

**DURHAM • CHAPEL HILL • CARRBORO**  
**METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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DATE: May 24, 2023  
 TO: DCHC MPO Technical Committee  
 SUBJECT: Durham County Transit Plan

**Background/Justification**

The Durham County Transit Plan is required by state legislation that enabled the local option half-cent sales tax for public transit improvements. The plan must be adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, the GoTriangle Board of Trustees, and the DCHC MPO Board. The sales tax is the primary funding source, but the plan also incorporates funding from vehicle registration fees and the rental car tax that are managed together in a Triangle Tax District. Durham County funding sources generate approximately \$40 million annually. The plan was first adopted in 2011, with an update in 2017, and was centered around the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project. In 2019, GoTriangle discontinued the light rail project, and there is now a need for a new Durham County Transit Plan.

The plan update is being managed by Ellen Beckmann, Durham County Transportation Manager. There is a multi-agency Durham Transit Team guiding the plan development. In 2020, the MPO contracted with Kimley-Horn and Associates to provide consultant support for the transit plan. Kimley-Horn is using several subconsultants on the plan, including community partners for public engagement services.

The public engagement process has followed the City of Durham's Equitable Engagement Blueprint. The first phase of outreach for the plan was initiated in coordination with the Durham Comprehensive Plan from October 2019 to February 2020 through the Listening and Learning sessions. This first phase focused on identifying high-level goals and objectives and seeking feedback on the universe of projects and services that residents would like to see included in the plan.

Two over-arching core principles were identified for the plan:

- Equity
- Community Trust

And four high-level goals were identified:

- Accessibility
- Connectivity
- Convenience
- Sustainability

The Durham Transit Team directly used the results of the Phase 1 outreach and technical analysis to develop three representative transit options for how the funding could be used through 2040, making sure to address the needs identified by current transit riders, low-income residents, and People of Color. This second phase of outreach occurred in summer 2021. The results of the Phase 2 outreach were presented to boards in fall of 2021. The key takeaways from the Phase 2 outreach were:

- Regular Transit Riders and People of Color consistently identified later/weekend bus service, more bus frequency, and more reliable bus service as their highest priorities.
- All respondents supported getting more improvements more quickly.
- All respondents supported bus rapid transit or the elements of bus rapid transit such as 15-minute service, bus-only lanes, and traffic signal priority.
- The commuter rail project has support, but it is not the highest priority for any group. The commuter rail project has less support from People of Color and Daily Transit Riders.

The results of the Phase 2 outreach and technical analysis provided the basis for a preferred scenario that was brought to the public for review in summer 2022. The Phase 3 outreach results generally were supportive of the preferred scenario, indicating that it should be used as the basis for the final recommended plan. Upon the completion of that outreach and analysis of the feedback, the preferred scenario has been refined and tested against projected revenues to ensure compliance with the financial model requirements agreed to by GoTriangle and Durham County. This final preferred scenario is reflected in the final recommended plan that was released for public comment on December 15, 2022 and will be brought to the three governing boards in May and June for adoption.

Durham County, and the entire Triangle region, has many more transit needs than available funds can provide. A key purpose of the draft Durham County Transit Plan is to identify and prioritize those needs within fiscal constraints. The recommended plan balances community needs for improvement to the existing local and regional bus systems and planning and building for future travel needs as the Triangle grows.

The final plan report has been posted on the plan's Engage Durham website:

<https://engagedurham.com/101/Durham-Transit-Plan>

The preferred scenario focuses on four key themes for improvements:

- Improve the Current System
- More Projects Sooner
- Connect the Region with Quick and Reliable Service
- Better Experience at Stops and Stations

Project highlights include:

- All services currently being provided through the Durham County Transit Plan will continue
- Increased midday service on the GoTriangle 400/405 and 700 routes
- New GoDurham crosstown routes in north and east Durham
- Additional frequency on GoDurham Routes 3, 4, and 9/9A/9B
- Extend Sunday GoDurham service to midnight on all routes
- Improvements at all bus stops in Durham County
- Construction of bus stop and access improvements on five high-frequency Bus Transit Corridors
  - Route 5 (Fayetteville Street)
  - Route 3 (Holloway Street)
  - Route 10 (Morehead Avenue/Chapel Hill Road/University Drive)
  - Route 9 (Avondale Drive/Club Boulevard/Dearborn Drive)
  - Route 4 (Roxboro Road)
- Construction of new transit centers
  - The Village

