

The Joys of Watching a Bridge Shave the Tops Off Trucks

A North Carolina span shaves the tops off tall trucks; 'crash art' for sale

The Wall Street Journal By Ben Cohen Updated Jan. 9, 2016 10:35 a.m. ET

DURHAM, N.C.—A height sensor on the street detected impending doom here last month. Yellow lights began flashing a block away. The danger: A Budget rental truck barging down the road wasn't going to get under the railroad overpass.

The truck ignored the warning. It rumbled underneath. Its roof did not.

The train bridge's underside trimmed a layer off the truck's top, looking like a grater shaving a layer of cheese.

The world can watch the whole thing, thanks to Jürgen Henn.

Hearing the crash from his office nearby, the systems analyst raced out to survey the scene. He returned to his computer, checked his video cameras and uploaded footage of the episode to 11foot8.com, his website that tracks accidents under this city's infamous 11-foot-8-inch underpass.

It was a milestone mishap, the 100th time since 2008 the bridge had bit into a vehicle.

The trestle's clearance is about two feet lower than the minimum for standard-sized trucks. When one can't clear it, Mr. Henn says, "it can be pretty spectacular."

His online followers apparently agree: His most popular clips have more than a million views. Mr. Henn's online store sells chunks the bridge has carved off trucks; he calls it "crash art."

The bridge's victims include box trucks, flatbed trucks and hay trucks.

Trucks have their tops scraped, ripped, rolled like sardine-can lids and folded like accordions. Camping trailers and buses lose their air-conditioning units. Some trucks do wheelies, their front tires lifting when the bridge stops their tops.

Local rental companies alert drivers to it when they hand over truck keys, especially because insurance generally doesn't cover the overhead damage. "We warn people all the time to avoid that area," says a spokesman for [Avis Budget Group](#) Inc.'s area office.

Penske Corp. is "well aware of the issues with this low train trestle and the website," says a spokesman for the company, whose rental trucks star in some of Mr. Henn's videos.

Penske's truck heights are visible from the driver's seats, and the local office informs customers about the underpass. "If drivers are paying attention to their surroundings," the spokesman says, "they should never hit it."

North Carolina's transportation department says the bridge bashes have produced no fatalities since 2008 and only one injury, of the lowest severity category. But the bridge has caused more than \$500,000 in vehicle damage, it says.

Trucks often get stuck under the bridge in Mr. Henn's clips. That leaves time for him to chat with drivers while they deflate their tires to lower vehicles enough to free them. Some tell him they didn't know their trucks' heights. Others insist they didn't see the signs.

One said, "Oh, no. Not this bridge," Mr. Henn says. "He knew the website. He had seen the footage. And he still hit the bridge."

Mr. Henn tells drivers their accidents will be on YouTube. If they get in touch with him, he tells them, he will send a T-shirt showing the 11-foot-8 sign. "No one has ever claimed the T-shirt," he says.

The shirts are part of his modest business involving the bridge. The “crash art” he sells comes with certificates of authenticity. One piece, listed at \$45, is a truck fragment twisted into the shape of a number nine. Another, at \$22, looks like a Fruit Roll-Up.

He has pieces from the 100th crash, he says, but hasn’t put them up for sale yet.

People watch crash videos, says Eric Wilson, a Wake Forest University professor who has studied the phenomenon, for the reason they rubberneck on highways: morbid curiosity.

These bridge videos, he says, add an element of slapstick. “It’s like watching Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin,” he says. “We’re all imperfect and flawed and one step away from slipping on that banana peel.”

Mr. Henn’s bridge interest was accidental. After he took an information-technology job in 2002 at Duke University, where he still works, the crashes outside his office were impossible to ignore. They rattled the windows, and co-workers bet on how far trucks had made it.

He wondered: How often did this occur? “For weeks, you wouldn’t think about it,” Mr. Henn says. “Then there would be another one—and, oh, there’s another one.”

So he took a home-security camera to the office and aimed it at the bridge. “I figured I’d keep track of it for a while,” he says, “and then move onto something else.”

But his videos spread across Durham and then the Internet. He added a camera on a building across the street for an alternate view and eventually placed an infrared camera for nighttime accidents.

He has come to think of the endeavor as a documentary project.

The bridge hasn’t always shaved trucks. But it has effectively shrunk as vehicles have gotten taller over the last century. City officials say the trestle can’t grow because of the train tracks above and utility lines below.

