



**TRIANGLE WEST**  
Transportation Planning Organization

## **North Carolina Department of Transportation Strategic Prioritization and the Triangle West TPO Local Input Point Methodology Process**

### **Introduction**

NCDOT's Strategic Prioritization Process (SPOT) is designed to evaluate transportation projects across the state and assist in the prioritization of those projects for inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP contains statewide, regional, and division level transportation projects funded through a combination of federal, state, and local funds for the next ten years. The SPOT Process is designed to be a transparent, data-driven process for evaluating and ranking projects for roadway, bicycle and pedestrian, rail, public transportation, ferry, and aviation. The Triangle West Transportation Planning Organization (Triangle West TPO) plays a critical role in the SPOT Process by initially submitting projects for evaluation and then assigning additional local input points to projects deemed most important for the region.

The Triangle West TPO Local Input Point Methodology describes the process used by Triangle West to identify projects to submit and how local input points are allocated.

Prioritization starts at the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The TPO's process to prioritize projects begins with the development of the region's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), and as such, inclusion in the MTP is a fundamental requirement for projects submitted by the TPO into the SPOT Process. During the development of the MTP, projects are prioritized by quantitative criteria such as: multimodal network impacts, user benefits, safety, and environmental impacts, as well as qualitative criteria such as inclusion in local transportation plans, local priority, public input, and coordination with regionally significant economic development projects. The MTP also incorporates the recommendations developed in other required plans and special studies such as the Congestion Management Plan (CMP), the Vision Zero Safety Action Plan, and many others.

The development of the MTP is a long and thorough planning process that takes up to 30 months to develop and approve. The public's participation in the TPO's prioritization process also occurs with the development of the MTP through a series of public workshops, open houses, formal public comment periods and hearings, as well as surveys and stakeholder



interviews. In addition, the above-mentioned plan and study processes each have a robust set of public participation activities. All public involvement requirements and policies for the TPO, including those related to MTP development, plans, special studies, and prioritization, are documented in the TPO's Public Participation Plan. Copies of the adopted Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the Public Participation Plan, and information on the TPO's plans and studies are available via the Triangle West website ([www.twtpo.org](http://www.twtpo.org)).

### **Candidate Project Selection & Prioritization Processes Overview and Schedule**

The TPO's role in the SPOT Process occurs during two separate and distinct steps:

- I. The initial selection and submittal of candidate projects from the MTP to NCDOT's SPOT system, and,
- II. The allocation of local input points to those projects.

The entire SPOT Process, from submitting projects for scoring until the release of the Draft STIP, can take up to 18 months.

### **TPO Submittal of Local Input Point Allocations**

During the SPOT process, the allocation of local input points is based on a combination of the quantitative technical score provided through the SPOT Process by NCDOT, an evaluation of the competitiveness of each project with respect to its potential funding category, and qualitative factors that reflect established regional goals and objectives.

Once the NCDOT quantitative scores are released, the TPO begins analyzing the projects for their competitiveness with respect to:

- Funding potential;
- Feasibility to be completed within the upcoming TIP/STIP timeframe;
- NCDOT Division input; and,
- Competing projects within those STI categories and modes.



The TPO then drafts an initial point allocation based on the Board's adopted methodology centered on competitiveness, which aims to maximize the number of projects demonstrating need that score high enough to be considered for potential funding.

Similar to the review and input process in the candidate projects selection process, the draft recommended local input point allocation is presented to both the TPO's Technical Committee (TC) and the TPO Board for review and possible revisions before releasing the list for a minimum 30 day public review and comment period (see Public Participation Plan).

The TC reviews all public comments received and forwards a recommendation to the TPO Board. The TPO Board also reviews all public comments received and approves point allocations - with possible revisions - for the TPO staff to submit to the SPOT system. The TPO Board has sole authority to approve both the projects submitted to SPOT and the local input point assignments. The TPO Board can deviate from their adopted methodology at their discretion. If the TPO Board chooses to deviate from this methodology, documentation for their decision will be included on the project submittal list or point assignment.

### **Additional Background**

Every project in SPOT is classified into one of three categories: Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, and Division Needs. Furthermore, the STI law includes a weighting of the TPO's and Division Engineer's points by category. The TPO's local input points contribute more towards a project's final score in the Division Needs category than the Regional Impact category.

The Statewide Mobility category scoring is 100 percent quantitative. Table 1 below displays the contribution towards the final score for the SPOT quantitative data, Division Engineer points, and MPO/RPO points.



Category	Quantitative Data	Division Engineer Local Input Points	MPO/RPO Local Input Points
Statewide Mobility	100%	-	-
Regional Impact	70%	15%	15%
Division Needs	50%	25%	25%

Table 1. NCDOT Strategic Prioritization Categories

The Strategic Transportation Investments law (STI) states that projects in the Statewide Mobility category that are not programmed with funds from that category will also compete within the Regional Impact category. Likewise, projects that are not programmed at the Regional Impact category will also compete for the remaining funds in the Division Needs category. This aspect of the STI law is commonly referred to as “cascading”. For more information on STI funding categories including how final scores are calculated see

NCDOT assigns the number of local input points for each MPO, RPO, and Division based on the area’s population. There is a separate set of points for Regional and Division categories. Each MPO, RPO, and Division can assign a maximum of 100 points to each project. After reviewing all relevant factors, the TPO estimates the minimum SPOT score a project would need for consideration for programming. This is considered to be the competitive threshold. In some cases a project’s quantitative score may be so low that even with the maximum number of local input points (100 points), it may not meet the competitive threshold.

In addition, the competitive threshold varies across STI categories and modes because the amount of funding and the number and types of projects competing changes with each SPOT Process. A quantitative score of 50 in Johnston County (Region A, Division 4) may be deemed more competitive than a quantitative score of 60 in Wake County (Region C, Division 5) because of the competition and funding for those two different Regions and Divisions. Therefore, the TPO estimates competitive thresholds for each STI Region and Division within its boundaries, as well as for each mode. The TPO assigns local input points to the projects just under the



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competitive threshold to raise them over the estimated minimum score in order to maximize the number of projects that meet the competitive threshold.

### **Additional Information and Materials Sharing**

All Triangle West materials related to the SPOT Process, including the NCDOT prioritization schedule, Triangle West TPO methodology, project submittal lists, draft and final point assignments are posted to the MPO's website: <https://www.twtpo.org/transportation-plans/transportation-improvement-program/transportation-improvement-program-2028>

NCDOT presentations, training materials, project technical scores, and other resources for prioritization can be found here

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/pages/prioritizationresources.aspx>

For questions or comments related to the MPO's Methodology or specific project information please contact Triangle West TPO staff at (919)-503-4123 or via email at

[PublicComment@twtpo.org](mailto:PublicComment@twtpo.org).