

Transit service between Carrboro, Durham to start

The Herald-Sun From Staff Reports August 6, 2016

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK -- Carrboro residents will have weekday transit service to Durham beginning Monday, Aug. 8.

"We're pleased to offer this service that meets a need we've heard from Carrboro residents," said GoTriangle General Manager Jeff Mann. "By extending our former Chapel Hill to Durham route in the busy 15-501 corridor, we'll give passengers an efficient one seat ride from Carrboro to downtown Chapel Hill, Duke, the VA and downtown Durham."

The fare is \$2.25 one way. The route will run in weekday peak hours.

"The Town of Carrboro is excited to have GoTriangle expand this regional route into our walkable, bikeable, transit friendly town," said Mayor Lydia Lavelle. "The route will serve residents who can now travel more easily to Durham, and visitors who will have greater access to our town. This new service supports our values around public transportation, including increased accessibility for all residents while reducing our greenhouse gas emissions."

Morning service from Carrboro to Durham begins at 5:45 a.m. and will serve these stops:

- Jones Ferry at Collins Crossing
- East Main Street at Weaver Street Realty
- East Franklin Street at the Carolina Coffee Shop
- Erwin Road at Duke Hospital
- Durham Station Transportation Center, 515 W Pettigrew Street

Afternoon service from Durham to Carrboro begins at 3:30 p.m. and will serve these stops:

- Durham Station Transportation Center, 515 W Pettigrew Street
- Erwin Road at VA Hospital
- East Franklin Street at the Varsity Theatre
- East Main Street at Jade Palace
- Jones Ferry at Alabama Avenue

The full schedule can be found at bit.ly/2aZh5tf online. The first full year of service will cost an estimated \$650,000 and will be paid with funds from the voter approved local sales tax and vehicle registration revenues for bus improvements and the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project.

Learn more at gotriangle.org online or call 919-485-RIDE.

Fire official ties speed humps to response delays

The Herald-Sun By Keith Upchurch August 11, 2016

DURHAM -- Durham's speed humps often delay firetrucks and ambulances in getting to their destinations and increase risk to those they're trying to serve, a fire official says. (CONTINUED...)

Deputy Chief Chris Iannuzzi of the Durham Fire Department wrote a paper on Durham's speed humps while attending the elite Executive Fire Officer Program in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Iannuzzi and Assistant Durham Fire Chief Andy Sannipoli recently graduated from the four-year program, which accepts only about 300 people nationwide each year.

In his research, Iannuzzi found Durham fire trucks are delayed an average of 10 seconds for every speed hump they travel over on the way to a fire or other emergency.

Because fire doubles every 60 seconds, delays can make a difference in the severity of damage and affect the outcome for someone having a heart attack or other medical emergency.

"Anecdotally, there have been cases when speed humps slowed firetrucks' arrival," Iannuzzi said. "We haven't collected specific data, so I can't go back and say it happened on a specific call, but we're trying to make sure we get that data."

Iannuzzi said that if a fire truck crosses several humps, the fire will likely be worse when firefighters arrive.

Likewise, firefighters often respond to medical emergencies when every second counts.

"For someone who's not breathing, every minute of delay in starting defibrillation means there's a 10 percent decrease in survivability," Iannuzzi said. "Then it starts to make a difference."

He cited a Texas study showing speed humps resulted in lost lives there because of emergency vehicle delays.

Iannuzzi said he couldn't document a case where a speed-hump delay caused a fire death in Durham, but there was one case that made him wonder.

"I was responsible for that call," he said. "A man died, and speed humps were there. It's impossible to say what caused it. Was there a delay? Yes. Was that delay what caused the man to die? I can't say, because I don't know at what point he died. But I think about it."

Iannuzzi said there are streets in Durham where he believes speed humps should be removed.

On Swarthmore Drive, for example, a fire truck must drive over four speed humps if it turns right, slowing it by 45 to 60 seconds, he said.

Iannuzzi said the Fire Department plans to be more assertive in opposing speed humps that would create a serious problem for emergency vehicles.

"We haven't asked that any be removed, but that's something that maybe we'll do," he added.

