



ACEC/NCDOT MINUTES

May 14, 2026 @ 1:30pm

**Chief Engineer's Conference Room
or
Microsoft Teams**

<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/29759255257734?p=xLTskBeuFU7SMxl5cU>

- I. Welcome and Introductions (Laura Fisher)
 - In Person Attendees:
 - Jamie Lancaster, Clint Morgan, Laura Fisher, Jennifer Hernandez, Steve Smallwood, Jennifer Evans, Katrina Feltes, Brett Abernathy, Steve Brown, Addison Gainey, Brian Elam, Erskine Brooks, Trent Huffman
 - Online Attendees:
 - Nicole Hackler, Matt Jones, Angel Pridgen, Chip Lichtenwalner
- II. Approval of 5/14/2026 Meeting Minutes (Laura Fisher)
- III. Preconstruction Updates (Jennifer Evans/Jamie Lancaster)
 - Personnel and Unit Updates
 - Office of the Secretary
 - Mary Cole Pike named as Chief of Staff in mid-May
 - Deputy Chief of Staff being hired soon
 - Chief Engineer Patrick Norman
 - Now reports directly to the Secretary
 - Previously reported to COO Chris Peoples – COO position no longer exists
 - Boyd Tharrington is the Senior Deputy Chief Engineer
 - Julie White and Amanda Olive now report directly to the secretary
 - Troy Brooks named Director of Field Support – replacing Wiley Jones who retired
 - Brian Skeens – State Construction Engineer
 - Jon Weathersbee – State Contract Office – Replaced Ron Davenport
 - Division of Planning and Programming – Now reports to the Chief Engineer
 - Brian Wert – Deputy Director of Transportation Planning
 - David Wasserman – Deputy Director of Capital Programming
 - SL 2026-46 Section 25 - ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION AND MUNICIPALLY OWNED ELECTRIC ENTERPRISE UTILITY RELOCATION COSTS

- Deals with reimbursements. Basically, gives them a way to prove they have a valid easement. Aligns with FHWA, removes Ad-hoc. From Municipal standpoint, doesn't change anything. Doesn't affect any other electric providers.
- The main changes the addition to the law bring are as follows:
 - 1. It solidifies what EMC and municipally-owned power providers need to demonstrate to prove they have a valid, compensable property interest. The Department was already recognizing recorded easements as a valid property interest. Now, as part of this change, the Department will also recognize non-recorded easements that these power entities maintain as the result of inverse condemnation. This condition is also recognized by FHWA.
 - 2. With the clarity provided by the new condition described above (non-recorded easements obtained through inverse condemnation) the Department can discontinue its previous use of an ad-hoc adverse possession policy.
 - 3. From a fiscal perspective we do not anticipate any significant impacts. The Department was already reimbursing the majority of non-betterment relocation costs for EMC and municipal power providers. We will continue to do so but now under a more lawful approach that is in line with FHWA requirements.
 - 4. This law will not affect other electric providers, such as Duke Energy and Dominion Energy. These entities are for-profit businesses and are not organized under NC General Statutes.
- Private Road & Bridge Program Design Standards
 - DOT is required to establish a separate design category and design standards for private bridges under the Helene Private Road and Bridge program.
 - Engineering firms involved in bridge design and disaster recovery projects may need to be prepared for the development of new design criteria.
 - If involved in disaster recovery projects, prepare for them. The language is subjective on what we have to do, and Roadway may be more of a liaison and let Structures continue to handle it.
- Fee Setting
 - The Board of Transportation now has authority to establish cost-based fees for numerous DOT services, including driveway permits, expedited permit review, traffic impact analyses, utility-related reviews, and other development services. Construction has gone through and drafted guidance to ensure the resident engineers can comply with this.
 - Any fee changes will require a public hearing before adoption.
 - NCDOT intends to engage stakeholders as implementation moves forward.
 - Could affect permitting costs for development and highway construction.
- Pavement Preservation Study
 - NCDOT is required to conduct a long-term study evaluating the effectiveness and longevity of pavement preservation treatments.
 - Results could influence future maintenance strategies, project selection, and pavement preservation specifications.
- Highway Fund Revenue Forecasting

