

GoDurham adds two electric buses to fleet on Earth Day



GoDurham

This is one of the two electric buses that joined the GoDurham fleet Thursday.

GoDurham's first electric buses hit the road in Durham

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY RICHARD STRADLING RSTRADLING@NEWSOBSERVER.COM

DURHAM GoDurham has become the latest bus system in the Triangle to go electric.

The first two electric buses to join [GoDurham's fleet of diesels](#) arrived from the factory in California and were unveiled during an Earth Day ceremony Thursday morning.

A short time later, one of the buses began picking up passengers on the city's busiest bus route, along Holloway Street.

Riders may first notice their distinctive blue and black design, featuring silhouettes of trees along with a bull and the city skyline.

GoDurham becomes the third public bus system in the Triangle to put electric buses on the road, after Raleigh-Durham International Airport and GoTriangle. GoRaleigh and Chapel Hill Transit have electric buses on order.

So far, the bus purchases have all been made with the help of federal grants. Money from the [Federal Transit Administration's Low or No Emission Vehicle Program](#) paid 80% of the cost of the GoDurham buses, with local taxpayers covering the rest.

Bus systems usually seek the subsidies because electric buses and the charging equipment that comes with each one cost more than standard diesels. GoDurham paid about \$1 million apiece for the electric buses, or \$450,000 more per bus compared to a comparable diesel, according to Sean Egan, director of the city's transportation department.

But lower fuel and maintenance costs for electric buses over their 12-year lifespan are expected to make up the difference in the purchase price, Egan said, plus the buses are better for the environment. While the buses will use power from the grid that may be generated by fossil fuels, they won't emit any exhaust.

"Investment in clean, quiet, zero-emissions technology aligns with the City of Durham's strategic goal of having a sustainable natural and built environment," Egan said in a written statement. "This also reflects the input we have received from community engagement to reduce our carbon footprint, improve air quality and reduce noise pollution, particularly for historically disadvantaged communities served by GoDurham."

Egan said the city has not decided where the electric buses will be used regularly. GoDurham will evaluate their performance on several routes in coming months to determine where to incorporate them into regular service, he wrote in an email, "with priority given to routes that serve traditionally disadvantaged communities such as the Route 3 on Holloway Street."

CHAPEL HILL, RALEIGH HAVE ELECTRICS ON ORDER

The transition to alternative-fuel buses is still just getting started in the Triangle. The two electrics join 57 diesel buses in GoDurham's fleet, which carried 20,000 passengers a day on average before the coronavirus pandemic. In January, the city ordered six more electric buses that are expected to arrive by the end of the year, Egan said.

Chapel Hill Transit [will soon receive the first of 10 electric buses](#) it has ordered, allowing it to retire some of its 93 diesel buses. GoRaleigh has [five electrics on order](#), though the [Raleigh Transit Authority](#) has also begun replacing its 100 diesel buses with those powered by compressed natural gas or CNG, which is cheaper and burns cleaner than diesel.

GoTriangle [put its first two electric buses into service](#) in early 2020, and Duke University [added two electrics early this year](#).

The pioneer in electric buses in the Triangle was RDU. The airport [purchased four of the buses](#) using a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration and began using them to carry passengers between the terminals and remote parking lots in May 2019.

RDU was happy enough with its electrics that the Airport Authority decided in early 2020 to [buy four more, this time without government subsidies](#). But when COVID-19 decimated air travel, RDU closed its remote parking lots, parked its shuttle buses and canceled the order for four more electrics.

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Planners already preparing for traffic Apple hub will add to area roads

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By Keely Arthur, WRAL reporter

[RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C.](#) — Apple's move to the Triangle means an influx of people, money – and traffic.

"It's a safe bet that we need to continue to make some critical investments in transportation and mobility," Joe Milazzo, executive director of the Regional Transportation Alliance, said Tuesday.

Major projects are already underway, such as extending the N.C. Highway 540 toll road across southern Wake County. The section connecting Holly Springs to Garner should be finished in 2023 – the same time Apple arrives. Improvements to Capital Boulevard and U.S. Highways 64 and 70 also are in the works.

Several approaches will be needed to ease the potential traffic congestion, Milazzo said, such as bus rapid transit, which combines dedicated lanes for buses and priority at traffic signals to speed riders on their commutes.

"Right now, you might look around and say, 'I don't see any miles of this bus rapid transit that I thought was coming.' That's fair, but in less than 10 years, this region is going to have 55 miles of bus rapid transit in Wake, Durham, Orange and Johnston counties," he said.

Officials are looking at building a commuter rail system between west Durham and Garner, including a stop a couple of miles from the Apple site, if it proves to be cost-effective.

"I think we're very close to it becoming a reality. We'll just have to see how the study pans out and let folks make their decision next year," said Charles Lattuca, president and chief executive of GoTriangle.

Milazzo said businesses can help keep traffic off area roads by allowing people to work from home, even after the pandemic. Keeping employee hours flexible will help cut rush hour congestion, he said.

"We need to continue to be flexible with the approaches we are looking at or solutions [and] pivot if something comes up," he said. "We need to do something different."

In Austin, pride, growth and transit followed Apple investment

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By Joe Fisher, WRAL reporter

AUSTIN, TEXAS — Since Apple designated Austin as the site of a second headquarters in 2018, the Texas capital has seen cranes tower over downtown, a constant reminder of the growth to come – a \$1 billion campus and 5,000 jobs promised by 2022.

With Monday's announcement that North Carolina would get its own Apple campus, WRAL News sent Joe Fisher to Austin to see what the Triangle can learn.

"We are trying to have that growth while preserving the magic of this place," said Austin Mayor Steve Adler.

Apple already employs about 7,000 high-paid workers in Austin.

Adler says the Triangle will see some similar boosts in the coming years.

"I think in this community, Apple has a really good brand. They did everything they say they were going to do and more," he said.

Like RTP, Austin is known as a technology hub. Business leaders there say the Triangle can expect more development to follow.

"This is chapter one of a future of technology and innovation investments for you. That's what we have seen in Austin," Laura Huffman, president and CEO of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, told WRAL News.

Adler said the growth has not come without challenges. Thousands of new jobs have put pressure on housing affordability and congestion on the roads. Last year, Austin voters approved a tax increase for a new light rail system and bus rapid transit.

"We just need to move more people more places in the city, and that's not going to happen until the alternative to cars is faster, cheaper, safer and more convenient," he said. "That's been a real significant investment in our community."

Austin's light rail is expected to roll out by 2029. By then, Apple is expected to have added thousands of more jobs in a city it has called home for 30 years.

"People are really proud to have Apple here," Huffman said. "It's such cutting edge technology."