

## **Amtrak, NCDOT, Uber, public transit join forces**

The Herald-Sun From Staff Reports November 2, 2016

RALEIGH – TransLoc, a transportation technology platform that delivers seamless mobility, on Wednesday announced a three-month pilot partnership with the N.C. Department of Transportation (to integrate Uber and public transit with the state’s passenger train system to enhance statewide mobility).

NCDOT and Amtrak partner to operate the Piedmont and Carolinian trains in North Carolina. TransLoc’s Rider app will provide North Carolina passengers with seamless, easy, door-to-door trip planning to and from nine Amtrak stations throughout the state: Raleigh, Cary, Durham, Burlington, Greensboro, High Point, Salisbury, Kannapolis, and Charlotte.

The project will bring multimodal transit opportunities to more than five million residents across three major metropolitan areas.

The initiative advances NCDOT’s mission to eliminate transit deserts and connect more North Carolinians with safe mobility options for travel across the state and beyond. As a result of its work with local public transit systems over the past five years, NCDOT has seen a 40 percent increase in ridership.

Now riders not only have more options for getting to the train, but they can plan and coordinate an entire multi-leg trip at the touch of a few buttons.

Effective immediately, Tar Heels can input their preferred train station into the Rider app. The app will display a route that integrates Uber and public transit with the train schedule, providing route options from the rider’s front door to the train station platform.

For example, the app might provide a synchronized route to the train that incorporates walking, taking a bus or riding with Uber. Riders can also use the app to find transit options or an Uber at their destination.

Over time, the app will learn user preferences around cost, convenience and mode of transportation to deliver a customized door-to-door plan for worry-free transit.

## **Future freeway project steers county discussions**

The Herald-Sun By Rachael Riley November 9, 2016

Plans to convert part of U.S. Highway 70 into a freeway drove a portion of Durham County commissioner discussions Monday.

Commissioners were told the \$136 million transportation improvement program is tentatively scheduled to start in spring 2024.

Environmental assessments of the impacted areas are just starting.

The project will upgrade U.S. 70 to a controlled-access facility from Lynn Road at the East End Connector in Durham to west of TW Alexander Drive in Raleigh, said Richard Hancock, District 5 deputy engineer for the North Carolina Department of Transportation that serves Durham County. (CONTINUED...)

The project will be built in four phases, with a couple already funded. Other changes include converting the intersection of U.S. 70 at South Miami Boulevard, Mineral Springs and Sherron roads to an interchange.

"As you all know, U.S. 70 is divided in the Raleigh-Durham area, parallel to I-40 -- a lot of development there, a lot of growth in the region ... what we're looking at is converting this to a freeway facility," Hancock said.

Kristina Miller, a consultant for NCDOT with RK&K, is leading the environmental assessment of the project.

The planning and environment study are for the 5-mile upgrade of U.S. 70, from Lynn Road to west of TW Alexander Drive.

"The project is fully state funded at this time," Miller said.

The project history dates back 13 years to original plans for an early loop project but now would be with fully-controlled access, or access to U.S. 70 would be only at interchange locations, she said.

"With a freeway, there are no driveways, there are no intersections, there will be no bus stops along U.S. 70 to allow this to be a freeway facility and operate safely," she said.

Commissioner Ellen Reckhow remembers northern loop discussions started "controversial," but new plans were part of the negotiating.

The East End Connector was at the top of the project along with the future freeway in Durham County as a connecting link north of Interstate 85, Reckhow said.

"This is going to be a major project, a vital project in terms of our future transportation network," Reckhow said.

She said she would like to see economic development potential along the corridor evaluated.

Commissioner Wendy Jacobs agreed and said she'd like to see a study of its impact on businesses, churches and residential developments in the area.

Jacobs also suggested looking at costs associated with landscaping and masonry, similar to a section of Interstate 85, studies of the freeway's impact on connector streets and easement roads and the city-county planning staff to look at the connector and if it will create more roadway traffic.

Miller said more information will be available in the next year, after receiving initial feedback from officials and the community.

The main purpose of the study is to address the impact of the connection between the East End Connector and Interstate 540, she said.

Field work is underway to identify community characteristics, such as residential and business areas, throughout the study area, as well as streams, wetlands or cultural resources, Miller said.

Residents and drivers can track the progress of the project by going to <https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/US70DurhamRaleigh/>.

## **Wake County voters approve tax hike for transit**

The News and Observer By Paul A. Specht November 9, 2016

RALEIGH -- Wake County voters agreed to raise the sales tax to expand public transit options. (CONTINUED...)

With all precincts reporting, about 53 percent of voters supported a referendum to raise the sales tax by a half-cent to help pay for a 10-year, \$2.3 billion plan to add commuter rail and increase bus service throughout the county.

Wake's Board of Commissioners decided earlier this year to put the referendum on the ballot. Board members have said the tax hike is worth it to potentially reduce traffic congestion and improve connectivity.

Commissioner Matt Calabria said the county's support for the referendum showed that Wake is a "forward-thinking" community.

"You can't be a world-class region unless you have strong infrastructure. Voters showed tonight that we want to continue to stay ahead of the curve," Calabria said. "Our future and our children's future will be brighter for what we did today."

The referendum's approval would give GoTriangle, a regional transportation authority and provider, permission to raise the sales tax rate to 2.5 percent from 2 percent, the current level. The state government levies a 4.75 sales tax rate.

The referendum also enables the county and GoTriangle to apply for state and federal grants, which will help fund the plan.

The Wake Transit Plan calls on the county to build a commuter rail system between Garner and Durham with stops at N.C. State University, downtown Cary, Research Triangle Park, Morrisville near RDU International Airport and Duke University in Durham.

The plan also aims to introduce Bus Rapid Transit, which runs buses in dedicated lanes and gives them priority at traffic signals. BRT buses would mostly run along four main corridors in Raleigh's core: Western Boulevard, Capital Boulevard, New Bern Avenue and Wilmington Street. They would also connect to downtown Cary, WakeMed Raleigh and the Tryon Road-U.S. 401 intersection near Garner.

The transit plan and the associated referendum have been a political issue for years.

