

## Road Worrier: Wake transit plan combines urban ridership, rural coverage

THE NEWS & OBSERVER – NEWS COLUMNS & BLOGS BY BRUCE SICELOFF DECEMBER 7, 2015

Wake Transit Plan will be unveiled Tuesday at Raleigh Convention Center public meeting

The \$2.3 billion, 10-year plan includes bus rapid transit and rush-hour trains

Towns with no bus service would be offered matching grants from the county

RALEIGH -- Hoping to put years of delays and debates, false hopes and false starts behind them, local leaders this week are rolling out a \$2.3 billion plan for trains and lots of buses that could quadruple transit ridership in Wake County by 2027.

The Wake Transit Plan stretches to satisfy both the demand for frequent, day-long bus service in Raleigh's fast-growing urban core and the cry for connectivity in outlying towns – some of them also expanding rapidly – that have little or no public transportation now.

Maps, videos, real buses and model trains will be featured at a public unveiling for the transit plan from 4 to 8 p.m. Tuesday in the ground-floor exhibit hall at the Raleigh Convention Center, 500 S. Salisbury St.

The Wake County commissioners and two other boards are expected next spring to approve the plan and call a November referendum on a half-cent local sales tax, which would help pay for it.

"Wake County is growing at 63 people a day, from people who are moving in and people who were born here," Matt Calabria, a Wake County commissioner, told a regional business audience last week, in a preview of the Wake Transit Plan. "If we're going to be prepared for the future – and head off the problems that can come with congestion and traffic and the kind of meteoric growth that we have in Wake County – we're going to need to get started now."

The plan incorporates a 37-mile commuter rail line running, mostly at rush hour, from West Durham through Research Triangle Park and Raleigh to East Garner. Wake County's stated goal would be to get the trains up and running – along with all the planned buses – by 2027, 10 years after the proposed start of transit sales tax collections in 2017.

### Bus rapid transit

Along with more standard buses rolling more frequently on more streets, the Wake Transit Plan features a criss-cross map of bus rapid transit (BRT) lines radiating out from Raleigh's center on major streets in four directions.

Bus rapid transit is an up-and-coming, lower-cost and more flexible alternative to light rail, with bus stops that resemble rail platforms. Details and amenities vary from city to city, and planners say they probably would vary in different parts of Raleigh. Options include a dedicated lane, where BRT vehicles can zip ahead of rush-hour traffic, and traffic-signal technology that gives BRT drivers more green lights.

Outlying towns would see a lesser boost in bus service, coupled with incentives to develop homegrown transit options. Each town would have buses running to downtown Raleigh – some every 30 or 60 minutes, from 5 a.m. to midnight, and some only at rush hour. The county also would offer a 50 percent funding match to help towns in southern and eastern Wake establish their own bus service.

The Wake Transit Plan was developed over the past year in an effort that included meetings across the county, a 76-member citizen advisory committee and more than 4,000 public comments. The commissioners are not expected to make substantial changes.

Durham and Orange counties advanced their transit plans quickly after the legislature authorized the local half-cent sales tax. But public transportation faced bigger obstacles in Wake.

A Republican-dominated board of commissioners refused to discuss any Wake plan for a few years. But transit was one of the major campaign issues that helped Democrats take control of every seat in the 2014 election, and the tide turned abruptly.

Wake's planning group considered electric-powered light rail at first. The Regional Transportation Alliance, a business group that sometimes influences state and Triangle transportation priorities, frowned on light rail and lobbied hard for the little-known alternative of bus rapid transit.

A less-expensive rail vehicle was added to the mix – diesel multiple units, with each car powered by its own diesel engine – but Norfolk Southern Railroad signaled its reluctance to let these trains share the N.C. Railroad corridor with its freight trains.

The Durham-to-Garner commuter trains would have to overcome political, financial and technical obstacles. Heavy federal funding would be needed, and Wake would count on Durham County to cover its share of capital and operating costs.

But Durham shelved commuter trains a few years ago and, for now at least, is investing most of its own transit tax receipts in a \$1.5 billion Durham-Orange County light-rail project.

"There will be commuter rail ultimately," John Kane, the North Hills developer, said last week, appearing with Calabria at a Regional Transportation Alliance gathering. "When that will happen is still a matter of timing, but it will be done. And it will connect Garner over to Durham. So this will give us connectivity throughout the Triangle."

