

The Durham East End Connector looks finished. So why can't people drive on it?

BY RICHARD STRADLING

JUNE 03, 2021 12:00 PM

Play Video

Duration 0:22

East End Connector in Durham will link NC 147 and UC 70

The East End Connector isn't scheduled to open until June 2021. When the connector is done, the highway stretching from Interstate 85 south to I-40 near Research Triangle Park, including parts of N.C. 147, will be known as I-885. BY NCDOT

Around the first of the year, it appeared this would be the month that Durham drivers would finally get to begin using the East End Connector, a four-mile highway that was [first proposed in 1959](#).

Now, six years after construction began, the N.C. Department of Transportation says the project has been delayed again and probably won't be ready for traffic until the end of the year.

The connector will link Interstate 85 with the Durham Freeway on the east side of town. It entails constructing a new 1.25-mile highway between the Durham Freeway (N.C. 147) and U.S. 70 and converting about 2.75 miles of U.S. 70 to a freeway.

Before it can open, contractors must tear down a temporary railroad bridge that crosses U.S. 70 near where it merges with the new section of highway. The concrete piers that hold up the bridge are in the path of some of the new lanes of the wider road.

The temporary bridge was built to carry CSX and Norfolk Southern trains over U.S. 70 while two parallel permanent bridges were demolished and replaced with new ones that can accommodate the wider highway. The new Norfolk Southern bridge is finished, but CSX still needs to lay tracks on its bridge and is still using the temporary one, said Liam Shannon, NCDOT's resident engineer for the project.

Shannon said winter weather delayed construction on the CSX bridge, which was built by NCDOT's contractor. It's up to the railroad to lay the tracks, he said, and that should happen this summer, allowing NCDOT to then tear down the temporary bridge and finish the road underneath it.

"Our goal right now is around the end of the year to have the connector itself open to traffic," he said.

The Durham East End Connector includes this 1.25-mile stretch of new highway that links N.C. 147, the Durham Freeway, on the left with U.S. 70 on the right. When construction began, the highway was expected to open in 2019.

HIGHWAY IS THREE YEARS OVERDUE

When construction of the East End Connector began in the spring of 2015, NCDOT [expected it would be finished in 2019](#). The completion date has now been pushed back at least three times, to the chagrin of Durham residents like Thomas Aker.

Aker lives in southern Durham and drives to the northeast side of town almost daily to visit friends or as a part-time Amazon delivery driver. He's very much looking forward to the connector opening.

"It would be a huge help," he said. "Navigating from southern Durham to that part of town is like going through a rat maze. And if you go a certain time of day, the traffic is horrible."

Like a lot of people, Aker drives past the point where the new highway branches off from U.S. 70 or the Durham Freeway and wonders why it is taking so long.

"Going up 70 and all, it's been a headache for years," he said. "I was finally glad they did something. Never had any idea it would take this long to complete it."

Even Durham residents who don't ever expect to use the East End Connector are anxious to see it open. That's because they're hoping the highway will divert some traffic from city streets such as North Mangum and North Roxboro that run between N.C. 147 and I-85.

"It should take a lot of traffic off Gregson and Duke streets and make them safer," Jon Paul Davis, who lives in Northgate Park, wrote on Facebook. "Those streets are residential streets but function more like highways that enable people to push through town to get to and from 147."

DELAYS ARE NOT COSTING NCDOT MORE MONEY

NCDOT awarded a [\\$142 million contract to build the East End Connector](#) back in 2015. With all the delays, the general contractor on the project, [Dragados USA](#), has not asked for more money, Shannon said.

In fact, it may be that Dragados will be paid less. Contractors can be financially penalized for delays in NCDOT projects, and Shannon said the department and the company are negotiating over how much could have been avoided and what could not.

On a project of this size, he said, delays are common.

"It happens all the time on something of this scale, especially with a third party like the railroad involved," he said. "So a six-month delay, maybe a year delay, is honestly not unheard of. This is obviously beyond that at this point."

Whenever the East End Connector does open, the highway stretching from I-85 south to I-40 near Research Triangle Park, including parts of the Durham Freeway, will be known as I-885.

Death in the Fast Lane

The Charlotte Observer and News & Observer in Raleigh wanted to know how often extreme speeding was happening on North Carolina's roads — and whether the COVID-19 pandemic had made highways deadlier. They found that nearly 92% of extreme speeders get breaks in the courts that allow them to avoid the full penalties.

Highway Patrol troopers, meanwhile, acknowledged they were stretched thin. Experts say that helps explain why highway deaths have increased — and why people who drive 90, 100 mph or more routinely get away with it.

MOORESVILLE, N.C.

By 8:15 a.m., dozens of traffic defendants are already lining up outside the Iredell County Courthouse.

Inside, prosecutor Regina Mahoney is preparing for another blur of a day in administrative court. There are 1,001 traffic cases on the docket, a massive workload that will soon leave prosecutors feeling exhausted.

Mahoney, a prosecutor who has been with the Iredell DA's office for two and a half years, dispenses justice at factory speed. She resolves most cases in less than a minute. There's no time to examine the driving records of each defendant, prosecutors say, so they use an honor system, asking drivers whether they've had recent speeding tickets in the county.

"We're relying on them being honest," Mahoney says.

Prosecutors in Iredell County aren't the only ones who handle such huge caseloads. Each week, in courtrooms across North Carolina, versions of this play out. Prosecutors say the state's overwhelmed and underfunded courts would simply grind to a halt if they didn't offer deals to most people charged with speeding.

"It's always 'let's make a deal time' in district court because you can't litigate them all," said Ike Avery, a retired top lawyer for the N.C. State Highway Patrol.

'I'LL WORK FASTER'

With most speeders, Mahoney has a short routine. She asks the driver's name and searches through alphabetized rows of yellow envelopes for the correct file. She asks the drivers whether they've had any other moving violations in Iredell County in the previous three years. And after a quick glance at the officer's citation, she makes her offer:

"I can reduce it to improper equipment if you'd like. It's a non-moving violation. You'll have 90 days to pay the fine."

Mahoney agrees to reduce the charges for many who are caught driving 19 mph or more over the speed limit, and for many who have recent speeding tickets.

But she gives her best deals to those who were driving less than 19 mph over the limit and who had no recent speeding tickets in the county. They are allowed to plead to the lesser charge of “improper equipment.”

On paper, that charge appears to be designed for those whose speedometers aren’t working properly. But in reality, prosecutors across the state regularly use it to give drivers breaks and clear court dockets. While prosecutors in Iredell don’t give such deals to those caught driving 20 mph or more over the limit, those in all 99 of the state’s other counties do, the Charlotte Observer and News and Observer of Raleigh found.

During the recent Wednesday at the Iredell courthouse, more than three dozen drivers got “improper-equipment” deals. They are ordered to pay \$266 in court costs and fines, but they avoid something much worse: points on their driver’s license and the steep insurance premium hikes that can accompany them.

Several defendants that day are charged with driving more than 90 mph. Mahoney tells them she can’t reduce their charges, so they will instead need to face the charges in district court on a later day.

