

# Southwest Region Planning Commission

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March 31, 2021

Victoria Sheehan, Commissioner  
NH Department of Transportation  
PO Box 483  
Concord, NH 03302

Re: 2023-2032 Ten Year Plan Recommendations

Dear ~~Commissioner~~ <sup>Victoria</sup> Sheehan:

The Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) has completed its solicitation for the FY 2023-2032 Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan (TYP) update. In addition, the SWRPC Board of Directors has unanimously adopted the SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee's (TAC) recommended ranking of projects for the FY 2023-2032 TYP update. SWRPC's recommendations and its process for developing them are described below.

## TYP Priority Project Development Process

As you know, NHDOT and the regional planning commissions made some improvements to the TYP development process for the FY 2023-2032 TYP update including a revision of project evaluation criteria, a standardized scoring system for TYP projects, and a standardized TYP project submission form for project nominations. SWRPC is satisfied with these improvements and the SWRPC TAC's feedback on the more comprehensive project evaluation criteria was positive.

SWRPC followed all guidance that was provided by NHDOT regarding the TYP update process. NHDOT's guidance included the documents entitled *RPC 2023-2032 Ten Year Plan Approach*, *2023-2032 NH Ten Year Plan Regional Planning Commission Process*, *NH Ten Year Plan: Regional Project Review*, *Transportation Project Proposal Form*, and *Projected Regional Allocations for New Projects in the 2023-2032 NH TYP*. The SWRPC TAC devoted six meetings to discussions around TYP development for this update cycle and took time to develop project criteria weights and score projects between meetings. In separate correspondence, the following items will be posted on the NHDOT Bureau of Planning and Community Assistance ftp site documenting more details about SWRPC's TYP project solicitation and project ranking process should you wish to review them:

- Sample TYP solicitation letter;
- SWRPC TAC meeting minutes from June 29, 2020, August 3, 2020, September 14, 2020, October 5, 2020, February 16, 2021 and March 1, 2021 documenting the development of criteria weights and project rankings, as well as SWRPC Board of Directors meeting minutes from March 16, 2021 documenting endorsement of the TAC's recommendations;
- SWRPC information packet submitted to the SWRPC TAC to assist in reviewing projects entitled *2023-2032 Ten Year Plan Project Nomination Information*;

TDD Access: Relay NH 1-800-735-2964

- Written correspondence between SWRPC and NHDOT related to NHDOT’s screening process for new prospective Ten Year Plan projects; and
- Scoring information related to newly nominated SWRPC TYP projects.

SWRPC’s project solicitation process yielded three municipal project nominations, two of which were nominated two years ago for the 2021-2030 TYP, but were not recommended as top priorities by SWRPC at the time. These included a refined project proposal from the City of Keene to make improvements to West Street from the NH 9/10/12 interchange to School Street and an appeal from the Town of Walpole to fully fund, Walpole, NH-Rockingham, VT #41720, to rehabilitate the Vilas Bridge, a project which is partially funded in the current TYP. The third project nomination was a request from the Town of Swanzey to extend the project area of an existing TYP project, Keene #40666, approximately 665 linear feet in a southerly direction beyond the original project footprint. Since only two of the project nominations involved new project information (Keene’s West Street project and the extension of Keene #40666), these are the only projects which were submitted to NHDOT for preliminary screening relative to project scope, estimated costs for engineering, right-of-way and construction, and project schedule implications.

In correspondence dated February 3, 2021, NHDOT concurred with the decision to extend the project area for Keene #40666 and indicated that there would be no impact on SWRPC’s regional budget to fund that extension, no impact to the project’s existing schedule, and a commitment to use 100% federal funds for the proposed extension. Through follow-up discussions with NHDOT, additional time was spent discussing Walpole, NH-Rockingham, VT #41720 and SWRPC’s currently underfunded priority project in the current TYP, Keene #41590, a project that makes improvements to NH 101 from the historic Stone Arch Bridge to Branch Road in Keene. These projects are further addressed later in this correspondence.

Re-affirmation of Existing Project Priorities

SWRPC continues to support the following TYP projects that are in the current 2021-2030 TYP and expect them to remain in the 2023-2032 TYP update. The project description for Keene #40666 is updated below to reflect the commitments made by NHDOT regarding the project extension described above.