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## **WAKE TRANSIT PLAN DETAILS**

### **1. Regional connections**

Commuter trains run for 37 miles from West Durham through Research Triangle Park to downtown Raleigh and Garner, including stops at Morrisville and N.C. State University. The focus is on the workday rush hour, with 5 to 8 trains each way, plus two runs at midday and two in the evening. Also, express buses connect Raleigh and Chapel Hill with stops at RDU Airport and RTP.

### **2. Wake community links**

Each Wake town has buses to downtown Raleigh. The Raleigh buses run all day, every 30 minutes from Cary and Morrisville, and every hour from Apex, Garner, Knightdale and Wake Forest. The Raleigh buses run hourly – but only during rush hour – from Fuquay-Varina, Holly Springs, Rolesville, Wendell and Zebulon.

### **3. Frequent, rapid urban service**

Raleigh now has 17 miles of bus lines that run every 15 minutes all day; that would rise to 83 miles. These heavy-ridership lines include 20 miles of Bus Rapid Transit routes radiating out from downtown on New Bern Avenue to WakeMed, Capital Boulevard to Wake Forest Road, South Wilmington Street to Garner, and Western Boulevard to Cary.

### **4. Better access in neighborhoods and outlying areas**

Residents in the more populous areas, mostly Raleigh and Cary, live within three-quarters of a mile of a bus stop. In the rest of the county, Wake expands TRACS, its on-demand, call-in program of vans and volunteer ride connections. All Wake towns except Raleigh and Cary become eligible for county grants to cover half the cost of new local bus service.

### **Major money sources, 2017-2027**

Some of the expected funding sources: \$962 million half-cent transit sales tax. \$720 million federal funds (half the capital cost for commuter trains and BRT). \$512 million bond proceeds. \$112 million passenger fares. \$95 million car registration fees. \$41 million rental car tax. \$14 million state bus funds.

Source: [waketransit.com](http://waketransit.com)

## Light rail questions, progress in focus; Durham, Orange officials updated on transit plans

THE HERALD-SUN BY LAUREN HORSCH December 10, 2015

DURHAM — It'll be a few more months until residents in Durham and Orange counties learn exactly what the federal government thinks of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project (DOLRT), but until then GoTriangle continues to work to meet its deadline.

Durham City Councilman Steve Schewel, the newly appointed chairman of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization, has been interested in getting regular updates about the progress of the DOLRT as it moves forward.

He has been especially interested in hearing about how plans could be created for a "city center" station in Durham, a proposal by the Durham Area Designers during the public comment period on the DOLRT's draft environmental impact statement.

"We intend to be talking to you forever, so that's not going to stop," Patrick McDonough, GoTriangle's planning manager, told Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization members at a meeting Wednesday.

McDonough said GoTriangle has been working with the Federal Transit Administration to get a final environmental statement completed.

"People feel very good about the level of detail in the environmental document," he said. "That is moving forward, basically the FTA has a month to read it and they might come back to us with questions and follow-ups."

GoTriangle believes it should have a "record of decision" by the end of February, meaning it would have an official, federal approval that in working with all stakeholders, it has done its job "to document environmental impacts, potential mitigations and ways to move forward to eliminate impacts or minimize them otherwise and manage them ..."

Durham County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow has expressed interest in having a city center station after experiencing traffic congestion around the American Tobacco Campus last Friday for the annual tower lighting.

"I was really struck last week, going to the tower lighting, attempting to get there, and you know we had a major performance at DPAC that night, the tower lighting and other things going on downtown," Reckhow said. "(We) literally crawled from 147 to the north parking deck, it was painful."

She said as downtown continues to grow and redevelop, the city really needs to think about ways to best serve it with stations.

"We have roads that don't necessarily carry the traffic as it needs to get carried," she said. "We need to be thinking about where downtown Durham will be 10, 15, 20 years from now ..."

Later Wednesday, some of the same leaders heard more comments about DOLRT progress at a Durham-Chapel Hill-Orange Work Group meeting.

In that meeting McDonough said the “two-year shot clock” on the environmental statement will be up in February, and since DOLRT is the first project through the FTA that has been subject the two-year deadline there has been some relief with making the deadline.