Some speeders, however, do get a big break.

One young mother is charged with driving 90 mph in a 65-mph zone — an offense that under the law could cause her to lose her license for 30 days and cause her insurance premium to skyrocket. She tells District Court Judge Dale Graham she wasn’t paying attention to her speed, but acknowledges “that’s no excuse.”

The judge grants her request for a prayer for judgment continued, or PJC. That means she’ll be required to pay \$193 in court costs but won’t lose her license or be hit with higher insurance premiums.

In North Carolina, only judges can grant PJCs.

One after another, the cases fly by. One man, charged with driving 24 mph over the limit, is allowed to plead to 14 mph over — a deal that allows him to avoid a license suspension. Another, charged with going 17 mph over is allowed to plead to “improper equipment.” A woman, charged with going 87 in a 65, gets a PJC. And so it goes.

By 10:30 a.m., the line of defendants waiting to get into the courthouse stretches to the parking lot. Mahoney has already dealt with 118 defendants by then. “Is it 10:30 or 2:30?” she says, eliciting laughter from her courtroom colleagues.

Shortly after noon, a bailiff tells Mahoney that many defendants are still outside, waiting to get their cases heard. “OK, I’ll work faster,” she says.

At 1:24 p.m., the morning session of administrative court finally ends. Except for one 10-minute break, Mahoney has been handling cases non-stop for nearly five hours.

Mahoney, wearing a face mask adorned with images of coffee, is asked how she feels. “Exhausted,” she replies.

But her work isn’t done. That afternoon, she and another prosecutor handle scores of additional plea requests sent in by attorneys. They also tackle the mound of paperwork that resulted from the morning’s court session.

At 6:30 p.m, they finally wrap up their day.

And in seven days, the traffic court marathon will begin all over again.

‘Like NASCAR on the road,’ extreme speeding increasingly brings death to NC highways

BY AMES ALEXANDER AND
RICHARD STRADLING *DATA ANALYSIS BY GAVIN OFF, CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, AND
DAVID RAYNOR, RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER*

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Death in the Fast Lane

The Charlotte Observer and News & Observer in Raleigh wanted to know how often extreme speeding was happening on North Carolina’s roads — and whether the COVID-19 pandemic had made highways deadlier. They found that nearly 92% of extreme speeders get breaks in the courts that allow them to avoid the full penalties.

Highway Patrol troopers, meanwhile, acknowledged they were stretched thin. Experts say that helps explain why highway deaths have increased — and why people who drive 90, 100 mph or more routinely get away with it.

About an hour before nightfall, Dakeia Charles was driving his 1992 Cadillac down Charlotte’s outerbelt at what police said was 120 mph. He changed lanes. Then, his car slammed into a box truck, which ran off the road, careened across the median and collided with two other cars traveling the opposite direction.

With that crash on July 3, 2020, Lynn Sherrill lost four of the people she loved most: Her fun-loving son, Matthew Obester; her artistically gifted daughter-in-law, Andrea Obester; her horse-loving, 12-year-old granddaughter Elizabeth, and her “full of life” 9-year-old granddaughter, Violet. Sherrill had hoped for many more joyous days and years with her granddaughters.

“That was part of my life plan,” she said. “Now I have to make a new plan. You just don’t know what to do anymore.”

Like hundreds of others across North Carolina, Sherrill saw her life tragically upended by those who drive at extremely high speeds.

Almost everyone drives over the speed limit sometimes. But an investigation by the Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer in Raleigh found that extreme speeding — where drivers fly 20, 30, even 50 mph over the speed limit — has increased dramatically in North Carolina, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Law enforcement officers have clocked some drivers going nearly 200 mph.

Speed-related crashes have claimed the lives of more than 1,800 people in the state over the past five years. And last year, as drivers took advantage of uncongested roads during the pandemic, speed-related fatalities reached their highest point in more than a decade.

It’s happening largely because North Carolina allows drivers to get away with it.

Enforcement has been spotty, particularly during the pandemic, when some law officers say they were told to stop speeders only in the most extreme cases. The state’s overwhelmed courts let speeders off easy. As a result, many in North Carolina are able to drive at extreme speeds and escape punishment.

The news organizations found:

- When people are charged with driving 20 mph or more over the speed limit, nearly 92% get breaks in the courts that allow them to avoid the full penalties. In some counties, fewer than 2% of extreme speeders are convicted as charged.
- Some super speeders are caught doing it again and again. From 2016 through 2020, roughly 16,000 people have been charged at least three times with extreme speeding — that is, driving 20 mph or more over the limit.
- Dozens of speeding drivers whose charges were reduced or dismissed were later involved in fatal crashes.
- Although North Carolinians drove fewer miles during the pandemic, the death toll on the state’s roads in 2020 jumped 12% over the previous year. Speeding contributed to about a quarter of these deadly wrecks, playing an even bigger role in the highway carnage than alcohol.
- Speed enforcement in North Carolina has declined in the past five years, despite the growth in the state’s population. State troopers said that during the early days of the pandemic, they were told to stop issuing citations in all but the most egregious cases.

- Prosecutors have made it easier for speeders to avoid all punishment, including license and insurance penalties. They do it by using a loophole in state law that allows drivers to claim, without showing proof, that their speedometers aren't working properly. Many get this break, regardless of how fast they were speeding.

Asked for his assessment of the state's effort to curb speeding, Ike Avery, a retired top lawyer for the North Carolina State Highway Patrol, had three words:

"It's not working."

'ADDICTION TO SPEED'

Every 21 hours, on average, someone died last year in a speed-related crash in North Carolina. Of the roughly 1,650 traffic fatalities last year, at least 414 died in speed-related wrecks, according to state Department of Transportation data.

More than 70 fatal crashes last year involved people driving 100 mph or more, state data shows.

Over the past five years, more than 75 drivers in North Carolina have gotten extreme speeding charges reduced or dismissed, only to be involved later in wrecks that killed or injured others.

Part of the problem, experts say, is that unlike drunken driving, there's little public stigma against speeding. In some circles, it's even glorified. Street racing — involving drivers who sometimes top 180 mph — is on the rise in some communities, residents and law enforcement officers say.

But all too often, excessive speeding proves deadly. It's dangerous, experts say, because it leaves drivers with less time to react and greatly increases the distance needed to stop a car. What's more, the force of a collision rises exponentially at higher speeds.

"We just have this addiction to speed in this country. And that's killing us," said Mark Ezzell, director of the Governor's Highway Safety Program. "... We've really got to recognize speeding as the public health crisis that it is."

CAR TOPS 165 MPH, THEN CRASHES

Triple-digit speeds have become commonplace on the state's highways. During the five-year period examined by The Observer and News & Observer, about 20,000 drivers in North Carolina were charged with exceeding 100 mph. Some reached nearly 200 mph. A Raleigh man was charged in 2018 with going 197 mph on the interstate.

From 2019 to 2020, the number of drivers ticketed for going 100 mph or more rose 69%.

