

Phil Trew from the High Country Council of Governments presented a county wide comprehensive transportation plan developed by the High Country Rural Transportation Planning Organization to the Watauga Commissioners during their Tuesday evening meeting. “The idea was to do a comprehensive plan that included the entire county. We looked at roads, we looked at transit, bicycles, pedestrian, and highway.” Conner Sellers, with the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s planning division, presented the major recommendations contained in the plan indicating they had not been prioritized. The recommendations include improving Hwy 321/421 west of Boone from the 105 bypass to the 321/421 intersection, Hwy 194 north of Boone to Howard’s Creek Road, Hwy 105 south to Avery County, Hwy 221 from Deep Gap to Jefferson, and the NC 105 bypass. The improvement to these roads consists primarily of widening to three or four lanes and adding bike lanes. Additionally the plan contains recommendations for developing a new transit route between Blowing Rock and Boone, constructing a four lane 421 bypass from the east of Boone to west of Boone, making pedestrian improvements to the Middle Fork Greenway, and incorporating Boone’s pedestrian plan into the comprehensive plan. The inclusion of the Boone bypass, which has been under discussion for many years, brought the question from Commissioner David Blust, “If we were to vote on this—which is not going to happen tonight—and adopt this plan, does that mean it’s cast in stone?” Trew explained that the plan had been presented to the town of Blowing Rock and would be presented to the towns of Seven Devils, Beech Mountain, and Boone in the near future. It would then come back to the Commissioners for action in April. He explained that if any of the governmental agencies do not approve the plan the Department of Transportation will follow the most recently approved one. Mr. Trew also assured Commissioner Blust that approval of the plan did not stop opportunity for input or revision in the future. He indicated that the High Country Transportation planning group hopes to take this plan, with the county and towns’ governing bodies’ approval, to the Rural Transportation Planning Organization’s May meeting for its endorsement and recommendation to the State Board of Transportation.