



## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## **Far Western Counties Benefit from New NCDOT Draft Plan** *12 new projects included in 2029 Draft STIP for Division 14*

*(Editor's Note: The correct 10 counties of Division 14 are included in this version)*

**SYLVA** – The N.C. Department of Transportation today unveiled its [draft 10-Year transportation plan for 2020-2029](#) at the monthly Board of Transportation meeting in Raleigh.

The plan, called the Draft 2020-2029 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes 12 new highway projects in Division 14. The division consists of Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Polk, Swain and Transylvania counties.

The department's 10-year plan is updated every two years. Projects scheduled in the first five years of the plan are considered committed and are not re-evaluated when the new plan is developed. But projects in the final five years of each 10-year plan are prioritized again for consideration in the next plan. The Board of Transportation is expected to consider final approval of the draft plan this summer.

The 12 new highway projects for Division 14 include:

- Modernizing U.S. 276 from U.S. 19 to Interstate 40 in Haywood County by upgrading shoulders and turn lanes to current standards, construction starts in 2024;
- Modernizing U.S. 23/74 from Balsam View Drive to Old Balsam Road in Haywood and Jackson Counties by constructing a climbing lane and upgrading shoulders, construction starts in 2026;

- Improving U.S. 23/441 from West Piney Mountain Road to U.S. 441 Gateway in Jackson County by improving intersections replacing a bridge and upgrading and interchange, construction to start in 2025.

One project is being accelerated in the draft plan:

- Priority needs pushed the construction of a median and access control measures on U.S. 64/276 from Fortune Cove Road to Caldwell Street in Transylvania County from 2024 to 2022.

Projects with schedule adjustments include:

- Upgrading N.C. 143 from West Buffalo Creek to N.C. 143 Business in Graham County with construction delayed from 2024 to 2025 to assist in balancing funds;
- Widening U.S. 64 Business from U.S. 64 to Main Street in Clay County with right of way delayed from 2019 to 2020 to allow additional time for planning and design.

“The addition of 12 new projects to our plan for Division 14 reflects the need for new and safer transportation infrastructure in the western mountains,” Division 14 Brian Burch said. “We’re seeing a continuation of good projects being selected by our partners, planning organizations and local governments that are going to bring value to the traveling public and our communities.”

The draft STIP includes projects across all transportation modes and in all 100 counties in the state. The list includes 1,266 highway projects, 86 aviation, 235 bicycle and pedestrian, six ferry, 23 public transit and 47 rail projects selected on statewide, regional and division levels. The projects were prioritized based on technical data as well as input from local officials and residents.

The draft plan includes about 500 changes in major highway projects from the current STIP. Half of the changes include new road projects. Also, there were about 200 projects where a schedule was changed for planning or budgeting needs, and 10 projects whose schedules were accelerated. Another 24 projects on the current STIP didn’t score high enough this time to remain in the new draft plan. A statewide list of these major highway changes can be found on the [NCDOT STIP](#) web page.

Projects that did not score high enough in the evaluation process to be funded at the statewide level rolled over to the regional level for consideration. Projects that were not funded at the regional level could still be considered at the division level. This cascading aspect of the process helps ensure that local input plays an

important role in prioritizing projects for funding. More information about the STIP and how transportation projects are funded is available on the [NCDOT website](#).

Division 14 will host an in-house public comment session Feb. 25-March 1, during normal business hours. It will be a chance for interested residents to review maps and handouts about projects, ask questions of local staff, and submit comments. There will also be an opportunity for residents to submit comments online, with those details being announced later.

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