (Flo. Co. Planning), Patrick Ward (Florence Co. IT Staff)

**Call to Order**
Chairman Lowe called the meeting to order at 10:30am, welcomed everyone, and a quorum was confirmed.

**Introduction of New Policy Committee Members**
Chairman Lowe began the meeting by welcoming the newest Policy Committee Member, Mr. Sel Hemingway, Jr., who is the recently appointed SCDOT Highway Commissioner for District 7. Mr. Hemingway briefly described his background stating that he is from the Georgetown Area, his family owns Hemingway Ford and he previously served as the Administrator for Georgetown County for a number of years. Mr. Hemingway explained that he was very happy to be a part of the FLATS Policy Committee and was looking forward to his time here on the Policy Committee. After Mr. Hemingway's introduction, Chairman Lowe initiated a round-robin for all of the sitting Policy Committee members to introduce themselves. After introductions, Chairman Lowe explained to Commissioner Hemingway that the Policy Committee was glad to have him on board.

**Approval of February 21, 2025 Meeting Minutes**
The next order of business was to approve the previous meeting's minutes from February 21, 2025. Chairman Lowe first ensured that everyone had been able to read and review the minutes and with confirmation from the group, Mr. George Jebaily moved to accept and approve the February 21, 2025 meeting minutes. Senator Mike Reichenbach

seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion to approve the February 21, 2025 meeting minutes as presented passed unanimously.

**FY26-FY27 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

Chairman Lowe next introduced FLATS Staff, Mr. Ethan Brown up to the podium to present the updated FY26-FY27 FLATS Unified Planning Work Program, colloquially known as the UPWP. Mr. Brown stated to the Committee that, if approved, the newly updated FY26-FY27 FLATS UPWP would replace the current FY24-FY25 FLATS UPWP. Mr. Brown first explained what the UPWP is and what purpose it serves for the FLATS MPO. He described it as a federally-regulated and federally-funded statement of work for the MPO spanning over the next 1-2 years.

He explained the federal funds received for executing the program originate from the FHWA and the FTA and are then distributed to the SCDOT where they are combined into Metro PL funds. Once combined at the State level, it is the State DOT's job to distribute the funds to all legally recognized MPOs and COGs within the State based on a mutually agreed upon formula that is finalized and approved by the FHWA and FTA. He further explained the funding amounts designated for and listed in the UPWP were solely to be used to perform MPO Planning tasks and activities and furthermore, in order for any MPO planning tasks and activities to be reimbursed at 80% with these allocated Metro PL Funds, they must first be identified/listed within the UPWP.



Mr. Brown continued his presentation by explaining to the Policy Committee what changes had been made to the newly updated FY26-FY27 Program. He first noted the slightly tweaked work category updates using an example from the Mapping category in the FY24-FY25 UPWP that changed to Maps and Applications in the FY26-FY27 UPWP. He explained the new category helped better describe the work tasks identified and stated that this was the case for essentially all of the identified updates made to the Work Category titles. Mr. Brown then explained to the committee that there were several cosmetic and layout updates also made in the new UPWP with only a handful of modifications that were actually made to the content in order to account for updated workflows and/or regulations. He presented an example of the cosmetic/layout updates by showing a side-by-side comparison of a page from the FY24-FY25 UPWP against the FY26-FY27 UPWP.