**Table 1: Existing TYP Projects Supported by SWRPC**

| <b>Town</b>                    | <b>Project Number</b> | <b>Route / Road</b>           | <b>Project Description</b>   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Antrim                         | #42579                | NH 31                         | Address red list bridge (133/132) carrying NH 31 over Steel Pond Brook   |
| Harrisville                    | #42575                | Chesham Road                  | Address red list bridge (056/058) carrying Chesham Road over Minnewawa Brook   |
| Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT | #12210C               | NH 119                        | Construction of new bridge over Connecticut River  |
| Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT | #12210D               | NH 119                        | Rehabilitation of red list bridges (041/040 & 042/044) carrying NH 119 over Connecticut River  |
| Jaffrey                        | #16307                | US 202                        | Reconfigure “dog-leg” intersection of US 202, NH 124 and NH 137  |
| Keene*                         | #40666                | NH 10 (Winchester Street)     | Reconstruction of Winchester Street from NH 101 to the main entrance of the Market Basket in Swanzey including the replacement of the red list bridge over Ash Swamp Brook (118/051) |
| Keene*                         | #41590                | Swanzey Factory Road / NH 101 | Reconstruction of NH 101 from historic Stone Arch Bridge to Branch Road  |

|                               |        |                 |   |
|-------------------------------|--------|-----------------|---|
| Marlow                        | #40088 | NH 10 / NH 123  | Address bridge (116/091) carrying NH 10 & NH 123 over Ashuelot River                      |
| Peterborough                  | #27712 | US 202 / NH 123 | Replacement of red list bridge (108/116) carrying US 202 and NH 123 over Contoocook River |
| Surry                         | #41470 | NH 12           | Address red list bridge (082/040) carrying NH 12 over NHRR (Abandoned)                    |
| Troy                          | #40370 | NH 12           | Replacement of red list bridge (089/114) carrying NH 12 over South Branch Ashuelot River  |
| Troy                          | #40371 | NH 12           | Replacement of red list bridge (096/091) carrying NH 12 over NHRR (Abandoned)             |
| Walpole, NH – Rockingham, VT* | #41720 | Bridge Street   | Rehabilitation of red list bridge (062/052) carrying Bridge Street over Connecticut River |

\*Projects currently underfunded in the 2021-2030 TYP. NHDOT recently agreed to fully fund #40666 as described in the table above in the 2023-2032 TYP update.

#### Recommendations for 2023-2032 TYP Update

NHDOT guidance for the establishment of regional priorities for the 2021-3030 TYP update indicated a regional allocation of \$4,289,235 available for priority projects to be ranked in the SWRPC planning district. With this information, SWRPC developed the following ranking for NHDOT's consideration.

**Table 2: SWRPC TYP Project Ranking for \$4,289,235 Regional Budget**

| Rank | Town                         | Project Number | Route / Road  | Project Description   | Recommended Allocation |
|------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------|---|------------------------|
| 1    | Keene                        | #41590         | NH 101        | Reconstruction of NH 101 from historic Stone Arch Bridge to Branch Road | \$525,945              |
| 2    | Keene                        | N/A            | West Street   | Corridor Improvements to West Street from NH 9/10/12 to School Street   | \$3,763,290            |
| 3    | Walpole, NH – Rockingham, VT | #41720         | Bridge Street | Rehabilitation of Vilas Bridge  | -                      |

More information regarding these recommendations as follows:

#### ***Keene: NH Route 101 Reconstruction (Project #41590)***

The scope of Project #41590 involves improvements to NH 101 from approximately the Stone Arch Bridge to Branch Road. The project seeks to address sight distance issues at the intersection of Swanzey Factory Road and NH 101 and involves reconstructing the highway to get as close as possible to 12 foot lanes in each direction with up to 8 to 10 foot shoulders. The estimated cost is \$6,290,000. Construction is currently scheduled to begin in 2027 and end in 2029. The project has been programmed for \$5,764,055 in the FY 2021-2030 Ten Year Plan, leaving a balance of \$525,945 to fully fund the project. The project scope includes:

- Potential shifting of Swanzey Factory Road intersection (potentially including a new bridge over the Branch River, the costs of which are included in the estimate above);
- The existing bridge will be replaced/rehabbed as part of the project but will be funded using State (DOT) Bridge funds as a distinct project.

- Full depth roadway reconstruction for the entire highway portion of NH 101;
- Drainage work; and
- Aerial utility relocations.

SWRPC's allocation of \$525,945 is intended to fully fund this project based on NHDOT's cost estimate. In correspondence from February 10, 2021, NHDOT indicates that it would need to review the current financial constraint for 2029 for this particular project. SWRPC requests that NHDOT provide an update on its review when it becomes available.