The problem can be worse for ambulances, because humps slow them in both directions and can delay a patient's arrival at a hospital.

Iannuzzi said the Executive Fire Officer Program teaches skills that benefit Durham.

"It helps develop skills and perspective on the fire service that help us run an effective organization," Iannuzzi said.

City discusses East End Connector land-use plan

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan August 16, 2016

DURHAM -- The Durham City Council heard public comments about its land-use analysis of an area of eastern Durham County where the East End Connector will link Interstate 85 with the Durham Freeway, during its meeting this week.

The land along business U.S. 70 leading toward the center of Durham has been under construction for several months for the N.C. Department of Transportation project. Trees were removed, a few businesses relocated and buildings demolished and ground cleared -- all visible to commuters passing by on 70.

The Durham City-County Planning Department has been holding public meetings about future land use for that area of residential, commercial and industrial use.

Lisa Miller, senior planner with the City-County Planning Department said because of the East End Connector changing the area, they wanted to look at future land use. As the character changes, they looked at whether land use should change in that area, too, Miller told Council members at the start of a public hearing Monday night.

Miller said they've received public input over the past year, holding sessions in Calvary Baptist Church, which sits at the intersection of 70 and Lynn Road and is impacted by the East End Connector work.

Changes to land use recommended by staff were mostly amending property zonings where there is split land use, and also where access to properties is becoming limited because of the highway project.

"Some locations where future land-use designation currently in place is not in keeping with existing use or zoning designation," Miller said.

One change local residents and drivers will notice after the East End Connector is finished is a new frontage road that will be on the east side of 70. Miller mentioned the frontage road and said the planning department advises the east side of 70, which is zoned majority residential, stay that way and use that as dividing line for an appropriate split between residential on one side and commercial on the other.

Residents who spoke during the public hearing had mostly clarification questions about existing zoning designations, answered by staff. Questions about the East End Connector impact on roads were referred to NCDOT.

Durham Mayor Bill Bell was assured that all property owners had been notified of the future land-use plans. Miller said that there were questions from individual property owners, but there were no objections to the planning department's proposal.

Councilman Eddie Davis said he had spoken with members of Calvary Baptist Church who were upset over the East End Connector itself. Miller said that public meetings were held at the church, and that Calvary was ultimately happy with the city-county zoning designation. The East End Connector is a highway project of NCDOT, not the city and county.

Councilman Don Moffitt proposed, and the rest of council approved, that they follow the staff recommendations for land use except for one area retained as low-medium residential. To view the maps and documentation, visit bit.ly/2bxZ3NJ and item 20 on the council agenda for Aug. 15, which details the resolution, maps and land use.

All council meeting agendas, and video during and after meetings, are posted on the city website, atdurhamnc.gov/1560/Media-Center.

NCDOT provides updates on the status of the East End Connector at ncdot.gov/projects/eastendconnector. The highway is due to open to traffic in July 2019, with project completion in January 2020.

Local Briefs: Alston Avenue widening, improvements set

The Herald-Sun Staff Reports August 16, 2016

Alston Avenue widening set

RALEIGH — Drivers in Durham will be getting an improved Alston Avenue (N.C. 55) to use, courtesy of a \$39.8 million Department of Transportation contract.

The project, awarded to Zachry Construction Corp., a San Antonio, Texas company with an office in Morrisville, will widen and improve more than a mile of the highway to accommodate a four-lane median-divided road between the Durham Freeway and just north of U.S. 70 Business/N.C. 98 (Holloway Street).

The improvements are needed to reduce congestion and improve safety along that stretch of road, which is projected to be used by nearly 33,000 vehicles a day in the next 20 years.

Part of the road will initially be striped for on-street parking at the conclusion of the project, with the four-lane pattern implemented for the entire stretch when traffic volumes warrant the additional lanes at some point in the future.

In addition to the added lanes, the project will include a widened bridge over the Durham Freeway, sidewalks on both sides of the road and either wider outside lanes to accommodate bicycles or designated bike lanes. There will also be the addition of retaining walls, railroad track work and new railroad bridges.

The project can get under way as early as Aug. 29, with the new road open by Nov. 1, 2019, and the rest of the work wrapped up by May 2020.