Democrats won full control of the county board in 2014 on the promise that they'd boost funding for public schools and expand Wake's transit options. Republicans who previously controlled the board hesitated to put a referendum on the ballot, saying Wake isn't dense enough to warrant the needed spending.

A previous proposal excluded BRT and included light rail – which features faster trains than commuter rail.

The Wake County Republican Party, Wake County Taxpayers Association, John Locke Foundation and at least one local mayor oppose the referendum. But the changes were enough to draw support from the Regional Transportation Alliance, which opposed the previous plan, as well as 75 other organizations and businesses.

"The result of today's vote and the efforts of a large, diverse coalition of organizations and businesses will be a profound, positive impact on the economy, connectivity, and quality of our lives in Wake County and the Triangle," said Karen Rindge, executive director of WakeUP Wake County, which supported the referendum.

## **Despite green light for Wake transit plan, not all are on board**

abc11.com By Elaina Athans Friday, November 11, 2016 08:27PM

RALEIGH (WTVD) -- The sales tax is increasing in a few months to bring Wake County's \$2.3 billion transit plan to fruition. (CONTINUED...)

The ballot referendum barely passed Tuesday, with 53 percent of voters in favor.

Wake officials say they believe the plan will be transformational for the region.

"If we want to continue to attract the best jobs and the best employees to work at those jobs, we're going to have to have a region that has transportation options," said Wake County Board of Commissioners Vice Chair Sig Hutchinson.

Bus service is going to quadruple and infrastructure is going to be built.

There are three area of mass transit improvement.

First, bus service is increasing. It's going from 17 to 83 miles across Wake County. There will be service every 15 minutes.

Work on this starts in two to three years.

Secondly, bus rapid transit will be introduced in four to six years. Specially designed buses with raised platforms are being manufactured, and there will be dedicated bus lanes on local roads so bus operators can bypass traffic and keep their routes on schedule.

And finally, a brand new commuter rail will be unveiled. Tracks will run from Garner to downtown Raleigh and continue to Durham. There will be stops at N.C. State University, Cary, Morrisville, and RTP.

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Construction gets underway in six to eight years.

The plan is a waste of money, says the Wake County Taxpayers Association.

"We don't need three times as many empty buses on the street. And when I say three times as many empty, the ones we got on the road now are generally empty buses," said Russ Capps of the WCTA. "What we need is additional traffic lanes, we need potholes patched; we need maintenance."

The Association campaigned and tried to get the referendum rejected.

"(County officials are) counting on a whole bunch of federal money that may not come about. They're counting on state funds that may not come about and they're counting on fares from the fare boxes. But empty buses don't produce fares," said Capps.

"This is good for us," Hutchinson countered. "Even though sometimes people can't quite see it yet, over time they will see that this will allow us to double in size while improving our quality of life."

The new sales tax goes into effect in April.

There are some exemptions. Folks buying medication or groceries won't pay extra.

## **RDU International Airport plans prepare for takeoff**

The Herald-Sun By Rachael Riley November 12, 2016

DURHAM -- The recently completed and approved Raleigh-Durham International Airport 2040 master plan focuses on four key areas and a new \$400 million runway within the next five years.

Durham Council members were provided with highlights of the plan and future goals by representatives of Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority during a workshop meeting Thursday.

The plan took 18 months to complete and focuses on runways, terminals, ground transportation and general aviation, said Robb Teer, an RDU board member who is one of Durham's representatives.

"And (it) provide(s) the flexibility and tools to respond to industry uncertainties and community needs and to meet regional, national and global demand for air," Teer said.

The board just approved the plan, which will be in the implementation and documentation phase for about a year and then submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), he said.

According to a video the airport authority showed council members, RDU contributes \$8.5 billion to the region's economy and serves more than 10 million passengers.

Included in the plan is a new consolidated rental facility between terminals one and two, a transportation facility for shuttles, limousines and other providers and reconstruction of the runway.

The current runway, which opened in 1986, would relocate 500 feet to the left and be constructed as the current one operates.

Once the new one is constructed, it could allow up to 24 new gates in the future, and the current runway would be converted into a taxiway.

The current runway has an estimated 3 to 5 years left, said Michael Landguth, president and CEO of the RDU Airport Authority.

"Our greatest concern is the existing condition of that runway and will it actually make it that 3 to 5 years," Landguth said.

A tentative timeline is for the FAA to approve the airport layout plan, an environmental process, design and actual construction taking about 24 months, he said.

With about 2,400 slabs making up the runway, Landguth said about 11 were "surgically" replaced within the past eight months costing \$50,000 each.

The estimated cost to replace the runway is \$400 million, he said.

Councilman Charlie Reece questioned plans for RDU commercial development of properties it owns near Umstead State Park.

Landguth said the airport authority leases properties near Lake Crabtree in Wake County and another north of Interstate 40.

One is against the lake's flood plain and the other is leased to the biking community, he said.

The Urban Land Institute has identified possible projects for future construction advancement. The land can not be leased for less than fair market value if it is bought with FAA grants, he said. (CONTINUED...)

There have been nine public meetings with stakeholders to discuss the federal obligations, which are to use the property for the airport or to produce income, Landguth said.

Wake County has reached out to the UNC's School of Government that helps cities and counties look at similar properties and figure out how to partner with third parties to develop it and generate income while providing space to the community, he said.

Landguth estimated a \$400 million investment for the runway, \$200 million for the rental car facility and a quarter of a billion to maintain infrastructure as costs for the airport.

"And you've got a federal program that is stuck -- literally stuck -- and so we come up with very few options that are left available to us at the end of the day and so figuring out how you maximize use of that property," he said.

The primary focus right now is the runway and "getting it funded," he said.

Responding to council questions about an online system for RDU parking, Landguth said the airport upgraded its revenue control system with a third party in 2014 at a cost of \$1.2 million.

Developing the online reservation system resulted in failure of the revenue control system, he said.

"It is not allowing us to provide the products and services that customers of this region should expect and that third party company has failed us, and it's unacceptable," Landguth said.

He recommended the board throw out the revenue control system and replace it for \$3.5 million to \$5 million, which is in the airport's budget in future years.

