



## The Multimodal Message

The latest news from the Multimodal Division of NCDOT  
Bicycle/Pedestrian•Public Transportation•Aviation•Ferry•Rail

### **Toward a Successful Future at the N.C. Ferry System Message from Deputy Secretary Julie White**

Of the five modes I oversee as the Deputy Secretary of Multimodal Transportation, the North Carolina Ferry System is the most unique. It is the largest division in terms of employees and operating budget among the non-highway modes. It is the most seasonal in terms of activity peaks. It is the only division that offers housing to employees. And it is geographically the furthest from Raleigh. Given these unique qualities I have spent significant time in Eastern North Carolina getting to know the division, the people we serve, our employees, our terminals, the shipyard, the vessels and the opportunities we have for improvement.



In my first year with NCDOT, I have attended passenger ferry stakeholder meetings and inspected the construction of the vessel, met with the teams operating each of our terminals, ridden the vessels and talked with the captains and crew. Among the challenges I have heard is the pay compression resulting from the increase in the state minimum wage and the competition we face from the military and private sector in hiring and retaining our crew members. I visited with the field maintenance team to learn about our hiring and retention challenges due to the lack of career advancement and met with ferry leadership to examine how we can better monetize our operations through advertising and other opportunities for the private sector in our terminals and on our vessels. I have also spent time examining our training programs and how we can better invest in our employees, visiting our dorms to

determine how we can better maintain them and ensure they are secure, and asking for recommendations on updated uniforms to ensure we are using the latest fabrics with ultraviolet protection so our workforce is protected from sun exposure.

If you have met me on one of my visits I have probably asked you, “What are your goals for your career with the ferry system?” Too often my question is met with silence at first, and then, “No one has ever asked me that before.” Folks have told me they feel their lack of proximity to Raleigh leaves them forgotten. I have seen firsthand the challenges of hiring in locations that don’t always have the needed workforce, which is why we provide housing to our employees. I understand the challenges of completing performance evaluations and trainings when you spent your day on a boat and not at a desk.

I was so pleased to have our new NCDOT Human Resources Director Darryl Bass accompany me on a two-day visit to Hatteras Island. He was able to speak directly with crew and terminal staff at all levels about many of these issues. Mr. Bass came away from our visit with a keen understanding of our human resources challenges in the ferry system and was motivated to help meet our unique needs. This level of attention from NCDOT leadership is just one example of how the department is examining how we can better support our ferry system.

As I wrapped up my yearlong listening tour of the system, I had a better understanding of our challenges but needed inspiration on how we could address them. To that end, I recently engaged in a peer exchange with Washington State Ferries. I spent two days with their leadership learning how they are modernizing their fleet, investing in their employees, managing their long-range planning and fleet maintenance planning, using the Vessel Watch program and more. I returned with a clear vision for modernizing our ferry system and am working with Harold Thomas, our Ferry System director, to get those efforts underway.

Some changes are already being implemented, such as online tracking of facilities maintenance requests and completions, our weekly shipyard activities report and the creation of a standardized security plan for our dorms. We are working on hiring a talent manager, who will serve in human resources to help in recruiting and filling needs. We are developing a weekly situation report, which will pull together our important weekly statistics on our performance into a single dashboard and enable us to easily track our progress and address our weaknesses.

Our long-range plan will look 40 years into the future and plan for vessel modernization and additions to the fleet. It will engage our riders and the larger

coastal community in a conversation on the region's needs from the ferry system. It will engage our ferry employees at all levels in developing a vision for the future of the system and examine how we can use new technologies to provide a better customer experience and to improve maintenance planning. We are working closely with staff in human resources to determine how we can address pay compression and inequities, provide ladders of opportunity for all employees, promote diversity and inclusion in all parts of the ferry system from the boats to the leadership, and create a robust training program to encourage career growth for all.

Not all of our challenges are easily surmountable. The ferry system has been running operating deficits for years. Each year's deficit rolls forward into the next year. We cannot continue on this unsustainable path. We will be examining options for addressing these budget challenges and engaging our employees and the coastal community in these discussions through our long-range planning efforts.