Ramp meters coming to I-540 in Raleigh next spring

The News and Observer – Traffic By Richard Stradling August 16, 2016

RALEIGH -- The state Department of Transportation plans to install traffic signals on four on-ramps on Interstate 540 in Raleigh early next year to break up the long lines of vehicles that pour onto the freeway during rush hour.

The signals, known as ramp meters, will switch between green and red, allowing one or two drivers to go, then stopping the next ones for a few moments. The idea is that putting some space between the vehicles on the ramp should make it easier for them to merge into traffic on the highway.

“That translates to better traffic flow and more reliable times on the freeway, as well as improved safety and fewer crashes,” said Kevin Lacy, DOT’s state traffic engineer.

It will be the first time ramp meters have been used in North Carolina, though they’re common in other large cities, including New York, Houston and Atlanta. They’ve been used on freeways in Chicago since the 1960s.

The I-540 lights are a test for the state, said DOT spokesman Steve Abbott. If they’re successful there, DOT would look to install them on other busy ramps in North Carolina.

The signals will be installed on the westbound on-ramps at Falls of Neuse, Six Forks, Creedmoor and Leesville roads and will be used during the morning rush hour and at other times of heavy traffic, such as after an accident, Abbott said. The lights will be turned off when not in use.

DOT chose the four ramps in part because of their length, Abbott said. The lights will be placed about halfway down the ramps, giving drivers enough space to get up to speed from a dead stop. “You have to have a long enough ramp to get up to highway speed,” he said. (CONTINUED...)

Sensors in the pavement will detect if traffic from the on-ramp is backing up onto the road and will turn the light green long enough to clear the backup. NCDOT's traffic operations center will monitor the ramps via cameras and can manually adjust the signals if necessary.

The ramp meters will cost an estimated \$2.1 million to install, and DOT hopes to have them in place by next spring. It will hold a public meeting to explain how they'll work and answer questions on Thursday, Sept. 29, at the Abbotts Creek Community Center on Durant Road in Raleigh. The meeting will run from 4 to 7 p.m.

Traffic fatalities continued to surge in first half of 2016

WRAL.com Posted 8/23/2016

By JOAN LOWY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Traffic fatalities were up 9 percent in the first six months of this year compared to the same period last year, continuing a surge in deaths that began two years ago as the economy improved and travel picked up, according to preliminary estimates released Tuesday by the National Safety Council.

An estimated 19,100 people were killed on U.S. roads from January through June, said the council, a congressionally chartered nonprofit that gets its data from state authorities. That's 18 percent more than two years ago at the six-month mark. About 2.2 million people also were seriously injured in the first half of this year.

The council estimates the cost of these deaths and injuries at about \$205 billion.

At that rate, annual deaths could exceed 40,000 fatalities this year for the first time in nine years, the council said. More than 35,000 people were killed on U.S. roads last year, making it the deadliest driving year since 2008, when more than 37,000 were killed.

"Our complacency is killing us," said Deborah A.P. Hersman, the safety council's president and CEO. "Americans should demand change to prioritize safety actions and protect ourselves from one of the leading causes of preventable death."

U.S. drivers have also put in a record 1.58 trillion miles on the road in the first half of this year, a 3.3 percent increase over the same period in 2015, the Federal Highway Administration said this week.

States with the biggest increases since the upward trend began in late 2014 include Vermont, up 82 percent; Oregon, 70 percent; New Hampshire, 61 percent; Idaho, 46 percent; Florida, 43 percent; Iowa, 37 percent; Georgia, 34 percent; Indiana, 33 percent; California, 31 percent and Wisconsin, 29 percent.

"While many factors likely contributed to the fatality increase, a stronger economy and lower unemployment rates are at the core of the trend," the council said in a statement. Another likely factor: Average gas prices for the first six months of this year were 16 percent lower than in 2015.

The council also predicts that 438 people will be killed on the nation's roads over the three-day Labor Day weekend that begins Sept. 2, which would make it the deadliest Labor Day weekend since 2008.

Historical data show that after peaking in the 1970s, traffic deaths have generally trended downward, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Large dips in deaths have corresponded to shocks to the economy — the oil embargo of the mid-1970s, the recessions of the early 1980s and early 1990s and the more recent downturn that began in late 2007 with the subprime mortgage crisis.