“In terms of other activities, the next major step in the project timeline is our application and engineering,” he said.

That should come about three to four months after the environmental statement is finished. With the statement on track to finish in late February, GoTriangle is looking to apply for the engineering phase in June or July.

The application is through the New Starts program from the FTA.

“What that gap between the environmental documentation and application, is we’re going to wait to see if the FTA has any final advice for us,” McDonough said.

GoTriangle has a meeting planned today with the FTA to discuss the New Starts application.

Reckhow, during the work group meeting, suggested that GoTriangle work be as thorough and clear in its answers and responses to public comments as possible, instead of relying on appendices.

## **WAKE JUNCTION?**

Earlier this week, Wake County released its final draft of transit plans that would incorporate bus rapid transit and rush-hour trains. The 10-year plan would cost about \$2.3 billion and could quadruple ridership for that county.

Durham leaders were concerned about comments made that said Durham “shelved” plans to use commuter rail in connecting with the region.

McDonough said that in February 2012, when the local MPO voted on the local preferred alternatives for the DOLRT, it also endorsed plans for a Durham-Wake commuter rail plan.

“That same month we were bringing the same plans to the (Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization) side and they didn’t actually physically put it on a shelf, but metaphorically at the time that’s what happened,” McDonough said.

So essentially, back in 2012 no one wanted to partner with Durham on the plans.

“I do think we need to point out that we are committed to this, and we have taken action to this,” Schewel said.

During Wednesday’s work group meeting, McDonough joked that Wake has caught up to where Durham and Orange counties were in 2012.

He said the Wake plan “has a lot in it to like” and reflects the size and diversity of that Triangle county — which features municipalities that are rapidly growing in size.

“There is a great variety of service in it,” he said.

## **New light to target bridge-truck collisions**

THE HERALD-SUN BY LAUREN HORSCH December 12, 2015

DURHAM — A popular website that highlights trucks slamming into a bridge that runs parallel to Peabody Street could be forced to find a new star once a traffic light gets installed.

The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization was told this week that a signal was going in at the intersection of Peabody and Gregson streets.

Durham City Councilman Don Moffitt raised a question about the signal because of its proximity to traffic lights at the intersection of Main and Gregson streets.

However, Joey Hopkins with the N.C. Department of Transportation Division 5, said that proximity didn't factor in with this particular signal.

"Have you ever heard of the website 11foot8.com?" he asked Moffitt. "That's what that signal is for."

The website curates videos of trucks attempting to go under that bridge, which has a clearance of height of 11 feet, 8 inches. Often trucks get stuck or damaged during the attempts.

"When over-height trucks get to that point, which they frequently do, and some of them frequently try to go under that bridge, and most of the time they don't make it," Hopkins said. "So that traffic signal will turn red when it detects an over-height vehicle and will stay red until they turn on Peabody."

City of Durham Transportation Director Mark Ahrendsen said another signal would also be going in at the intersection of Roxboro and Pettigrew streets that would do the same thing.

That bridge has a slightly lower clearance at 11 feet, 4 inches. That intersection already has a traffic light on it, but Hopkins said the lights there will be programmed so the lights would stay red until an over-height vehicle turns onto Pettigrew Street.

According to the website, there have been 100 collisions between the bridge and over-height vehicles since April 2008.

## NC population tops 10M

WRAL.com Web Editor Matthew Burns Posted December 22, 2015

Raleigh, N.C. — North Carolina has become the ninth state with more than 10 million residents, the Census Bureau reported Tuesday.

The Tar Heel State added 281 people per day from July 1, 2014, to July 1, 2015, bringing its population to 10,042,802, according to the latest population estimates. The state ranked behind only Texas, Florida, California, Georgia and Washington in annual growth.

"Those of us who live in North Carolina know why this state is such a great place to live," Gov. Pat McCrory said in a statement. "With our growing economy, great colleges and universities and quality of life, from the mountains to the coast, nothing compares to North Carolina."

2reactions

Population is critical in divvying up federal money and U.S. House seats among states. North Carolina picked up its 13th House seat after the 2000 census, and it is now pulling away from Michigan, which in 10th in population and has 14 House seats.

