

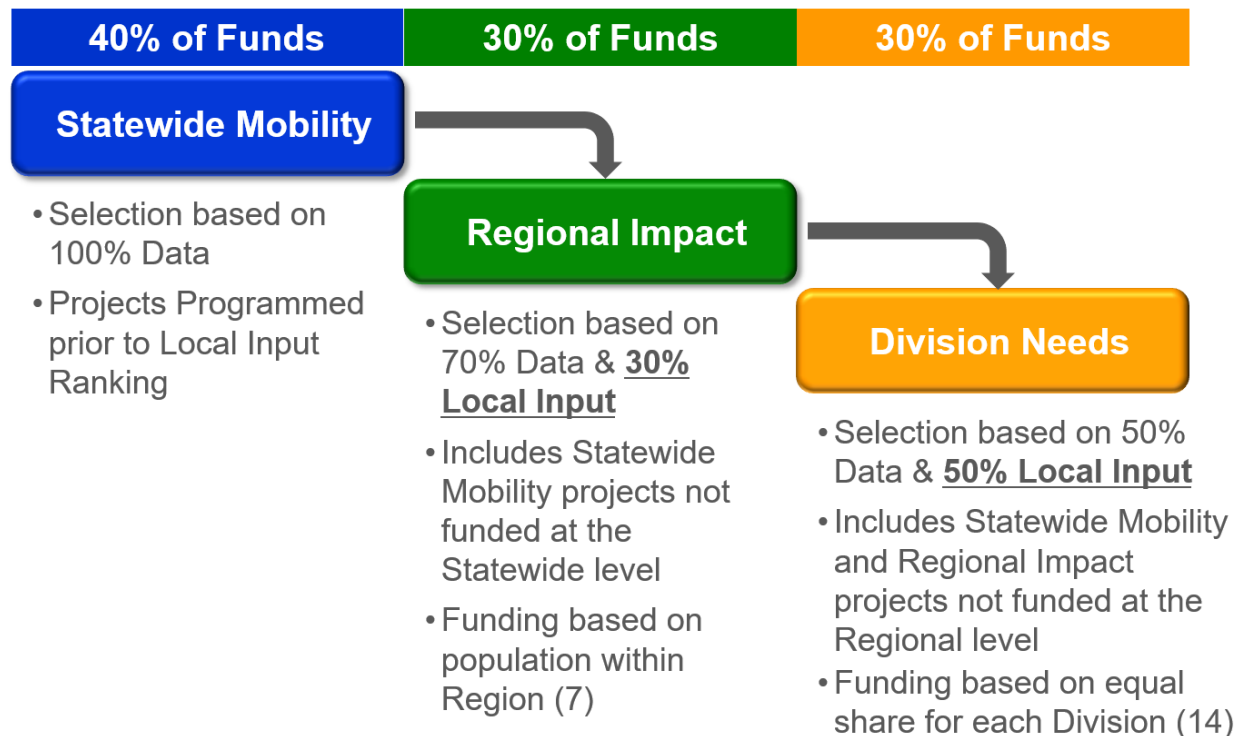
HIGH COUNTRY RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RPO) PRIORITIZATION 8.0 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) law (GS 136-189.10 and .11), enacted in 2013, directs NCDOT to select and fund major capital improvement projects using a data-driven prioritization process in combination with local input. Under STI, all major capital mobility/expansion and modernization projects across all six modes of transportation compete for funding. Each project is classified into one of three funding categories – Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, or Division Needs – where it competes for funds with other eligible projects.

Statewide Mobility eligible projects compete against all other projects in this category across the state, and project selection is based 100% on the data-driven quantitative score. Regional Impact projects compete against all other projects in this category within the same funding region (consisting of two NCDOT Transportation Divisions), and selection is based 70% on the quantitative score and 30% on local input (15% MPO/RPO priority and 15% NCDOT Division Engineer priority). Division Needs projects compete against all other projects within the same NCDOT Transportation Division, and selection is based 50% on quantitative score and 50% on local input (25% MPO/RPO priority and 25% NCDOT Division Engineer priority).

The STI law includes an innovative component known as cascading, where projects not funded in the Statewide Mobility category are eligible for funding in the Regional Impact category. Similarly, projects not funded in the Regional Impact category are eligible for Division Needs funds. Projects that cascade down are then subject to the scoring criteria and local input for the respective funding categories.



The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and North Carolina General Assembly have required that all rural planning organizations develop a project solicitation and ranking methodology to evaluate projects for the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for highway, bicycle & pedestrian, public transportation, aviation, and rail modes of transportation.