In other airport information, Teer said there are nine major carriers to domestic and international destinations -- making RDU the 37th largest in the industry for domestic revenue.

There are 46 daily nonstop destinations, including Paris, and an announcement to add Austin, Texas by March.

Farad Ali, another RDU board member and Durham representative, highlighted data of

disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE) goals and airport concession disadvantaged business enterprise (ACDBE) goals.

Both are tied grants and ensuring promoting local, minority and business owned participation internally and externally at the airport, Ali said.

"As we're bringing this economic impact to our community, that we make sure that everyone gets a chance to participate and that we can have some shared prosperity," he said.

## **NC lawmakers want U.S. 264 interstate plan approved before Obama leaves**

The News and Observer-Politics and Government By Anna Douglas November 14, 2016

WASHINGTON – Eastern North Carolina's representatives in Congress want President Barack Obama's administration to quickly sign off on designating U.S. 264 as a future interstate – a move proponents say would be a step toward better transportation options for the state's largest city without an interstate highway. (CONTINUED...)

North Carolina's request for Highway 264's interstate status is pending on the desk of U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, a former mayor from Charlotte, N.C. The document – called a memorandum of understanding – wouldn't allocate any federal money but local officials say it would help them immediately start marketing the area to prospective companies looking to relocate where roads will meet their needs. And, the federal designation would prioritize funding for the future interstate corridor.

**AS A BOOMING CENTER OF INNOVATION ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF INDUSTRIES, IT IS VITAL THAT THE GREATER GREENVILLE AREA HAS ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION.**

**Rep. Walter Jones, Republican from Eastern North Carolina**

State transportation officials want to build out the thoroughfare over the next 25 years to better connect Greenville and surrounding areas. Most of the stretch of road from Greenville to Zebulon, east of Raleigh, is built to interstate highway standards.

The interstate project is supported by U.S. Reps. G.K. Butterfield, Democrat from Wilson, and Walter Jones, Republican from Farmville, as well as North Carolina's two Republican U.S. Sens. Richard Burr, from Winston-Salem, and Thom Tillis, from Huntersville. Supporters say [developing Highway 264](#) into an interstate connected to Interstate 95 and neighboring Virginia and South Carolina would be a boon for local residents and the economy.

"Connecting Eastern North Carolina to neighboring states and regions will play a crucial role in the sustainable long-term growth of the area," Jones said in a news statement Monday. "As a booming center of innovation across a wide range of industries, it is vital that the greater Greenville area has access to high-quality infrastructure and transportation."

Butterfield said getting Foxx's approval would be a step toward providing modern transportation infrastructure in a region where it's badly needed. Greenville is North Carolina's 10th-largest city and the only one in the top 10 without an interstate highway.

## **Orange, Durham asked to spend \$175M more for light-rail transit**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb November 18, 2016

CHAPEL HILL – Orange County leaders learned Thursday they face some tough questions in light of a \$200 million funding gap for the \$1.5 billion Orange-Durham light-rail project and a December deadline to move ahead.

The funding gap is expected to emerge by 2028 because of changes to state and federal funding, GoTriangle representatives told county, Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Hillsborough officials at the Assembly of Governments meeting.

GoTriangle is asking Orange and Durham counties to pay another \$175 million once construction starts, likely in 2020, project manager Danny Rogers said.

Orange County's share would be \$4 million a year for 10 years. Durham is being asked to pay another \$13.5 million a year for 10 years.

They will be looking for a commitment from Orange County at the Dec. 5 commissioners meeting and from Durham commissioners at the Nov. 29 meeting. GoTriangle will talk with the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization on Dec. 14. (CONTINUED...)

Another \$40 million could add at least 3 cents to the property tax rate, Commission Earl McKee said, burdening homeowners who already struggle to pay their taxes. While citizens approved the quarter-cent sales tax for transit, they did not approve covering “a gap that is not of their making,” he said.

“This gap from the state, I do not believe will be corrected, given the composition of the legislature, regardless of the governor’s race. We still have the same legislature we had in 2014,” McKee said. “If they do anything, I see more likely they are going to cut it back to zero, and then are we going to be asked to pick up the entire \$400 million?”

The deadline for submitting a plan for the 17-mile rail line from UNC to Alston Avenue in Durham to the federal engineering phase is Dec. 31. The plan must include commitments for at least 30 percent of the local and state cost, Rogers said. Project officials also are studying an extension to N.C. Central University.

If the engineering phase is not approved by March, the project will fall out of the Federal Transit Administration’s New Starts transit funding program.

“Obviously, it doesn’t look good if you fall out of the program (for your) ability to do the project,” Rogers said. “More than that, if you’re not in the program, money you’re spending to advance the project or to get it back into the program is no longer eligible for federal reimbursement.”

That could include money for a \$60 million to \$70 million engineering contract set for April, he said. Once the project is fully funded, however, 50 percent of the money spent developing the light-rail line would be reimbursed.

But the Durham-Orange light-rail plan no longer can rely on the state picking up 25 percent of the cost, Rogers said. The legislature, after eliminating \$138 million that already was allocated to the project and setting a \$500,000 cap, agreed this year to pay 10 percent of the total light-rail project cost.

The federal government, meanwhile, has reduced the refund that local governments can expect each year to \$100 million, meaning the project partners will spend more than they receive by 2028, Rogers said. Expected revenues from a quarter-cent sales tax approved by Orange and Durham voters also fell short.

It is uncertain at this point what effect Donald Trump’s administration will have on federal transit funding. The president-elect pledged during his campaign to spend \$1 trillion on the nation’s infrastructure, but did not specifically mention buses or trains.

The current shortfall leaves Orange and Durham counties paying 40 percent, instead of 25 percent, of the light rail cost. Orange County’s share of the local cost is roughly 23 percent, based on its share of the rail line.

GoTriangle officials hesitated but agreed with McKee’s suggestion of an independent financial analysis. They warned that could take several months.

State and federal reductions also mean Orange County could pay 54 percent – instead of 10 percent – for its buses and train cars, bus stops, and park and ride facilities, and 30 percent for a bus-rapid transit line along the Martin Luther King Jr./South Columbia Street corridor in Chapel Hill, up from 25 percent.

Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger said she wants the plan to work, but there are a lot of unknowns, including the possibility of future legislative changes and the economic benefit that development around the light-rail stations will bring.

The Gateway station, just inside Durham County, has the most development opportunity and is within walking distance of Chapel Hill’s former Blue Cross and Blue Shield campus – now the State Employees Credit Union – and the proposed Wegmans Food Market in Chapel Hill. UNC owns three other stations and a fourth, at Glen Lennox, is already developed.

“There’s a lot of opportunities and there’s a lot of holes, so I guess this funding gap is the hardest part, because if we are committing to funding those numbers we’re going to figure out how to do it realistically,” Hemminger said.

(CONTINUED...)



Carrboro Mayor Lydia Lavelle, Commissioner Bernadette Pelissier and others advocated for taking the next step. It's reasonable to give the process a few more months considering the strong support for the transit tax, Lavelle said.

But tough questions need to be asked, Commissioner Barry Jacobs said. He also pushed for negotiating a better cost-sharing formula with Durham County.

"However worthy, and it is worthy, to extend the line further in Durham, that doesn't necessarily mean that the taxpayers of Orange County should pay 23 percent of it," Jacobs said.

## **Durham-Orange group putting its minds to light-rail funding gap**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb November 21, 2016

CHAPEL HILL – A new group is looking for money to fill the gap in the \$1.87 billion Durham-Orange Light Rail Project.

The Funding and Community Collaborative of 21 private citizens and leaders from universities, health care institutions and governments has been looking for a couple of months at how to meet state budget cuts and federal transportation funding changes.

The 17-mile light-rail line would connect UNC to Alston Avenue or possibly N.C. Central University in Durham. In between, the rail line would serve Chapel Hill's N.C. 54 corridor, New Hope and South Square retail areas, downtown Durham, and other stops.

Riders could transfer to buses to reach Research Triangle Park and other destinations east of Durham.

It will give residents better access to jobs, education and health care, said Michael Goodmon, a collaborative member and Capitol Broadcasting vice president of real estate. The American Tobacco Campus in Durham, which Goodmon manages, is on the proposed route.

GoTriangle officials think the rail line could launch in 2028 and provide at least 26,000 passenger trips a day by 2040. The regional transit agency has applied to the Federal Transportation Administration's New Starts program, which could pay half the development costs if the plan is approved.

Although the plan had the state picking up 25 percent of the cost, the legislature's most recent decision has set the cap at 10 percent, making Durham and Orange counties responsible for 40 percent of the cost. The local share now is roughly \$748 million, about \$280 million more than originally anticipated.

The FTA recently reduced its expected annual payout to \$100 million a year during the 2020-28 construction period, instead of \$125 million. That leaves a \$200 million gap that GoTriangle and local governments have to navigate until the federal reimbursements catch up. Delayed payments also could increase the interest.

GoTriangle has asked Durham and Orange counties for up to \$175 million more in local dollars and for help resolving the remaining shortfall. The additional gap, transit officials said, could be filled with cash contributions, other federal grants and donations of land for the rail line. The collaborative and GoTriangle officials also are seeking project cost savings, spokesman Mike Charbonneau said.

The legislature's cuts to light-rail funding sparked the idea for a collaborative group, Charbonneau said. Durham Mayor Bill Bell, past chairman of GoTriangle's Board of Trustees, said the board initiated the effort, asking individuals who might have an interest in advancing the project to work together. (CONTINUED...)

“We just thought about areas that we thought were important to be a part of it – the university system, the (banking) industry, business community, persons who had a vision for the need for an alternative to transportation other than roads, such as light rail and ultimately commuter rail,” he said.

There have been a few ideas, Bell said, but the effort is still a work in progress. The work is important for letting the community how the project will be funded, he said, but also because the FTA will weigh the available funding sources in making its grant decision.

The project is too important to stall, said Chapel Hill developer Roger Perry, president of East West Partners.

The proposed light-rail line would serve three East West Partners’ ventures – the East 54 and Hamilton Road developments at the proposed Glen Lennox station, and the Meadowmont community, a short walk from the proposed Woodmont station to the east.

“Just as we do in our individual businesses and organizations, we must find creative ways to bridge the gap and keep the project moving forward for the benefit of our entire community,” Perry said.

Years of detailed study and planning have gone into the project, Orange County Commissioner Bernadette Pelissier said. The longtime light-rail advocate and collaborative member noted that now “is the time to redouble our efforts to make modern light rail a reality in our region.”

“Failing to act now would result in falling years behind in delivering critical transit investments to our growing communities,” she said.

Tammy Grubb: 919-829-8926, @TammyGrubb

#### **FUNDING AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE**

The 21-member Funding and Community Collaborative is working to raise money and secure land for the Durham-Orange light-rail project. Members are:

- Than Austin, UNC
- Brad Ives, UNC
- Benjamin Durant, N.C. Central University
- Tallman Trask, Duke University
- Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger
- William Fulkerson, Duke University Health System
- Karen McCall, UNC Health Care
- Kathy Higgins, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina
- Chris Bell, Suntrust Bank
- Gene Conti, The Conti Group
- Michael Goodmon, Capitol Broadcasting Co.
- Robert Ingram, Hatteras Venture Partners
- Rufus Jackson, Duke Energy (CONTINUED...)

- David King, former N.C. State Employees Credit Union Foundation Board member
- Sam Nichols, Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce
- Roger Perry, East West Partners
- Jim Trogdon, SAS

#### **GoTriangle Board of Trustees members**

- Durham Mayor Bill Bell
- Durham County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow
- Wake County representative Fred Day
- Orange County Commissioner Bernadette Pelissier

### **GoTriangle fills in details of plan to meet light-rail shortfall**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb November 26, 2016

CHAPEL HILL – GoTriangle officials clarified last week how they are combining projected rising sales tax revenues, local dollars, and public and private resources to meet an increased local share of the \$1.87 billion Durham-Orange light rail plan.

The project faces federal and state challenges, they said.