Law enforcement officers say some drivers race down roadways so fast they simply can't catch them.

Trooper Mitch Geracz said he recently clocked a Dodge Charger going 128 mph on Interstate 85 in Cabarrus County. Then, with Geracz in pursuit, the driver barreled onto Interstate 485 in Charlotte, where he reached 175 mph.

“He ran out of gas,” Geracz said. “That was the only reason I caught him.”

In July, a Union County sheriff’s deputy tried to stop another Dodge Charger on U.S. 74 in Wingate. The car reached speeds of more than 160 mph, according to Sgt. Coy Norris, of the Union County sheriff’s office. Norris pursued the car for several miles but couldn’t keep up with it.

Soon afterward, the car crashed in Wadesboro. The driver, 26-year-old D’Ante Cedric Kelley, fled on foot but was later arrested. He was charged with reckless driving, hit and run and fleeing to elude arrest. The charges are pending.

Like many charged with extreme speeding, Kelley had gotten breaks on previous speeding charges. In December 2019, Cumberland County prosecutors dismissed a charge of failure to reduce speed.

Prosecutors also gave Kelley a deal on a separate speeding charge after law enforcement officers reported that he’d been driving 15 mph over the speed limit. He was able to use a loophole in state law that allows speeding drivers to claim that their speedometers weren’t working properly.

In Mecklenburg County last year, 54 people died in wrecks involving cars that were going 20 mph or more over the speed limit. Ten of those crashes involved cars going 100 mph or more.

On June 27, 2020, police said a Chevrolet Equinox was going 104 mph in a 45-mph zone on Idlewild Road before it hit a median and went airborne. The car went down an embankment and struck a tree, killing Anahy Amantecat, a 14-year-old passenger. Michelle Lorenzo, the driver, pleaded guilty last month to a reduced charge of misdemeanor death by vehicle.

Two months later, on Aug. 27, Eric Love, 33, was walking across W.T. Harris Boulevard when he was struck and killed by a speeding car. Police say the driver, Timothy Nicholson, was driving his Volkswagen more than 100 mph in a 45-mph zone. Nicholson has been charged with driving while impaired and felony death by vehicle.

And nine days after that, police said, a Lexus sedan was going 90-100 mph in a 35-mph zone on West Boulevard when it careened into a car it was attempting to pass. The crash killed 30-year-old Antonio Bennett, a passenger in the Lexus. The driver of the speeding car, Shamari Pinkney, has been charged with second-degree murder.

In the Triangle over the past year, at least 30 people were killed in crashes involving drivers going 20 mph or more over the speed limit. Some were going much faster. Crash reports record the speeds: 80 mph in a 45-mph zone on Spring Forest Road in Raleigh; 95 mph in a 45-mph zone on N.C. 42 near Clayton; 115 mph in a 65-mph zone on Interstate 40 in Garner.

State troopers estimated Tre’shon Pope was driving 100 mph on Interstate 87 east of Raleigh last June when he lost control of his Honda Accord, crossed the median and hit a Dodge Dart head-

on. Pope, 19, his friend and passenger, 21-year-old Quartez Davis, and the driver of the Dart, Yameer Greene, 26, all were killed.

Andreas Darden of Cary was going about 175 mph last October as he tried to elude a law enforcement officer on eastbound U.S. 264 in Nash County, troopers say. Darden, 19, [lost control of the Porsche](#) he was driving and flipped over in the median, throwing him into a tree, according to the Highway Patrol. He was dead before troopers caught up with him.

SPEEDERS EXPLOIT OPEN ROADS

In 2020, as COVID-19 forced more people to work or attend school from home, the number of miles driven on North Carolina's roads fell by more than 11% from the previous year, according to state data.

Speeding citations dropped sharply, too. That's partly because people were driving less, experts say. Several state troopers also told the newspapers that they were instructed during the early days of the pandemic to make stops only in the most flagrant cases.

But many law enforcement officers interviewed for this series said they're encountering super speeders much more often than they used to. In 2020, the N.C. State Highway Patrol reported issuing more than 42,700 tickets to people driving more than 25 mph over the speed limit — a 35% increase over the roughly 31,600 tickets written in 2019.

Highway Patrol Trooper Ray Pierce said that in the years before the pandemic, troopers in Mecklenburg and surrounding counties would typically write a ticket a week for drivers going more than 100 mph. After the pandemic began, he said, it was not uncommon for them to write two or three a day.

Sgt. Jeff Weatherman, of the Union County Sheriff's Office, said that before last year, he occasionally saw drivers going more than 90 mph. Since the pandemic struck, he, too, has seen that become commonplace, he said.

Weatherman recalled a day last year when he was investigating a wreck that happened after a car hydroplaned on the rain-soaked Monroe Bypass.

"I was just finishing the paperwork, and somebody blew past me at 114 miles per hour," he said. "There was still standing water on the road. ... At some of these 100-plus speeds, if they get in a crash, that's not a survivable crash."

The pandemic brought an increase in extreme speeding in many other states, too, highway safety experts say.

"When you see less people on the road, sometimes people will see that as an invitation to hit the gas more," said Ezzell, of the N.C. Governor's Highway Safety Program. "And they may be under the impression that law enforcement is not out there."

Trooper Justin Miller said the number of people he sees driving at extremely high speeds these days is “just ridiculous.” Last year, Miller charged more than 260 people with driving faster than 90 mph.

On a recent morning at rush hour, Miller was driving an unmarked car on I-85 in Cabarrus County when a car zoomed up behind him at about 95 mph. Miller stopped the driver, who said he was going fast because he was late for work. After Miller wrote him a ticket, the driver pulled off on an exit.

Miller continued down the highway and, minutes later, saw a familiar-looking car fly past him at 90 mph. Miller stopped the car and was surprised to see it was the same driver. He ticketed him again.

In another recent case, Miller clocked a driver going 126 mph on I-85. It was about 11 a.m.

“That’s kind of like NASCAR on the road,” Miller said. “... Some of the (drivers) on the road know they can outrun us. So that’s what they do.

“It’s almost like (drivers) don’t care anymore.”

The state Highway Patrol has this advice for drivers who spot cars flying past them at extremely high speeds: Pull over and dial *HP to call the Highway Patrol communications center in your area. Dispatchers there can take information on the speeding car and relay it to troopers in the area.

STREET RACING ON THE RISE

Play Video

Duration 1:07

Police see more street takeovers in Charlotte area

'Show-off' drivers' burnouts and doughnuts devolve into reckless and aggressive driving, CMPD says. BY CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT

Increasingly, law enforcement officers in some cities say adrenaline junkies are turning public roads into drag strips.

In a YouTube video posted in 2017, a group of amateur racers assembled one night in a parking lot in Denver, N.C., about a half hour north of Charlotte.

“The only thing I ask is leaving out of here, just keep it quiet,” one man on the video told the others. “No burnouts or anything. Because that’s going to get the cops here faster than anything.”