During the Great Recession triggered by the housing crisis, the number of miles Americans put on the road each year plunged and fatalities dropped to levels not seen since Harry Truman was president. (CONTINUED...)

The council's tallies of traffic fatalities differ slightly from those of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration because the council includes motor vehicle deaths that take place in parking lots, driveways and other nonpublic roadways.

OWASA board OKs Mountains-to-Sea Trail link; no final route yet

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb August 25, 2016

CHAPEL HILL -- OWASA's board voted Thursday to add Cane Creek Reservoir lands to a statewide trail but left room to make exceptions and approve the county's final route.

Chairman John Young said he sees the board's decision as giving the county a framework for working out the many issues that remain before setting a final route.

"OWASA's responsibility is to promote reasonable mitigation of this for our neighbors and encourage the county to work with this broader community to find the right balance and the right mitigations," Young said. "They're the elected officials. It's their responsibility to deal with those issues in the broader sense."

The 8-1 decision followed three hours of public comment and debate about some of the more than 45 conditions that the Mountains-to-Sea Trail must meet to cross Orange Water and Sewer Authority land.

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail is an effort by the North Carolina State Trails Program to link the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks. The county is trying to site a trail from southern Alamance County to existing segments in Hillsborough and eastern Orange County.

OWASA's conditions are aimed at protecting high-quality drinking water, meeting existing policies and minimizing the risks of a public trail, the board said. OWASA money will not be spent to build the trail.

The board added a few last-minute changes Thursday, from lifting a prohibition on using foul language to blocking trail construction on OWASA lands until the county secures at least one connecting segment.

They do not support a standalone trail on OWASA lands, members said, but they left for the future a decision about hosting a trailhead or parking.

Apple Mill Road resident Luther Livermon was among roughly 20 speakers supporting an OWASA link. It will be more than a trail through the county, he said.

"You have an opportunity to take a jewel in North Carolina, which is the property around the reservoir, and let that be part of the trail," he said.

Trail opponents said they still have concerns about the risk of fire, increased crime and the liability for someone who has an accident on the trail.

The county has talked with Forest Service, Orange County Sheriff's Office and insurance officials, said Dave Stencil, director of the county's Department of Environment, Parks, Agriculture and Recreation. Only the Orange County Sheriff's Office had concerns, he said, about where trailheads are located and the potential for car break-ins. They recommended trailheads and access points with good visibility, he said.

Rural residents also noted the natural beauty and the solitude of the area as reasons to oppose an OWASA segment. (CONTINUED...)

"We live in the rural watershed area because we enjoy living in the country without the intrusion of shopping centers, gas stations, pedestrian and auto traffic, and the list goes on and on," said Thunder Mountain resident Christine Silva.

Mt. Mitchell Road resident Brenda McCall and Bonnie Hauser, with the rural advocacy group Orange County Voice, suggested looking for an alternate route that could take cyclists and hikers past natural, historical and cultural sites.

"We like to call it the Lands Legacy segment of the trail," Hauser said, referring to the county's land conservation program. "It would be a truly distinctive segment of the statewide trail network."

RDU faces criticism amid 25-year planning efforts

The News and Observer By Kathryn Trogon August 26, 2016

RALEIGH – As the CEO of the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority spoke Thursday of the importance of a strong and growing airport, protesters gathered outside to object to parts of the airport's proposed 25-year plan for growth.

Nearly 20 hikers and cyclists held up signs that said "Rethink Vision 2040" and "Keep RDU Green" outside the Raleigh Convention Center. The signs referred to the airport's 18-month master planning process, called [Vision 2040](#), that is expected to be completed later this year.

They hoped to gain the attention of Michael Landguth, president and CEO of the airport authority, who was speaking at the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitor's Bureau's annual meeting. Many of the protesters were from two area nonprofits – Triangle Off-Road Cyclists and The Umstead Coalition – who have ramped up their efforts to raise awareness about the airport's plan since [June](#).