Mr. Brown then explained the largest update, content-wise, was concerning Work Category #8 which was previously titled, "I-95/SC 327 Planning Study", and which was updated to, "2050 Long Range Transportation Plan Development (LRTP)". He explained to the Committee that for this updated category, FLATS MPO Staff intended to hire a third-party consultant to assist with the development and creation of the 2050 LRTP, which is required to be reviewed and updated every five years by the MPO. Mr. Brown further explained to the Committee that the LRTP was essentially a long-range planning guide for the MPO with a 20-year planning horizon. He described the timeline of anticipated activities for the 2050 LRTP development, stating that January 2026 would mark when FLATS Staff would advertise a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and the selection process would follow directly after this event and take roughly six months to complete resulting in the actual work towards updating the LRTP projected to begin around July of 2026. This projected start date, Mr. Brown explained, would provide the MPO (in conjunction with the hired consultant) an entire calendar year to update the LRTP and present it before the Committee in July of 2027 for approval, thus satisfying the five-year federal update regulations. Mr. Brown went on to inform the Policy Committee member's to anticipate individual outreach sessions during the updating process in order for the MPO to collect and receive feedback from each member regarding any anticipated accomplishments or other transportation updates/expectations. Mr. Brown explained to the Committee that this plan was the roadmap for the MPO for the next five years, noting that it would also need to be a fiscally constrained document. Mr. Brown also mentioned to the Policy Committee that the 2050 LRTP would include corridor identification data that is part of the Regional Mobility Program and the MPO Staff would collaborate with SCDOT Staff to include this data in the Plan as well.

To conclude his presentation, Mr. Brown discussed the annual allocated amount's for FLATS MPO planning activities that SCDOT had provided, via a memo dated March 3, 2025, to FLATS Staff. Mr. Brown stated that this was the funding for the UPWP document's tasks and activities. He also explained to the Board what projects were in process that haven't been deducted from the total amount. He explained the carryover balance of $493,267.04 was from FY2024, but the I-95/SC 327 Planning Study ($300,000) had not yet been deducted and the 2050 LRTP update was expected to deduct $250,000 but the FY2025 Allocation was $263,854.73, resulting in a current total balance of $757,121.77 in federal funds available to the FLATS MPO for anticipated planning activities during the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Brown further explained that there was a 20% local match from Florence County in the amount of $183,602.03 and combined with the federal funds it made a grand total of $940,723.80 available for MPO Planning activities during the upcoming fiscal year. He also noted that Flats Staff time is broken down as percentages in each work category and historically Staff doesn't utilize the entirety of these balances and usually like to have a small amount of carryover to be able to fund impromptu studies or plans that may come up during any given year.

At this time there was a question from Senator Reichenbach to Mr. Brown inquiring about the listed dollar amount Staff expected to carry over to the next fiscal year and how it is arrived at. Mr. Brown explained to Senator Reichenbach that Staff doesn't always know what the number will be because the report is always a year behind and special projects may come up that Staff may not anticipate in the year prior. He explained the current carryover didn't reflect the deduction of the $300,000 allocated for the I-95/327 Planning Study but Mr. Brown explained that he personally liked to see around $200,000 carried over every year. Senator Reichenbach then asked if the carryover funds are held in an interest-bearing account. Mr. Brown said no and explained the process as he understood it, describing SCDOT holding the funds into one account and distributing them as they are requested from the MPO. Senator Reichenbach gave a rebuttal, stating that six figures was a large amount of money to hold on to without earning interest on it. At this time, Mr. Jim Walden, an SCDOT Regional Planning Manager approached the podium and explained that Metro PL funding is a reimbursement fund and neither SCDOT or FLATS receives funds until the reimbursement is actually requested. He further explained that it was not like a grant program where a lump sum is distributed and the money is available, but as the MPO requests the reimbursements each Fiscal Quarter to the State, the State will then send the MPO the reimbursement amount and turn around and request reimbursement from FHWA. He also said that SCDOT prioritizes using the oldest carryover funds first due to these funds lapsing three years from the first year of allocation. At that explanation, Senator Reichenbach's question was answered and Mr. Walden and Mr. Brown returned to their seats. Chairman Lowe reiterated to everyone that the funding listed in the UPWP was not for roads but instead for MPO planning and administrative tasks. There were no further questions and no further discussions.

**FY26-FY27 UPWP ADOPTION – MOTION**

Chairman Lowe then called for a motion to which Mr. Schofield made a motion to adopt the FY26-FY27 UPWP as presented. Senator Reichenbach seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion to adopt the FY26-FY27 UPWP passed unanimously.