Then, driving souped-up Dodge Chargers, Corvettes, Mustangs and motorcycles, they raced side-by-side down two lanes of a four-lane highway, their engines roaring. When the video camera focused on a speedometer, it showed one car reaching 183 mph.

At 4:30 a.m., after complaints from a nearby resident, the racers finally called it quits.

“One thing’s for sure, North Carolina knows how to throw down,” the video’s narrator says with a chuckle. “That was a helluva lot of racing.”

Last month, Charlotte-Mecklenburg [police seized 60 cars](#) and charged more than 50 people as part of a six-month investigation into illegal street racing. During the investigation, police encountered large groups of cars, sometimes in the hundreds, engaged in reckless street racing, commonly called “hooning.”

A number of the seized vehicles had costly modifications that gave owners an advantage over other drivers, police said.

Retired trooper Robin Benge recalled seeing two cars racing on I-485, near Northlake Mall, on a recent afternoon. They appeared to be going more than 150 mph, he said. He worries that drivers like those will eventually kill people.

“I was like, ‘Good God!’ ...The citizens they’re passing don’t even have time to react.”

Benge lives in Charlotte’s Highland Creek neighborhood, about a mile from I-485. Even from there, he can hear the unmistakable engine sounds of cars racing on the outerbelt.

There are TV shows dedicated to street racing. Such races often are organized through private message groups on Facebook or Instagram, Trooper Geracz said. Groups of drivers typically go slowly to block other drivers behind them, and to open up a stretch of highway in front of them. Then they make way for the racing drivers.

“The street racing on 485 — it’s going to be deadly,” Geracz said. “It’s going to end up costing people’s lives.”

Elsewhere, it already has.

On a Thursday night in early October, Charlotte police say, two drivers raced down two-lane Parkton Road in east Charlotte, reaching speeds of 80 mph — more than three times the speed limit. One of the drivers, 21-year-old Daniel David Knapp, died after losing control of his car and slamming into a tree.

The other driver, 20-year-old Amy Linares, [has been charged](#) with involuntary manslaughter. Police say she initiated the race but didn’t have a driver’s license.

The Triangle has also seen an increase in street racing during the pandemic, said Sgt. Casey Norwood, who heads traffic enforcement for the Durham County Sheriff’s Office. Norwood said the closing of bars and restaurants and the emptying of large parking lots in places such as Research Triangle Park prompted car club members and others to meet outdoors in growing numbers.

Norwood said the nighttime gatherings are planned, but the racing is often spontaneous.

“People have nice cars, they put a lot of money into them,” he said. “Eventually it’s going to get to a point where someone is going to want to show off and prove what they can do behind the wheel or encourage others to show off what they’ve done to the vehicle. So that’s when you get the guys burning rubber.”

On Jan. 30, Durham sheriff’s deputies and state troopers [staked out several areas of the county](#) where racing is known to occur and issued 55 citations, including 34 to drivers going 15 mph or more over the speed limit. The top speed the officers witnessed that night was 97 mph.

‘A CONSTANT REMINDER’

Play Video

Duration 1:57

15-year-old's life cut short by fatal NC crash

Justin Porter, a respectful young man with a passion for collecting sneakers, was the youngest among four passengers to die in a speed-related crash. BY KHADEJEH NIKOUYEH

Speed-related wrecks place an enormous economic burden on the public. Cars are totaled. Insurance rates rise for all. Injured people lose time from work and rack up large medical bills. A [2013 report](#) by the UNC Highway Safety Research Center estimated that speeding-related crashes at that time cost the state and its citizens nearly \$900 million a year.

But some things are more difficult to measure: the grief, lost opportunities and hardship that result when lives are extinguished.

On June 22, just before 6:30 p.m., five teenagers left a pool in Guilford County, climbed into a Honda Accord and began rocketing east on I-40. According to State Highway Patrol records, the car was traveling 100 mph before the driver lost control. The car flew off the right side of the road and went airborne after hitting a ditch. It slammed into a tree and split into two.

The crash cut short the lives of four of the youths: the 16-year-old driver, Maurice Darnell Williams, of Gibsonville; and passengers Justin Lionel Trevon Porter, 15, of Burlington; Sequoyah Delaney II, 16, of Greensboro; and Javon Johnson, 16, of Greensboro.

They were among the more than 400 people killed in speed-related crashes in 2020 in North Carolina, according to the state Department of Transportation.

Porter, the youngest victim, shared his father’s passion for collecting sneakers — and giving them away to people in need. He was a gifted student who loved to play basketball, spend time with his family, and root for whatever team LeBron James played for, his father, Jeremicus Porter, said.

After middle school, Porter was accepted to N.C. A&T early college, a program that allows high school students to take college-level classes. “He applied himself and wanted to be successful,” Porter said of his son.

Today, Jeremicus Porter still sees cars racing down North Carolina highways at more than 90 mph.

“It’s just a constant reminder,” he said. “It’s something I’ll never get over.”

Not long ago, he saw a car carrying a group of young people speed through the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant. When the car stopped in the line for food, Porter pulled up alongside it. “I told them, ‘I know you want to get something to eat. But I want you to know anything can happen. And I want you to be safe.’”

Now Porter would like to bring his message to a larger audience. He hopes he can one day talk with students in driver’s education classes.

What would he tell them?

“Would you rather be late getting to where you want to go? Or would you rather be early going to your tombstone?”

GRIEVING A LOST FAMILY

Play Video

Duration 2:40

Grandmother struggles with loss after super speeder kills four members of her family

Lynn Sherrill of Lake Wylie, SC, lost four family members, including granddaughters Elizabeth and Violet Obester, in a high-speed crash July 3, 2020. Sherrill loved horseback riding with her granddaughters. Now they help her cope with her loss. BY STEPHANIE BUNAO

At her home near Lake Wylie, Lynn Sherrill spoke of the four loved ones she lost after the high-speed crash on I-485 on the eve of the July Fourth holiday.

Her son, Matthew, an Army veteran who worked as a carpenter, loved to take his family on outdoor adventures. He was straightforward, opinionated, helpful and happy, Sherrill said.

“He wanted to make people laugh,” his mother said.

Her daughter-in-law, Andrea, was a talented artist who also ran a nonprofit that rescued small animals.

Elizabeth, her oldest granddaughter, had a special bond with animals, particularly horses. She was usually quiet. But atop a horse, she was fearless, and often rode bareback.

Lynn Sherrill sits in her horse barn after tending to her horses. Sherrill used to spend as much time as she could riding horses with her two granddaughters, Elizabeth and Violet. Her granddaughters died in a high-speed crash in 2020. “Now I have to make a new plan,” Sherrill said. Jessica Koscielniak *CHARLOTTE OBSERVER*

Violet, her younger granddaughter, had long auburn hair, enormous energy and a love of nature. “Her middle name was Sunshine,” Sherrill said. “And that’s how she was — always happy.”

A fifth person in a separate car, Mark Barlaan, a 58-year-old Bank of America manager who loved to cook and volunteer at the Charlotte Rescue Mission, also died in the crash.

