

## City's anti-crash measures paying off

The Herald-Sun By Lauren Horsch Mar. 27, 2015 @ 04:27 PM

DURHAM — In 2003 Durham hatched a plan to target trouble spots for motorists in the city. Eleven years after its implementation the city has seen a significant decrease in accidents at those trouble spots.

"What we're doing here is not anything new," Larry McGlothlin, transportation engineer for the City of Durham said. "There have been many studies, and investigations, and counter measures that have developed from those studies."

However, what Durham is doing that is new and unique is focusing the programs to identify recurring patterns in traffic accidents over time. Then it's analyzing before and after data to measure the effectiveness so the city could "learn and apply it to other situations."

"We have access to accident history reports, where we can go back and pull up the history reports for every intersection in Durham," McGlothlin said. From that data the city could then determine if one type of accident was happening more than others.

"Vehicular crashes are random in nature," he said.

By going back and examining the historical data he and other city engineers can see if there is any type of crash that is happening over and over again.

"And that kind of gives us a lead," McGlothlin said.

One of those examples is the intersection of Cornwallis and Pickett roads.

"It was a two-way previously, and we converted that to a four-way (stop)," he said. "We were seeing specific type angled crashes, that there were sight distance issues that motorists just couldn't overcome."

According to data provided by the City of Durham between 2001 and '08 that specific intersection saw 37 crashes, with an average of 4.6 per year.

By installing those two extra stop signs — or countermeasures — over a three year time period crashes at that intersection were reduced from 33 to five. Injuries during that same three-year time span also went from 25 to one. Property damage also diminished from about \$157,465 to \$15,050.

Even though the program has been around for over a decade the data examined is based on three-year increments, so many of the findings are now just coming to light.

In the most recent report published in January 2015 the city saw a 52 percent reduction in targeted types of crashes at targeted intersections — from 568 to 271. Targeted types of crashes are those most likely to occur at a specific intersection — such as the angled crashes at Cornwallis and Pickett roads.

Overall, crashes in the areas targeted by the city were reduced by 31 percent — from 1,188 to 814, according to City of Durham calculations.

"We felt like that the program and our focused efforts were successful," McGlothlin said. "We could see the numbers after five or six years. We were starting to see nice percentages in reductions."

Since the inception of the program a total of 85 locations across the city have been identified as areas that needed treatment of some kind. Of those, 53 had reached completion, with 42 of those locations showing "measured declines."

Other areas of the city that received treatments that saw a significant decline in crashes included the intersection of William Penn Plaza and Ben Franklin Drive. McGlothlin said there were multiple issues at that area including horizontal and vertical curves as well as a median that was causing sight issues.

"Basically the historical accident reports bared out that there were angled accidents from many of the directions at the intersection," he said. So, to fix the issue the city installed a traffic signal where there had previously been two stop signs.

McGlothlin said installing the lights helped reduce targeted accidents from 30 to just four.

In the coming years McGlothlin said he and the city's Transportation Department will learn from their successes and then apply them to new situations.

"We will continue to do the things that we have been doing," he said. "What we learn is what helps us to be proactive."

He said the city's engineers are seeing patterns quicker now and are able to replicate successes at various locations.

He also urges Durham residents to let the city know of any problem intersections so they can evaluate it.

"We want to partner with the citizens, we can't be every where," he said.

Overall the city has installed 162 countermeasures with 17 more countermeasures pending. The countermeasures have prevented an estimated 297 accidents and \$2.3 million in property damages, according to the city

## **Hillsborough could get boost from MTS Trail**

The Herald-Sun By Katie Jansen Mar. 28, 2015 @ 03:44 PM

HILLSBOROUGH — Hillsborough could become the first trial "trail town" on the Mountains to Sea Trail, a network of trails and roads that stretches 1,150 miles across the state.

Kate Dixon, executive director of Friends of the Mountain to Sea Trail, spoke at the first economic development meeting hosted by the Hillsborough Chamber of Commerce to discuss the economic impact the trail could have on the town.

The trail is a state park that was first imagined in 1977 by Howard Lee, former secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Decades later, the trail still isn't officially complete, but much progress has been made. More than 620 miles of the trail are open, and they are connected temporarily by routes on back roads.