The federal challenge stems from a change in when Federal Transit Administration money could be paid toward the 17-mile light-rail line from Chapel Hill to Durham, they said. The route is expected to connect UNC, Duke University and, now, N.C. Central University.

GoTriangle had anticipated \$125 million in annual FTA installments over eight years, based on other projects. However, the FTA notified local officials in October that annual installments would be \$100 million over 10 years because of the number of projects seeking money.

The change does not affect the 50 percent share that GoTriangle can expect the FTA to pay if the Durham-Orange Light-Rail Project is approved, GoTriangle spokesman Mike Charbonneau said, but more local money will be needed by 2020 to cover construction costs until the federal reimbursements catch up.

The plan also estimated initially that the state would pick up 25 percent of the light-rail cost – or \$467 million – based on Charlotte’s light-rail project. When the legislature decided this year to pay only 10 percent, or \$187 million, it left the local partners responsible for 40 percent of the cost instead of 25 percent.

GoTriangle had some extra money available from half-cent transit sales tax that Durham and Orange voters approved in 2011 and 2012, Charbonneau said, and they looked at different ways to finance some parts of the project. That narrowed the local shortfall from about \$280 million to \$254 million. (CONTINUED...)

Durham and Orange counties have been asked to tentatively commit to finding the bulk of the \$254 million – \$135 million over 10 years from Durham County and \$40 million over 10 years from Orange County. GoTriangle will meet with Durham commissioners Nov. 29 and with Orange commissioners Dec. 5.

The counties will get updated transit and financial plans in April, GoTriangle officials said. They will have to formally decide whether to commit any additional local funds or stop the project by June 2018.

GoTriangle also will ask the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization on Dec. 14 to commit \$20 million of its federal dollars over 10 years. The remaining \$59 million could be realized through cost-cutting or donations of money or land for the rail line right of way, GoTriangle officials said.

GoTriangle also has been working for three months with a Funding and Community Collaborative of university, government and private individuals to look for alternative funding sources and land that might be donated for the light-rail line.

The timing is critical, GoTriangle officials said, because the FTA's deadline for applying to enter the light-rail engineering phase is Dec. 31. The application must include commitments for at least 30 percent of the local and state cost. A missed deadline could set the project behind and put federal dollars at risk.

"I think taxpayers need to understand that until all of that work is done, and we know what the actual gap is after what's been made up by the Funding Community Collaborative effort, then that's what the conversation will be with Durham and Orange County down the line," Charbonneau said.

## **Orange Co. board chair raises questions about light-rail update**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb November 29, 2016

CHAPEL HILL – A request to consider putting in more local money only raises more questions about the \$1.8 billion Durham-Orange Light Rail Project and how it will be funded, says Orange County commissioners Chairman Earl McKee.

The 17-mile light-rail line would connect UNC to Alston Avenue or possibly N.C. Central University in Durham. In between, it would serve Chapel Hill's N.C. 54 corridor, New Hope and South Square retail areas, downtown Durham, and other stops.

"This is something that touches everyone, and my main concern is how it touches some of the people who can afford it the least," McKee said in an interview Friday. McKee lives in and represents District 2 in northern Orange County.

"There are needs that are not being addressed by this project to get people to the grocery store, to address issues in their daily lives, because they don't live close enough to the project and the project doesn't go where they need to go," he said.

The final cost and who will pay also is uncertain, he said, especially with the possibility of future decisions by the state and President-elect Donald Trump's administration. Better to put the focus now on a stronger bus network, he said, and think about light rail down the line.

GoTriangle has a plan to cover a \$280 million state shortfall and unexpected federal funding delay with higher than anticipated quarter-cent transit sales tax revenues, a longer financing term, \$175 million more from Orange and Durham counties, and a mix of public and private donations, grants and money. (CONTINUED...)

The request for more local money prompted the rural advocacy group Orange County Voice to push for "Plan B," which would replace light rail with more bus-rapid transit, traditional bus and on-demand, car-based services. A separate citizens petition seeks to delay a Dec. 5 vote by the county commissioners until the light-rail benefits and costs can be studied.

The federal engineering application due Dec. 31 needs commitments for at least 30 percent of the money, or the project will be delayed.

His other concern, McKee said, is the Funding and Community Collaborative – a group of 21 private citizens and health care, university and government officials working to resolve light-rail challenges. Both county board chairmen heard about the group from a news release. They should have been invited to join, McKee said.

"This is a powerful group of people, these are thought leaders from the community. It's not like one person's going to walk in that room and dominate the conversation," McKee said. "Even at that, to form a group that is trying to help determine the outcome and help determine the direction of a project of this size, it should have some dissenting voices, whether it's mine or someone else."

Commissioner Bernadette Pelissier, a member of the collaborative and the GoTriangle Board of Trustees, mentioned in September that a group was exploring light rail options. GoTriangle officials at the time said the unnamed group was exploring an extension to N.C. Central University.

The collaborative was not mentioned during a Nov. 17 financial discussion, although a news release that day said the collaborative was seeking solutions. The collaborative has only met a couple of times, Pelissier said. McKee called her about his concerns, she said.

"I said, Earl, this is an informal group of people who want to see the project go forward and are trying to find solutions," she said. "Why would we ask you when you know you've never liked light rail? It's not about the status of an elected official."

Commissioner Barry Jacobs said better communication is needed.

"I think part of the problem here, too, is not only are there a lot of uncertainties, but the explanations have not been clear of what we're being asked to do or what's happening or who is contributing what money or what contingency plans have been made," Jacobs said.

The commissioners are going to ask for clear benchmarks and scheduling, he said. Both are required by 2016, according to the interlocal agreement guiding the light-rail plan.

A vote to stop the process in December seems shortsighted, Commissioner Mark Dorosin said. The commissioners will review updated transit and financial plans before deciding to spend \$60 million to \$70 million on engineering work in April.

"Before we have to make any substantive commitments, I think we will have time to do the kind of close financial review and negotiation that everyone is asking for, that I think opponents and proponents alike want and need," Dorosin said.

## GoTriangle works to address \$250M funding gap

The Herald-Sun By Rachael Riley November 29, 2016

DURHAM -- Since making a Nov. 15 presentation to Orange County related to increased local funding and decreased state funding for the future Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project, GoTriangle representatives are clarifying that request.

