

Commissioners back NCCU-area proposed light rail site

The Herald-Sun By Rachael Riley October 5, 2016

DURHAM -- By day, Faye Calhoun is an associate director for research at N.C. Central University, but on Tuesday, Calhoun spoke as a resident at the Durham County Commissioners' meeting in support of adding a future light rail transit station near the university.

"The stop is purposeful," Calhoun said. "The stop is one that makes a lot of sense. It makes all the sense in the world because it is right there in a particular neighborhood that needs transportation."

Calhoun said she thinks the stop will serve Durham Tech, too, and increase collaborations with Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill when parking is taken into account.

Calhoun's comments were taken into consideration Tuesday, when county commissioners unanimously approved supporting the addition of the extension to the overall 17-mile Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project.

"Linking our three great universities is just an awesome opportunity," Commissioner Wendy Jacobs said.

Representatives of the project and GoTriangle staff provided commissioners with an update and background history of the project.

In February, an environmental assessment required by the Federal Transportation Administration was completed, said Danny Rogers, project director for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Project.

Yet the administration requested ask the application for funding be deferred when taking into account a \$500,000 funding cap put in place in 2015 for the project, Rogers said.

By delaying the engineering phase, Rogers said officials were able to reevaluate the project based on prior public hearing comments.

Based on ridership models, Rogers said the future stop would be the "highest ridership station in Durham."

Rogers said the new stop has the same "footprint" for impacting the area near Alston Avenue, as previous plans indicated. It will serve as an additional station, and not a replacement, he said.

As the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization will considering amending the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan to include the amended locally preferred alternative for the project, county commissioners were expected to vote on the matter Oct. 24.

However, Commissioner Ellen Reckhow, who is a representative to the planning organization, said it is expected to vote on the matter sooner than Oct. 24.

"I think it enhances the line so much to have a direct stop at NCCU," Reckhow said, mentioning she thinks it's a benefit for graduate students who live off campus.

Reckhow said she'd like to see developers continue to investigate an option mentioned by residents, organizations and officials in the past to include a downtown stop near the intersection of Blackwell and Pettigrew streets.

In other business Tuesday, commissioners reviewed County Manager Wendell Davis' proposed updates to the county's paid parental leave, donated leave and living wage policies.

Residents commended the county's initiative to extend the paid parental leave policy to 12 weeks.

Eliminate all traffic deaths? NC leaders say it could eventually happen

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY COLIN CAMPBELL OCTOBER 3, 2016

RALEIGH -- State leaders set an ambitious goal Monday as they launched a new traffic safety program: Cutting the number of crash deaths to zero.

N.C. Vision Zero seeks to improve safety on the state's roads by bringing together law enforcement, emergency responders, engineers and drivers. While 1,387 people died in North Carolina traffic accidents last year, N.C. Department of Transportation leaders say the state can cut that number in half within 15 years, and eventually eliminate all traffic deaths.

"For us, it's more of a vision," said Don Nail, director of the Governor's Highway Safety Program, noting that driverless cars will eventually help improve the statistics. "We know that we're not going to achieve that overnight."

In [a video introducing the program](#), Gov. Pat McCrory calls the current number of deaths "not only sad but unacceptable."

"This initiative will remove silos and create a data-driven effort to end traffic-related crashes and fatalities," McCrory says.

The Vision Zero program includes a website, ncvisionzero.org, which offers a variety of traffic statistics and other data. State agencies and anyone who's interested can track trends in the number of crashes and causes, such as alcohol, speeding and distracted driving.

Of the 793 traffic deaths so far this year, 368 victims weren't wearing seat belts. Speeding was a factor in 155 deaths, alcohol played a role in 168, and 100 were due to distracted driving practices, such as cellphone use.

The data also helps law enforcement and traffic engineers determine where crashes are happening frequently so they can take action to prevent future wrecks.

"We're trying to put tools in folks' hands – law enforcement, hospitals and EMS – they can go in and look at their own data," Nail said. "The data's going to be very specific."