They thought they had a solution with the current warning system. A height sensor a block from the overpass triggers the yellow lights when an oversize vehicle approaches and gives the driver time to turn, at least in theory.

Some of Durham’s transportation employees say they are among Mr. Henn’s followers. But if they have their way, his site may soon offer less drama.

Durham officials on Monday began building a system hooking the height sensor to a traffic light before the bridge that will turn red when it picks up a too-high truck. The light will turn green eventually, but they hope it is red for long enough that drivers realize they should turn.

Pete Nicholas, a transportation-department engineer, made sure Mr. Henn was among the first to find out. “I hate to tell you,” he says he told him, “but my goal is to put your website out of business.”

Mr. Henn says he can’t wait to track whether the idea succeeds: “It’s more exciting to me than another truck crash.”

He isn’t convinced his website will be wrecked.

“We’ll never totally eliminate stupidity in this world,” he says. “But we can reduce the risk.”

Road Worrier: Help NCDOT test drive its 2-day pothole repair pledge

Legislature has given NCDOT strict deadlines for responding to resident complaints

Potholes must be fixed within 2 business days; other problems, 10 to 15 days



A pothole measuring more than 3 feet across appeared in Wendell in 2012. NCDOT is now required by law to fix any reported pothole within two business days. Paul A. Specht aspect@newsobserver.com

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY BRUCE SICELOFF JANUARY 11, 2016

RALEIGH -- The clock starts ticking when you click the SUBMIT button.

When anybody reports a pothole on a state-maintained road, the state Department of Transportation has two business days to repair it.

That's the law. The General Assembly last year ordered up a new "DOT Report" program in an effort to make government more responsive – in this small area, at least – to residents.

And potholes are a good place to start. Hey, if this works out, maybe we'll go back and ask for clean energy and world peace.

Using a toll-free number or DOT's revamped "Contact Us" Web page, you can report potholes and other ills, including clogged culverts, damaged shoulders, drainage issues, highway debris, and bad guardrails, traffic signals and traffic signs.

This quick two-day turnaround is mandated only for pothole fixes. DOT is allowed 10 business days to “properly address” other safety-related complaints, and 15 days for problems where safety is not at risk. The law took effect Jan. 1.

Larry D. Huff is one resident who welcomes this new accountability.

“Make ‘em do what they’re supposed to do,” Huff said. “That’s what we pay our taxes for.”

He lives south of Raleigh in the Colonial Heights neighborhood, where potholes are a perennial problem on the state-maintained subdivision streets. He sometimes calls DOT’s Wake County maintenance office, and he says he sees results within a few days.

“I hit a pothole here pretty hard the other day, and I was going to call in about it,” said Huff, 72. “I noticed yesterday it’s been fixed.”

In Raleigh, state maintained roads include such high-traffic arteries as Glenwood Avenue and Capital Boulevard. Now DOT says there’s no need to look up that Wake County number, or the numbers for maintenance offices in 99 other counties. Call DOT’s toll-free number (877-368-4968) or go online to ncdot.gov/contact/.

You’ll be asked to explain the problem, with specifics (for example, on the pothole report form: Is it bad enough to damage a car?). Don’t forget to describe the location, including the county name, so DOT crews can find it. You’ll be asked for your contact information, so DOT can ask follow-up questions and let you know what happens.

The new Web form is plugged into DOT’s Citizen Action Request System (CARS). If that pothole is in, say, Chatham County, the message is supposed to be routed automatically to the Chatham maintenance office.

“So when the pothole repair crew comes in this morning, they can punch up that reporting system and see there’s a pothole report that came in last night,” said Steve Abbott, a DOT spokesman. “And they can go right out the door and fix it.”

It’s a technology upgrade that should work faster because it gets rid of an old human layer that was called ... Steve Abbott.

Along with fielding reporters’ queries and writing news releases, Abbott used to read emails from across the state each day. He figured out where to send them, or he responded to the email with a request for more particulars.

“I was an extra layer,” Abbott said. “They basically are eliminating an extra layer. This helps us get better information from the citizen, and it helps us respond much better.”

The city of Raleigh made a comparable improvement last year in its online resident complaint program, which uses the SeeClickFix government feedback Web technology. Raleigh had a backlog a year ago with

hundreds of unresolved complaints, partly because they were sorted by city employees who became a system bottleneck.

“Now when a citizen reports a pothole, that goes straight to our street maintenance folks and into their software system,” said Lou Buonpane, the city manager’s chief of staff. “They can quickly assign a crew to repair it and report back when it is resolved.”