The trail goes through sections of wilderness as well as through the heart of 21 small towns — including Hillsborough. It skirts some 20 other towns.

Dixon said that even though the trail is not complete, the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail still want to market it because it is already a wonderful trail that will only be improved as other sections are added in the future.

Dixon said she hopes Hillsborough, whose Riverwalk boasts a significant portion of the trail, will be one of the first towns to jump on board and help advertise the trail to gain attention both nationwide and internationally.

Dixon said the Mountains to Sea Trail hopes to draw millions of visitors per year, whether they are weekend backpackers exploring a small section of the trail or more dedicated hikers setting out to complete the whole journey.

Towns on the trail will see economic benefits associated with the trail, Dixon said.

New jobs may be created, while current jobs will be supported by the flow of people into the towns, Dixon said. Towns will enjoy reliable tourist spending, an easier time recruiting and keeping businesses and increased property values.

The Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail has also created a brochure that shares with visitors what is special about each town on the trail, as well as lodging options, restaurants, grocery stores and tourist attractions.

Sarah DeGennaro, executive director for the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, said she is working with the tourism board to figure out how to better promote the trail and possibly become the Mountains to Sea Trail's first "trail town."

One of the main challenges Hillsborough will face in doing so is a lack of lodging or camping options for hikers.

Libbie Hough, a member of the tourism board, said she sees Mountains to Sea Trail as a countywide asset, and she hopes the tourism board will be able to collaborate with the Orange County Visitors Bureau to figure out solutions and strategies.

On a statewide level, the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail is also focusing on promotion. The organization plans to use a North Carolina Department of Commerce grant to hire a marketing consultant.

"We really see the Mountains to Sea Trail as having the potential to be one of the great trails in the world," Dixon said.

The Chamber of Commerce plans to hold an economic development session on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Each session will focus on a different topic.

## **RDU CEO: We need money to maintain the airport**

Triangle Business Journal Sougata Mukherjee Friday, March 27, 2015, 3:00pm EDT

Raleigh-Durham International Airport – a facility that has played a big role in the Triangle's growth – has a financial problem.

It does not have enough money to maintain the \$1.5 billion in assets it has amassed with the construction of Terminal 2, redevelopment of Terminal 1 and other ancillary services in and around the airport.

So, RDU CEO Michael Landguth is seeking help from the federal government to open up the revenue stream for the airport.

Landguth is not alone. Hundreds of airport directors have targeted the passenger facility charges (PFC) – a \$4.50 fee charged for every plane ticket – as the line item that offers a potential solution. That charge has not changed since 2000. Airports and travel groups want Congress to raise that charge to \$8.50 for every passenger ticket.

**Read:** [Airlines, airports, travel groups join fight to raise, thwart passenger facility charges for fliers](#)

"Airports, unlike cities, are unable to levy taxes and our ability to charge user fees, which airlines use effectively to support their operations, is limited," Landguth says. "We need about \$30 million annually to renew and replace our infrastructure. Current PFC will not generate sufficient revenues to fund our improvements."

Currently, at RDU, the PFCs needed to offset annual debt service is running about \$24 million per year. "Collections only generate about \$19 million," Landguth says. "The math is not working."

**Poll:** [Passenger facility charges: Do you side with the airlines or with the airports?](#)

For RDU, this is new territory. The PFC fund balance ballooned to more than \$10 million in 2013 because of airline expansions and passenger growth. Now, the fund balance is running in the red, with leveled-off passenger growth and higher debt service primarily because of Terminal 2 construction. The PFC fund balance is expected to hit a negative \$20 million-plus by 2019, airport officials estimate.

And the whole situation of depleting revenue at airports is forcing the service provider to fight with its primary revenue source — the airlines who do not want Congress to raise the passenger facility charges because it will raise airfares.

Some of these air carriers have claimed that airports can raise the necessary money by floating new bonds. Most airport directors scoff at that idea because of airlines have cut flights and capacity at most airports to raise the demand of available seats. And that strategy in many cases reduced the landing fees at airports because there are fewer flights operating. Ratings agencies that rate airport bonds are fast to slap negative warnings on new airport bonds that are not showing strong, top-line revenue growth.

