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New Amtrak route could transform downtown Wake Forest



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The "mobility hub" will include a pedestrian bridge. It will also include space for leased retail and office. [Expand to read more](#)



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As a \$1.3 billion commuter line inches closer to becoming a reality between Wake Forest and Raleigh, officials envision a 3-story "mobility hub" to maximize the opportunity.

The engineering process for the [S-Line project](#) – a rail expansion that will initially extend service from Raleigh’s Union Station to Wake Forest with the eventual goal of creating a faster [Amtrak](#) route to Richmond, Virginia – is in full swing. And plans for the transit hub in Wake Forest, which would include office and retail space, are coming together.

Last year the Biden Administration announced \$8.2 billion in new funding for passenger rail projects, including \$1.1 billion earmarked for the S-Line route between Raleigh and Wake Forest.

“We have a target date of 2030 to start that service,” said Jason Orthner, rail division director for the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

The S-Line will go through Henderson into southern Virginia with stops in places like Youngsville and Franklinton. The ultimate goal is to improve rail connectivity along the entire corridor, from Atlanta to Washington, D.C.

In North Carolina it starts with Wake Forest, where last month residents reviewed plans for a \$15 million mobility hub via a series of public-input sessions.

Officials say the project could transform downtown Wake Forest.



Rendering of what the mobility hub could look like in Wake Forest.

STANTEC

Mobility hub called an opportunity for Wake Forest

Jason Cannon, president of the Wake Forest Business & Industry Partnership, said bringing back passenger rail “is a huge opportunity for the community to be better connected to Raleigh and the rest of the Triangle.”

"An opportunity for us to bring that live-work-play environment that we all want to see," he said about the hub.

Mike Rutkowski, senior principal at Stantec, which is working on preliminary designs for the project, sees it as a “catalyst” for downtown Wake Forest.

“Yes, it’s a train station. But it’s much more than that,” he said, noting the reason the town picked the “mobility” descriptor is because the vision is a multi-modal facility that accommodates bus service, electric bikes and ride-share services such as Uber and Lyft.

Citizens seem enthusiastic about the plan, officials said.

“Most people think it’s going to be a good thing, and they’re excited about seeing it happen,” said Mayor Vivian Jones.

There have been naysayers, particularly those worried that the hub could complicate parking downtown. The rail hub will be developed on what is currently a half-acre parking lot on South White Street.

Officials point to a multi-story parking deck planned for Elm Avenue and South White Street as one way to mitigate parking concerns.

Jones said other parking improvements will likely be a part of the package.

“We haven’t figured it all out yet,” she said, adding that finding a compromise on parking will be a priority as the project moves forward.

Rutkowski said the goal is to create a hub that blends in with downtown.

Closer look: Beyond 540: The three projects that could transform Triangle commutes

The mobility hub would go across both sides of the tracks and be connected by a pedestrian-bicycle bridge. The center would have the usual features, such as a ticketing area, restrooms and a cafe. It would also have green space for events and areas for retail and office tenants.

Funding for construction has not yet been fully secured.

Brennon Fuqua, director of NCDOT’s Integrated Mobility Division, said the state is applying for grants to help pay for it, and that the \$15 million figure is just an early estimate for how much the project will cost in Wake Forest.

Transit hubs are critical in integrating new rail service into communities, he said. The plan is to open the Wake Forest hub before the rail line's debut in 2030.

The S-Line, 'part of an answer' for congested commutes

In the meantime, Wake Forest is banking that the S-Line will mean major opportunity on its own.

Right now, most of the industrial rail service between Raleigh and Richmond routes through Rocky Mount. The project will create an exit ramp directly to Wake Forest – both for Amtrak passengers and industrial traffic.

Jones sees the connection as essential for commuters who battle congestion every morning on their way to Raleigh.

“This will be part of an answer, not the answer, but part of an answer to their commute problems,” she said, noting the town is [still awaiting promised improvements to Capital Boulevard](#).

NCDOT is studying options for multiple mobility hubs along the North Carolina stretch of the larger project. Downtown Wake Forest was selected as a “preferred site,” with planning scheduled through 2025.