Raleigh repaired 582 potholes in 2015 based on complaints filed at raleighnc.gov/ext/SeeClickFix, Buonpane said.

It’s not clear how well the new DOT program will work, and how much it will cost. DOT officials initially told the legislature’s fiscal analysts that the new deadlines would cost about \$30 million a year. Later they revised their cost projection to near zero.

The DOT Report effort has not been publicized yet because DOT officials want to start out with a quiet test drive. Mild winter weather has given them a break, with fewer pothole problems than drivers usually encounter in January. Even so, DOT is patching 100 potholes a day in Wake County alone, Abbott said.

Larry Huff says he’ll be glad to help them out with their trial run.

“Yes, I will,” Huff said. “I’m sure I can find a pothole in my neighborhood without looking very hard.”

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CLICK, AND IT SHALL BE FIXED

On Jan. 1, the state Department of Transportation quietly launched a program to field complaints about potholes and other road ills including problems with traffic signs and signals, guardrails and shoulders.

It’s online at ncdot.gov/contact/.

A new state law gives DOT two days to fix potholes, and it sets longer deadlines for other problems. Because residents aren’t always sure whether a particular road is maintained by local government or by DOT, the law requires DOT to forward the complaint to local government if necessary.

Many cities including Raleigh, Cary and Durham field complaints through the SeeClickFix.com website.

Who killed the Durham-Orange County light-rail project?

Indy Week By David Hudnall January 13, 2016



On Sept. 18, Triangle residents awoke to news that the long-planned, 17-mile light-rail project connecting Durham and Orange counties was effectively dead. Worse, nobody knew who killed it.

Things had been chugging along nicely for light rail. The financing plan—which called for 25 percent from the counties, 25 percent from the state and 50 percent from the feds—was on track. Voters in Durham and Orange had levied a half-cent sales tax to cover their share. The state had chipped in a quarter of the cost of Charlotte's light-rail system and was expected to do the same for this project. The N.C. Department of Transportation had committed \$138 million.

From there, it was a matter of getting the feds on board. That was looking up, too: Earlier that week in September, the project was awarded a \$1.7 million developmental grant from the Federal Transit Administration.

Then the state budget arrived.

It was supposed to land on Gov. Pat McCrory's desk by July 1, but House and Senate Republicans couldn't reach an agreement. They spent 11 additional weeks arguing about it, passing three stopgap spending measures to accommodate the delay. Finally, a bill was produced. It was quickly passed by the Legislature and signed by McCrory.

Inside that 429-page budget bill, though, was a tiny provision that capped state spending on light-rail projects at a paltry \$500,000. This meant that the DOT could no longer contribute the \$138 million it had promised to the Durham-Orange County line. It also destabilized the request to the federal government; the feds like to know a project has its other funding secured before delivering the big money.

The provision had never been brought up for any kind of public debate, and not a single House or Senate Republican claimed credit for inserting it into the budget. It just appeared at the last minute, out of nowhere, and became law.

None of the local legislators representing the districts through which the light-rail project would pass were notified about the \$500,000 cap during the backroom negotiations that produced the budget. But four separate Democratic lawmakers told the INDY last week that they believe they know who slipped the cap into the bill.

"My understanding is that [Speaker Tim Moore's] chief of staff is the one responsible," says Graig Meyer, D-Hillsborough.

Another Democrat in the Legislature, speaking on the condition of anonymity, says, "I have zero doubt in my mind whatsoever that it was [the Speaker's chief of staff]."

The source adds that lawmakers heard from Republicans on the conference committee that Rep. David R. Lewis of Harnett County, the chairman of the rules committee and a lead budget negotiator, came to the GOP caucus at the 11th hour and told them the cap had to go in. The Republicans took that directive as if it had come from the speaker.

Moore's chief of staff—and the man Democrats believe convinced Moore to insert the cap—is Clayton Somers. Formerly the executive director of the N.C. Turnpike Authority, Somers makes \$158,500 per year as Moore's top aide. He also lives in a community adjacent to Downing Creek, a well-heeled pocket of Chapel Hill that has loudly opposed light rail.

Under the light-rail plan, four street-level crossings would be created at intersections along Highway 54 near Downing Creek so that trains could pass through. Upon learning that light rail would interrupt highway access, residents of Downing Creek mobilized in opposition. They cited, among other things, traffic congestion, noise and a lack of dedicated parking as reasons why the project should not go forward in their neighborhood. They created a website challenging GoTriangle's planning assumptions, started an online petition and had anti-light-rail op-eds published in *The News & Observer*. Signs opposing light rail dotted the front yards of Downing Creek homes.

