GHMPO

Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization

REVIEW OF CURRENT PLANS' VISIONS, GOALS, POLCIES AND OBJECTIVES

Greater Hickory MPO

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Contents

LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN: Goals and Policies

To guide its decision making, the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Organization (GHMPO) has developed goals and policies from transportation guidelines at the local, state and federal levels. The GHMPO will implement these goals to provide the citizens of the GHMPO Planning Area with a safe and efficient transportation system for the movement of people and goods. These regional transportation options provide mobility choices, protect the environment and improve the quality of life within Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.

This Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) incorporates a wide range of federally mandated analyses and process steps. The most recent federal transportation legislation, known as MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century), requires the plan to address eight planning factors, analyze future conditions

on the transportation system, look at air quality and include a fiscally constrained financial plan. The eight planning factors listed below overlap with the key goals of the plan.

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity and efficiency.
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility for people and freight.
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, people and freight.
7. Promote efficient system management and operation.
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Integrated Multi-modal Transportation Network

Goal: Develop a high-quality, fully-integrated, multi-modal transportation network that provides transportation options that meet the short and long term transportation needs of residents and businesses in the Greater Hickory Area.

Policies:
- Provide an integrated system of multi-modal transportation facilities in the GHMPO Planning Area.
- Require improvements to be integrated with other transportation modes where practical to assure the opportunity for both multi-modal and inter-modal connectivity and efficiency.
- Promote land use policies and infrastructure projects that support transit, walking, bicycling, rail and air in local and regional plans.
- Create street patterns that encourage safe pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel, provide access to public transportation and ensure connectivity.
- Improve mobility by planning facilities that enhance interconnectivity and accessibility to major regional destinations and activity centers.

Street and Highway Network

Goal: Designing streets and highways that are safe and efficient for motor vehicle drivers while accommodating public transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Policies:
- Provide a street and highway network that will serve the population now and in the future.
- Encourage ways to improving and enhance the existing regional road system along with building new facilities.
- Enhance mobility by improving the connectivity of the existing street network.
- Encourage plans to include policies for access management on existing and proposed streets.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation

Goal: Create a safe effective bikeway, sidewalk, and greenway network that is integrated with the transportation system, links together resources and destinations, provides an alternative to automobile travel, increases recreational opportunities, advances healthy lifestyles and enhances the quality of life in the Greater Hickory Area.

Policies:

- Provide a pedestrian and bicycle system that allows greater access to and links between public transit, schools, parks and other major activity centers.
- Develop a system that integrates pedestrian and bicycle modes of travel with motor vehicle transportation, and connects inter-regionally with existing bike and pedestrian infrastructure (such as the Carolina Thread Trail).
- Increase pedestrian and bicycling activity for both transportation and recreation to promote healthy, active living and improve public health.
- Promote, through public education, the economic, environmental, and health benefits of walking and biking as practical modes of transportation.
- Partner with local, county, and state agencies to encourage bicycling and pedestrian activities across different populations.
- Recommend that new or widened roadways are designed to include the land on each side of the road with sufficient width to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian facilities safely.
- Encourage the delineation of safe pedestrian ways and bicycle routes, emphasizing separation from vehicular areas when possible.
- Recommend the installation of signage when bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities are integrated with roadways.

Public Transportation

Goal: Enhance and expand public transportation into a system of buses, vanpools, car pools and special population transit services that is efficient, convenient, safe and cost effective. Increase transit use through service enhancement, improved pedestrian and bicycle linkages, and transit supportive development patterns.

Policies:
- Promote, improve and expand transit services.
- Promote a convenient, accessible and affordable public transportation system, provided by public and private operators, that enhances mobility and economic development.
- Assist the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA) in identifying public and private methods of funding to enhance and expand transit service.
- Support the enlargement of the service area and increasing the frequency of transit service.
- Minimize use of fossil fuels and vehicle operating costs by considering alternative fuels and alternative-fueled vehicles.
- Develop and implement a new Regional Transit Plan.
- Enhance the visibility and public image of the WPRTA and the services it provides.
- Encourage development of a regional park and ride system for cars and bicycles to support transit services and encourage ridesharing.
- Support a bus/van service to major population and employment centers to reduce dependence on and as an alternative to Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOV).
- Promote a "Bikes on Buses" program for all public transit routes.

Rail and Air Transportation

Goal: Support policies and development patterns to make the establishment of a regional commuter rail service. In addition, support efforts to improve air service, promote economic development and provide transportation access to Hickory Regional Airport and Foothills Regional Airport.