- The budget requires a 10-year transportation revenue forecast to support cash flow management, STIP planning, and debt capacity decisions.
- More robust forecasting should improve long-term planning and funding predictability.
- Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) Pilot Expansion
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 - This is the same project delivery method being used to repair I-40.
 - This provides additional opportunities to utilize collaborative project delivery on large or complex transportation projects.
- Traffic Impact Analysis Requirements
 - The agency bill requires NCDOT's Traffic Impact Analysis criteria to incorporate a population growth factor based on recent county growth trends.
 - NCDOT will update guidance as necessary, so developers and consultants understand how the revised methodology will be applied.
- Projects Near Me Launched in July - <https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/ProjectsNearMe/default.aspx>
 - Projects Near Me is a map that shows NCDOT projects across the state that are in preconstruction and construction.
 - Projects can be clicked on and details shown, such as description, milestones, and Project Manager.
 - Any questions about the data, reach out to Chip Lichtenwalner (rllichtenwalner@ncdot.gov) and any technical issues with the website reach out to Jason Streich (jpstreich@ncdot.gov).
- NCDOT Strategic Plan coming in September – Project Delivery will be a focus area.
- Project Review Meetings starting in August with PMs in all 14 Divisions and Central PMs.
 - Focus will be on central let STIP and non-STIP bridges and will discuss project schedules, identify risks and resource needs. Criteria for projects:
 - Within 6 months of Planning Doc Date for CE, MCDC, FONSI
 - Within 12 months of Planning Doc Date for EA, EIS, or ROD
 - Within 6 months of Right of Way Plans Complete (RPC)
 - Within 6 months of Utilities by Other (UBO)
 - Within 15 months of planned Let Date (current 15-month meetings will not continue)
- Upcoming Conferences/Training
 - NCLUG - August 18-20
 - Jennifer Evans really encouraged everyone that can to attend NCLUG and highlighted that it's a great conference.
 - SASHTO - August 21 - 25
 - ACEC/NCDOT - September 21-22
 - Transportation Summit - October 27 - 28

IV. Project Management Updates (Katrina Feltes)

- New Team Lead for the Western Team – Olivia Pilkington
 - Still need to backfill her old position.

- Katrina asked for feedback about different avenues to engage consultant firms on different topics, for example, what we use cost projections for, so we can get better data, or tips and tricks in MS Project Schedules.
 - Options mentioned include Precon Workshop, or something similar to the Utilities Workshop, but for PMU.
 - Lunch and Learn received some positive mentions as an option, since it doesn't require travel and is recorded. Though drawbacks are that Lunch and Learn's are not as interactive, only an hour, and can be hard to get onto the schedule for, so it may not be an option for some topics, like one focused around project schedules.
 - There was mention of if there could be any items for engaging consultants don't know and are unaware of, like tools that may be used on the side. Or if there are some repeat issues that are being run into at plan submittals to reiterate key guidance to reduce issues at an industry-wide level.

- V. Roadway Design Updates (Steve Smallwood)
 - No updates

- VI. Professional Services Management Update (Jennifer Hernandez)
 - Upcoming Advertisements
 - New dashboard will be available here: [Master LSC Schedule Report](#).
 - Show the 12-month anticipated advertisement list in a table format, in addition to the traditional list that has been on the site.

- VII. Contract Standards and Development Update (Nicole Hackler)
 - Ken Kennedy (in the Directory as Durwood Kennedy) is the new State Proposal and Specifications Engineer, announced 7/21/2026.
 - No one has replaced Jon Weatherbee's old position yet.

- VIII. Workforce Open Discussion
 - Jamie mentioned how impressed he was with the interns this year and highlighted how Preconstruction interns gets exposure to many different areas of Preconstruction along with other experiences within NCDOT, like the Rail Division.