N.C. Vision Zero is also encouraging drivers to take an online pledge to obey speed limits, wear a seat belt, never drink and drive and to "keep my eyes on the road, my hands on the wheel, and my mind on driving."

Part of reducing traffic deaths, Nail says, is getting drivers to "start thinking about the personal responsibility that people have when they get behind the wheel."

GoDurham transit administrator from Ghana paves way for others



From left, Pierre Osai Owusu of Ghana, GoDurham transit administrator, with intern Brian Inyang of Nigeria, has been honored for bringing diversity to his work in Durham. “Those who are here don’t know what they have,” he says. “When the plane lands at JFK, you can smell the freedom.” **Mark Schultz** mschultz@newsobserver.com

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY STEVE BYDAL OCTOBER 9, 2016

DURHAM -- Pierre Osei-Owusu of Durham speaks English with an American accent. His parents back home in Ghana, Africa, have told him so.

“They know I’m American,” Osei-Owusu said. “You stay here 20 years ... they see you more as an American.”

This past summer, Osei-Owusu, who works as transit administrator for GoDurham, the city’s public transit arm, made his annual trip to Ghana to present workshops in urban public transportation management.

“When you go back home, they will be able to tell that you are (no longer) from there,” Osei-Owusu said, inside his office at the GoDurham headquarters. “If there is one measure ... it’s always going to be speech.”

English is not foreign to Ghana. It is the official language of the country, even though many Ghanaians continue to speak an indigenous language at home. Osei-Owusu said one way American English stands out to Ghanaian ears is the way in which the pronunciation of the letter “t” is often swallowed in words such as, “Atlanta”.

“That is one big give-away,” Osei-Owusu said. “In Ghana, it’s ‘At-lanta’ – the ‘t’ is very well stressed.”

Osei-Owusu, now a U.S. citizen, first came to America in 1985 for a master’s degree in transportation planning at the University of Georgia. (CONTINUED...)

"I fell in love with the society, the system, the opportunity," he said. "The culture eases you into it."

While finishing his master's at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Osei-Owusu obtained an apprenticeship with Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. He then went on to work as a manager for the Greenville Transit Authority in South Carolina before joining GoDurham in 1997.

"I was never prepared fully," Osei-Owusu said. "Nobody gets that structure. You learn half of it through practice."

Osei-Owusu has made it his responsibility to put his words into practice each day at GoDurham, in the form of student apprenticeships. Since 2000, he has helped more than 15 college graduates with an interest in urban planning transition to the professional world.

Armando Sullivan, 23, of Durham, who apprenticed with Osei-Owusu in 2015, began his graduate studies at Harvard this past August.

"He introduced me to everyone he could," Sullivan said. "Basically, I was learning to do what he does."

Sullivan's first assignment was to ride each of GoDurham's 20 bus routes, because Osei-Owusu wanted him to see the people that he would be serving during his apprenticeship.

By the end of his 10-month assignment at GoDurham, Sullivan had written a \$150,000 grant proposal to expand service for GoDurham ACCESS, which provides tailored transit service to disabled residents. The grant was approved.

"I learned all about grant management and procurement from the apprenticeship," Sullivan said.

Cha'ssem Anderson, 38, of Durham was one of Osei-Owusu's first apprentices. He's now the director of transportation at NCCU, his alma mater.

"He didn't feel like a boss – he did a really good job of being a teacher," Anderson said. "He never tried to bend my views on something."

Anderson said his first assignment for Osei-Owusu was to record latitude and longitude coordinates for every bus stop in Durham. The data was collected for the transit system's first uplink to GPS. The project took him about a month, and gave him a ground's eye view of Durham's transit system.

"What better way for me to learn the routes and the neighborhood?" Anderson said.

Osei-Owusu's latest apprentice is Brian Inyang, 28, from Nigeria, who earned his master's degree in public administration at NCCU.

"I wanted to leave my country to explore," Inyang said.