They're just some of the 5,000 people who have signed an online [petition](#) asking the airport authority to preserve 611 acres of forested land and recreational trails between Lake Crabtree County Park and William B. Umstead State Park.

In an interview, Landguth said the hundreds of acres in question could one day be necessary for the development of uses like offices or hotels to help pay for the airport's infrastructure needs as it serves more customers.

The authority must create the master plan according to Federal Aviation Administration guidelines, but airport representatives have said that doesn't mean all of the property will be built out anytime soon.

Landguth emphasized the airport authority's willingness to work with the community as it develops the 25-year plan, but said the airport has obligations it must meet that date back to the 1940s, when the military turned the airport over to the airport authority.

"Federal requirements say that land should be for aeronautical use or produce income to pay for critical infrastructure," he said. "That's what we agreed to in 1948 when we took a \$2.2 million asset and paid \$65,000 for it."

But Landguth said the airport authority still hopes to find a solution that benefits both the airport and the community.

"So as long as we can meet those federal requirements and we can work with the community on the solutions, we are more than willing," he said.

Natalie Lew, a cyclist in Raleigh, and other area hikers and bikers think they have a solution that will make that happen. They have proposed using the 600 acres for an Urban Trails Center, with more than 50 miles of trails surrounded by commercial development, such as bike shops, restaurants and hotels, that would cater to outdoor enthusiasts. (CONTINUED...)

"We are not trying to work against the airport," Lew said. "We know they need to make money, but we feel like with this urban trails center concept that we have would create sustainable business for them and would benefit the entire community."

Growing needs

Inside the convention center, Landguth spoke to government and business leaders and focused on a different facet of the airport – its growth within the aeronautical core.

"Site selectors, event planners and tourists look for strong air service and world-class facilities, and so our interests are totally aligned," he said. "A stronger airport means a stronger tourism business, more hotel stays, more dinners."

The airport generates an estimated total economic impact of \$8.5 billion, sustains 20,000 jobs and generates \$148 million in state and local tax revenues, Landguth said.

While the airport saw a drop in customers during the recession, "nine years later, we do see a light at the end of the tunnel," he said. The airport expects to serve more than 10 million customers this year – the most customers served since 2007.

But the airport's "big win," he said, was the addition of [Delta's nonstop flight to Paris](#) in May. International flights are expected to generate \$1.4 billion of economic impact over 25 years of service, he said.

"Delta wouldn't be making that type of investment if they didn't think there was a great opportunity for them," he said in an interview.

This success means an expanding list of infrastructure demands that will mean significant capital funding needs in the future.

The airport expects it will have to rebuild its longest runway – a crucial piece to allow for international travel – in the next three to five years. It also expects to build a new consolidated rental car facility and will need 23 new gates in the next 25 years.

"This growth will not come without challenges," Landguth said. "We need to work together to ensure we have facilities to support the aviation needs of our community and the visitors we want to attract to this region."

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.

"We are looking for other opportunities [for] how we can develop additional sources of revenue by providing new products and services to our consumers," he said. "That's part of the master planning process ... to sort through those details."

'We've seen cars in trees': How can cops stop texting drivers if threat of death won't?

The News and Observer By Denise Lavoie, Associated Press September 2, 2016

WEST BRIDGEWATER, Mass. -- State troopers in Chattanooga, Tennessee, have been known to patrol in a tractor-trailer so they can sit up high and spot drivers texting behind the wheel.

In Bethesda, Maryland, a police officer disguised himself as a homeless man, stood near a busy intersection and radioed ahead to officers down the road about texting drivers. In two hours last October, police gave out 56 tickets. (CONTINUED...)

And in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, south of Boston, an officer regularly tools around town on his bicycle, pedals up to drivers at stoplights and hands them \$105 tickets.

Texting while driving in the U.S. is not just a dangerous habit, but also an infuriatingly widespread one, practiced both brazenly and surreptitiously by so many motorists that police are being forced to get creative – and still can't seem to make much headway.

"It's everyone, kids, older people – everyone. When I stop someone, they say, 'You're right. I know it's dangerous, but I heard my phone go off and I had to look at it,'" said West Bridgewater Officer Matthew Monteiro.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates nearly 3,500 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in the mainland U.S. and Puerto Rico in 2015, up from almost 3,200 in 2014. The number of deaths in which cellphones were the distraction rose from 406 in 2014 to 476 in 2015.