RDU has a AA- credit rating from Fitch Ratings with a \$661 million debt portfolio. If Fitch lowers its ratings, RDU's debt service will go up, further worsening the financial situation.

In a March 25 letter written to Bill Shuster, the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee in Washington, Landguth and scores of airport directors across the U.S. were far from kind to the air carriers.

"The airlines have claimed that a modest PFC adjustment will impact air travel demand. That argument rings hollow in an era where airlines routinely charge passengers \$25 to check a single bag, \$200 to change a ticket, \$99 to pick a seat, and a host of other fees," the letter reads. "In fact, the airlines recently forecast that spring travel will increase to 134.8 million passengers, the highest number of travelers since 2007, and they reported that 2014 was the fifth consecutive year of airline-industry profits — growth that is occurring despite rising fares and airline ancillary fee collections."

Landguth estimates RDU's \$1.5 billion infrastructure needs about \$30 million every year.

"Under the current \$4.50 cap, I need to have an additional million-plus passengers come through my front door," he says.

Since only passengers that are originating from RDU pay this PFC, adding 1 million-plus passengers annually is nothing more than a pipe dream. Currently, RDU has about 4.8 million passengers that originate from the Triangle. In all, about 9 million passengers use the airport every year.

Other than the operating income from landing fees, parking, taxi service, concessions, RDU also receives about \$4 million from the federal government in form of a broader federal aviation package called the Airport Improvement Program (AIP).

With Congress cautious of raising any appropriations, AIP disbursements may come under pressure as well during the upcoming budget negotiations as well.

For now, however, Landguth wants a focused fight in the interest of serving the Triangle community, he says.

"Some parts of Terminal 2 are about seven years old," Landguth adds. "Still, people think it is a brand new terminal. It is not. It just looks that way because we maintain it properly."

## East Durham group not on board with light-rail station move

Site could boost economic development in depressed area

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Jim Wise 03/31/2015 12:00 PM

DURHAM – A group representing Northeast Central Durham wants Triangle Transit to think again about where it ends the Durham-Orange Light Rail in that neighborhood.

Originally, the plan was to put the line's terminal station east of Alston Avenue – with the idea of using the North Carolina Railroad's bridge to get across the street.

When it turned out that sharing the bridge did not suit the railroad's own future plans, Triangle Transit shifted the end of the line to the west side of Alston, at Grant Street – a difference of about a quarter mile.

"It doesn't seem like much of a shift, but it is a shift in the wrong direction," said Jim Svarra, a member of the Northeast Central Durham Leadership Council who brought that group's complaint to the InterNeighborhood Council (INC) last week.

The Leadership Council is a nonprofit made up of Northeast Central Durham residents and others interested in that long-depressed area's revitalization, including INC Council President Philip Azar and Vice President DeDreanna Freeman.

"The system doesn't get very far into East Durham as it is," Svarra said.

Triangle Transit's original station site was a half mile from Driver Street, which has become "a focus of economic development activity," Svarra said.

Moving it puts the station beyond what transit planners consider feasible walking distance for stations; also farther from the R. Kelly Bryant pedestrian bridge that residents south of the Durham Freeway could use to reach the light rail.

The move also puts the station more than a half-mile from the McDougald Terrace public-housing complex; and it reduces the likelihood of the light-rail maintenance shop and its job potential coming to East Durham and of the line's future extension east with direct service to Driver Street and Durham Tech.

A Leadership Council resolution calls on Triangle Transit to consider other alignments, outside the railroad corridor, for crossing Alston Avenue and extending light rail farther east.

Azar pointed out that in the overall transit-improvement plan, areas farther east would be served by a separate "commuter rail" system running from downtown Durham to Raleigh.

"But the point is still valid with regard to light rail," Azar said, adding that the free Bull City Connector bus service, whose route ends at the Golden Belt complex, "barely made it to East Durham.

"This runs the risk of happening again with light rail," Azar said. "The time to get this right ... is now."