Policies:
- Promote rail and air passenger transportation opportunities.
- Maximize the use of rail and air in the transportation of freight.
- Create an efficient passenger rail service to and from the GHMPO Planning Area.
- Support the Hickory Regional Airport and the Foothills Regional Airport's long range plans.
- Continue to support the development of passenger rail service for the Western North Carolina Rail Corridor.
- Develop an inter-modal rail program that would move goods throughout the region in a more efficient manner.

Freight Transportation

Goal: Provide a safe and efficient freight transportation system that improves existing levels of freight access and mobility, supports the region's economic wellbeing and minimizes negative impacts on sensitive land-uses and the environment.

Policies:
- Create a safe, efficient and coordinated transportation system for the movement of goods within and through the GHMPO Planning Area.
- Consider congestion on heavily-traveled truck routes when developing plans.
- Establish intermodal operations and facilities among transportation modes, focusing on mobility and access.
- Establish and designate truck routes consistent with federal, state and local regulations and minimize exposure to neighborhoods, historic sites and cultural resources.
- Develop streets and highways that are accessible and compatible with freight transportation.

Land-Use and Transportation Coordination

Goal: Promote integrated development patterns and transportation networks that work together to support mixed-use, pedestrian friendly communities and active modes of transportation. Land-use and transportation decisions should be consistent and mutually reinforce each other.

Policies
- Develop a transportation plan that is integrated with local land use plans and development policies.
- Promote land use patterns that combine a mixture of uses where practical.
- Identify and recommend land use patterns and development policies that increase overall mobility.
- Support local government policies that require right-of-way dedication, payments in lieu of construction and/or installation of transportation improvements when warranted for new development.

- Evaluate the impact of land use on the transportation system when development plans are adopted and policy decisions are made and, likewise, evaluate the changes in land use brought about by the expansion and construction of transportation facilities.
- Improve and support transportation efficiency through compact, mixed-use, transit and pedestrian-friendly development.
- Encourage regional and local land use plans to include policies for access management.
- Promote coordinated multi-jurisdictional and intergovernmental land use plans.

Human and Natural Environment

Goal: Develop a multi-modal transportation system which provides access and mobility to all residents, while protecting the public health, natural environment, cultural resources and social systems.

Policies:
- Develop a transportation system that preserves and coexists with the natural and built environment and minimizes pollution.
- Promote better integration of land use and transportation planning to minimize pollution.
- Support transportation projects that preserve and complement the MPO planning area's natural features.
- Identify and protect environmentally sensitive, archaeological, historic and culturally valuable areas early in the transportation planning process.
- Develop and support a transportation system and programs that maintain or improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gases, ozone, particulate matter and other pollutants.
- Design transportation facilities that minimize transmission of traffic noise and dust to surrounding properties.

Environmental Justice

Goal: Identify and address the needs of minority and low-income populations in making transportation decisions.

Policies:
- Ensure environmental justice by providing transportation facilities that do not disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations.
- Enhance the MPO's analytical capabilities to ensure that the long-range transportation plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) comply with Title VI.
- Identify residential, employment and transportation patterns of minority and low-income populations so that their needs can be identified and addressed, and the benefits and burdens of transportation investments can be fairly distributed.
- Evaluate and improve, where necessary, public involvement processes to eliminate participation barriers and engage minority and low-income populations in transportation decision making.

Transportation Funding

Goal: Ensure adequate long-term funding for maintenance and construction of all modes of transportation facilities.

Policies:

- Design a fiscally responsible transportation system.
- Make the most efficient use of limited public resources.
- Minimize the cost of implementing and operating transportation projects.
- Develop transportation projects that enhance the local and regional economies.
- Actively explore and consider a wide range of standard and innovative funding sources for transportation projects.

Transportation Planning Process

Goal: Support an open, inclusive, and participatory transportation planning process.

Policy:
- Improve communication and cooperation between the MPO and RPO governments, local, state and federal transportation agencies, freight carriers, law enforcement, emergency services and other stakeholders.

Congestion Management

Goal: Establish policies and programs to improve the efficiency of the roadway network and reduce congestion.

Policies:
- Improve mobility by utilizing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to the maximum extent practical.
- Develop an efficient street and highway network capable of providing an appropriate level of service for a variety of transportation modes.
- Maximize transportation system efficiency and safety by promoting alternatives to adding general-purpose traffic lanes.
- Enhance mobility by improving the connectivity of the existing street network.

Safety and Security

Goal: Establish policies and programs to improve the efficiency of the roadway network, reduce congestion pollutant emissions, increase safety and improve efficiency.