But many safety advocates say crashes involving cellphones are vastly underreported because police are forced to rely on what they are told by drivers, many of whom aren't going to admit they were using their phones.

"You don't have a Breathalyzer or a blood test to see if they are using their phones," said Deborah Hersman, president and chief executive of the National Safety Council and former chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board. "Certainly, law enforcement can ask people, 'Can I see your phone?' but people can refuse, so they then have to get a search warrant."

Forty-six states have laws against texting while driving that typically also ban sending or reading email, using apps or engaging in other internet activity. Fourteen states bar drivers from using hand-held cellphones for any activity, including talking.

While efforts to discourage texting have increased in recent years, the consensus among police, safety advocates and drivers is that the problem is only getting worse.

In New York, texting tickets soared from about 9,000 in 2011 to nearly 85,000 in 2015. In Massachusetts, they rocketed from about 1,100 to a little over 6,100 over the same period. In California, the number of people found guilty of texting while driving climbed from under 3,000 in 2009 to over 31,000 in 2015.

"We did see one driver who had two phones going at one time – one in his left hand and one in his right hand, with his wrist on the steering wheel." Lt. Paul Watts, Virginia state trooper

Everywhere they look, police see drivers staring at their phones.

"We did see one driver who had two phones going at one time – one in his left hand and one in his right hand, with his wrist on the steering wheel," said Lt. Paul Watts, a Virginia state trooper.

West Bridgewater Police Chief Victor Flaherty said: "We've seen cars in trees. We've had two houses hit within three weeks. We had a car off the road 100 yards before it hit a parking lot."

Enforcement is difficult, in part because it's hard to prove texting violations in states that allow drivers to talk on hand-held cellphones.

"For the normal officer, in a car, it's very difficult to tell if someone is texting or just using their phone in another way," Flaherty said.

In Florida, texting is a secondary offense, meaning that even if police spot drivers texting, they can't be stopped unless the officer sees another violation, such as speeding. Police gave out just 1,359 citations for texting in 2015.

Drivers have also become sneakier. Instead of resting their phones against the steering wheel, they hold them down low to make it more difficult for police to see what's going on. (CONTINUED...)

“Some people call it the red-light prayer because their heads are bowed and they are looking down at their laps with a nice blue glow coming up in their face,” said Chris Cochran, a spokesman for the California Office of Traffic Safety.

In New York, some lawmakers proposed equipping police with a device called the Textalyzer. An officer investigating a crash could use it to check the driver’s phone for any activity before the wreck. The idea ran into legal objections and has not been put to a vote.

Fines for first offenses range from \$20 to \$500. In some states, such as New York, drivers caught texting also get points on their driving record, which can lead to higher insurance rates.

Some states have increased the penalties, including Louisiana, which raised its fine for first-time offenders from \$175 to up to \$500. But safety advocates have focused more on pushing for better enforcement, said Jonathan Adkins, executive director of the Governors Highway Safety Association.

Surveys show that most drivers know the dangers of using their phones while driving but that many do it anyway.

Jay Winsten, director of the Center for Health Communication at Harvard’s School of Public Health, is working on a major media campaign against distracted driving. The center spearheaded the successful 1980s campaign that promoted the use of designated drivers to combat drunken driving.

In addition to warning drivers not to use their phones, the new campaign will promote defensive driving, urging motorists to watch out for distracted drivers.

“We’re trying to get the attention of people by not talking to them as the villain, but rather as the other guy,” Winsten said.

In the meantime, Officer Monteiro can’t pedal his bike fast enough to get to all the drivers he sees texting. One day, he caught a teenager playing Pokemon Go on his phone while driving. Another time, he caught a woman watching YouTube videos. Both got slapped with \$105 tickets. The teenager also faces a 60-day suspension of his license.

Vinny Fiasconaro, 30, got a warning after Monteiro saw him using the calculator on his phone at a stop sign. Fiasconaro shook his head sheepishly.

“I was in the wrong,” he said. “You should be focusing on the road. You should pay attention.”