Four months into his apprenticeship with Osei-Owusu, Inyang has managed contractor bids as well as an agreement with NCCU's transportation department to share GoDurham's vehicle maintenance facilities. Inyang said public transportation in Nigeria – buses and taxis – is widespread, but not well-organized.

"The management is very ineffective," Inyang said.

Inyang said he first learned about the apprenticeship when he was taking a course in urban planning at NCCU that was being taught by Owusu.

"This is a way to give back to American society," Osei-Owusu said. "There should be someone who can give you the scoop." (CONTINUED...)

Last May, the city of Durham recognized Osei-Owusu with an award for bringing diversity into the city. The award hangs on his office wall, next to photographs of him from years past in the company of movers and shakers in Ghana. Osei-Owusu's diplomas stand alone on a wall that faces his desk.

"Those who are here don't know what they have," Osei-Owusu said. "When the plane lands at JFK, you can smell the freedom."

Osei-Owusu believes that using transit projects to spur a city's economic growth is as much about timing as it is about demand. He said that apartment housing is already being constructed along the proposed light rail route from Durham to Chapel Hill.

"Nothing stays the same," Osei-Owusu said. "The question is, what do you do? Do you wait until Durham is the size of Charlotte or Atlanta to grow the (transit) system? You have to decide whether it is the right time or not."

Osei-Owusu drives the 2 miles from the GoDurham offices to downtown for a 10 a.m. meeting at City Hall. Public radio plays on his FM stereo, whose clock displays the time as 9:55. As Osei-Owusu approaches an intersection, a man wearing a yellow hardhat and orange safety vest signals for him to stop. He waits as the construction crew maneuvers out of the street.

"Commuters, either in cars or on buses, are all fighting for a common goal of arriving at their respective destinations on time, safely and reliably," Osei-Owusu said. "Whoever can deliver that trip faster ... is always going to have the edge."

With less than three minutes to spare before his meeting, Osei-Owusu finds parking in an unmarked loading lane and swipes his I.D. to enter City Hall.

"The bottom line is time," he said.

RDU approves Vision 2040 plan for future growth

The News and Observer By Kathryn Trogdon October 20, 2016

MORRISVILLE – A 25-year master plan that will guide growth at the Raleigh-Durham International Airport through 2040 moved forward Thursday despite protests from area hikers and cyclists.

Claps arose from the audience of more than 100 people after the RDU Board of Directors unanimously approved the plan, but so did boos from outdoor enthusiasts, who are pushing to preserve more than 600 acres of the airport's property to be used for an [urban trails center](#).

The master plan, which lays out potential development of the airport's core and surrounding land, still needs to be approved by the Federal Aviation Administration before shovels can go in the ground. Airport representatives say the process will take at least six months.

[Local hikers and cyclists](#), including members of the Triangle Off-Road Cyclists and the Umstead Coalition, say they [fear](#) that the plan will develop as approved with a quarry next to William B. Umstead State Park and a hotel or office park where miles of [hiking and biking trails](#) already exist at Lake Crabtree County Park.

They are championing a solution that calls for the 600 acres to be used for more than 50 miles of trails and supporting commercial uses, such as bike shops, campgrounds and restaurants. (CONTINUED...)

On Thursday, board discussion regarding the plan lasted only a few minutes, with several board members praising the plan and encouraging continued talks with Wake County about leasing a portion of airport property north of Interstate 40 at fair-market value for recreational use.

"I remain optimistic that something can be worked out to create a win-win situation for everyone," board member Robert Teer said.

But some, including Raleigh cyclist Natalie Lew, were disappointed that the staff and board members focused almost entirely on the airport's core and that there was little discussion about the future of the surrounding land, particularly the acres that would be needed for a possible urban trails center, which exceeds what is being discussed with Wake County.

"I'm not too impressed," she said.

The airport authority must create this plan according to Federal Aviation Administration guidelines, but RDU representatives described the master plan as "flexible" and said it could be changed as new conditions present themselves.