Somers declined to comment for this story. He did, however, email a short statement attributed to Moore.

"Neither I nor my staff inserted any provision in the budget regarding the light-rail project," it says.

Of course, if it's true that Lewis inserted the provision at the behest of Moore's office, this statement would be technically accurate but nonetheless misleading. (Lewis, who over the weekend defeated a tea party attempt to oust him from his role as a Republican National Committeeman, did not return calls seeking comment.)

In any event, it's hard to imagine that Moore doesn't know who's responsible. But even after the provision's existence came to light, the public remained in the dark. That's a problem.

The deeply undemocratic process that allows a mystery person to derail years of research, planning and careful adherence to the bureaucratic process is worth noting here. Roughly, it unfolds like this: The House passes a budget plan and sends it to the Senate. The Senate doesn't like it, comes up with its own budget and sends it back to the

House. At that point the House speaker (Moore) and the Senate president pro tem (Phil Berger) appoint lawmakers to a conference committee tasked with negotiating a budget agreement.

The speaker and the president designate a handful of lawmakers to lead these negotiations. These are the individuals who end up doing the horsetrading. Once a compromise is reached, there's no further discussion, just an up-or-down vote. And that's how things like the light-rail cap sneak into a budget bill.

As Sen. Mike Woodard, D-Durham, puts it: "The final negotiations on the budget are hammered out by a very small group of senior legislators from the majority party, and very few senators and state reps have any say in those negotiations, even if what comes out of it affects their district."

Following the cap's disclosure, several Republican lawmakers, including powerful Wake County Rep. Paul Stam, publicly condemned the surreptitious move. The House voted to repeal it, but that measure stalled in the Senate. Transit advocates hope the Senate will follow through on repealing it in this year's short session. McCrory, who pushed light rail as mayor of Charlotte, would likely support the repeal.

"I'm cautiously optimistic that there are lawmakers who may not be great fans of mass transit but are nevertheless offended about the way this language was put into the budget," says Sen. Floyd McKissick, D-Durham. "We have a merit-based system for evaluating our transportation needs in North Carolina. It's meant to depoliticize that process. And moves like this put the politics right back in."

Meyer says he asked Moore last September who inserted the cap into the budget and why. "He said he'd been hearing complaints from Orange County about light rail," Meyer says. "Then he said to me, 'I think your constituents will be happy,' and gave me a knowing smile. It wasn't a forum where I could say what I wanted to say back to him. So I just smiled back. It was pure gamesmanship on his part. And there wasn't anything we could do about it."

This article appeared in print with the headline "Who killed light rail?"

<http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/who-killed-the-durham-orange-county-light-rail-project/Content?oid=4982480>

Road Worrier: With meters and zippers, NCDOT separates Early Mergers from Late Mergers

Ramp meters will be installed to smooth the on-ramp flow at Interstate 540 interchanges Engineers offer nuanced advice about how to handle two lanes that merge into one Sometimes it's better to 'merge like a jerk.'

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY BRUCE SICELOFF JANUARY 18, 2016

RALEIGH --What's the best way for drivers in two lanes to merge into one lane? Ask any two traffic engineers – or any two experienced drivers, for that matter – and you'll get three or four answers strung together with: "It depends."

The state Department of Transportation this year will install traffic signals called ramp meters at a few interchanges on Interstate 540 in northern Wake County, to see if they can spread out the flow of drivers merging onto the freeway.

And DOT engineers are considering an I-85 overhaul project in Warren County, where two lanes will squeeze into one for weeks at a time, for an experiment in “dynamic” message signs – flashing instructions that vary with changes in traffic conditions – to help drivers merge together smoothly, like a zipper.

Zippers and meters represent efforts by DOT to reduce congestion on freeways that are getting more hectic every year – by easing the hassles that come with merging.

Smooth merging sometimes is negotiated in a quick mind-meld between drivers who are calm and attentive, generous and almost telepathic: *Yes I'm going to slip into that gap ahead of you / Yes I'm going to let you slip ahead of me.* It's like ... highway magic.

But when it's not like magic, somebody has to hit the brakes to avoid a side-swipe or rear-ender. Not smooth. Other drivers have to brake, too.

That's what can happen when five cars barrel down the on-ramp together, trying to merge onto the freeway all at once.