The methodology for ranking projects will include the following steps:

1. Submittal of new projects to NCDOT
2. Solicitation of transportation project priorities from the counties in the High Country RPO region
3. Ranking of solicited projects received from High Country RPO counties for the development of a Priority Needs list
4. Assignment of 1500 points to the top scoring Regional Impact and Division Needs projects on the Priority Needs list

Applicability

This methodology applies to all projects ranked by the High Country RPO in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties that fall in the Regional Impact and Division Needs categories as defined in the 2013 Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) legislation. For example: US 321, US 421, and NC 226 are considered eligible Regional Impact category facilities. All county State Road (SR) Routes, airports, transit agencies, and bicycle and pedestrian projects are eligible Division Needs projects.

Statewide Mobility projects will be 100% quantitative data driven by NCDOT with no local input from the RPO or Divisions. Regional Impact projects will be 70% quantitative data driven by NCDOT with 30% local input (15% NCDOT Division 11 or 13 and 15% RPO). Division Needs level projects will be 50% quantitative data driven by NCDOT with 50% local input (25% NCDOT Division 11 or 13 and 25% RPO). Other factors like local government priorities will also be considered when scoring, ranking, and allocating local points to projects for the development of a priority needs list.

New Project Solicitation

High Country RPO staff will request new projects from the seven High Country Counties and the Town of Boone and submit them to the Strategic Prioritization Office of Transportation (SPOT) office for inclusion in the Project Prioritization (P8.0) database. Each county and the Town of Boone can submit up to the requisite number of new projects within each mode (highway, bicycle & pedestrian, transit, aviation, and rail) as follows:

Alleghany – 1; Ashe – 2; Avery – 2; Mitchell – 1; Watauga – 3; Wilkes – 5; Yancey – 2; Boone - 1

RPO Steps	Target Dates
Staff to solicit new transportation projects from County Managers (highway, bicycle & pedestrian, public transportation, aviation, and rail modes)	June 5, 2025 – July 16, 2025
New projects scheduled for RTCC consideration and recommendation of approval to RTAC.	August 20, 2025
New projects scheduled for consideration and approval by the RTAC.	August 20, 2025
RPO staff submittal of approved RTCC/RTAC new projects to NCDOT for project evaluation and scoring.	August 21 – September 30, 2025

Solicitation of Priority Projects for Local Scoring and Ranking

High Country RPO staff will solicit priority ranking of all eligible projects in NCDOT's P8.0 database for the High Country RPO which includes submittals from the RPO, and NCDOT's Divisions 11 and 13. All eligible projects (highway, bicycle & pedestrian, public transportation, aviation, and rail modes of transportation) from the seven High Country counties and the Town of Boone to be ranked will be in priority order and will serve as the basis for the Priority Needs List.

Scoring and Project Ranking Approach

Projects submitted will be evaluated by the criteria and scoring as detailed on pages 6 – 8 of the methodology. The resulting project scores and rankings will be adopted by the RPO as the High Country RPO Priority Needs List and will serve as the basis for assignment of points to transportation projects which include all modes of transportation.

Local Point Assignment Process

The Priority Needs List will guide the assignment of points. Projects not funded at the Statewide Mobility tier will cascade down to the Regional Impact tier for RPO scoring and ranking. After projects are locally scored and ranked, the top 15 projects receive 100 points each. The top 15 projects in the Regional Impact tier receive 100 points. The Division Needs category projects including the projects that cascade down from the Regional Impact category will be re-ranked for point allocation. *For example:* If Ashe County submits 5 priority projects for scoring and ranking in priority order (#1 - #5) and only the top 2 projects are funded at the Regional Impact category the remaining projects (#3 - #5) will cascade to the Division Needs category and will be scored and ranked as follows: Project #3 becomes priority #1, Project #4 becomes priority #2, and Project #5 becomes priority #3. Once Division Needs projects are re-ranked for point allocation, the top 15 projects in the Division Needs category will receive 100 points. High Country counties and the Town of Boone will have an opportunity to revise division projects if desired.

Regional Impact Projects: Eligible regional impact routes in the High Country RPO include US 19, US 19E, US 19W, US 21, US 221, US 321 and US 421 not otherwise eligible at the statewide level. In addition, all NC routes (NC 197, NC 194, NC 16, NC 18). The Class I railroad in Mitchell County is also an eligible regional rail line. If a project is not funded at the Regional Impact category it will shift down to the Division Needs category for RPO scoring and ranking.

Division Needs Projects: Eligible Division Needs routes in the High Country RPO include all State highways, secondary roads, and all other modes of transportation (bicycle/pedestrian, remaining rail, airport, and transit projects).

Public Input Process

Public input for the STIP prioritization process shall be in accordance with the High Country RPO Public Participation Plan. The scoring and ranking methodology will be shared with the public through press releases and posting on the High Country RPO website at <https://hccog.org/planning/#Transport> and will consider any public input. The RPO will issue a press release regarding the adoption of the Priority Needs list and provide for public comment at applicable RTCC and RTAC meetings. The prioritization of projects from the Priority Needs list will be presented at applicable RTCC and RTAC meetings and will include a public hearing component. The Priority Needs list and public input comments received will be posted on the High Country RPO website at <https://hccog.org/planning/#Transport>. In addition, any comments received during a public hearing held by the High Country RPO's RTCC or RTAC will be included in the meeting minutes. The final assignment of points by the RPO and local project scores will also be available via the High Country RPO's website.