California is by far the most-populous state, with 39.1 million residents, followed by Texas at 27.5 million residents and Florida at 20.3 million residents. Georgia is No. 8, less than 200,000 people ahead of North Carolina.

The United States as a whole saw its population increase by 0.79 percent over the period. to 321.4 million, slightly faster than the rate of growth over the previous one-year period, according to the Census Bureau.

## Road Worrier: NCDOT calls for new curbs on bicyclists

Bike riders would be told to stay in the right half of the travel lane

Other changes would encourage a wider berth when cars pass bicycles

Legislators asked NCDOT to study restrictions and other bike-safety changes

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY BRUCE SICELOFF DECEMBER 28, 2015

RALEIGH -- Bike safety advocates applaud proposals from the state Department of Transportation for new laws that would encourage motorists to take more care when they pass bicycle riders, but they are balking at DOT's push for new restrictions on cyclists.

Drivers would be given more leeway to cross the double-yellow line that marks a no-passing zone – where they can do so safely – in order to pass slower-moving cyclists. They also would be required to give cyclists a wide berth, maintaining a passing clearance of four feet.

An average 19 cyclists die and more than 600 are hurt on North Carolina streets and highways each year. Many crashes involve impatient drivers who are determined to avoid crossing the center line on the left – while they misjudge the space separating car from bicycle on the right.

"The motorists pass too closely or swerve back too soon," James Gallagher of the UNC Center for Highway Safety Research said Monday.

Greenville Police Sgt. Mike Montanye said the proposed yellow-line exception for passing bicycles was, "hands down," the most important recommendation on DOT's bike-safety list.

"If you can give the bicycle a greater distance when passing, I think it's safer all around," Montanye said. "Where the passing occurs, from what I've seen, is where the crash is going to occur."

The proposed legislation was among draft [recommendations DOT released](#) quietly last week, after a review [requested by the legislature](#). Montanye and Gallagher served on a 12-member ad hoc committee that had spent the past five months studying bike safety issues, at DOT's request.

### **IF YOU CAN GIVE THE BICYCLE A GREATER DISTANCE WHEN PASSING, I THINK IT'S SAFER ALL AROUND.**

**Sgt. Mike Montanye, Greenville Police Department**

Cycling advocates and some study group members criticized three DOT proposals that went counter to the study group's suggestions. Department officials led by Kevin Lacy, DOT's chief traffic engineer, say cyclists should not be allowed to ride more than two abreast, should be required to get local permits for large informal group rides, and should be directed to stay in the right half of the travel lane.

Many cyclists argue that it sometimes is safer for riders to "take the lane" – riding at the center or left of center – to make themselves more visible to motorists and to discourage cars from passing in dangerous situations.

"If the law were changed so cyclists have to ride at the right edge of the lane, drivers will try to squeeze by," said Steven Goodridge of Cary, a board member for [BikeWalkNC](#), a statewide cycling advocacy group, who served on DOT's advisory committee.

State law says vaguely that all vehicles must stay "as close as practicable" to the right edge of the road. Lacy said the DOT recommendation would simply clarify the rule for bicycles.

“This comes down to defining where motorists should expect to see cyclists,” Lacy said. “There’s different lines of thinking out there.”

The study group acknowledged that local residents and motorists sometimes are unhappy about traffic snarls blamed on cyclists who ride in groups of 50, 100 or more. They called only for education and outreach efforts to teach cyclists how to avoid problems.

**THIS COMES DOWN TO DEFINING WHERE MOTORISTS SHOULD EXPECT TO SEE CYCLISTS. THERE’S DIFFERENT LINES OF THINKING OUT THERE.**

**Kevin Lacy, NCDOT chief traffic engineer**

DOT said local governments should be empowered to require permits for big informal group rides.

“In some cases they were shutting down roads, blocking people in their homes, or preventing people from getting access to their businesses,” Lacy said.

Goodridge said a variety of local regulations would be unfair and unworkable for bike trips that pass through several counties. He said permits are appropriate only for special events such as parades and races where roads are closed.

The proposal to relax the yellow-line rules where bikes are involved is similar to a broader bill, which covered drivers trying to pass any slow-moving vehicle, that died early this year. Some [legislators worried it would cause head-on crashes](#).