The North Carolina Ferry System is an integral part of Eastern North Carolina. From getting children to school and employees to work to transporting tourists to attractions, we are the marine highways of North Carolina. As industries across the globe are undergoing changes due to disruptive technologies and changing customer desires, we too must examine our opportunities and create a roadmap to a sustainable, successful future. We look forward to all our ferry employees being a key part of the development of this roadmap.

Please know you have a knowledgeable loyal advocate for all the modes and a listening ear when you see opportunities for improvement. You should feel free to email me at [JulieWhite@ncdot.gov](mailto:JulieWhite@ncdot.gov) and look for the launch of our Multimodal Innovation effort next year which will provide a structured way for employees to provide suggestions for improvements across all our non-highway modes.

Thank you for your service to the Department of Transportation and the people of North Carolina.





## Drone Summit Envisions Future of Flight

The Division of Aviation hosted nearly 400 speakers, exhibitors and attendees at the inaugural [N.C. Drone Summit and Flight Expo](#) earlier this month. National-caliber speakers including those from NASA, the FAA, AUVSI and Intel discussed using drones for infrastructure inspection, public safety and environmental monitoring. People from across the industry shared the uses for drones and new technical advancements and ways to stay safe with the technology.

[Learn more.](#)

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## Piedmont Improvement Plan Receives Award



[The Piedmont Improvement Program](#), North Carolina's largest program of improvements to the state's rail infrastructure, was selected as one of the best transportation projects in the Southeast by a panel of judges with the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials, or AASHTO.

The program, which was completed in 2017, involved a series of rail and highway projects that made train travel safer and more reliable between Raleigh and Charlotte.

The \$520 million program was largely paid for with federal stimulus money through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The NCDOT partnered with the North Carolina Railroad Company, the Federal Railroad Administration and Norfolk Southern on the program.

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### **Meet the Division Director Bobby Walston, P.E. - Aviation Division**

Bobby Walston is responsible for all state aviation functions, programs that provide resources to local airports and the state's Unmanned Aircraft Systems (Drone) Program.

A graduate of NC State University, he has a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and is a registered professional engineer. Bobby is also lieutenant colonel in the NC Air National Guard and has served in the National Guard for more than 23 years.

Mr. Walston grew up in Tarboro, and now lives in Wake Forest with his wife and four children.

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### **Bike & Pedestrian Grants Available**

Applications are now being accepted for the [2019 Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant Initiative](#). The program provides funding for municipalities across the state to develop comprehensive bicycle or pedestrian plans. Since 2004, approximately \$5.5 million has been awarded through this program to 190 municipalities and three counties across the state.

The deadline for submitting an application, which must be sent electronically, is 5 p.m. Nov. 2. [Learn more.](#)





## **G.K. Butterfield Transportation Center Dedicated**

The ribbon was recently cut on the new Butterfield Transportation Center in Greenville. It will serve as a centrally located transfer facility that will combine local and regional transportation services such as the Greenville Area Transit system (GREAT bus system), Pitt Area Transit (PATS), ECU Transit, and Greyhound. Additionally, the facility will provide a connector for Amtrak service.

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## **Ferry System Forges Welding Internship**

The N.C. Ferry System recently implemented an internship program with the College of the Albemarle. Four students who are in the welding program at the college are working in an apprenticeship at the shipyard. This innovative partnership provides real-world training and helps the Ferry System access employees in this high-demand field.

[Watch a video to learn more about the program.](#)

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## **Peele Nominated for AASHTO Award**

Catherine Peele, an environmental specialist in the Ferry Division, was nominated for AASHTO's *Transportation Vanguard Award*. This award honors a deserving individual doing extraordinary things in the field of transportation. AASHTO grants this award in honor of James C. McMinimee, a professional engineer who committed much of his work



with the Utah Department of Transportation to leading innovation.

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## Multimodal in the News

- [State Reps to Visit Ocracoke on Aug. 27](#) – Ocracoke Observer
- [State Transportation Board Funds Improvements at 24 Airports](#) – The Stanly News & Press
- [First in flight: Drone delivery lands on the roof of WakeMed in Raleigh](#) – The News & Observer
- [Take the Kids: See the trains come and go at Raleigh's new train station](#) – WRAL
- [More electric buses are coming to the Triangle](#) – The News & Observer
- [GoTriangle Offers Free Rides for Teens](#) - WRAL

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