

Careers: Go Triangle names new general counsel

THE HERALD SUN CAREERS APRIL 10, 2016

Shelley Blake will be GoTriangle's new general counsel and will join the agency on May 16.

"We are pleased that Shelley will be joining GoTriangle. She brings a wealth of knowledge that will be of great assistance as the chief legal advisor to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Staff," board of trustees chairman and Durham mayor Bill Bell said. "Blake joins us at an important time as we continue work on the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project, help Wake craft a Transit Plan and work to expand local and regional bus service."

Blake is currently general counsel and deputy secretary at the N.C. Department of Transportation, on the executive leadership team and a senior advisor to the N.C. Secretary of Transportation. She has served in private practice in Raleigh, Cary and Durham, and as an adjunct professor at N.C. Central University's School of Law on legal writing and analysis.

She holds a law degree from NCCU. Blake will replace Deborah Ross, who resigned in 2015.

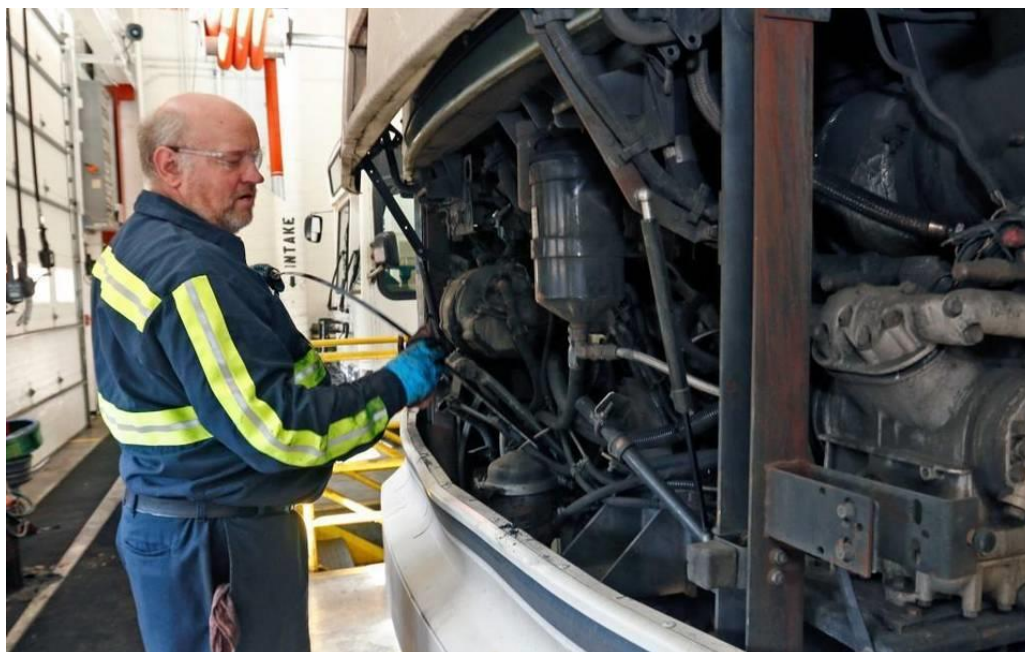
"I am pleased to be joining GoTriangle and am excited about this new opportunity," Blake said. "I look forward to putting my skills and experience to work for our community to ensure the best transit options are available for all residents and helping to strengthen economic development in this rapidly growing region."

Chapel Hill Transit to buy up to 53 new buses

Nearly half of the fleet's 99 buses are between 14 and 20 years old

25 clean diesel buses could be bought over next 12 months at \$450,000 each

Town, transit partners will continue to study electric bus technology



Robert Farrell, a Chapel Hill Transit bus service technician, checks the transmission fluid level on a 2002 bus in this 2015 file photo. Farrell said at the time that the bus had logged 399,000 miles. The town authorized staff Monday to begin purchasing some of the 53 new buses that could be added to the fleet over the next few years. Harry Lynch hlynch@newsobserver.com

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY TAMMY GRUBB APRIL 12, 2016

CHAPEL HILL -- The Town Council approved a five-year contract Monday for up to 53 clean diesel Chapel Hill Transit buses but also left the door open to add electric buses in the future.

The contract does not guarantee the town will buy all the clean diesel buses that were authorized, but the need is critical now, transit director Brian Litchfield said. Each new bus could cost roughly \$450,000.

Nearly half of the fleet's 99 buses are more than 14 years old, and the oldest buses are more than 20 years old; the federal standard is to replace buses after 12 years. The town last added new buses to its fleet in 2013 and could buy up to 25 buses over the next 12 months, he said.

"It's even affecting our newer buses," he said. "As our older buses have gotten older, we're putting more and more miles on our newer buses as well, too, so some of our newer buses have miles on them for buses that are about twice their age, which is a challenge."

There's also a significant amount of staff time involved in maintaining older buses, he said.