Materials Sharing

Materials will be provided on the High Country RPO website at <https://hccog.org/planning/#Transport> and will include: 1) A link to the NCDOT STI Prioritization Resources website. 2) The adopted High Country RPO Prioritization 8.0 Methodology document and 3) Regional Impact and Division Needs local input point assignment documentation. All materials will be posted until adoption of the final STIP by the Board of Transportation.

Schedule

RPO Steps	Target Dates
The High Country RPO staff to submit the updated P8.0 draft methodology for ranking and scoring of projects to NCDOT for review and approval.	January 2026
Draft methodology available for public comment through press releases and the posting of the document on the High Country RPO website at https://hccog.org/planning/#Transport .	January 1 – 31, 2026
Consideration and approval of methodology by RTCC & RTAC with public hearing during RTAC meeting.	February 18, 2026
RPO staff to solicit priority projects with a supplemental overall project scores list (after scores are released from NCDOT) from local governments for scoring and ranking.	June 2026
RPO consideration and approval of Prioritization 7.0 Priority Needs list with public hearing during special RTAC meeting.	August 19, 2026
RPO assigns 100 points to top 15 ranking regional projects.	August 30, 2026
RPO assigns 100 points to top 15 ranking division projects.	November 2026
All public comments received and all final point assignments including any justification for point assignment which deviates from this local methodology will be placed on the High Country RPO website at https://hccog.org/planning/#Transport by December 1, 2026.	December 1, 2026

HIGH COUNTRY RPO

Prioritization 8.0 Criteria and Scoring

HIGHWAY REGIONAL IMPACT PROJECTS		
CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORE METHODOLOGY
SPOT P8.0 Score	70	SPOT P8.0 Score
Local Priority	20	1 = 20 2 = 15 3 = 10 4 = 5 5 = 0
Plan Consistency (project identified in a locally adopted plan)	5	Yes = 5 No = 0
Funded for Preliminary Engineering in current STIP	5	Yes = 5 No = 0
TOTAL	100	

HIGHWAY DIVISION NEEDS PROJECTS		
CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORE METHODOLOGY
SPOT P8.0 Score	50	SPOT P8.0 Score
Local Priority	20	1 = 20 2 = 15 3 = 10 4 = 5 5 = 0
Plan Consistency (project identified in a locally adopted plan)	15	Yes = 15 No = 0
Funded for Preliminary Engineering in current STIP	15	Yes = 15 No = 0
TOTAL	100	

Project Example: If a project scores the maximum or near the maximum number of points for each criteria listed above it will rank near the top of the priority needs list and be allocated 100 points. However, if a project does not score well based on the criteria, it is not likely to be allocated 100 points.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN DIVISION NEEDS PROJECTS		
CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORE METHODOLOGY
SPOT P8.0 Score	50	SPOT P8.0 Score
Local Priority	20	1 = 20 2 = 15 3 = 10 4 = 5 5 = 0
Project Connectivity (project provides connection to existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities)	20	Yes = 20 No = 0
Right-of-Way Status	10	Right-of-way acquired = 10 None acquired = 0
TOTAL	100	

AVIATION DIVISION NEEDS PROJECTS		
CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORE METHODOLOGY
SPOT P8.0 Score X 1.6	80	SPOT P8.0 Score X 1.6
Local Priority	20	1 = 20 2 = 15 3 = 10 4 = 5 5 = 0
TOTAL	100	

TRANSIT DIVISION NEEDS PROJECTS		
CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORE METHODOLOGY
SPOT P8.0 Score X 1.6	80	SPOT P8.0 Score X 1.6
Local Priority	20	1 = 20 2 = 15 3 = 10 4 = 5 5 = 0
TOTAL	100	

RAIL DIVISION NEEDS PROJECTS		
CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORE METHODOLOGY
SPOT P8.0 Score X 1.6	80	SPOT P8.0 Score X 1.6
Local Priority	20	1 = 20 2 = 15 3 = 10 4 = 5 5 = 0
TOTAL	100	

RURAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RTAC) POINT FLEXIBILITY

The methodology shall serve as a guide for the RTAC to assign points to projects located within the High Country RPO planning jurisdiction. The RTAC will have the flexibility to assign points as the committee desires including the use of the Local Input Point (LIP) Flex Policy to transfer up to 500 points between Regional Impact and Division Needs categories. Flexing of Local Input Points between categories will be coordinated with the NCDOT Prioritization Office. Deviation from the methodology shall require justification/rationale to be made during a public meeting of the RTAC as advertised and documented to be posted on the RPO's website.