Policies:
- Promote, provide and continue to improve transportation safety and security of the transportation system within the GHMPO Planning Area.
- Support the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority's (WPRTA) efforts to increase transit safety and security for riders and employees.
- Ensure safety through public education, enforcement and engineering.
- Improve safety by utilizing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to the maximum extent practical.

WESTERN PIEDMONT BICYCLE PLAN: Vision, Goals, and Policies

As part of the public input process, the Steering Committee created a vision, goals, and policies to guide the development of the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan and bicycle planning in the region for years to come. The

following was developed over several months. Each goal has related policies that have been prioritized by the public.

The following vision statement guides the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan:

Our region values bicycle use for its health and recreational benefits. Bicycles represent an alternative transportation option for our community's residents and visitors as an accessible, safe, healthy and scenic way to reach places people want to go.

To achieve this vision now and in the future, the following goals and policies were developed:

Goal 1: Safety and Engineering - Design our region's communities as places where bicycle use is valued as a significant transportation mode.

1. Improve bicycle safety by eliminating road conditions that present hazards for bicyclists.
2. As part of the development review process, support bicycle-friendly amenities and connectivity to local greenways and routes.
3. Encourage dialogue among engineers, planners, regional bike advocates and local governments.
4. Promote NCDOT's "Complete Streets" policy at the local and regional level.
5. Encourage the use of NCDOT'S "Watch for

Me" campaign and other recognized safety education programs.
6. Encourage and promote public outreach events.

Goal 2: Transportation - Connect key bike routes to individual communities across the region.

1. Connect neighborhoods to schools, shopping and work places.
2. Ensure parks, community destinations, and employment centers are connected to bike facilities.
3. Develop connectivity between public transport and non-motorized modes of transportation.
4. Increase the number of "Share the Road" signs or develop a billboard/advertising campaign promoting "Share the Road."
5. Expand directional signage and pavement markings to direct bicyclists to the greenway trail network.
6. Create a logo and signage for regional bicycle routes.
7. Distribute guides for regional bike routes with location, descriptions of difficulty, and skill levels.

Goal 3: Recreation - Encouraging bicycle use for different purposes, ages, and skill levels.

1. Publish a regional bicycle network map.
2. Promote bike trails by listing them to the "Rails to Trails" website, and publicize their events.
3. Promote biking as a fun, low-cost family activity through region-wide events.
4. Provide bike rental to adults in various parks and urban areas across the region.

Goal 4: Health and Education - Bicycling provides and improves the community's physical and mental health.

1. Educate people that increased biking options contribute to healthier lives. Use data to demonstrate health improvements (such as heart health and lowering risks for diabetes) that result from bicycling.

2. Strategize between local health organizations and bike advocates about shared funding options.
3. Connect bike advocates with health-focused organizations such as YMCAs and local health departments.

Goal 5: Economic Vitality - Strengthen the economic impact of bicycling.

1. Emphasize that a "bike-friendly" community is an asset to the region's economic attractiveness.
2. Educate local officials and the public about the economic benefits of bicycling.
3. Market the region's bike trails through advertising campaigns.

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES: Goals and Objectives

Section 5: CEDS Goals and Objectives

Goal Number One	Build on the Region's Competitive Advantage and Leverage the Marketplace
Objective 1	**Identify the region's clusters of economic development that offer competitive advantages**
Strategies to Meet Objective	An update of the Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis (IGA) would complete this objective. It identifies industries that are growing faster than the national average and pay above the regional rate. These "most favored" industries would become the targets for future economic development in the region. The analysis also aligns the fastest growing industries with community college/university programs in the region. The last IGA was completed in 2009. The data in the study is becoming outdated as economic conditions change. The IGA should be updated at a minimum every three to four years.
Lead Agency Partner	Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Economic development organizations in the region (Alexander EDC, Burke Development Incorporated, Caldwell EDC, Catawba EDC), Appalachian State University, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, Catawba Valley Community College, Western Piedmont Community College
Actions (s)	Complete the Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis in 2013 and 2017 and share the results of the analysis with the community colleges, economic development organizations and other interested organizations in the region.
Estimated Costs	$20,000 to complete each analysis
Alignment of Resources	Workforce development funds with support from the region's economic development organizations. Use grant money to complete the analysis if necessary.

Barriers/Issues	The major barrier to the completion of the analysis seems to be funding. It appears that the Workforce Development Board does not have funds to complete the project. Another issue is getting all of the economic development organizations and the community colleges in the region to use the results of the analysis.
Performance Measures	The new IGA is used for economic recruitment purposes. An increase in the number of persons employed in the region and a reduction in the region's unemployment rate. Increases in the region's average yearly wage.