Ramp meters are signals that switch back and forth quickly between red light and green light. The signal lets one on-ramp driver go now and tells the next driver to wait a moment, so the cars enter the freeway one at a time.

“It's the freeway accepting a drip, drip – as opposed to the full faucet,” said Jim Dunlop, a DOT congestion management traffic engineer.

Ramp meters are credited with speeding up the urban rush hour flow in other states. But it's not guaranteed that they'll work here. Drivers might get confused. The on-ramp queues might back up onto the side streets.

If they do prove helpful on I-540, we'll see more ramp meters in coming years at busy interchanges on I-40 and I-440, and in Charlotte. (Learn more online at ncdot.gov/projects/rampMetering/.)

The other kind of merging comes when your road drops from two lanes to one lane. Usually there's a sign to warn you: Right lane ends in one mile; merge left.

This is where it gets tricky.

Should you be an obedient Early Merger, moving immediately into the other lane? Or should you stay in your lane until it ends, and then weasel your way in front of somebody in that other lane – a Late Merger?

It depends, Dunlop said.

If traffic is moving freely, be an Early Merger.

Don't slow down if you don't have to. Start looking for an opportunity to move into that other lane.

“If it's not congested, once you see that a lane is ending, you merge in at speed,” Dunlop said. “Pick a reasonable point so you don't slow up the other drivers. Everything runs smoothly.”

Because if you wait until your lane has ended, he explained, you may not be able to merge without forcing drivers in the other lane to slow down.

Dunlop's advice is just the opposite in cases where traffic is clogged and slow: Be a Late Merger.

YES. THE MOST EFFICIENT WAY IS TO MERGE LIKE A JERK.

Jim Dunlop, NCDOT congestion management traffic engineer

Drive all the way to the end of your lane and then do the zipper-merge – a car from the left lane alternates with a car from the right lane – to combine your two lanes. It's easier in this case because everybody is moving slowly. And you're making full use of both lanes.

That can mean other drivers will be backed up in the left lane while you speed past them in the right lane – making them hate you.

It's still the right thing to do, Dunlop explained to members of the state Board of Transportation.

"I was asked at the board meeting: So the best thing to do is go to the end of the line, where everybody's calling you a jerk?" Dunlop said. "Yes. The most efficient way is to merge like a jerk. Speed past all the people in the lane that's not ending."

This was hard enough to explain to board members and to the Road Worrier. Now Dunlop and his DOT colleagues are trying to figure out how to make this clear for drivers affected by that I-85 project in Warren County.

They aim to combine traffic radar with message signs to tell I-85 drivers when they should be Early Mergers, when they should be Late Mergers – and how to act like zippers.

Second road sinks in Chatham

Sinkhole develops on Jones Ferry Road in northern part of the county

It comes a day after part of Lystra Road collapsed where it crosses arm of Jordan Lake

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY RON GALLAGHER JANUARY 19, 2016



An excavator frames a five foot deep by 20-foot wide sinkhole on Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2016. The sinkhole opened up the day before across the eastbound lane of Lystra Road between Farrington Road and Jack Bennett Road in northern Chatham County forcing

NC DOT to close the popular connector road between Farrington Road and Highway 15-501. A Chatham DOT road crew was also dispatched Tuesday morning to a reported second sinkhole opening across Jones Ferry Road near River Road a few miles to the west of the Lystra Road sinkhole. Harry Lynch hlynch@newsobserver.com

PITTSBORO -- For the second day in a row, the pavement gave way on a road in Chatham County.

Chatham officials said Tuesday that Jones Ferry Road in the northern part of the county was closed as pavement began to disappear into a sinkhole.

Jones Ferry Road was blocked off just north of River Road because of a "sinkhole that is starting to crack the pavement," officials said in an announcement. The road crosses Crows Creek in that area, but it was not immediately known if that was where the pavement gave way.

State Department of Transportation engineers were on the way to assess the damage, the announcement said.

Earlier Tuesday, the transportation department said that repairing a sinkhole that developed Monday on Lystra Road in the northeastern part of the county "could be an extensive project."

The eastern end of the road was closed off Monday after the hole developed where the road crosses an arm of Jordan Lake.

The state Department of Transportation said two 6-foot culverts that carry water under Lystra Road had been damaged, and the road above them lost its support.

It was not clear Tuesday exactly what damage had happened, and crews were on the scene assessing that and what it would take to fix the problem and reopen the road, DOT spokeswoman Ginny Inman said.