Dakeia Charles, the 25-year-old Charlotte driver accused in the wreck that killed Sherrill’s family members, has been charged with five counts of murder. The case is pending.

Currently awaiting trial in the Mecklenburg County Jail, Charles did not respond to a letter sent to him seeking comment. Two of his attorneys wouldn’t comment on the case.

Sherrill would like to erect road signs, urging people to slow down for the sake of their families.

“One person’s selfish act can destroy so many lives,” she said.

The Washington Post

Cities are turning to supercharged bus routes to more quickly and cheaply expand transit services

The plans reveal a debate about the role of transit investment: Should it aim to help people traverse urban sprawl or reshape it?



A CDTA bus navigates State Street, also known as Route 5, in Schenectady, N.Y., on July 15. Cities around the country are turning to bus rapid transit to offer high speed transportation to their communities. (Cindy Schultz for The Washington Post)

By
Ian Duncan

July 23, 2021 at 7:00 a.m. EDT

Cities looking to boost their transit options are giving special fast bus routes a fresh look — an effort buoyed by hundreds of millions of dollars in [coronavirus](#) relief funds that could get another boost if Congress passes an infrastructure package. The Federal Transit Administration last year awarded \$375 million to help build the lines, known as bus rapid transit (BRT) — the largest sum in a decade, according to agency records. In a pipeline of almost 50 transit projects seeking federal investment in the coming years, 34 are for the bus lines. Eighteen projects under construction or in

planning phases shared \$185 million in funds from the most recent coronavirus relief package.

The lines take the humblest form of public transit, the city bus, and supercharge it using a combination of technology, road redesigns and route planning tweaks. The bus projects are gaining steam as federal transportation officials prioritize modes of transportation seen as more friendly to the environment in a battle against climate change.

Some transportation experts are skeptical because many lines that are dubbed BRTs involve only limited upgrades to bus service. They say those kinds of lines are not likely to tame urban sprawl or lure suburban drivers out of their cars.

Many of the projects are in major cities and have costs in the hundreds of millions of dollars. But transit agency leaders say the advanced bus lines — with the prospect of driving local economic development in ways regular buses struggle to do — are particularly appealing in smaller urban areas and the less dense communities that dominate the American landscape where subways and light rails are hard to justify.

The Capital District Transportation Authority, which serves Albany and nearby cities in New York, opened its first BRT line in 2011, then another in November. It is aiming to have a third in service by 2023.

Carm Basile, the agency's chief executive, said he faced calls for years to build a light rail system, an option he said was not feasible for the region. But as the agency rolled out its BRT lines, the calls for a rail system have disappeared.

"This is rail on wheels," he said. "It's a fraction of the cost, and it is much more suitable to smaller, midsized urban areas."



Commuters at the bus stop on Central Avenue, also known as Route 5, in Colonie, N.Y. (Cindy Schultz for The Washington Post)

Details of a \$1 trillion infrastructure package being assembled by President Biden and a bipartisan group of senators have not been disclosed, but an outline calls for an additional \$48.5 billion for transit — the largest federal transit investment ever, according to the White House. Much of the money would likely be dedicated to a maintenance backlog, but experts expect part of the money used for expansion to be directed at BRT projects.

In practice, bus rapid transit has come to encompass a range of services. The most elaborate systems involve dedicated busways with stops that mimic a light-rail station and facilities to buy tickets on the street, as well as speeds that can rival rail. But many such bus lines in the United States are more basic, largely involving stops that are further apart and technology that changes stop lights to green as buses approach.

Some warn that betting on a form of transit well suited to America's road-dominated cities and suburbs could be counterproductive: an unhappy middle way that offers modestly better service and does not promote the kind of denser communities that allow transit to thrive.

“The extent to which BRT is used for its flexibility and to conform to non-transit friendly surroundings, we're wasting our money,” said Beth Osborne, director of advocacy group Transportation for America. “That's where BRT gets us in trouble. It's on the roadway, and the roadway is still being built for a spread-out transportation system.”

Legislation passed by the House this month would increase the size of projects that qualify for an FTA program often used to help build BRT systems and increase the amount of federal funds projects could receive. It also opens the door to new kinds of bus projects that use highway express lanes as a way of reaching regions poorly served by transit.

The provisions were supported by the Community Transportation Association of America, which represents smaller transit operators, and pitched by a bipartisan group of Georgia and Florida House members to boost transit in suburban districts. Scott Bogren, executive director of CTAA, said the wider definition acknowledges the reality of American geography.

“Conceptually, the evangelists — the BRT purists — I know exactly where they're coming from,” he said. “In a perfect world I might tend to agree with them, but so many communities are operating within landscapes that don't fit that perfect world but could benefit from the operational improvements and service improvements that BRT can create.”

The idea for BRT was developed in Brazil in the 1970s and imported to the United States, with a line opening in Pittsburgh that decade. But despite the concept's history, disputes remain about which systems truly qualify as BRT.



A signal for buses is part of the rapid transit system for CDTA buses on Central Avenue, also known as Route 5, in Colonie, N.Y., on July 14. (Cindy Schultz for The Washington Post)

The Federal Transit Administration has adopted a broad definition that encompasses projects that upgrade a transportation corridor but do not necessarily have dedicated lanes or roads for the buses.

Annie Weinstock, president of consulting firm BRT Planning International, said the label should apply only to lines that fit specific criteria: The buses have their own lanes or travel on dedicated roads; passengers pay their fare before they board; stations have raised platforms so there is no need to step up onto the bus; and intersections are designed to prioritize bus movement.

Some lines in the United States fit that narrower definition, including those in Eugene, Ore., and in Cleveland, where the HealthLine bus route has been used to spur revitalization in the city.

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, officials hope to open a new BRT line every year to build a network of about 20. That region is mixing different kinds of BRT lines to help provide connections to a light-rail system.

“It’s not a blanket package that you have to do the same things every time,” said Charles Carlson, director of Bus Rapid Transit Projects at Metro Transit, which serves the Twin Cities. “Instead, it’s a toolbox where you can tailor the solution.”

The 21-station Gold Line, for example, would operate mostly in dedicated bus lanes following Interstate 94. The FTA recommended the project receive \$100 million in

federal funds in the coming budget year. But other projects largely rely on existing roads.

In the Albany region, BRT lines have spaced-out stations and technology to prioritize buses at intersections, but lack many advanced features. Basile said the agency cannot justify the costs.



A CDTA bus navigates State Street, also known as Route 5, in Schenectady, N.Y., on July 15. Cities around the country are turning to bus rapid transit to offer high speed transportation to their communities. (Cindy Schultz for The Washington Post)

Nonetheless, he said the lines are 25 percent faster than regular buses. Before the pandemic, ridership on the region’s first route reached 4 million passengers a year — 25 percent higher than the old bus line, the agency said.

“That’s what you promote to people,” Basile said. “The value to them is I can get them where they want to go a little quicker.”

There are indications that BRT lines can promote some of the density long associated with rail routes. A new analysis of job and residential growth by researchers at the University of Arizona examined areas around BRT stations in 11 cities between 2013 and 2019. In each case, they found areas close to the stations accounted for a significant share of regional growth.