Both Durham and Orange counties are being asked to provide "non-binding" letters of commitment, Jeff Mann, general manager for GoTriangle, told members of the Durham joint city-county planning committee Tuesday.

"We're not asking you to commit funds today," Mann said.

Instead the counties and municipalities are asked to help seek those funds, he said.

The 17.5-mile light rail transit project faces a \$250 million funding gap, he said.

In 2015, the state put a \$500,000 spending cap in place for the project. The cap since was modified to reflect 10 percent of project spending, compared to the 25 percent originally expected before either cap.

Losing 15 percent from the state leaves the gap, Mann said.

While addressing the cap, the Federal Transportation Authority, which is expected to take on 50 percent of the project costs, granted a one-year deferment of the project in February, project manager Dan Rogers said.

While working during the summer to reconcile the state's commitment, he said the overall project was re-evaluated.

A stop at N.C. Central University was added to make a total of 18 prospective stops along the route. Rogers said the light rail project would connect three major universities, including NCCU, Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill.

"It is also allowing us to serve (NCCU) and the surrounding communities, as well, through a likely bus shuttle to connect to Durham Tech," he said.

The cost to add NCCU is about \$100-\$110 million, Mann said, but a cost analysis still indicates a "net positive."

Davis said other than the station, the cost of the project "hasn't really changed. "

"If you look at the cost of the original project and the dollars in 2011, you would escalate that to 2016 dollars, and the cost of that is essentially the same or close," he said.

To close the \$250 million gap, he said the organization has a new financial adviser and is looking at "opportunities" such as public-private partnerships.

Tuesday's presentation identified Duke, UNC, NCCU, foundations and donations as possible partners contributing \$25-50 million toward the project.

However, a Nov. 21 letter to GoTriangle representatives from Duke Chancellor for Health Affairs and Duke University Health System President Eugene Washington, and William Fulkerson, executive vice president of DUHS, cites concerns.

"While we welcome continued dialogue regarding the development and an efficient and cost effective public transportation system, we cannot support the proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail as it is currently proposed," the Washington and Fulkerson wrote, citing concerns with access and safety along Erwin Road, and alleging that the proposal "remains essentially unchanged." (CONTINUED...)

A Nov. 28 response from Mann states that since 2010, GoTriangle has made design changes along Erwin Road to address access and safety.

"Given the positive affirmation we have received from the university over the years since 2010, we were surprised to receive your letter....," Mann wrote.

Mann told officials Tuesday GoTriangle is not seeking increased funding from local governments at this time.

According to the presentation, a way to resolve the funding gap is if Durham County committed 77 percent, or \$13.5 million for the next 10 years and if Orange County's funding was at 23 percent, or \$4 million over the same period.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

Davis said a supplemental environmental assessment required will be considered for public comment Dec. 7.

The organization is in the process of amending the metropolitan planning organization's plan, which will be considered Dec. 14, followed by submitting engineering plans to the Federal Transportation Agency.

If items aren't submitted to the FTA by February 2017, Davis said the project faces dropping out of the program and being forced to compete again against other entities. That is why GoTriangle representatives said they are seeking the non-binding letters soon to support seeking extra funding.

"We realize there are many, many funds that the counties have," Mann said. "This project is a community initiative. It's part of the improved bus-rail investment plan."

Durham County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow said infrastructure is key to supporting community development.

She asked both city and county officials to look at fiscally responsible ways to support the funding gap, and cited tax increment financing as an example.

Mayor Bill Bell said he still feels positive about seeing the project move forward, given traffic congestion on Interstate 40 and the Durham Freeway as prompting the need.

"This is not a plan for today or tomorrow, but for what the community looks like 10, 20, 30 years from now," Bell said. "This is the first step in addressing that."

## **Duke president voices support for Durham-Orange light-rail plans**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb December 2, 2016

DURHAM – Duke University's president expressed continuing support for the \$1.87 billion Durham-Orange Light Rail Project in a letter Friday afternoon to GoTriangle.

The letter to GoTriangle general manager Jeff Mann followed up to a Nov. 23 [letter](#) from Gene Washington, chancellor for health affairs and CEO of the Duke University Health System.

Washington had written that the health system could not support the current route past Duke's hospitals on Erwin Road because of longstanding concerns about patient and emergency access and safety.

But on Friday, Duke President Richard Brodhead said Duke officials will "encourage Orange County and Durham County to join us in expressing support for the project." (CONTINUED...)

“On behalf of Duke University and Duke University Health System, I’d like to reaffirm our support for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project,” Brodhead said. “While Dr. Washington’s letter highlights areas that still need work, particularly the alignment of the route of the project near Duke Hospital, we look forward to continuing discussions with Go Triangle.”

The 17-mile project would connect UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill with Duke and N.C. Central universities in Durham. GoTriangle recently brought a \$254 million funding gap to the attention of Orange County and Durham County commissioners. The gap is caused in part by the state’s decision to cap state funding to 10 percent of project costs, down from the 25 percent that project planners had been counting on.

The Orange County Board of Commissioners will consider Monday, Dec. 5, whether to sign a letter of intent to help GoTriangle and its partners find \$40 million more for the project over a 10-year period. The agreement on the table Monday does not commit the county to paying the money yet.

GoTriangle asked the Durham County Board of Commissioners earlier this week to help find \$135 million more over 10 years. The Joint City-County Committee, which includes three City Council members and three county commissioners, unanimously voted Tuesday to take the request to their respective boards.

GoTriangle also has been working for three months with a Funding and Community Collaborative of university, government and private individuals to look for alternative funding sources and land that might be donated for the light-rail line.

## **Durham and Orange counties have come too far to give up on light rail now**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill Opinion By Bernadette Pelissier, Sally Greene, Ed Harrison, George Ciancilo, Penny Rich, Damon Seils and Bethany Chaney DECEMBER 4, 2016

Beginning five years ago, voters in Durham and Orange counties demonstrated their support for a regional light-rail system and related transit improvements. In November 2011, 60 percent of Durham County voters approved a half-cent sales tax for transit. This plan includes buses between both counties and a 17-mile light-rail system. Orange County voters followed suit in 2012 by approving, by 59 percent, a half-cent sales tax.

