



January 27th, 2020

Dear Stakeholder,

The City of Wilmington is pleased to announce that a request for qualifications and letters of interest from consulting firms with relevant expertise in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes and preliminary engineering (PE) for railroad projects was posted to our website on January 7th. All pertinent information can be found via the following link – www.wilmingtonnc.gov/departments/finance-department/current-bids. Once more, a sincere thank you must be extended to NCDOT Rail Division and the Federal Railroad Administration for their support and guidance on the Rail Realignment Project.

The year ahead will be formative for the Rail Realignment Project. Along with beginning NEPA and PE work, submissions for NCDOT's 2023–2032 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) are due by May 1st. Projects submitted will be objectively analyzed, prioritized and programmed under NCDOT's Strategic Prioritization Process.

The City is evaluating, alongside Wilmington's Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) and NCDOT, how best to submit the Rail Realignment Project. The Strategic Prioritization Process was designed to compare similar projects across similar measures, but the Rail Realignment Project is unique. The very qualities that make the project so transformative and impactful also make it difficult to rank against other projects. Significant collaboration has taken place thus far between the City, WMPO and NCDOT, but more will be needed to ensure a successful outcome. An original approach will be required.

In preparation for the upcoming STIP deadline, NCDOT Highway Division 3 currently has a feasibility study underway for the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. There are four alternatives presently being considered under the study, with one alternative exploring a multimodal crossing that incorporates rail. Early collaboration between the City, WMPO, and NCDOT brought about this innovative concept which could have meaningful impacts as to how Rail Realignment moves forward.

The City remains energized not only by the collaboration taking place between WMPO and NCDOT, but also by progress being made on rail projects outside the state. A deal recently reached between the Commonwealth of Virginia and CSX carries with it tremendous potential for rail stakeholders in North Carolina. The announcement serves as exciting precedent for two important strategic considerations:

1. CSX is open to altering the use of long held assets to create arrangements where private freight interests and public transportation interests can grow together without one inhibiting the other.
2. Government can find new, collaborative ways to fund transformative transportation projects that meet the public's mobility needs.

These considerations play into the advancement of Rail Realignment, as well as other important rail projects in North Carolina such as the development of the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor. Conditions are ripe for positive, meaningful change and work continues to bring it to fruition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aubrey Parsley".

Aubrey Parsley, PE
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City of Wilmington
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