In Cuyahoga County, home to Cleveland, two-thirds of new jobs were located within about a block of a HealthLine station, although Arthur C. Nelson, who co-authored the

analysis, said the region is an exceptional case. It is not clear whether the new lines spurred the growth or whether they were established in areas already primed to grow, but Nelson said experts generally have found that investments in transit promote density and growth.

“I suspect the level of private investment depends on the quality of the BRT,” Nelson said. “Cleveland’s is considered the nation’s best and probably most expensive, but others have made solid investments to build systems that attract development.”

Jacksonville, the largest city by land areas in the contiguous United States, has 45 miles of BRT lines serving 47 stations and is working on another 12-mile route. Nathaniel P. Ford Sr., chief executive of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, said the city has seen \$1.6 billion in residential and commercial permit requests within a half-mile of its BRT lines, a sign they are attracting investment.

“We are seeing greater density around these corridors,” he said. “In the meantime, the bus rapid transit network is suitable for our community.”



LOCAL

Greenway trail through the Triangle poised to become part of state parks system

BY RICHARD STRADLING

JUNE 15, 2021 02:47 PM, UPDATED JUNE 25, 2021 02:17 PM



David Crouse and his wife Mary Crouse cycle the Walnut Creek Trail, part of the East Coast Greenway, on Tuesday, June 15, 2021, in Raleigh, N.C. Legislation approved Monday would add the East Coast Greenway to the North Carolina state parks system. ROBERT WILLETT RWILLETT@NEWSOBSERVER.COM



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RALEIGH

Update: Gov. Roy Cooper signed the bill into law on June 25.

The East Coast Greenway, a planned 3,000-mile trail from Florida to Maine that passes through North Carolina and the Triangle, may soon become part of the state parks system.

The [General Assembly has sent a bill](#) to Gov. Roy Cooper that would designate the greenway a North Carolina State Trail and make it a unit of the Division of State Parks. The designation would raise the trail's profile and make it eligible for state support, including money to help develop new sections.

The greenway's planned route through the state runs 365 miles from the southeastern corner north through Fayetteville and the Triangle before entering Virginia near Kerr Lake. About 30% of the trail is finished in the state, including a 75-mile stretch through the Triangle that is the longest completed section of the East Coast Greenway in a metropolitan area.

There's also a planned 425-mile alternative route that branches off at Wilmington and follows the coast to Virginia near [Dismal Swamp State Park](#).

House Bill 130 would make the East Coast Greenway the [10th State Trail in the parks system](#). The most prominent one is [the 1,175-mile Mountains-to-Sea Trail](#), which also passes through the Triangle and is more than half finished.

The state parks system does not own the trails but acknowledges their importance and aids in their development.

"They have a whole team of folks who help develop these state trails, from planning them to helping them get constructed," said Sarah Sanford, manager for the East Coast Greenway in North Carolina and Virginia. "So we would get the assistance of all those staff members."

[House Bill 130 authorizes the state](#) to spend money acquiring land for the East Coast Greenway but doesn't provide any. Sanford said that's one reason the bill sailed through the General Assembly, with only one dissenting vote.

Cooper's office has not responded when asked whether he will sign the bill.

Another bill, [House Bill 936](#), introduced last month would provide \$20 million over two years to help develop land and paddle trails across the state. It hasn't moved out of the House Appropriations Committee, though the money could show up in the House version of the budget.

"It's more complicated," Sanford said. "That bill is going to change a lot from draft to final version."

TRAILS DEVELOP 'SLOWLY BUT SURELY'

The idea for the East Coast Greenway was hatched in New York City in the early 1990s by people who wanted to be able to safely ride bikes over long distances. The greenway has become a multi-use trail for cyclists, pedestrians and people in wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

The nonprofit [East Coast Greenway Alliance](#), based in Durham, encourages development of the 3,000-mile trail but doesn't own any of it. Each section is built and maintained by state or local governments or park systems.

"We designate the local pieces and link them together slowly but surely," Sanford said. "And then over time we work with communities that haven't been able to build trails yet to get them built and link them up to existing ones."

In the Triangle, the East Coast Greenway encompasses parts or all of 17 different local trails, including Black Creek Greenway in Cary, [Reedy Creek Trail through Umstead State Park](#) and the [American Tobacco Trail](#). A 13-mile section of the Neuse River Trail between Raleigh and Clayton is part of both the East Coast Greenway and Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

Very few people spend more than a day at a time riding or hiking on these long-distance trails, says Kate Dixon, executive director of the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. But there is value in being part of something big, Dixon said.

"It adds to the romance of the trail. People hear about it, and it helps raise awareness about it," Dixon said. "People aren't walking all over the state, but they are in their love with their own section."

The East Coast Greenway Alliance is also helping launch the [Triangle Trails Initiative](#), a local effort to plan and promote the growing network of trails in a 14-

county region around Raleigh and Durham.

For more information about the East Coast Greenway, go to www.greenway.org/.

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LOCAL

Imagine a statewide network of NC greenway trails. Officials want your ideas.

SEPTEMBER 28, 2020 1:27 PM



A cyclist uses the Walnut Creek Trail at the intersection with the Neuse River Trail, part of the East Coast Greenway, on Tuesday, June 15, 2021, in Raleigh, N.C. Legislation approved Monday would add the East Coast Greenway to the North Carolina state parks system. ROBERT WILLETT RWILLETT@NEWSOBSERVER.COM

RICHARD STRADLING

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LOCAL

Enjoying riding the bus for free in the Triangle? Here's how long that will last

BY ANNA JOHNSON

JUNE 29, 2021 07:30 AM, UPDATED JUNE 29, 2021 10:05 AM



GoTriangle unveiled its first two electric buses outside Raleigh Union Station downtown on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, bringing to six the number of Proterra buses in the Triangle. Four have operated at RDU airport since May. BY KEVIN KEISTER

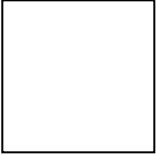



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Triangle residents will be able to keep riding local buses for free through June 2022.

GoRaleigh, GoDurham, GoTriangle and GoCary will continue to let riders board the buses for free. Chapel Hill Transit is free all of the time.

The fares were suspended in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as riders were asked to use the rear door to board the buses to maintain social distancing. The bus systems also “sought to ease financial burdens for the frontline workers” and others who relied on the transit systems, according to a news release.

“As we finally start to emerge from this pandemic, our transit agencies see this as an opportunity to do something good for the community while we also welcome back riders and attract new ones,” said GoTriangle President and CEO Charles E. Lattuca, in the news release. “We’ll bring even more value to the federal money as we use it to expand equity and impact our community in a positive way.”

The cost of going fare-free was covered by the federal government in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

GoDurham has returned to all-door boarding.

Masks are still required on public transit.