**Transportation Agency Updates**

At this time, Chairman Lowe moved to the transportation agency updates. The first to provide an update was Mayor T. Ashby Gregg, who shared information on behalf of the Florence CTC. Mayor Gregg stated the CTC held a meeting the night before and went through about seven million dollars in roughly two minutes to improve about 7-8 roads and they will adjourn till next year when they receive more money from the State. He noted they spend everything they can get their hands on, and they just don't ever seem to get enough. Senator Reichenbach asked Mayor Gregg how the CTC prioritizes the road improvements to which Mayor Gregg explained that SCDOT is the primary handler of that process, but he went further to explain that the CTC will usually get requests from small municipalities and SCDOT will investigate the roads to determine what the issues are and what improvements should be made and SCDOT will prioritize them. Chairman Lowe stated that SCDOT Staff was in attendance and Mr. Brian Dix could probably provide information and looked to Mr. Dix as he briefly summarized his general idea of SCDOT's prioritization process. Mr. Brian Dix, a Program Manager, stood up and concurred with Chairman Lowe stating they (SCDOT) observed several factors to determine which roads received improvements first but they also coordinated the work with other federal road improvement dollars from federal funds available. Chairman Lowe further explained that the CTCs receive their funding from the SC gas tax and the CTC should roughly get a base (every year) of about four million and he noted that over the past three years the State has maxed out the funding to ten million distributed to each CTC, which has helped clear out the CTC's backlog. He said, however, that unless there was "new money" available this year, the CTC would most likely only receive the base amount of four million to allocate to road improvement projects. There were no further questions or comments.

The second transportation update came from Mr. Brian Dix, a Program Manager with SCDOT overseeing the FLATS Study Area. Mr. Dix covered several projects that were in various stages of construction from within the FLATS Study Area. He first discussed the newest project, an intersection improvement at SC51 and US 52, which the FLATS Committee approved this past February. He explained that SCDOT was in the process of getting the funds authorized and starting the procurement process. He also noted that they were excited to get this project started; noting that it was going to be a complex project and hopefully help resolve transportation issues currently occurring at that particular intersection. Mr. Schofield stated to Mr. Dix that he was not in attendance at the last meeting (where programming for this project was approved) and was inquiring on which of the two designs had been approved to which Mr. Dix explained the designs from the Feasibility study that were presented with the item during the last meeting were purely conceptual and more than likely there would be other designs/alternatives proposed as the project moves forward and goes through the NEPA Process. Mr. Schofield stated he owned property at the intersection and explained that this was a primary corridor for many people coming to Florence and that he was excited for the coming project/improvements. Chairman Lowe then asked Mr. Dix about an unrelated issue involving permits being held up at the SCDOT District Offices, he asked how he could help resolve the backlog. Mr. Dix explained he was not directly involved in that process, but he could certainly reach out to determine what the problems were and try to help resolve them. Chairman Lowe explained that if there was anything he or any other Committee member could do to please let him know. Mr. Dix continued his presentation with improvements currently underway on Holly Circle. He stated that the project was moving along as planned and everything was going well. Mr. Dix then discussed some Pee Dee COG projects that were just within the FLATS Study Area, such as the intersection improvement at McIver Rd and Old Florence Rd; he explained they were proposing a roundabout at this location to alleviate issues experienced by truck traffic/CSX equipment. The next Pee Dee COG Project he presented was another intersection improvement at E National Cemetery Rd and Paper Mill Rd. He stated that SCDOT was finished with preliminary engineering and ROW acquisition, and they were ready to advertise and hoped to begin construction in September. This concluded his update. There was a question from Senator Reichenbach inquiring about the status of Alligator Rd to which Mr. Dix stated it was completed last November but there will still a few punch list items that were being performed out there. Senator Reichenbach mentioned to Mr. Dix that he had been getting a few calls from folks out in this area regarding that project and he surmised those last few punch list items being worked on were most likely the culprit. There were no further questions or comments from the Committee.

**Public Comments/Other Business**

At the conclusion of the transportation agency updates, Chairman Lowe asked if anyone had signed up from the public to speak to the Policy Committee. Mr. Brown stated that no one from the public had signed up to speak to the Committee and there were no further business items to discuss.

**Adjournment**

At this time, Chairman Lowe thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and called for a motion to adjourn. All were in favor and the motion to adjourn passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:04 AM.