



NORTH CAROLINA
Department of Transportation

I-77 South Express Lanes

Charlotte City Council: Transportation, Planning & Development Committee

March 5, 2026

Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina

NCDOT & City Council Collaboration

NCDOT's Commitment to Enhance Community Engagement

- Secretary Johnson listening sessions with community residents and council members
- NCDOT project team will continue to engage with the community
- Level-set and extended community listening period
 - First draft RFP in late June

Provide Innovative Approach to Engage Community

- Identify community enhancements based on stakeholder and community feedback
- Establish community engagement center

Continue to Stay Fully Engaged and Shape the Final Design

- Design is only 10–15% complete and won't be final until late 2027
- Procurement will prioritize and incentivize minimizing impacts and adding additional community enhancements



Why We Are Here

Regional Growth



Increased Congestion!

41 hours

Charlotte commuters spend on average per year in traffic

\$711

Each commuter spent per year in fuel and time lost*

**Source: INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard, June 2024*

Project History & Context

I-77 South is one of NC's Most Congested Corridors

The 11-mile stretch from uptown to the SC line is in gridlock for much of the day beyond rush hour. The **crash rate is over 2.5x higher** than the statewide average for urban interstates. The corridor **has 5 to 6 crashes per day and 5 fatalities per year.**

Designs Not Complete Until Late 2027

Current base project designs are **10-15% complete**. Final designs won't exist until **late 2027**. Private developer teams will be incentivized to **minimize impacts and maximize community benefits.**

Decades of Planning, Not a New Proposal

CRTPO submitted the I-77 South Express Lanes project to NCDOT in **2014**. NCDOT and CDOT have worked in lock-step since 2019. NCDOT has held nearly **30 small group meetings** and two formal public hearings engaged close to **2,000** people.

Construction Scheduled for 2030s

Between now and late 2027, the community has the opportunity to **influence the final design and community benefits** through the competitive P3 procurement process.

Why a P3 & Why Express Lanes?

WHY A P3?

- Private sector designs, builds, finances, operates, and maintains a project— toll revenue finances the private investment.
- NCDOT Comparative Analysis: P3 Delivery feasible with up to **\$600 million available in state funds for the express lanes project.**
- NCDOT partnered with the CRTPO working group **creating priority key terms for the contract.**
- **RFP process incentivizes developers to benefit the community** and leave it better than they found it.
- Developers compete to deliver the best solution by minimizing impacts and **maximizing community benefits.**

WHY EXPRESS LANES?

Safety

Crashes (5 to 6 per day) and fatalities (5 per year) are a documented, growing problem on the I-77 South corridor.

Environment

Managing congestion reduces carbon emissions and improves air quality.

Growth

160,000 vehicles utilize I-77 South daily. Express Lanes are a long-term congestion management tool.

Reliable Travel

Fast Lanes Study. Better manage traffic flow, express lanes provide a reliable travel time option.

Funding

Utilizes private funding sources to deliver needed improvements sooner.