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LOCAL

RDU airport receives another big federal grant to help make up for COVID-19 losses

BY RICHARD STRADLING

JUNE 26, 2021 07:30 AM



MICHAEL LANDGUTH
RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY

The Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority and a coalition of Triangle companies unveiled an advertising campaign June 14, 2021 to encourage people to fly again and help the region’s economic recovery after the pandemic. The campaign’s theme is “Carry On.” BY TRIANGLE TAKEOFF COALITION



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MORRISVILLE

Raleigh-Durham International Airport will receive another infusion of cash from the federal government to help make up for losses caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

RDU will receive nearly \$50.7 million from the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) approved by Congress in March and signed into law by President Joe Biden. The money is RDU's share of \$8 billion the act provides through the Federal Aviation Administration to help U.S. airports recover from the drop in revenue when COVID-19 severely curtailed air travel.

The Triangle's two Democratic members of Congress, Deborah Ross of Raleigh and David Price of Durham, announced the grant this week.

The money must be used to cover salaries and other operating costs and make debt payments. It can't be used for construction projects. RDU slashed its budget by nearly 45% last year, which included shelving \$96 million in capital projects, such as the expansion of the security checkpoint in Terminal 2 and the addition of four gates in Terminal 1.

The federal government has now given RDU \$100 million to help it get through the pandemic. The airport received \$49.5 million through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security or CARES Act last year, as well as nearly \$18 million from the state. That money accounted for about 45% of RDU's budget last year.

Government restrictions and a fear of confined spaces decimated air travel in the spring of 2020; only about 40,000 passengers passed through RDU in April, about as many as during a normal day before the pandemic.

Business has rebounded but still remains about a third below pre-pandemic levels. Earlier this month, the airport and a coalition of Triangle companies unveiled a broadcast and print advertising campaign to encourage people to fly again and help the region's economic recovery. The [campaign's theme is "Carry On."](#)

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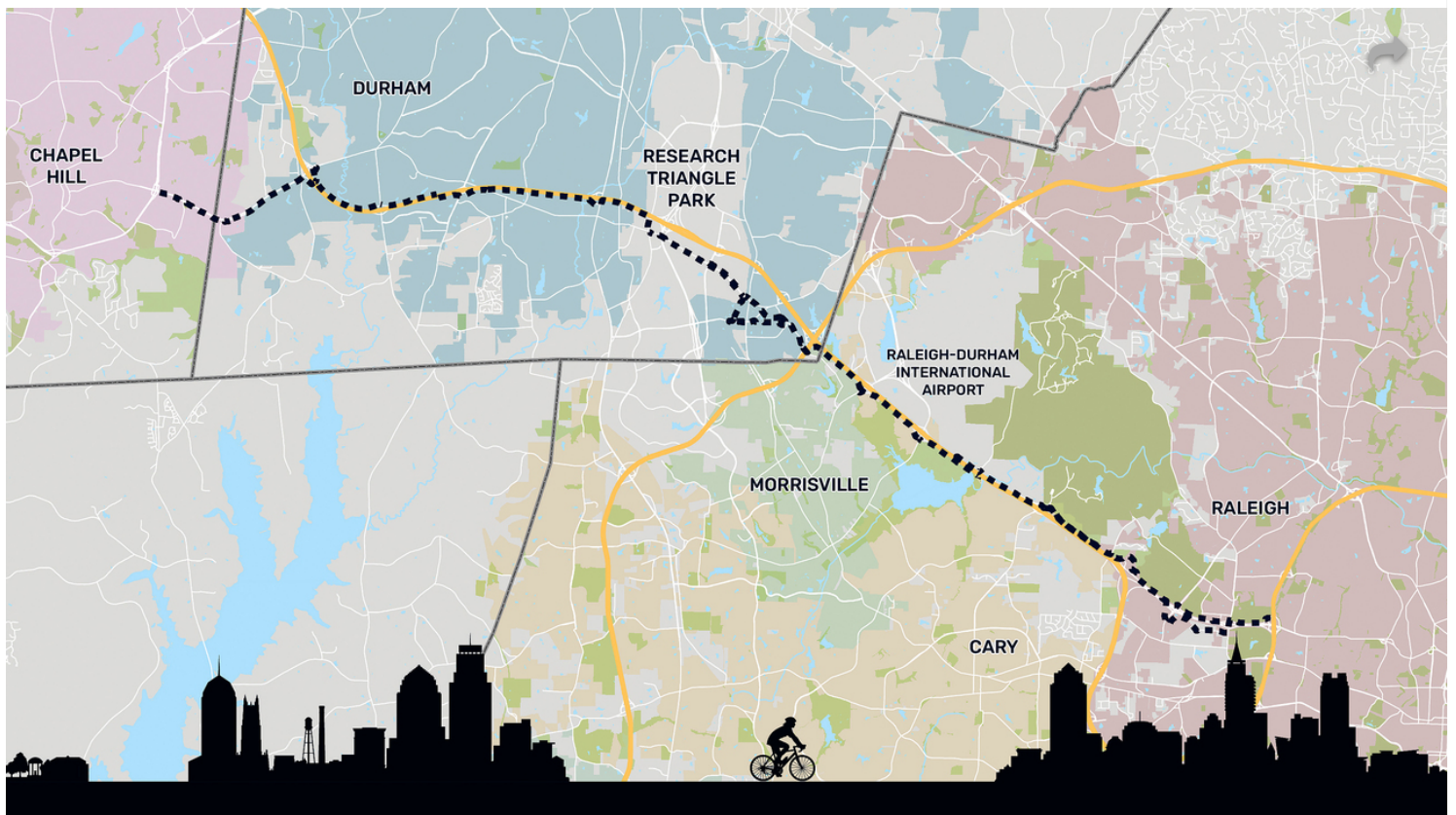


LOCAL

Proposed highway for bicycles could parallel I-40 from Chapel Hill to Raleigh

BY RICHARD STRADLING

JUNE 23, 2021 11:20 AM



The proposed Triangle Bikeway is a 17-mile paved path along I-40 and NC 54 between Chapel Hill and Raleigh. Regional transportation planners have refined the concept and identified a likely route and are now seeking public feedback. BY TRIANGLEBIKEWAY.COM | MCADAMS



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RALEIGH

A few years ago, Wake County commissioner Sig Hutchinson [floated the idea of building a five-mile bike path](#) parallel to Interstate 40 near Cary that people could use instead of driving to get to and from work.

Since then, the proposed Triangle Bikeway has expanded into a 17-mile paved path along I-40 and N.C. 54 between Chapel Hill and Raleigh. Regional transportation planners have refined the concept and identified a likely route and are now seeking public feedback.

The bikeway would be open to pedestrians and no doubt attract people who want a little exercise and fresh air. But its design and location would make the path an option for commuters, Hutchinson said.

“It’s going to be 14 feet wide or wider, so it’s going to be a bike superhighway,” he said. “It’s going to be focused on transportation.”

In Chapel Hill, the bikeway would begin at Fordham Boulevard and follow N.C. 54 out to I-40. From there, the bikeway would run in its own separate path along I-40, except for a detour through Research Triangle Park, to the [N.C. Museum of Art park](#) and the greenway bridge that crosses the Raleigh Beltline.