***Keene: West Street Corridor Improvements (No Project Number)***

The scope of the proposed project includes the section of West Street between the Rt. 9/10/12 interchange and the School Street intersection. The resulting typical section of the highway would require 70 feet of right-of-way with 2 lanes in each direction (11 foot lanes), a 6 foot treed median, 5 foot bike lanes and 5 foot sidewalks. The estimated cost for the project is \$7,110,979 with construction taking place in 2032. The proposed project includes:

- Replacing/upgrading signalized intersections and coordinating signals;
- Implementation of access management, predominantly through the use of medians to control and limit the number of left turn movements (some left turn movements to unsignalized streets such as Pearl Street may be allowed);
- Upgrade sidewalks as necessary to 5' in width on both sides of the street;
- Installing 5' bicycle lanes on both sides of the street
- Upgrading the deck of the West Street bridge
- Some drainage work; and
- Eliminating the existing "trap lane" for eastbound traffic at the intersection of School Street.

During this TYP update cycle's screening process, NHDOT placed a cap of \$5,668,738 federal dollars that would be eligible for this project. With SWRPC's recommended allocation of \$3,763,290 towards the project, this leaves a balance of \$1,905,448 in federal dollars that could be allocated to the project in the next TYP update cycle, and a balance of \$3,347,689 to fully fund the project.

***Walpole, NH – Rockingham, VT: Vilas Bridge Rehabilitation***

The scope of the above referenced project is to rehabilitate the Vilas Bridge as close as possible to its original condition. The project is estimated to cost \$10,228,550 in the 2021-2030 Ten Year Plan and is programmed for \$5,294,032, leaving a balance of \$4,934,518 left to fully fund the project. Having ranked third among three projects, SWRPC's regional budget allocation is insufficient to accommodate this project.

Regardless of its current funding status, the SWRPC TAC spent considerable time discussing the importance of addressing the Vilas Bridge in several meetings including a meeting with the Walpole Board of Selectmen. Based on the information that SWRPC has received, there is an urgent need to conduct a risk assessment relative to the wastewater conveyance underneath the deteriorating deck of the Vilas Bridge. The Walpole Select Board is concerned about the environmental and economic impact that would occur should the deteriorating bridge deck undermine the structural integrity of the sewer main resulting in a potential spill and associated environmental contamination. According to the Town of Walpole, they have no access to inspect the sewer main because NHDOT has restricted all access to the bridge. While SWRPC advises that this urgent matter be addressed soon, it is clear that there is strong support on both sides of the river to find funding to complete this long delayed bridge rehabilitation project. Therefore, SWRPC also urges NHDOT to renew coordination with the State of Vermont about arranging for the project's completion with

consideration given to reaching out to the Vermont and New Hampshire Congressional delegations for assistance. SWRPC stands ready to provide any assistance that might be needed on either of these matters.

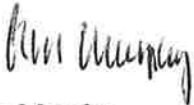
### Additional Feedback

SWRPC continues to value our partnership with NHDOT to address New Hampshire's most urgent transportation needs by developing a draft TYP for the Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT) hearings scheduled for later this year. However, like NHDOT, we are concerned at the continued insufficiency of revenues for adequately addressing transportation infrastructure needs. This is the third TYP cycle in a row in which SWRPC lacks a regional budget allocation sufficient to complete even one of its priority projects. We expect that the low response rate during the TYP project solicitation process experienced this year is an indicator of local disenchantment in the lack of funding to address transportation needs in the region.

Finally, we would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge NHDOT for responding to the input from SWRPC and others through letters and GACIT hearing testimony about the need for additional investment in transit in New Hampshire. More specifically we are encouraged by the decision to make use of underutilized Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program funds to address transit needs. Our expectation is that all of the funding that has been made available to our region will be used rapidly and efficiently to meet the needs of our growing, aging transit dependent population.

As previously stated, SWRPC will submit its scoring and evaluation materials to the Bureau of Planning and Community Assistance, including project information forms and supporting documentation for each of the new projects considered for the 2023-2032 TYP update. We look forward to working collaboratively with you and your staff as the process to develop the draft 2023-2032 TYP update for consideration by the GACIT and beyond. Please feel free to contact me or J. B. Mack if you have any questions about this correspondence.

Sincerely,



Tim Murphy  
Executive Director

cc: Honorable David Wheeler, NH Executive Council  
Honorable Cinde Warmington, NH Executive Council  
NH Senators, SWRPC Region  
NH Representatives, SWRPC Region  
Bill Watson, NHDOT Bureau of Planning and Community Assistance  
James Marshall, NHDOT Bureau of Highway Design  
Loretta Girard Doughty, NHDOT Bureau of Bridge Design  
John Kallfelz, NHDOT District IV  
Leigh Levine, FHWA NH Division  
SWRPC TAC Members