Legislators asked this year for the DOT review of bike-safety issues, including suggestions – both rejected by DOT – that cyclists be required to carry identification and ride in single file. The study group received recommendations from cyclists and from rural residents who favored sweeping restrictions.

The Schley Grange, an Orange County chapter of the national farmers organization, called on DOT to endorse a 15 mph speed limit for cyclists, require permits for group rides involving five or more cyclists and order cyclists to pull off the road when cars were unable to pass them.

While tensions rise where motorists and cyclists compete for space on city streets and rural roads, the DOT proposals come as state and local governments are extending bike lanes and making more accommodations for people who don’t want to travel in cars.

“We’re encouraging more pedestrians and more bicycles in our communities,” Montanye said. “And some old laws on the books may need to be adjusted.”

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**DOT’S BIKE SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In new draft recommendations to the General Assembly, the state Department of Transportation says North Carolina should:

Require cyclists to ride in the right half of the travel lane, when they’re traveling at least 15 mph slower than the speed limit.

Prohibit cyclists from riding more than two abreast, except when passing other riders.

Require a minimum passing clearance of four feet for motorists who pass slower-moving cyclists. Current law requires a two-foot clearance for all vehicles.

Allow motorists to cross the double-yellow (no passing) line, when they can do so safely, to pass cyclists.

Authorize local governments to require permits or registration for informal group rides involving more than 30 cyclists.

Require cyclists at night to use a rear red light or wear reflective clothing visible from at least 200 feet behind the bike.

Give cyclists the option to use the right hand to signal a right turn.

Punish motorists who run cyclists off the road or force them to change lanes because the motorist has made an abrupt turn or other unsafe movement. Current law gives this protection to motorcyclists.

Source: NCDOT

## Road Worrier: House members wade into NCDOT's long-term money needs

Even after a budget boost of \$440 million, NCDOT pegs its money gap in the billions

Rep. John Torbett chairs a new House panel focused on transportation finance

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY BRUCE SICELOFF JANUARY 4, 2016

RALEIGH

Hoping to build on legislative consensus that produced a hefty increase last year in state spending for roads and bridges, a 20-member special House committee has settled in for a hard slog of day-long, twice-monthly meetings aimed at drumming up the will to spend even more on transportation.

The legislature last fall boosted transportation spending by \$440 million a year, largely with a 30 percent hike in fees North Carolinians pay for car registrations, driver's licenses and other motor vehicle documents.

The new state budget also extended a sort of truth-in-taxation effort that had begun a few years ago: It ended the transfer of millions in gas taxes and DMV fees to the general fund, so the money will no longer be spent on non-transportation needs.

But state Department of Transportation engineers are still playing catch-up in the race to build new bridges faster than DOT inspectors reclassify old ones each year as "structurally deficient." DOT will spend \$453 million to replace 491 bridges over the next two years, while about 300 more bridges are added to the needs-replacement list.

Even with the recent increase in funding, DOT leaders expect to trim the share of structurally deficient bridges, now 17.5 percent statewide, to only about 15 percent. Worn-out bridges are just one of DOT's pressing concerns.

"These bridges are safe, but they have reached the end of their useful life," Mike Holder, DOT's chief engineer, said Monday. "Structurally deficient bridges are the department's top concern."

Holder was speaking to a subcommittee of the House Select Committee on Strategic Transportation Planning and Long-Term Funding Solutions, created in December by House Speaker Tim Moore. During a pause Monday in a dozen briefings delivered over five hours, committee members learned they will return for all-day sessions on the first and fourth Mondays of each month, continuing at least into April, when the 2016 General Assembly convenes.

Panel members submitted to the guidance of Rep. John Torbett, their chamber's chief transportation wonk. It was Torbett who developed the House's aggressive proposals for increased DOT spending last year, and he eventually got a few of the items he wanted when the House found compromise with the Senate.

DOT now is cranking up a Torbett-inspired program that won't save money but is intended to make the department more responsive to the public: a promise to fill potholes and fix other problems within 48 hours after somebody complains about them.



Given the state's relentless growth in population and traffic, coupled with the deterioration of transportation infrastructure from ferry boats to Eisenhower-era interstates, DOT reckons that the expected state and federal money streams will fall \$32 billion short of what North Carolina needs by 2040. That's just the estimate for keeping roads and bridges in their current condition. Upgrades to the transportation system are linked with a projected money gap of \$60 billion to \$94 billion.