"Early reports show this could be an extensive project," NCDOT said in a statement announcing detours around the problem.

Drivers who would normally use Lystra between Jack Bennett Road and Farrington Point Road were being directed to use Jack Bennett, Big Woods Road, U.S. 64 and Farrington Road to get around the closure.

The closed portion of Lystra Road is open at each end for local traffic, the statement said.

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Salt: The 'main weapon' for tackling wintry road mess in the Triangle

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY COLIN CAMPBELL JANUARY 22, 2016

Salt brine works great – but only until the snow and ice hits

State crews had used more than 1,400 tons of salt in Wake County alone by Friday afternoon

In Cary, 'our spreaders act like crème brulee torches'

RALEIGH -- Thanks to salt, state and local transportation officials say they largely managed to keep Triangle roads and streets from becoming sheets of ice Friday.

Before the storm hit, crews spent days coating roads with gallons upon gallons of salt brine. But brine was no longer an option once the sleet began to fall early Friday morning.

Liquids aren't the best remedy when ice is already on the road; Raleigh public works officials said brine sometimes even freezes when the temperature is low.

Crews generally stuck to a three-step process for clearing roads: Apply salt. Give it time to soak into the slush and ice. Come back later with a plow and scrape it off.

That's why some trucks were spotted on slush-covered roads with their plow blades up – plowing too quickly pushes away the salt.

"Salt remains the main weapon the department has to deal with the roads, and more than 1,400 tons of salt have been used so far (in Wake County), as well as 200 tons of a salt/sand mix," said Steve Abbott, a spokesman for the N.C. Department of Transportation.

Statewide, DOT crews planned to use 12,000 tons of salt. Municipal crews were well stocked for the storm, too. Cary had 900 tons of pure salt and 2,500 tons of salt/sand mix on hand.

"Our spreaders act like crème brulee torches, melting whatever glaze is covering the streets," said Scott Hecht, Cary's public works director.

Hecht said the salt brine his crews put on dry roads Wednesday and Thursday helped buy time Friday morning – sleet and snow melted quickly in the first hours of the storm.

And for much of Friday, occasional rounds of salt turned most of the ice to slush, even with temperatures below freezing.

"It's plowing off streets very well, and we will be doing that all night long," Hecht said, adding that Cary roads were "slick but not a sheet of ice ... It's not unmanageable."

Not every road got the full salt and plow treatment Friday. State and municipal road crews all have priority systems.

For the state, that means clearing interstates first and then moving to primary roads, with secondary roads last on the list. Raleigh prioritizes bridges – always the first to freeze – and what it considers "major thoroughfares," followed by streets that serve as city bus routes.

With ice building up late Friday and bringing down trees and power lines, road crews could be relying on a different tool Saturday: The trusty chainsaw.

By the Numbers: 2015 RDU passenger traffic

TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL BY LAUREN K. OHNESORGE FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2016, 2:06PM EST

Raleigh-Durham International Airport Authority reports that 443,170 passengers trekked through the airport in December, nearly an 8 percent uptick from the same time period in 2014.

RDU aircraft enplaned 6.9 million pounds of cargo during that same December time period, and 94.2 million pounds during the 2015 calendar year. And 172,783 vehicles exited public parking lots, with 21,490 taxi trips reported at RDU in December.

For the full year, that's 1.9 million exiting vehicles and nearly 330,000 taxi trips.

Of the flights taking off from RDU in December, a whopping 28.8 percent were Delta, trailed by Southwest at 24.5 percent, USAirways at 14.1 percent, American at 11.9 percent and United at 11.9 percent.

Including connections, RDU saw 445,957 passengers in December. For the calendar year, that's 4,987,585 passengers, or 4,957,449 without connections. It's more than a 4 percent increase over 2014's passenger count.

Enplaned passengers by month (less connections) in 2015:

- December: 443,170 (7.5 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- November: 425,106 (9.6 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- October: 450,427 (5.2 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- September: 397,798 (4.5 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- August: 435,107 (3.7 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- July: 469,980 (6.6 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- June: 462,420 (3.5 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- May: 444,803 (2.8 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- April: 406,157 (2.2 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- March: 394,963 (about the same as in 2014)
- February 300,684 (3.4 percent increase from the same month in 2014)
- January: 326,602 (4.2 percent increase from the same month in 2014)

CSX Corporation announces major freight rail infrastructure project in the Triangle

TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL BY LAUREN K. OHNESORGE THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2016, 11:23AM EST

Jacksonville, Florida-based transportation giant CSX Corporation (Nasdaq: CSX) has announced plans to develop a major freight rail infrastructure project in Johnston County, a project the company says will spur economic development and help position the region as a major transportation logistics hub.