Where are we now on implementation? Bus service is improved. Evening/weekend hours have been added in the urban areas and new bus service between Efland/Mebane and Durham has been introduced. The Hillsborough train station is on the books with the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization. Chapel Hill’s bus rapid transit system recently gained Federal Transit Administration approval for project development. The Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) project is being improved with the addition of a station at N.C. Central University, thanks to public feedback.

The challenge we now face with the light rail project is that the state will provide 10 percent of the funding, not 25 percent as it has for past projects. We are faced with a funding shortfall of approximately \$250 million.

A Funding and Community Collaborative made up of leaders from local universities, health care institutions, government and the private sector is working to bridge the gap. The initiatives include right-of-way donations from public and private partners and solicitation of private-sector funds. These and any additional project savings will be incorporated into the project budget before the counties are asked to invest more money.

How will the Orange County government help meet this challenge? In December the Orange County Board of Commissioners can sign a nonbinding letter of intent to work with Go Triangle and other community partners to identify the funds needed – approximately \$40 million – to complete the D-O LRT project. This letter is simply a way ensuring that we do not drop out of the FTA approval process before we have explored ways to address the funding challenges. (CONTINUED...)



Orange County will receive an updated transit and financial plan in April 2017. Additional local funds need not be committed until June 2018. There will be multiple opportunities for Orange County to decide whether to make that investment.

The D-O LRT is projected by 2040 to support approximately 27,000 passenger trips a day. Working in coordination with the bus systems operated by Chapel Hill Transit and Go Triangle, the light rail system will greatly enhance mobility, opening up more employment opportunities to more people by making commuting options easier. The tools of local land use planning, which already favor locating new development along transit corridors, can be leveraged to support the communities' interests in a range of housing affordability options.

For all households, reduced dependence on automobiles offers the benefit of a lower cost of living. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that households in auto-dependent locations spend 25 percent of their income on transportation. And for those who do not use the system regularly, the benefits are substantial. Reducing auto travel is key to addressing road congestion as well as to reducing our carbon footprint.

In short, though funding challenges to the D-O LRT Project are real, your elected leaders are proceeding carefully in evaluating the costs and the benefits. At this juncture, all that is being asked is a renewed commitment of intent.

We've come too far to place years of careful planning in jeopardy. As the voters in both counties have recognized, light rail promises to improve the quality of life for all of us.

Submitted by Orange County Commissioner Bernadette Pelissier, Chapel Hill Town Council members Sally Greene, Ed Harrison and George Cianciolo and Carrboro Board of Aldermen members Damon Seils and Bethany Chaney.

Read more here: <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/community/chapel-hill-news/chn-opinion/article118189398.html#storylink=cpy>

## Wake transit tax to go before county commissioners

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge December 5, 2016

Wake County is a step closer to moving forward with a new transit tax – one that means an increase in vehicle registration cost.

Commissioners vote Monday on both the increase and the authorization of a special board to lead the initiative.

The program raises the annual vehicle tax to \$8. Jeff Mann, general manager of transit planning agency GoTriangle, says it will go a long way toward [funding the future of public transportation in the county](#).

**Read:** [A look at what the transit tax is funding: The Wake Transit Plan](#)

"We're working hard with our partners in Wake County and the community to move that forward," he says, adding that there are a "number of steps" that have to happen to adequately inform both businesses and residents of their obligations under the new tax plan.

A \$5 regional transit authority registration tax has been assessed on vehicles in Durham, Orange and Wake counties since 1991. That tax funds regional transportation services. The \$3 increase is specifically earmarked for the Wake County Transit Plan, and is expected to result in \$2.5 million in new revenue each year.

And while Wake County voters approved part of the plan, a half cent sales tax during the November election, Mann says there are still several steps to go to bring the entire program to fruition, including a meeting of a special tax board in January. (CONTINUED...)

Wake County Commissioners vote on a resolution to authorize the \$3 registration tax at their meeting Monday, which begins at 5 p.m. Additionally, they vote on authorizing the tax board to move forward with the plan.

*Lauren Ohnesorge covers information technology and entrepreneurship.*

## **Wake commissioners approve new vehicle registration fees**

The News and Observer-Traffic By Kathryn Trogdon December 2, 2016

RALEIGH – The Wake County Board of Commissioners approved \$10 in new or increased vehicle registration fees Monday to help fund its \$2.3 billion transit plan, which is expected to connect the Triangle with more buses and trains by 2027.

The board, including new commissioners Greg Ford and Erv Portman, unanimously approved levying a new \$7 county vehicle registration tax and increasing the regional transit authority registration tax, which is levied by GoTriangle, by \$3 on all qualifying vehicles registered in Wake County.

Tim Maloney, Wake County's director of planning, development and inspections, said the changes are expected to take effect in July. They are estimated to generate \$8.5 million in fiscal year 2017, which starts next July 1.

The new fees will be among several sources of revenue that will help pay for a majority of the 10-year [transit plan](#). Another major funding source is a half-cent local sales tax that 52.7 percent of Wake County [voters supported](#) during November's election.

The transit plan, which was approved by the county in June 2016, calls for commuter rail between Garner and Durham, as well as more and higher frequency bus routes throughout the county.

Commissioner James West and newly-appointed Commission Chairman Sig Hutchinson confirmed with staff that funding from these new taxes would be used only in Wake County.

GoTriangle, a regional public transportation authority, and Wake County municipalities that offer public transportation services – Raleigh, Cary, Wake Forest and a portion of Durham within Wake County – still will need to approve an interlocal agreement. Maloney said this was expected to happen by the end of January.

## **Orange commissioners agree to seek light-rail funds, review plan**

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb December 5, 2016

HILLSBOROUGH – The Orange County Board of Commissioners, while raising concerns Monday about details of the \$1.87 billion Durham-Orange light rail project, voted 5-2 to sign a non-binding letter to help find up to \$40 million more in local funding.