Goal Number One	Build on the Region's Competitive Advantage and Leverage the Marketplace
Objective 2	**Develop a regional plan to leverage the region's competitive advantages**
Strategies to Meet Objective	Based on the loss of nearly 50,000 jobs in the region since 2000, some action on this objective is needed. The only regional plans concerning how to leverage the region's competitive advantage seem to deal with tourism/recreation and water supplies. No other regional economic development plan currently exists. A consulting firm would have the best chance to create a process to leverage the Hickory Metro's competitive advantages that would be adopted by the region's local governments and economic development organizations.
Lead Agency Partner	The consultants would serve as facilitators to complete the process.
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Alexander EDC, Burke Development Incorporated, Caldwell EDC, Catawba EDC, Chambers of Commerce in each county, NC Department of Commerce, WPCOG
Actions (s)	Consultants would need to be hired to develop and facilitate the process to leverage the region's competitive advantage and present the results to economic development organizations and elected officials.
Estimated Costs	$75,000 to $100,000 to develop the regional plan
Alignment of Resources	Counties, federal and state grants, NC Department of Commerce
Barriers/Issues	Is there political will in the Hickory Metro to implement the recommendations of a regional process when many of the counties and municipalities in the region may already have their own economic development plans? Where will the funding come from to hire the consultants? The Greater Hickory Metro is located in different economic development regions of the State.
Performance Measures	The process is completed and being implemented by the four counties and municipalities in the Hickory Metro. An increase in the number of persons employed in the region and a reduction in the region's unemployment rate.

Goal Number One	Build on the Region's Competitive Advantage and Leverage the Marketplace
Objective 3	**Conduct an analysis that identifies the existing and potential improved place brand for the region**
Strategies to Meet Objective	The region has been using the "Greater Hickory Metro" brand with only limited success with the exception of "The Greater Hickory Golf Classic." Many local governments in the region are content using their own brand, such as "Hickory-Life. Well Crafted." Created in the 1970s, the word "Unifour" (referring to the region's four counties) is still used by many organizations and groups in the region. There is a Hickory Metrocom website, but it has not been updated recently. It would appear the Hickory Metro Visitors and Convention Bureau and the WPCOG could do more to promote/re-promote a Hickory Metro brand.
Lead Agency Partner	Hickory Metro Visitors and Convention Bureau (CVB)

Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, local governments, WPCOG
Actions (s)	Determine if this analysis is needed or would even be implemented by local governments and businesses in the region. Conduct the analysis if needed.
Estimated Costs	$50,000 for brand marketing analysis
Alignment of Resources	Local governments, economic development organizations, Hickory CVB
Barriers/Issues	The political will to use a regional brand for marketing purposes may not exist. There also appears to be no willingness to fund yet another regional brand study.
Performance Measures	Existing Hickory Metro brand is re-promoted or a new brand is created and promoted. Regional logo is used by local governments throughout the four county area.

Goal Number One	Build on the Region's Competitive Advantage and Leverage the Marketplace
Objective 4	Develop a regional marketing plan
Strategies to Meet Objective	Several local governments and economic development organizations already have marketing plans in place. Local governments in the region are not interested in merging identities. Supporting existing plans may make more sense than developing a new regional marketing plan.
Lead Agency Partner	Economic development organizations
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Hickory CVB, local governments, WPCOG
Actions (s)	Catalog and support existing marketing plans within the region.
Estimated Costs	$5,000
Alignment of Resources	WPCOG staff time
Barriers/Issues	There seems to be little interest in developing a regional marketing plan when many local governments already have a marketing plan of their own. Without this interest the chance of successfully implementing a new marketing plan is low.
Performance Measures	Growth in the number of business announcements and gains in hotel/motel tax revenue. An increase in the rate of residential population growth and an increase in new residential and commercial construction activity.

Goal Number One	Build on the Region's Competitive Advantage and Leverage the Marketplace
Objective 5	Identify new adaptive capabilities of the regional economy
Strategies to Meet Objective	Several new adaptive capabilities have already been identified through the Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis and other research conducted by the region's economic development organizations including call centers, data centers, green energy, innovative manufacturing and warehousing. Much of the region already has electrical and water infrastructure in place for existing businesses to