The bikeway would intersect existing greenways and trails, including the [American Tobacco Trail](#) in Durham and the Black Creek and East Coast greenways in Cary, providing access to Umstead State Park.

The route between Chapel Hill and RTP is conceptual, while some design work has been done on the section between RTP and Raleigh. The plan calls for the path to cross I-40 three times, including over a new pedestrian bridge near the N.C. 54 interchange in Chapel Hill.

The transportation planning groups for Wake, Durham and Orange counties will present the plan and answer questions during two online workshops on June 29, at 12 and 5 p.m. Information on how to attend can be found at meetsyou.trianglebikeway.com/. The recorded workshops will be available on the website after June 29 as well.

There's also a survey asking people how they would use the bikeway and where they would want to get on and off. The route chosen by the planners was based in part on a similar survey that reached more than 2,100 people last fall.

COST ESTIMATES COME LATER

It's not clear yet how much the bikeway would cost to build or how it would be paid for. More detailed design work is needed before planners can put together reasonable estimates, said Bonnie Parker of the [Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization](#).

"At this early stage of design, we don't have cost estimates because they would be unreliable," Parker wrote in an email. "This phase is about identifying the best route to take into further design. When we move from concepts into engineering/full design, cost estimates will be developed."

Parker and Hutchinson both say the bikeway project would be eligible for state and federal grants, as well as support from the local governments along its route. Parker said once planners settle on a final route, they'll begin identifying possible sources of funding and begin full design work on sections of the trail.

Hutchinson said the long-range plan is to continue the Triangle Bikeway through Raleigh to the Neuse River Trail east of the city. He said trails like these are not only good for people's health and quality of life but they also help attract employers to the region.

"You look at the demographics of the folks who work at RTP, and those folks, they want to bike to work; they don't want to sit in their cars," he said. "I like to say it's taking the worst part of your day and turning it into the best part of your day."

For more information about the proposed Triangle Bikeway, go to www.trianglebikeway.com/.

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Greenway trail through the Triangle poised to become part of state parks



LOCAL

Business group proposes new revenue for RDU, including more local taxpayer support

BY RICHARD STRADLING

JULY 12, 2021 06:00 AM, UPDATED JULY 12, 2021 10:48 AM



MICHAEL LANDGUTH
RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY

The Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority and a coalition of Triangle companies unveiled an advertising campaign June 14, 2021 to encourage people to fly again and help the region’s economic recovery after the pandemic. The campaign’s theme is “Carry On.” BY TRIANGLE TAKEOFF COALITION



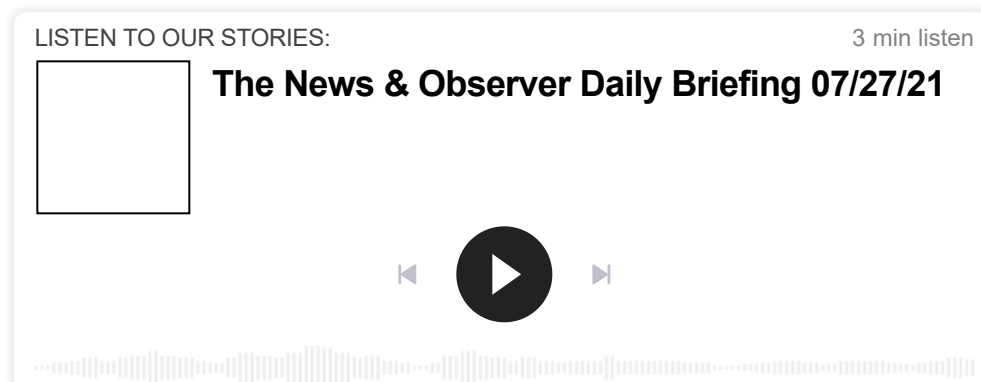
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CARY

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Leaders of the Triangle’s business community are redoubling their efforts to find new sources of revenue for Raleigh-Durham International Airport, potentially to include larger contributions from local taxpayers.

The [Regional Transportation Alliance](#), a program of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, has refined [a list of ideas it first presented in January 2020](#) for how to help RDU come up with an additional \$2 billion for construction projects. RDU says it needs as much as \$4 billion by 2040 for additional gates, a new main runway, a new rental car facility and other projects, but has identified sources for only about half that much.

The transportation alliance agreed to help RDU come up with new revenue because the airport is so important to the region’s prosperity, said Mike Schoenfeld, director of communications and government relations for Duke University and head of the group’s board.

“The anticipated growth in passenger traffic will not create sufficient funding to cover all the operations and the infrastructure needs over the next 20 years,” Schoenfeld said Friday. “In other words, while RDU can keep the lights on, it will not be able to pay for its capital program without identifying substantial new revenue.”

RDU will rely on federal funding for much of its expansion, particularly [the replacement of its main runway](#), something the airport hopes to finish by the end

of 2025. But that federal money is not guaranteed, and members of the alliance's RDU task force put lobbying federal officials at the top of their list.

"That to me is the top priority," said John McGeary, a senior vice president at First National Bank. "That's going to take a lot of support locally from the business community and the state and federal level, because we're talking about a reallocation of federal dollars. That's not easy, we all know that."

The task force recommendations also include several local sources of revenue. Some, such as raising parking fees by \$6 a day or establishing a new \$2 "access fee" for cars and trucks visiting the RDU campus, would come from visitors to the airport.

But local taxpayers should also contribute more, members of the task force said Friday as they presented their ideas to a room full of alliance members.

The four local governments that own RDU — Raleigh, Durham and Durham and Wake counties — each contribute \$12,500 a year to the airport, an amount that hasn't changed since 1957. The task force recommends they each kick in at least \$120,000 a year and maybe more.

"We think the time has come for a thoughtful look at the local funding from the municipal owners," McGeary said.

Matt Calabria, who heads the Wake County Board of Commissioners, said Friday that the board hasn't been asked to increase its support for RDU and couldn't say how the request would be received.

"I think we'd all be open-minded. We're very much committed to making sure RDU is successful," Calabria said. "But anything related to budget questions is complicated, and there are always different things to weigh."

The talk about RDU's growth comes as the airport is still recovering from the steep drop in air travel during the coronavirus pandemic. The number of passengers passing through the airport remains about 40% below pre-pandemic levels, with business travel slow to come back.

But leisure travel has helped the airline business rebound faster than expected just a few months ago, and RDU will again set new passenger records in 2024, if not before, according to forecasts from RDU.

Joe Milazzo, the alliance’s executive director, said the task force hopes it can persuade Triangle residents to help pay more to accommodate that growth.

“There’s always something people don’t want to pay,” Milazzo said. “There’s something for everybody in this report not to like, quite frankly, but closing the \$2 billion gap has to happen at some point. Because doing nothing seems unpalatable.”

The full task force recommendations can be found at www.letsgetmoving.org/priorities/rdu-funding/.

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JUNE 14, 2021 6:00 AM