The first buses could be paid for through a combination of debt financing, capital reserve money and grants, he said. Five buses could be purchased using Orange County bus and rail tax revenues, four using \$2 million in town funds, and three using state transportation funding.

The council also approved a financing agreement with transit partners Carrboro and UNC for up to 15 buses. Litchfield estimated the annual debt payment would be \$760,000 over roughly 10 years; the university would pay 58 percent, Carrboro would pay 11 percent and Chapel Hill, 31 percent.

State funding, which previously paid 80 percent of a new bus cost, has fallen sharply over several years, Litchfield said.

"The picture is dire," Litchfield said. "It looks a little bit better than it was a few months ago when I was talking to you about this, and we have some good options available to us."

A group of citizens recently petitioned the town to consider buying electric buses instead.

While electric buses are more expensive to buy – roughly twice the cost of a clean diesel bus, Litchfield said – and have higher labor costs, they use less energy than diesel buses, have lower maintenance costs and cut noise and emissions. The lithium-ion or iron-phosphate batteries that power electric buses recover energy at every stop.

The transit partners will discuss the petition at their April 26 meeting, Litchfield said. They also are exploring the possibility of using Duke Energy funds to buy an electric charging station. The cost for a station ranges from \$300,000 to \$1 million, he said.

Five Chapel Hill Transit buses already use a mini-hybrid system, Litchfield said, which relies on electricity to run the engine cooling system instead of a more traditional and expensive hydraulic system.

The town could benefit from improvements in the technology by waiting, council member Maria Palmer said. Council member Ed Harrison, a liaison to the transit partners, suggested the town spend its time on a formal study of alternatives to clean diesel buses, including compress natural gas systems.

Laser system created to cut down with bridge, truck collisions in Durham

WRAL.COM BY BRIAN SHRADER POSTED APRIL 26, 2016

DURHAM, N.C. — The railroad bridge over Gregson Street near Brightleaf Square has become Durham's best-known bridge, with a history of taking the roofs off passing trucks.

The Department of Transportation said it hopes those days are coming to an end.

Tall trucks collide with the bridge so often that Jurgen Henn, who works at Brightleaf Square, set up cameras and started a website with videos of the collisions.

"It has a reputation for enforcing the laws of physics mercilessly," Henn said.

City and state officials have implemented signs and an impact bar, but now the DOT has a new approach.

Jon Sandor and other DOT workers have mounted lasers on the bridge, which will trigger a signal down the street.

DOT officials said the systems cost about \$130,000 apiece.

"This will be a traffic signal that will stop traffic and process what's happening, and see the new sign lighting up indicating they need to turn," he said.

Sandor said raising the railroad and lowering the street would be costly. Nobody has been hurt due to the low hanging bridge, which Sandor said makes the project a lower funding priority.

"We're pretty confident," he said. "Maybe not all of them, but most of them should be eliminated with this."

Henn said he's recorded more than 100 crashes on camera but said he believes the DOT's new system will make it safer.

"I think it'll spare a few trucks from getting decapitated," he said. "I'm hopeful."

The DOT has installed a similar system at the Roxboro and Pettigrew railroad crossing.

McCrory's DOT budget would spend more for road maintenance and litter cleanup

Transportation tax collections are higher than expected

North Carolinians are driving more miles, pumping more gas and buying more cars

DMV would get more driver license examiners and Medical Review Program nurses

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER ROAD WORRIER BLOG BY BRUCE SICELOFF APRIL 27, 2016

RALEIGH Transportation tax collections are up because North Carolinians are driving more miles and buying more cars than state budget writers expected a year ago, and Gov. Pat McCrory has some proposals for how to spend that extra money.

In his recommended revisions for the 2016-2017 state budget, released Wednesday, McCrory called for a \$30 million increase in the \$1.2 billion Strategic Transportation Investment construction program, and \$27.5 million more for highway maintenance.

He also proposed to increase Department of Transportation spending by:

- \$10 million for roadside litter and debris removal, a big increase for a program now budgeted to receive \$16.9 million
- \$3.9 million to pay for 95 contract driver license examiners, to reduce wait times at busy driver license offices
- \$2.5 million for small urban transportation construction projects
- \$2 million in incentives to speed the consolidation of rural multi-county transit systems
- \$1.8 million to pay for 21 contract nurses and 7 fulltime Division of Motor Vehicles employees in the Medical Review Program, to “ensure due process for all types of adverse action that may be taken against customers’ driving privileges.”
- \$1.5 million in grants for public airport improvements
- \$1 million to promote DMV online services

Increased car sales will generate \$43.3 million more in highway use tax collections than had been expected in the DOT budget – producing a revenue total of \$703.1 million – for fiscal year 2015-2016, which ends July 1. Gas tax collections will come in around \$1.885 billion for the year, or \$88 million more than had been budgeted.

DMV fee collections are up, too – a projected \$682.3 million in 2015-2016, or \$22 million more than had been expected when the budget was approved last year.