But it comes at a cost: \$272 million. While CSX has committed to invest \$150 million, the execution of the project is contingent on securing \$100 million in discretionary infrastructure investment funds, says Louis Renjel, vice president of Strategic Infrastructure at CSX.

The company has already made the official proposal through the state of North Carolina's Strategic Transportation Investment process, so all he can do is wait, he says.

And there is no plan B. Without funding approval, CSX would look elsewhere for its next project. While he's not specific, he does say CSX picked Johnston County out of a long list of communities, including other counties in North Carolina.

The intermodal rail terminal CSX is proposing, dubbed the Carolina Connector, or CCX, will be a "state-of-the-art facility that will create distinct competitive advantages for North Carolina businesses and ports while serving the metro-Raleigh area," according to CSX.

Once it's operational, the new terminal will be transferring a broad range of goods, from food to furniture to appliances, between trucks and trains.

The company estimates the terminal to produce more than \$329 million in public benefits for the state over 30 years.

Construction alone is expected to create 250 to 300 short-term jobs. Over-time, 1,500 long-term jobs could be created statewide as a result of the project, in everything from terminal operations to trucking. But a big boon could be the possibility that other logistic centers will be attracted to the region. He points to another project CSX completed in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. There, Home Depot and an array of other big-name companies brought in their own logistic centers once the terminal was complete.

"And this is a far bigger facility," he says.

Currently, his team is reaching out to property owners in Johnston County to secure options on property east of Selma and close to Interstate 95 where the proposed facility would be constructed. The bulk of this year will be working on securing the investment. If all goes well, permitting activities would take place in 2017, with construction occurring in 2018. The complex itself could open in 2019, he says. But again – that's if it receives state support.

N.C. Transportation Secretary Nick Tennyson says the project would have a major impact on the state's ports and rail systems linking the North Carolina State Port at Wilmington with businesses from the Piedmont to the coast, transporting shipping containers over the nationwide rail network

"The project will strongly compete in the STI," he predicts.

RDU gets feedback on master plan

THE HERALD-SUN BY ALEX DIXON JANUARY 27, 2016

DURHAM — Nearly a year before it finalizes its master plan, Raleigh-Durham International Airport held its second round of public meetings Wednesday night to identify the airport's development goals through 2040.

Wednesday's meeting was at the Sarah P. Duke Gardens on the Duke University campus.

Since the first public meeting that was held this summer, airport officials and consultants have determined several facility upgrades that are needed due to projected demand and operation growth forecasts.

These potential upgrades include the reconstruction of a runway to accommodate international service, a nearly 50 percent increase in gate capacity in both terminals, roadway and intersection improvements and rental car facilities expansion.

But these upgrade suggestions have not been finalized and may change when consultants determine potential alternatives, the next step in the planning process, said Colleen Quinn, vice president of Ricondo and Associates, the firm leading the process.

Michael Landguth, CEO and president of RDU, said engineers have determined that the runway, called 5L/23R, has reached the end of its "useful life," but it is too early to determine the costs associated with reconstructing it.

Timing has a lot to do with that cost, Landguth said, as it has been determined that the reconstruction should occur within the next five years.

"The reconstruction will be a very substantial investment," Quinn said.

Consultants have also determined that additional gate capacity of 23 or more gates by 2040 is likely needed, as are capacity improvements in Federal Inspection Services to accommodate peak international arrivals. Ricondo and Associates has determined that current airfield capacity is adequate through 2040.

The 25-year master plan is part of a nationwide Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) plan that allows for airports to receive Federal grants.

RDU recently completed a 15-year construction project to update terminals, construct a ramp, parking garages and roadway systems.

"We invested probably over \$1.5 billion worth of assets that sit on the ground today to help provide the economic engine for the future," Landguth said in a previous interview. "Now we're going to focus on that future, and we're going to look out for the next 25 years to try to make sure we have that critical infrastructure in place to continue to support the economic growth of this region."

According to the plan's forecasts, which have been approved by the FAA, RDU should see a higher growth rate than the national average in both total aircraft operations and passenger airline enplanements.

Total aircraft operations, which encompasses activities such as commercial and military aviation, is expected to grow at an annual baseline rate of 1.5 percent through 2040.