For example, the last master plan the airport authority created, which was approved in 1994, showed a third parallel runway that was never built.

"There are things that get put on master plans that never get built," said Michael Landguth, president and CEO of RDU.

Rebuilding a runway

Kristie VanAuken, RDU's vice president of communications and community affairs, said the airport's main focus is rebuilding a runway and making it possible to add up to 23 new gates as needed in the next 25 years.

RDU representatives expect they will need to rebuild the airport's longest runway in the next three to five years, and the necessary federal funding to do so is contingent on the FAA's approval of the 25-year master plan.

Landguth said if the useful life of that runway were to end before a new one is constructed, it would bring the airport down to only one commercial service runway – one that isn't long enough to accommodate transatlantic or transcontinental service.

A rebuilt runway also would be needed if the airport hopes to attract a flight to China, which Landguth believes is on the horizon, likely as soon as 2019.

"We've got to have a 10,000-foot runway as a minimum in order to make that pitch," he said.

But the airport will face challenges in finding the funds; the airport is mostly self-sustaining and receives only \$550,000 in federal and state grants every year.

The projects could be funded by allowing development on the surrounding airport land.

"We've actually seen a lot of really exciting ideas," VanAuken said. "What we want to see now are some numbers on paper, get some people who are interested in funding those innovative ideas so we can move forward with a plan that can support our core aviation infrastructure."

But Apex resident Dave Anderson said he supports finding other sources of funding rather than developing on existing recreational land.

"If the airport is short on revenue, let's fill that some other way," he said. "Let's not fill it by the airport being in the land development business." (CONTINUED...)

Next steps

Now that the RDU board has approved the master plan, airport representatives and consultants will return to the public in about 60 to 90 days with a financial model and implementation plan before submitting the materials to the FAA.

While the FAA approval process will take a minimum of six months after the plan has been submitted, most cases of development would require an environmental study, Landguth said, which could take one year to five years before development can begin.

By the numbers: Raleigh and Charlotte rail travel

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge October 31, 2016

Little by little, N.C. Department of Transportation's massive [\\$520 million rail revamp between Raleigh and Charlotte](#), dubbed the Piedmont Improvement Project, is coming to fruition.

On Monday, NCDOT opened a section in Davidson County after the completion of four miles of double track. That project is one of three that will add about 26 miles of new second track along the main line – translating to uninterrupted double track spanning 92 miles between Greensboro and Charlotte.

The goal is to reduce congestion and capacity issues caused by a single track – and that, according to NCDOT officials, will help [decrease travel time between Raleigh and Charlotte](#).

As of August, 22,671 passengers had traveled between the two cities in 2016, newly released NCDOT records show. More than 500 additional passengers trekked to Raleigh from Charlotte than vice versa.

NCDOT spokesman [Katie Trout](#) cautions that "there have been frequent annulments due to track work."

Read: [The Raleigh-to-Charlotte rail line gets a technology boost](#)

A total of 37,272 passengers traveled bi-directionally between Raleigh and Charlotte in 2015. Slightly more travelers took the Charlotte to Raleigh route. An average of about 3,100 travelers went back and forth between the two cities each month, with November being the busiest for the routes, at 3,741 commuters.

Final work on the Piedmont Improvement Project [concludes next year](#).

The number of monthly Raleigh-Charlotte bi-directional rail passengers:

- August 2016: 2,954
- July 2016: 2,648
- June 2016: 3,292
- May 2016: 2,675
- April 2016: 2,796
- March 2016: 2,764
- February 2016: 2,968
- January 2016: 2,574 (CONTINUED...)

- December 2015: 3,273
- November 2015: 3,741
- October 2015: 3,589
- September 2015: 2,959
- August 2015: 2,951
- July 2015: 3,653
- June 2015: 2,672
- May 2015: 2,309
- April 2015: 3,050
- March 2015: 3,518
- February 2015: 2,563
- January 2015: 2,694

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