- IX. Division Comments and Open Discussion (Division Reps)
 - Division let limits have changed for division-managed bridge projects (on primary and secondary routes, not interstate routes) and can go up to \$10 million now (up to \$5 million previously).
 - Division 4 has already changed one from Central Let Division let with one project.
 - For projects changing from central let to division let, PMU would still manage them, but they will be let as DPOC.
 - SMU needs some review of plans (PGDs and final structure plans), but some divisions already do that. If GESD's used typically by divisions for bridge projects, these projects need to go through SMU for review.
 - Hopes are that this will lighten contracts and standards load and the goal is that if these go well, then this can be expanded to other project types.
 - As long as PS&E is delivered consistently, then NCDOT will keep the freedom to move projects around like this.

- X. Industry Comments and Open Discussion (Industry Reps)

- Thoughts on Complete Streets (Notes consolidated from multiple mentions during the meeting).
 - Meeting with IMD in the next few weeks with Roadway, Jennifer, and the Chief's office, going out to look at sites and review the recommendations IMD had made. The goal is to bring a diverse group of staff out to review projects and help navigate them together.
 - Industry is not getting consistent guidance when barrier separation is required for a structure design. Steve stated it ties into whether it's on a rural or city bridge. Questions about with a multi-use path, if going to use a barrier, whether the path has the same elevation profile as the bridge deck or is raised. Notes that they are seeing more barrier separation rather than a raised sidewalk.
 - The group discussed variability in mobility expectations, including cases where municipalities want more than IMD recommends and rural projects where long-term connectivity may never materialize or be decades away.
 - There was broad acknowledgment that IMD involvement early in project development helps avoid later conflicts, cost impacts, and confusion about who ultimately decides what is reasonable to build.
 - Participants noted differing perspectives among PMs, Divisions, IMD, and municipalities, especially around maintenance responsibilities, and pedestrian accommodation on high-speed roads.
- Project Schedules
 - Comment that schedules had been looking better.
 - Derrick is on the agenda at ACEC to highlight project schedules.
 - Nicole noted this is difficult due to workload.
- Work being done on coming up with goals for this group.
- Disaster Bridges Criteria
 - Industry looking for guidance on this. The language changed to shift responsibility away from DOT and DOT will be in an advisory role. Should come to Roadway through NCDM.
 - Cost, timelines, and how to get them quickly are all a concern. Steve thinks cost is why it was introduced as language.
 - Industry is attempting to get the contractor more information, so they have the right risk.
 - Steve is trying to get more guidance from the NCDOT side.
 - Other question raised, is the liability eventually turned over from the designer? For example, if a bridge fails after 5 years, is the designer responsible? There is concern that this uncertainty have led to overengineering and an increase in costs.
 - Some counties are not permitting if the bridge design wouldn't carry a fire truck. If that is required, then worries are there won't be the typical driveway bridge contractors for jobs.
 - Discussion around railcar bridges
 - Some positives, but an increase in prices was noted as well as the challenge of railcars not being uniform.
- ORD Workspace
 - Noted very positive experience with going through Vasim with conversions.

- Some firms have had challenges converting, especially Hydraulics with pipe designs.
 - For smaller projects, essentially just redo the project, import the old files and then redo the design.
 - Have to account for the time now to build up to ORD and back check it to ensure it is correct.
- Project Wise
 - Discussion around where different groups have their files, whether it is on their own servers or NCDOT's.
 - All consultants use Bentley Cloud, and there was discussion on where the servers for these are located.
 - Discussion around where files are being stored with everyone using NCDOT servers with Project Wise. Finding the record of truth and not getting confused from seeing in progress designs. Feedback from industry is that most are not on NCDOT's Project Wise for in progress files and use it only for final files.
 - There was discussion about whether future use of the design model for contract items, such as quantities, would require storing everything on a single server. While keeping all files together sounds ideal, it isn't realistically achievable in the near term. Concerns were raised that placing all deliverables in one system, like ProjectWise, could introduce access issues for non-design staff and conflict with existing SharePoint structures. A more feasible approach would be a unified upload portal, even if files continue to reside in different storage locations behind the scenes.

Next Meeting –Thursday, November 5, 2026 at 1:30pm