	expand or to attract new industries. The Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) and the NC Center for Engineering Technologies also help small manufacturers become successful in the global marketplace. Support for these endeavors will be important to achieve business growth in the region.
Lead Agency Partner	Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Community colleges, economic development organizations, Manufacturing Solutions Center NC Center for Engineering Technologies
Actions (s)	The Workforce Board will continue to coordinate with these groups to help the region adapt to the new economy. Community colleges are able to offer worker training programs to help the region adapt to changing economic conditions. The Manufacturing Solutions Center will be able to assist more businesses once the move to Conover Station is completed.
Estimated Costs	Unknown
Alignment of Resources	Western Piedmont Workforce Develop Board will coordinate with community colleges, economic development organizations, MSC and businesses throughout the region.
Barriers/Issues	It is extremely difficult to change the culture of the region to adapt to a rapidly changing economy. Another issue making sure that the workforce is able to adapt to the skills need in a new economy.
Performance Measures	An increase in the number of persons employed in the region and a reduction in the region's unemployment rate. Successful outcomes for business seeking MSC and community college services.

Goal Number Two	**Establish & Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure**
Objective 1	**Identify the region's infrastructure assets (transportation, workforce, water/sewer/gas, broadband, housing, education, healthcare, green space, access to capital and energy assets)**
Strategies to Meet Objective	In terms of identifying regional assets some data has been better inventoried than others. Data on demographics, income, transportation and workforce is available. The region does not have comprehensive Geographic Information Systems (GIS) layers on water/sewer/gas, broadband, housing (including septic systems), education, healthcare, green space and access to capital and energy assets. This data will need to be collected and catalogued in order to identify all of the region's assets. Updating the data is also important in order to achieve this objective. The WPCOG's GIS/Data Services group would be best equipped to gather the data and analyze the results.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	County and municipal GIS services, water/sewer/gas and broadband providers, education and healthcare providers
Actions (s)	The best way to complete this objective is to develop a program to create and maintain data layers of the region's infrastructure assets.
Estimated Costs	Around $90,000 a year to create and maintain the program.

Alignment of Resources	Fund the program through federal or state grants or have the local governments support the program based on per capita population.
Barriers/Issues	Acquiring funding for the program would be extremely difficult. Another issue is whether some local governments and businesses will be willing to share their data to identify all of the regional assets. It is also possible that some infrastructure asset data layers do not exist in a digital format.
Performance Measures	Produce list and maps of the regional assets. Keep track of data requests for the information.

Goal Number Two	Establish & Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure
Objective 2	Develop multi-modal transportation plans that address existing and future year capacity deficiencies
Strategies to Meet Objective	Transportation planning for the Greater Hickory region is covered by the Greater Hickory MPO and the Unifour RPO. Federal law requires the MPO to complete a long-range multi-modal transportation every four (4) years.
Lead Agency Partner	Greater Hickory MPO
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Unifour RPO, North Carolina DOT, local governments
Actions (s)	Complete long-range multi-modal transportation plan every four (4) years to comply with federal law.
Estimated Costs	$200,000 to complete the plan over 18 months.
Alignment of Resources	Greater Hickory MPO and Unifour RPO funding from federal, state and local governments cover the costs of completing the long range transportation plan.
Barriers/Issues	Maintaining a large MPO can be difficult with so many local jurisdictions. Working with or around several highway divisions in the region.
Performance Measures	The Greater Hickory MPO long-range transportation plan is approved by the Greater Hickory MPO TAC, State agencies and Federal agencies.

Goal Number Two	Establish & Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure
Objective 3	Identify whether water, sewer and natural gas infrastructure can accommodate future growth
Strategies to Meet Objective	Adequate water supplies exist for the slow growth the region is anticipated to experience over the next decade. Water supply plans, however, need to be reviewed and aligned with state recommendations. A hidden issue the region faces is the "aging" of the water/sewer infrastructure network. Proactively implement watershed level recommendations to improve surface water quality from both point and nonpoint source pollution to keep the region's water fishable, swimmable and drinkable.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG

Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	US Environmental Protection Agency, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, municipalities and other agencies that provide water/sewer service in the region
Actions (s)	Use Geographic Information Systems and demographics to create a water/sewer infrastructure asset analysis. Create and implement adequate drinking water source protection plans for the region. Develop asset management plans to improve water and sewer infrastructure while allowing for future growth as it occurs in the Hickory Metro. Expedite installation and utilization of advanced treatment methods in the region's Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTW) to eliminate the point source loading of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus), the number one cause of degradation to our regions' surface waters.
Estimated Costs	About $70,000 in staff time to complete the initial planning process. Millions of dollars will be required to update existing water and sewer pipelines. Utilization of advanced treatment methods would cost $5 to $10 million and is needed at three to four Waste Water Treatment Plants (WWTP) in the region. Ongoing Advanced Treatment (biological or chemical) would then cost $50,000 to $200,000 per plant per year.
Alignment of Resources	Federal and state grants to complete assessments and begin the planning process.
Barriers/Issues	There is a significant lack of funding in the region to replace all of the old water/sewer lines. Capital Improvement Plans may not have adequate amounts for Operations and Maintenance (O&M) and expansion. Water and sewer rates have changed little over the past decade while heavy water users have left the region leaving the burden of cost on residential customers.
Performance Measures	Adequate drinking water source protection plans approved. Alignment in the region with State Water Infrastructure Committee 2011 recommendations. Better coordination with the Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group.

