

Section 4

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

4.1 Funding

Several opportunities and methods exist to fund and implement wildlife crossing projects. It is best practice to include wildlife crossing elements in future transportation projects as they are being planned, as it often will cost less than to retrofit existing structures and sites to promote wildlife movement. Funding for and delivering wildlife crossing projects exist at the federal and state level, as well as through foundational giving.

Federal

Federal funding is available to support wildlife crossing efforts. The *Wildlife Infrastructure Funding Guide Funding Opportunities within the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (2024) is a comprehensive document detailing federal funding opportunities that can serve to reduce WVCs and improve habitat connectivity. Authored in partnership with ARC Solutions, National Parks Conservation Association, and Wildlands Network, this in-depth guide includes an overview of discretionary and formula allocation programs, and information including eligibility, selection criteria, set-asides, and other considerations alongside sample grant award descriptions from successful applicants in previous funding cycles. The guide can be accessed at <https://arc-solutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Wildlife-Infrastructure-Funding-Guide.pdf>.

Additionally, ARC Solutions developed a table

listing federal funding opportunities in North Carolina through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for DCHC MPO as part of this planning process. The funding table can be found in Appendix L.

State

Transportation Project Considerations at the Planning Phase

Incorporating wildlife crossing solutions for consideration during the planning phase of transportation projects, such as for bridge and culvert replacement projects, can help address and prioritize safety, WVCs and their related impacts, and wildlife connectivity from the start. Retrofitting wildlife crossing countermeasures after a project has been completed often requires more financial resources than if the solutions were implemented during initial project delivery. During a project's planning phase, NCDOT's Wildlife Passage Guidance document can be consulted, and both local jurisdictions and DCHC MPO may include the projects and example countermeasures in this plan as part of project input for consideration by NCDOT.

Strategic Transportation Investments (STI)

The STI law establishes the Strategic Mobility Formula, which allocates available revenues based on data-driven scoring and local input. This prioritization process – known as SPOT – is administered by NCDOT for the development of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which identifies the projects that will

receive funding during a 10-year period. Federal law requires the STIP to be updated at least every four years, and NCDOT administers the SPOT process approximately every two years.

NCDOT and MPOs submit their most competitive projects in the SPOT process. Wildlife crossing improvements could be incorporated into project submittals and could increase a project's score for safety. More information can be found at <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/transportation/stip/Pages/default.aspx>

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's Partners for Green Growth Program

This cost-share funding opportunity is offered by the NCWRC's Green Growth Toolbox program annually. The goal of Partners for Green Growth is to provide support for local government planning projects that consider wildlife and natural resource conservation in land use and development planning, incentives, and ordinances. Eligible applicants are local governments (North Carolina counties and incorporated municipalities) and Councils of Government. Partnerships between local governments and non-governmental, non-profit (NGO) conservation-related organizations are also eligible.

Eligible projects include but are not limited to:

- Planning that supports conservation of wildlife travel corridors.
- A land use, transportation or other plan draft that considers effective wildlife conservation.
- Creation or improvement of incentives for conservation-based land use and or development through local ordinances.

The NCWRC is the state government agency created by the General Assembly in 1947 to conserve and sustain the state's fish and wildlife resources through research, scientific

management, wise use and public input. More information about this program can be found at <https://www.ncwildlife.org/Conserving/Programs/Green-Growth-Toolbox/Technical-Assistance>

Foundations

Wildlife crossings have been implemented throughout the United States with the support of foundations whose giving policies align with wildlife conservation and connectivity. From the groundbreaking wildlife crossing project in progress that will protect and restore wildlife habitats in Southern California supported by the Annenberg Foundation,⁴⁶ to the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina supporting the advancement of wildlife connectivity and crossings in their region of North Carolina,⁴⁷ opportunities exist to align philanthropic giving to wildlife crossing efforts. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management has developed a list of resources (<https://www.osbm.nc.gov/documents/files/grant-seeking-resources-may-2022/open>) for grant seekers that can help identify funding opportunities.

4.2 Land Acquisition and Conservation

Land use is an important consideration in planning for wildlife crossing projects. To reduce the likelihood of ecological dead ends and gaps in an identified wildlife corridor, it is ideal to implement wildlife crossing solutions within and adjacent to natural and managed lands which offer opportunities for wildlife to move and thrive within their natural habitat. Therefore, the acquisition of land to preserve natural areas and implement wildlife crossing solutions is an important step to take to ensure wildlife connectivity and reduce the likelihood of WVCs.

Transportation agencies and funding entities, such as state DOTs, may be more inclined to incorporate wildlife crossing countermeasures into projects if there is reasonable guarantee

that the effectiveness of the project or structure will not be compromised by commercial or residential development in the future. Securing and conserving the land on either side of the road from development can help encourage and generate support for wildlife crossing projects.⁴⁸

Priority sites may also be within or adjacent to property owned by private entities. In cases where implementing wildlife crossing countermeasures at a particular site will have a positive impact on reducing WVCs, engaging these private entities – whether a private owner, company, or business – to consider supporting enhancing wildlife crossings may be worthwhile and align with their interests. Discussion could lead to conservation easements, development rights, or financial assistance.

4.3 Partnerships

Wildlife crossing projects can be realized through partnerships. Agencies such as MPOs, state DOTs, local governments, advisory committees, conservation agencies and organizations, and environmental groups all have resources, expertise, and insight that can be leveraged and combined to thoughtfully plan for wildlife crossing projects and achieve shared goals. Partnerships are essential in the planning process. The DCHC MPO leveraged many existing, and created new, partnerships as part of its wildlife crossing planning study.