This is an election year, so there was no talk Monday about higher taxes – or anything like last year's big increase in DMV fees. Torbett plans to school his committee about the state's transportation needs and the impact of not meeting them.

"We need to make it so commerce can more freely flow, so it can be more profitable," Torbett said in an interview. "If (truck drivers) can drive only eight hours (a day) and they're stuck three hours of it in traffic, what good does that do for commerce?"

Any big-money ideas are more likely to come in future years, he said.

Demonstrating his mastery of arcane transportation and funding issues, Torbett sometimes stepped in at Monday's meeting to field questions that other legislators directed at DOT managers. He praised the priorities spelled out in Gov. Pat McCrory's "25-Year Vision" for long-term transportation improvements – and then he deflected a suggestion by Rep. Nelson Dollar that the governor should come up with a way to pay for them.

That will be the legislature's job, he said.

"That vision he has, it's a strong vision," Torbett told Dollar, a Wake County Republican and the only Triangle legislator on his committee. "I think that's our responsibility, to provide infrastructure that's adequate for the people of North Carolina."

Berry Jenkins, a former DOT manager who lobbies for road contractors, said he was glad to see House members taking a comprehensive look at the state's long-term need for transportation funds.

"The question is, do they have the political willpower to do something about it?" Jenkins said. "And we don't know whether the Senate is plugged in to this or not. At some point, obviously, they would have to be."

## **NC campaign for \$2 billion bond package kicks off**

\$2 billion package will be on the primary ballot in March

Bonds would fund college building, infrastructure, state parks and other projects

McCrory pushed for bonds; probable foe Cooper also supports them

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY CRAIG JARVIS JANUARY 5, 2016

RALEIGH -- A little less than two and a half months before voters decide a statewide \$2 billion bond issue, the campaign to win its passage officially kicked off Tuesday.

More than 450 politicians, educators, representatives of business and others crowded the Duke Energy Room in the James B. Hunt Jr. Library on N.C. State University's Centennial Campus. They represented segments of the state that would benefit from the bond package: universities and community colleges, agricultural research, water and sewer improvements, the National Guard, state parks and the state zoo.

"There is no one who is not impacted by this bond," said Jim Rose, regional president at Yadkin Bank and one of the co-chairmen of the campaign, dubbed Connect NC.

That is the sales pitch, along with the fact that the bond issue would not raise taxes and the estimate by the governor's budget director that it would reduce the state's debt within five years.

Speakers pressed the point that it has been 15 years since a statewide bond issue was approved, and in that time the state's population has grown by 2 million people.

"We have a choice: Do we prepare for the future, or do we want the leaders of the future to have to react to what we didn't do?" Gov. Pat McCrory said.

The bond proposal has been a high priority for the governor, who has said often that many of the state's roads and buildings were embarrassingly outdated and that just patching them would be too expensive.

Voters will decide the issue March 15 on a primary ballot crowded with presidential, congressional, legislative and other candidates. If voters approve it, McCrory certainly will cite it as an accomplishment in his general election bid for a second term, where he is likely to face Democratic Attorney General Roy Cooper. Cooper and other members of the Council of State and Cabinet attended the kickoff Tuesday.

Cooper, who supports the bond, said Monday that candidates on the primary ballot should not appear in pro-bond advertising. He said that would imply promotion of the candidate and could harm chances for the bond package to pass.

The state Board of Elections director has advised that it would be legal for the bond campaign committee to use candidates' images in political material, as long as it doesn't coordinate with the candidates' campaigns.

McCrory didn't get all he wanted in the package, most notably money for transportation projects. He had proposed a \$3 billion package evenly split between transportation and infrastructure projects. Still, the General Assembly made budget changes that are expected to generate more transportation money over the next 10 years than McCrory's bond proposal would have done.

The governor lined up bipartisan support in getting the legislature to approve putting a referendum on the March ballot, and in volunteering to sow support for it.

State Sen. Dan Blue, a Raleigh Democrat, tempered the governor's recent narrative that North Carolina is on the comeback by saying at the rally that unemployment is still too high in parts of the state.

Blue fully endorsed the bond as a way to address that problem and said those in attendance should be able to persuade people to support it, "if we are the leaders we profess to be."