Passenger airline enplanements at RDU, which totaled approximately 5 million passengers in 2015, is expected to grow at a baseline rate of 2.3 percent per year and could reach more than 8 million passengers in 2040.

'CALMING' CLAMOR: City called to revisit speed hump policy

THE HERALD-SUN BY LAUREN HORSCH JANUARY 29, 2016

DURHAM — Durham's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) is lobbying for a change to the city's speed hump approval policy, last amended by the City Council on June 1, 2015.

Erik Landfried, BPAC chairman at the time of the changes, said the speed hump issue was not referred to BPAC for review and/or comment.

Two changes particularly concerned Landfried.

One changed regulations for the installation of speed humps. Previously, the 85th percentile speed recorded on the street had to exceed the posted speed limit by at least 6 miles per hour in order for a speed hump to be approved for installation. Now it must exceed the posted speed limit by at least 10 mph.

The second change reduced the maximum daily traffic volume for eligibility from 2,500 vehicles per day to 2,000 vehicles per day.

"I think it is a very negative change and one that should be amended immediately," Landfried wrote to the City Council earlier this month.

The changes came after the Durham Fire Department expressed "concerns and objections to the placement of new speed humps," according to a city staff memo from May 2015.

The Fire Department estimates a speed hump delays response time by about 10 seconds and can vary depending on vehicle size.

Now the commission has thrown its weight behind amending the policy.

"While we are very sympathetic to the desire of the emergency response departments to maintain appropriate response times in all areas of the city, we are also deeply concerned regarding the negative impact that limiting the ability to install new speed humps to calm traffic on neighborhood streets will have on our communities," BPAC chairwoman Kendra Bridges wrote to the Council on Wednesday.

A staff memo from May 2015 analyzed 124 speed hump requests in light of the new criteria. Of those 124, only 35 percent (43 total), would have met the new criteria.

The city has already approved more than 700 speed humps, but with the new criteria fewer speed humps would be approved.

In order to mitigate concerns from emergency responders, Landfried along with BPAC suggested finding a way to have "emergency response priority street" — a practice utilized in Portland, Oregon.

By designating priority streets the city would identify roads where traffic calming devices — like speed humps — wouldn't be allowed.

When the items came up before the City Council in May and June very few questions were asked of the city's transportation staff.

Former Councilwoman Diane Catotti wanted clarification on speeds, and staff advised only streets with 25 miles per hour speed limits were eligible for speed humps.

"I find it a little odd, I have some issues with the petition process," she said, due to the fact that 75 percent of property owners on a block need to petition for a speed hump, but a majority of more than 50 percent of property owners need to be on a petition to remove a speed hump.

Durham to talk 'mitigation costs' of new RDU-Paris flight

TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL BY LAUREN K. OHNESORGE FEBRUARY 1, 2016

One of the last steps in the behind-the-scenes process of securing a new RDU-Paris flight is paying for take-off.

Durham, like Raleigh, is expected to front what's called "mitigation costs" for the new flight – making Bull City a stakeholder when it comes to the Delta nonstop service.

[The new flight, announced late last year](#), is a risky endeavor for Delta. Before Delta agreed to gamble \$75 million on the service, it had a demand for the Triangle: That the community would mitigate the anticipated \$2.2 million first-year shortfall.

The Raleigh-Durham International Airport Authority is supporting the flight with its Air Service Deployment program, which reduces the gap to \$1.1 million. The Research Triangle Foundation has matched it with another \$1.1 million, a total which includes both public dollars and escrow funds held by private sector community investors, such as Kane Realty Corp., Merz, Quintiles and Red Hat. Included in that \$1.1 million are tax dollars from the surrounding communities – making both Raleigh and Durham stakeholders in the new flight with their contributions. If benchmarks are not met, the public sector partners' chunk of the mitigation costs are \$550,000. That includes both the cities of Durham and Raleigh, and Durham and Wake counties.

Durham's portion is \$137,500, and approving the sum is on Monday's City Council agenda. Durham City Manager Tom Bonfield said the sum, if approved, would come out of the general fund.

Raleigh [approved its portion in December](#).

In return, the community gets to benefit from a projected GDP increase of \$1.4 billion over a 25-year period.

The Delta flight, still on track for a May debut, will be seven days per week except during a couple of winter months, when it will operate on a six day a week schedule.

The flight is expected to add \$25 million in net annual economic impact spending in the Triangle, creating 100 initial new jobs.