- North Duke Crossing
  - Construction of improvements at Durham Station
  - Construction of a new Regional Transit Center in RTP
  - Construction of a new paratransit maintenance facility
  - Construction of improvements to the GoTriangle and GoDurham Bus Operations and Maintenance Facilities
  - Study to determine needed improvements for GoDurham and GoTriangle ACCESS and funding for implementation
  - GoDurham Connect (microtransit) zones in north and east Durham
  - Subsidized vanpools to Durham County employment sites
  - Transit Signal Priority to improve bus speed and reliability on congested corridors.
  - Bus speed and reliability improvements on downtown streets near Durham Station, including bus only lanes, signal upgrades, routing changes, and other infrastructure improvements.
  - Study for potential Bus Rapid Transit or other bus speed and reliability improvements and funding towards the construction of those improvements.
  - Durham County's financial contribution towards the construction and operation of fast, reliable, regional passenger rail or bus service initiatives.
- The improvements listed above do not address all the transit needs that Durham will have over the next 20 years. The Durham County Transit Plan report acknowledges the unmet transit needs and supports the further development of and identification of funding for a greater vision for transit in Durham County that is consistent with the DCHC MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).
  - Furthermore, consistent with the plan's focus on community trust, the final recommended plan includes implementation metrics that will be used to monitor and report on project delivery and outcomes. Additional staff administration resources are also programmed to facilitate project delivery, report on progress, and improve equitable contracting and transit-oriented development efforts.

The DCHC MPO Public Involvement Policy requires that the plan be released for a minimum 21-day public comment period. Due to delay in approval of the Transit Governance Interlocal Agreement, the public comment period was extended to May 1, 2023. A compilation of comments is included in the appendix.

Some edits and additions to the final Durham Transit Plan were made in response to the public comments received and board discussions:

- Additional description of the path forward for Bus Rapid Transit was added.
- Additional information about fare free transit was added.
- Additional information about electric buses was added.
- The Commuter Rail section of the Financial Chapter references the potential for incremental passenger/freight rail improvements through Federal Railroad Administration and NCDOT funding.

The adoption schedule for the Durham County Transit Plan is below. State law requires that the Durham County Transit Plan be approved by three governing bodies: the DCHC MPO Board, the Durham Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), and the GoTriangle Board of Trustees.

- BOCC – May 22
- GoTriangle Board of Trustees – May 24
- DCHC MPO Board – June 14

**Policy Impact**

The Durham County Transit Plan can help support many of the Strategic Plan goals including:

- Goal 1: Community Empowerment and Enrichment – Public transit provides better access to educational opportunity, affordable housing, employment, and social services.
- Goal 2: Health and Well-Being for All – Public transit provides better access to health resources, encourages more active transportation options for residents, and reduces traffic-related deaths and injuries.
- Goal 4: Environmental Stewardship and Community Prosperity – Public transit improves the quality of life for residents and supports sustainable development and economic growth.
- Goal 5: Accountable, Efficient, and Visionary Government – The Transit Plan as well as the Interlocal Implementation Agreement will establish an accountability structure to monitor progress towards implementation and ensure that Durham County taxpayers receive good value for the taxes and fees supporting the plan.

**Procurement Background**

N/A

**Fiscal Impact**

The Durham County Transit Plan lists the transit operations, projects, and staff that can be supported by revenues in the Triangle Tax District for Durham County. The Transit Plan is intended to have a 20-year horizon with annual updates or amendments as needed. Over the 20-year plan, approximately \$1.1 billion is expected to be available for public transit improvements.

**Recommendation**

**TC Action:** Recommend the MPO Board approve the Durham Transit Plan.

**Board Action:** Approve the Durham Transit Plan.