Goal Number Two	Establish & Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure
Objective 4	Develop plans for the expansion of telecommunications and broadband infrastructure growth or identify if their capacity is sufficient
Strategies to Meet Objective	Expansion of broadband in the Hickory Metro is currently a piecemeal effort. Results of a Broadband Needs Assessment should be reviewed and holes in broadband access should also be analyzed. Plans could then be created to expand broadband infrastructure where it is needed in the region.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	ARC, county governments, broadband carriers
Actions (s)	Coordinate and facilitate IT regional group. Determine if broadband capacity if sufficient for businesses and residents in the region. Create plan to expand the broadband network in the region where needed.

Estimated Costs	$100,000 to develop the plan. Significant costs are likely needed to fully implement the plan.
Alignment of Resources	ARC, county IT departments, NC Rural Center, MCNC, NCREN
Barriers/Issues	Entities in the region may not be willing to share broadband data. No funding available to complete such a study. Is there support from elected officials to implement regional broadband plan?
Performance Measures	GIS is used to map all of the existing broadband assets in the Hickory Metro region. Plan to expand broadband network is completed. Broadband network continues to expand in the region.

Goal Number Two	**Establish & Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure**
Objective 5	**Develop plans for equitable and affordable housing choices**
Strategies to Meet Objective	There appears to be no single regional affordable/equitable housing plan in place. The HOME program administered by the WPCOG is a way to provide down payment assistance for qualified buyers. The WPCOG also provides foreclosure counseling services. Section 8 housing also has existing work plans. WPCOG also administers programs for housing rehabilitation. All of these plans would need to be reviewed, combined with input from the community, to create the affordable housing choice plan for the region.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	HUD, NC Housing Finance Agency, local governments
Actions (s)	Create an equitable/affordable housing plan for the Hickory Metro. Make tax credits available for low income renters that do not qualify for Section 8 housing. Expand down payment assistance program to increase the number of eligible persons. Expand housing foreclosure counseling program to assist more clients.
Estimated Costs	$60,000 to create the plan. Additional funding would be required to fully implement the plan.
Alignment of Resources	HUD and NC Housing Finance Agency could help to cover the costs of developing and implementing the plan.
Barriers/Issues	Changing eligibility requirements for down payment assistance and making tax credits available would require state or federal action. The region's housing stock is aging rapidly with many homes having failing septic systems along with old plumbing and wiring. Job losses have also made it difficult for many to make mortgage or rental payments.
Performance Measures	The equitable/affordable housing plan for the region is created and implemented. More clients are served through the HOME program and foreclosure counseling. Economic conditions improve which lower the number of new foreclosure cases while increasing home and rental occupancy rates.

Goal Number Three	Create Revitalized and Vibrant Communities
Objective 1	**Promote environmentally conscious development patterns**
Strategies to Meet Objective	The key to meeting this objective is to not discourage development when the Hickory Metro's economy is in desperate need of job growth and tax revenue. There is no "regional development plan" in place; planning is handled by each local government in the region. One area that needs to be addressed, however, is to get all storm water plans in the region in compliance. Flexible development without sprawl should also be encouraged.
Lead Agency Partner	Local government planning departments
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	NCDENR, Western Piedmont Water Resources Committee, USEPA, WPCOG
Actions (s)	Advise local governments on environmentally-sensitive development patterns. Promote and support environmental planning forums in the region. Make sure stormwater programs in the region are in compliance with state and federal regulations. Develop and implement regional watershed protection. Promote LID (Limited Impact Development)/LEED certified building patterns.
Estimated Costs	About $25,000 per year to promote and education through environmental planning forums. At least $50,000 needed for auditing local codes for environmental compliance.
Alignment of Resources	USEPA and NCDENR grants supported by local match requirements to cover costs of environmental planning forums and audits.
Barriers/Issues	There may be a lack of awareness concerning environmental compliance in the region. A dedicated funded stream is imperative to adequately staff and support local program compliance.
Performance Measures	At least one environmental planning forum is held in the region per year. Stormwater programs in the region are in compliance with state and federal regulations.