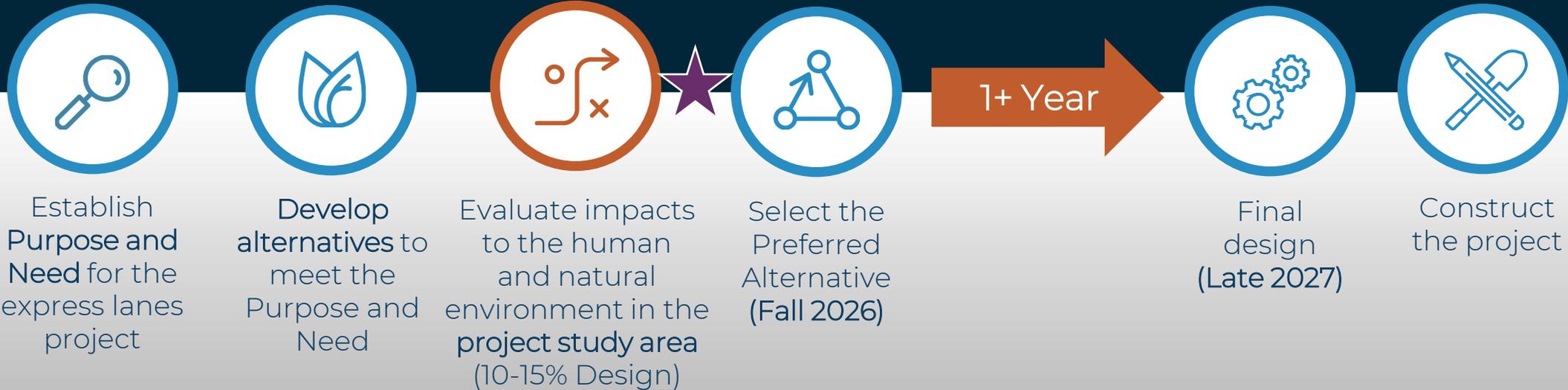
About Transit Alternatives

- Following state law, NCDOT is delivering the I-77 South Express lanes project as it was originally submitted and scored through the Statewide Tier for state highway funding.
 - The project CRTPO submitted included widening the I-77 South corridor with the addition of express lanes from the Brookshire Freeway to the South Carolina state line (2014).
- The project scored high enough and was included in the 2026-2035 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) with **up to \$600 million** in funding.
 - Per state law, those funds cannot be transferred to a standalone transit project.
- As prioritized by a CRTPO/NCDOT working group, CATS transit will use the express lanes for free and benefit from reliable travel times and more efficient bus mobility.

Project Development Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a foundational U.S. law that requires federal agencies to assess the environmental and human impacts of proposed projects and explore feasible design alternatives prior to making a final decision.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)



Ongoing Public Engagement

Illustrative Rendering

(Preliminary design is only 10-15% complete as required by federal NEPA process)



Elevated Express Lanes



Northbound

Southbound

W TRADE ST

Illustrative Rendering

(Preliminary design is only 10-15% complete as required by federal NEPA process)



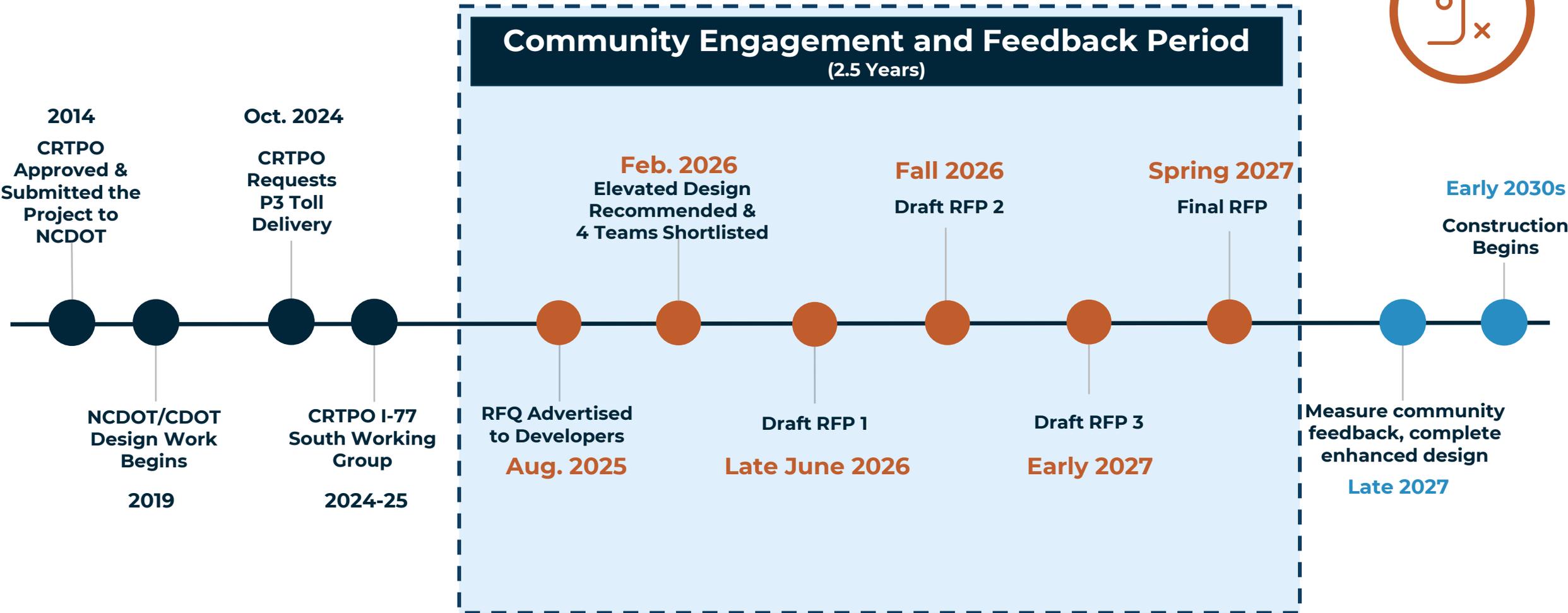
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Multimodal Connectivity

West Boulevard



Project Timeline: Community Engagement



Designs are not final. Until late 2027, the community can provide input—caps, enhancements, community benefits.