Commissioners Earl McKee and Renee Price rejected the move. They also opposed a statement of intent that Commissioner Barry Jacobs proposed as a way to show support for the light rail project while reassuring taxpayers that the board was not going to keep spending more money on it. The statement passed 5-2.

No one wants to be responsible for stopping the train and be accused of blocking progress, McKee said.  
(CONTINUED...)

"If we approve this, it sets an expectation that in April, we're going to move forward, and as I mentioned a while ago, every month that we move, we expend funds at a high rate, and every month we move forward, it's harder to back off," he said.

Price also took issue with the letter's statement that Orange County voters generally supported light rail. Many supporting the half-cent transit sales tax hoped for more bus services and the Hillsborough Amtrak station, she said.

GoTriangle officials are trying to fill a \$254 million state funding gap for the 17-mile light-rail line from UNC to N.C. Central University in Durham. They've also asked Durham to help find up to \$135 million over 10 years and the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization for up to \$20 million.

GoTriangle must show local support for at least 30 percent of the project's cost in its Federal Transportation Administration engineering application due Dec. 31. The next project update will be in April, when the commissioners must decide whether to spend \$60 million to \$70 million to do the engineering work.

The commissioners unanimously supported taking additional steps before April, including an independent financial review, a list of county transit goals and light-rail project benefits, and talks with Durham about the project and a cost-sharing agreement.

GoTriangle officials said the cost could reach \$2.4 billion by light rail's 2028 launch. FTA grants could pay 50 percent, if approved, but the state set a 10 percent cap, leaving Durham and Orange to cover the remaining 40 percent.

Orange County now picks up 23 percent of the local share, but commissioners want to renegotiate with Durham, which sees more light-rail stations and benefits. GoTriangle also is working with a Funding and Community Collaborative of private citizens and local organizations to find financial options.

They've raised their expectations in the last week from a \$25 million to \$50 million potential investment from public and private partners, general manager Jeff Mann said. None of that has been formally committed yet.

There are many questions, McKee said. He noted GoTriangle has spent about \$27.7 million so far, an average of \$700,000 a month for three years.

Commissioners Mark Marcoplos and Barry Jacobs also noted concerns about the information GoTriangle provided, but they and other commissioners agreed to move forward now and consider the details and options later.

"Where I have problems," Jacobs said, "is over time GoTriangle has been a translucent organization, and many people are frustrated because they can't get information or the information changes. I know that's true for some of us."

Slightly more than half of those who spoke urged the commissioners to stop and consider the options now. The rural advocacy group Orange County Voice collected more than 600 signatures on a petition supporting "Plan B" – bus-rapid transit, regular buses and on-demand, car-based services.

Some residents, including Patricia Clayton, president of the Northern Orange NAACP, said families, workers and seniors in rural areas lack good transit options. They endorsed the half-cent sales tax, because they expected it to bring more buses and other transportation to their community, she said.

"Given the recent state funding cuts and other challenges facing the project, we believe this is a good time to say no more. Our citizens will be best served if you redirect resources to an alternative plan that also includes transportation in northern Orange," Clayton said.

Hillsborough resident Aaron Butner pointed to the growing light rail cost and financial burden for lower-income families. There are better priorities, he said.

"Once I understood the facts on the ground and the risks to Orange County citizens, I found myself asking why you  
(CONTINUED...)

would want to support this project at all, especially since there's so many alternatives that are more flexible, provide more service and are a lot more cost effective," Butner said. "Plus, under new land-use assumptions, we should be planning on rapid service to Chatham Park, RTP, Wake, and even Hillsborough, not just service from UNC to Durham."

Olivia Truax spoke, however, about growing up needing a car to get from Chapel Hill to Durham. She wants her family one day to be less dependent on cars, she said.

"Not only would light rail connect existing development in Chapel Hill and Durham, at the hospitals and universities, it has the potential to promote the type of high-density mixed-use development in this area as it continues to grow, as its projected to do in the coming decades," Truax said.

GoTriangle commuter Tom Farmer said he already enjoys extra bus hours paid with the sales tax. Light rail is a "wise investment" in the economic future, he said.

"We risk losing our ability to attract good people, good businesses and good jobs as our economy stagnates while we are mired in traffic," Farmer said. "(Opponents) say that paying for light rail comes at the expense of other transit amenities, when in fact, Durham-Orange light-rail is the anchor of an extensive transit plan" connecting Durham to Wake via commuter rail and linking services across Orange County.

## **NCDOT to get new trains this holiday - part of massive Raleigh-to-Charlotte rail revamp**

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge December 6, 2016

The holidays mean new locomotives this year for the [North Carolina Department of Transportation, currently in the end stages of a massive rail revamp between Raleigh and Charlotte.](#)

Paul Worley, rail division director, says the department's new "Cab Control Unit" goes into testing this week. Cab Control Units are a piece of equipment that allows the train to operate without two engines.

**Read:** [NCDOT to debut 'last mile' solution for rail](#)

"If that goes well, it will go into paint the following week," he says.

Another locomotive, intended for Kannapolis, just completed a round of testing in Altoona, Pennsylvania, where the shop manufacturing the vehicles is located. That locomotive is currently in the shop for its final paint job. Both locomotives are expected to be shipped "right after Christmas," he says.

**Photos:** [Raleigh-to-Charlotte rail revamp to slash travel times](#)

And two additional units, one for the town of Cary and a second Cab Control Unit, are scheduled to be complete in mid-January, meaning they'll be tested later that month and delivered in early February.

The locomotives are coming to the state at a bargain – nearly \$1.9 million each. That's because they're rebuilt models, says Worley, noting a comparable new locomotive would run about \$6 million. And the Cab Control Units cost about \$700,000 each, designed specifically for NCDOT. "It is a repurposed locomotive body with controls," he explains, adding that the vehicles are all being manufactured at Norfolk Southern's Altoona, Pennsylvania subsidiary, Thoroughbred Mechanical Services, which partnered with Higher Power Industries on the project.

Both locomotives and CCUs must go through several tests to be commissioned, including what's called a "water" test where crews simulate strong rain fall to ensure "that there are no leaks where there shouldn't be," Worley says. And when the units arrive in North Carolina, both NCDOT and Amtrak will perform additional tests.