Goal Number Three	Create Revitalized and Vibrant Communities
Objective 2	**Ensure that underserved and distressed communities are engaged in the planning process**
Strategies to Meet Objective	Based on economic conditions the entire region can be considered "distressed." Another part of meeting this objective is not only to consider disadvantaged citizens in the region, but also residents who primary use websites and social media to obtain information about the Hickory Metro. Therefore, there are two strategies needed to meet this objective. The first is to reduce match requirements which keeps the region from applying for grants it would otherwise qualify for. The second part to meeting the objective is to utilize social media as well as other more traditional methods to let residents know of WPCOG programs, important meetings and events in the region. This will help get the public, including underserved communities, more engaged in the region's planning process.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG

Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	ARC, EDA, NC Department of Commerce, NC Rural Center, USDOL, USEPA
Actions (s)	Encourage EDA and other federal agencies to offer no-match grants to extremely distressed communities such as the Hickory Metro. Develop an expanded communications program to inform local governments and the public of WPCOG programs and scheduled events through its web site and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
Estimated Costs	$50,000 a year to develop and maintain a WPCOG Communications program
Alignment of Resources	ARC, EDA, NC Department of Commerce, USDOL, USEPA
Barriers/Issues	Changing regulations on federal and state grant matches would likely require federal or state legislation. Community apathy on governmental issues is another obstacle to overcome. Another barrier is the lack of funding available to develop WPCOG communications program.
Performance Measures	Federal and state agencies reduced grant match requirements for the region. WPCOG communications program is implemented.

Goal Number Three	Create Revitalized and Vibrant Communities
Objective 3	Develop plan for accelerating investments in healthy, safe and walkable communities
Strategies to Meet Objective	Regional transportation plans already mention bike lanes, sidewalks and other congestion mitigation strategies along with the Carolina Thread Trail and other "greenways" in the region. Additional healthy community plans could be created, however, to complement existing plans.
Lead Agency Partner	Greater Hickory MPO
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Area Agency on Aging, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Regional health agencies, Unifour RPO, USEPA
Actions (s)	Develop, healthy, safe walkable community plans where appropriate. Coordinate with health agencies in the region concerning these issues.
Estimated Costs	Cost would be part of existing planners time--about $25,000 to $50,000 to develop additional plans if needed.
Alignment of Resources	Part F (NC Division of Parks and Recreations) grant funding, federal and state transportation funds
Barriers/Issues	WPCOG planning staff is currently spread thin so completing this task adequately might prove difficult. Local elected officials would also need to be supportive of the plans in order for them to be successfully implemented.
Performance Measures	Additional plans where needed to address these issues. Improvement in health of the region's residents through analyzing data in County Health reports.

Goal Number Three	Create Revitalized and Vibrant Communities
Objective 4	**Develop a plan to promote the restoration and preservation of urban and town centers**
Strategies to Meet Objective	Many local governments in the region already have downtown/urban restoration and preservation plans in place. The key to meeting the objective is to acquire the funding to implement these plans as well as clean up several brownfield sites in the Hickory Metro.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG as a facilitator to meet this objective
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	NC Department of Commerce, USEPA
Actions (s)	WPCOG could host regional downtown development workshops. The WPCOG would also develop a regional brownfield planning program.
Estimated Costs	It would cost about $50,000 a year to develop and maintain a brownfield planning program. Up to $5,000 per year to host regional forums.
Alignment of Resources	State and federal grants to start a Brownfield planning program. Acquire money from NC Department of Commerce for façade improvements in downtown areas.
Barriers/Issues	Lots of rivalry exists between downtown development commissions of the larger towns in the region. There is also a question of cost effectiveness in rehabilitation of brownfield sites versus commercial and industrial development in other locations.
Performance Measures	Regional downtown development forums take place. Brownfield planning program is started and maintained. Jobs are created in urban centers in the region.

Goal Number Three	Create Revitalized and Vibrant Communities
Objective 5	**Create an Action Committee to drive collaboration**
Strategies to Meet Objective	A WPCOG Group that drives collaboration across groups such a county economic development organizations, county chambers and other interested groups to meet growth objectives for all four counties.
Lead Agency Partner	WPCOG
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	County economic development organizations, county chambers, community colleges, tourist bureaus
Actions (s)	Regular meetings of the Action Committee to create a collaborative objective. Recruit across the four county region to implement the objectives.
Estimated Costs	Resources already in place to form Action Committee
Alignment of Resources	Time needed to provide staff support for the Action Committee
Barriers/Issues	Agencies, tourist bureaus, etc. tend to be silos that compete with each other rather than working collaboratively.
Performance Measures	Measure of events and objectives achieved through the collaborative effort.