Traditional NCDOT Procurements vs. P3 Procurements

Traditional NCDOT Procurements:

- Design Bid Build (DBB): NCDOT prepares a final design that a contractor builds.
- Design Build (DB): NCDOT will prepare a partial design (15 to 30 percent complete) and allow a contractor/design firm to finalize the design and build it.

P3 Procurements:

- An iterative process where NCDOT interacts with each proposer for about 10 to 12 months from when the initial draft RFP is issued to continue refining the project and design.

Project Procurement Schedule:

- March 13, 2026 – Send proposers the **procurement plan**.
- June 2026 – **Issue draft RFP 1** to include initial instructions and technical requirements incorporating feedback from the community.
- Fall 2026 – **Issue draft RFP 2** to include updates.
- Early 2027 – **Issue draft RFP 3** to include updates.
- Spring 2027 – **Issue final RFP** to include final updates.

There is ample time to incorporate feedback from proposers and the community through a P3 procurement

CRTPO Priority Key Contract Terms

- 1 Toll Rate Caps
(Regime to encourage Express Lane Utilization)
- 2 Capacity Expansions
- 3 Operations Review and Amendment
- 4 HOV 3+ Toll-Free
- 5 Large Commercial Vehicles
- 6 Toll Discount for Low-Income Residents
- 7 Markings/Lighting on Express Lanes Facility
- 8 Emergency Response Vehicles Toll Free
- 9 Transit Toll-Free
- 10 Performance Reporting
- 11 Transparent Toll Rates
- 12 Toll Rates During Emergency Declarations
- 13 Real-Time Road Condition Updates for the Express Lanes
- 14 Real-Time Transit Information System for the Express Lanes
- 15 Small Business Outreach

[CRTPO Priority Key Terms](#)

Tolling Policies

Vehicle Access and Tolling Information

Toll-Exempt Vehicles:

- Transit Vehicles (CATS & MPTA)
- HOV 3+
- Emergency Response Vehicles
- Motorcycles

Toll Discounts for Low-Income Residents: developer will be required to implement and administer a discount program to provide eligible low-income users with a number of free or discounted trips on the express lanes.

Toll Rates: two levels of toll rate caps to optimize express lanes utilization.

- Toll rates will be required to stay lower when traffic in the express lanes is low.
- Toll rate caps could only be exceeded if necessary to keep traffic flowing in the express lanes.
- The I-77 North Express Lanes currently operate without any toll rate caps.

Examples of Key Contract Terms for Community Enhancements

We can make meaningful enhancements, but only once we move forward with priority discussions with the community. P3 teams can help us determine what is financially and physically achievable.

Highway Caps / Land Bridge

Create **green space** or **community connectivity** above the roadway in the uptown area. P3 teams will evaluate what is financially and physically achievable.

Reconnecting Communities

Targeted **enhancements at key uptown intersections** (such as 5th and Trade), developed in concert with the Reconnecting Communities federal effort.

Bike & Pedestrian Networks — Southern Segments

Every interchange requiring bridge reconstruction (currently all except Tyvola) will include updated **bike and pedestrian improvements**, directly linking neighborhoods divided by the corridor

Community Benefits Scored in RFP

Developers explicitly scored higher for minimizing impacts and providing community benefits. The Charleston model delivered **affordable housing, workforce development, and economic opportunity programs**, this is the reference framework for what is possible here.

I-526 Examples of Community Enhancements

Community Infrastructure Enhancements

- Community center facilities and amenities
- Bike/pedestrian connectivity
- Bus shelter amenities
- Aesthetics and landscaping improvements
- Noise walls

Education, Employment & Economic Opportunities

- Scholarships
- Skill building programs
- School-to-work programs
- Pre-employment training
- Small business development programs

Bonus Allocation Funding

- Bonus Allocation is the additional funding that an MPO can receive by implementing a toll project, as defined in NCGS 136-189.11(f)(3).
- Amount of funding:
 - This project will be eligible for \$100 Million in Bonus Allocation in addition to the \$600 million in STIP funding.
- Use of funding:
 - CRTPO determines project priorities.
 - Funds must stay in Mecklenburg County.



Action Items & Next Steps

- Conduct extended listening period prior to issuing the first draft RFP in late June.
- Establish a Community Engagement Center
 - Key resource for communities along the corridor
 - Will provide project information and opportunities to discuss potential community enhancements
- NCDOT to provide City Council members with requested information including:
 - Alternative designs and tunnel analysis
 - Express lanes / elevated lanes in the U.S.
 - Community engagement plan progress
- Shortlisted developers will meet with community residents.
- Incorporate community feedback into key contract terms in the first draft RFP.



ncdot.gov/projects/i-77-south-express-lanes