Goal Number Four	Develop Healthy and Innovative People
Objective 1	**Foster development, recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce**
Strategies to Meet Objective	This objective is one of the goals of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. Two programs that could help meet this objective are the Career Readiness Certification (CRC) initiative and "Project Renew." Project Renew is a job training program through Western Piedmont Community College that promises at least a job interview upon completion of the program. Literacy and livelong learning campaigns in the Hickory Metro aim to increase educational attainment levels.
Lead Agency Partner	Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Community colleges and regional employers
Actions (s)	Promote the Career Readiness Certification program throughout the Hickory Metro. Expand Project Renew to the other community colleges in the region. Expand industry internship programs throughout the region and promote adult education and literacy programs.
Estimated Costs	Between $200,000 and $300,000 per year to expand Project Renew to all community colleges in the region.
Alignment of Resources	State and federal workforce development funds
Barriers/Issues	The region suffers from the lowest educational attainment levels of any Metro area in North Carolina. Businesses in the region may not wish to participate in workforce development programs. Younger persons with higher educational attainment levels are leaving the region to find work in neighboring Metro areas. There is also a significant disconnect in the region between job openings and the skill set of available workers.
Performance Measures	An increase in the number of jobs in the region and a reduction in the Hickory Metro's unemployment rate. An increase in the number of persons with Career Readiness Certifications and in the number of participants that have completed the Project Renew program.

Goal Number Four	Develop Healthy and Innovative People
Objective 2	**Identify and analyze all educational resources and conduct a gap analysis if needed**
Strategies to Meet Objective	Since the Hickory Metro has the lowest educational attainment levels for persons over 25 of any Metro area in North Carolina, it is clear that education gaps exist in the region. The Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis looks at gaps between community college and university programs and high paying growth industries. The last study was conducted in 2009, however, so the results of the analysis are becoming outdated. A complete inventory of all K-12 and community college programs could be useful to determining additional gaps.
Lead Agency Partner	Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	WPCOG, Champions of Education and Education Matters

Actions (s)	Update the Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis in 2013 and 2017 to look at educational program gaps. Create inventory of High School and Community College programs to determine if any addition gaps exist in educational resources and develop programs to address the gaps.
Estimated Costs	$20,000 to complete each update of the industry growth analysis. $50,000 to $100,000 to complete educational resource inventory for the region, identify educational resource gaps and develop solutions to deal with the gaps.
Alignment of Resources	NC Community College System, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC University System, Workforce Investment Act funds
Barriers/Issues	One barrier is the region's low educational attainment levels, which shows that significant education gaps still exist for persons 25 and older. It could take some time to create a full inventory of all the educational programs for the entire region. Another question is whether community colleges and school systems will have the adequate funding in place to reduce the educational resources gaps identified in the analysis.
Performance Measures	A 15% increase in the region's educational attainment levels over the next five years. Education resources for the region have been identified and a gap analysis has been conducted. New programs are developed to eliminate educational gaps.

Goal Number Four	**Develop Healthy and Innovative People**
Objective 3	**Develop ways to create an environment that fosters entrepreneurial development**
Strategies to Meet Objective	Several small business and entrepreneurial programs already exist in the Hickory Metro, which could be expanded. The region needs additional capital funds in place for entrepreneurs to start and succeed. New start ups would also help other businesses in the community prosper.
Lead Agency Partner	Chambers of Commerce in the region
Strategic Public/Private Partnerships	Community colleges, Manufacturing Solutions Center, Small Business Administration, Economic development organizations, local investors
Actions (s)	Create a new $2,000,000 capital fund for new business start-ups. Expand the Edison Project contest for inventors and entrepreneurs to the entire region.
Estimated Costs	Investors would need to acquire $2,000,000 for the entrepreneur capital fund and $200,000 per year to expand the Edison Project.
Alignment of Resources	Angel investors, EDA, NC Rural Center
Barriers/Issues	It appears that there are no high dollar angel investors in the area. No money is currently available for the entrepreneur capital fund or to expand the Edison Project. Difficult economic times also make it harder for start up businesses to succeed.
Performance Measures	Increase in the number of business startups in the region. The Hickory Metro Entrepreneur Capital Fund is created. The Edison Project expands to all four counties.

Congestion Management Plan Objectives

- Improve accessibility and mobility for people and freight.
- Maintain productivity and efficiency of transportation facilities.
- Identify and implement transportation safety enhancements.
- Increase transit service to reduce dependency on single occupant auto travel.
- Increase bicycle and pedestrian facilities to promote the use of non-motorized modes.