The INC did not endorse the resolution, but encouraged Svarra and the Leadership Council to let Triangle Transit know its opinions. Public meetings on the light-rail route through downtown Durham are planned in June,

"The clock is ticking," said Mike Shiflett, the INC representative from Northgate Park. "The time for comment is now."

### TRIANGLE TRANSIT RESPONDS

The Northeast Central Durham Leadership Council resolution says that the group was “distressed that (Triangle Transit) did not request our input or inform us of the possible change in the station site” prior to announcing it at a meeting of county commissioners and City Council members in January.

After seeing the resolution last week, Triangle Transit spokesman Brad Schulz sent The Durham News an email response:

“We look forward to continuing our conversation with residents of NE Central Durham. Since this project began, engagement with the community has been a top priority with over 200 public sessions, neighborhood meetings and community discussions reaching 4,000 individuals. Public feedback is highly valued and will make this project better in every way. We take all interests of the community very seriously and look forward to sharing the information of our intensive study.”

#### SHAPING OUR COMMUNITY

**What’s happening:** Triangle Transit is providing updates and seeking feedback on the proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail Project is a 17.1 mile light rail transit line which extends from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to east of downtown Durham.

**What you can do:** Submit comments to Triangle Transit at [nando.com/form](http://nando.com/form). Comments may also be submitted to [info@ourtransitfuture.com](mailto:info@ourtransitfuture.com); Our Transit Future, P.O. Box 530, Morrisville, NC 27560; or a toll-free hotline at 800-816-7817. Forms received will be added to our comments database within 5 days of receipt.

**What’s next:** Triangle Transit will present data for the proposed project from the Ninth Street station to the proposed Alston Avenue Maintenance Facility from 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday, June 4, at the Durham Station 515 W. Pettigrew St. and from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, June 6, at John Avery Boys and Girls Club 808 E. Pettigrew St. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be released for public comment later this year.

## Road Worrier: April Fools! It’s a gas tax cut, for now

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Bruce Sicheloff 03/31/2015 11:23 am

RALEIGH -- North Carolina’s quickie tax cut is supposed to take effect on April Fools’ Day.

Do not read any significance into that. It is, surely, a coincidence of the calendar.

Republican Senate leaders announced in February that they wanted to reduce the gas tax in March – as Phase One of a puzzling plan to [push the tax higher](#) in future years. They voted, in a John-Kerryesque manner, to cut the gas tax before they voted to raise it.

Republican House leaders let the March date slide before they answered with their own idea: Cut the tax in April and leave it there for the rest of 2015 – as Phase One of a plan to let taxes fall where they may, starting in 2016.

Both chambers were expected to cast their first votes Monday night – with hope for final action and a signature by Gov. Pat McCrory on Tuesday – on [a hybrid plan that was worked out last week](#).

It is more paradoxical than the sum of its House and Senate parts. It’s a small tax cut that wards off a bigger tax cut.

The tax drops from its current 37.5 cents per gallon to 36 cents effective April 1. That’s Wednesday, just a few hours after the gubernatorial ink is scheduled to dry.

The tax falls again to 35 cents next January, and 34 cents in July 2016. After that – well, we'll get back to after that.

The first question is: Can the state actually reduce this tax overnight? Yes, it's easy.

The entire \$1.9 billion in state gas and diesel taxes paid over the course of a year is collected from about 50 wholesale fuel suppliers. For whatever taxes they owe on April 1, the suppliers will make their first payments to the N.C. Department of Revenue in May.

The second question matters more: Will drivers actually enjoy the benefit of this 1.5-cent quickie cut? Only in theory.

On April 1, we can expect to hear state leaders thanking themselves for reducing our taxes. But if we rush out to the nearest gas station, we'll find pump prices either higher, lower or exactly the same as they were on the last day of March.

Tom Kloza, chief oil analyst for the New Jersey-based Oil Price Information Service, said wholesale fuel prices can rise or fall 3 to 7 cents per gallon in a day. A 1.5-cent change in the tax would disappear as "noise," Kloza said by email, "in that it is such a small percentage of what goes into the actual price."

Ernie Brame, manager of the 95 Petro truck stop on Interstate 95 at Kenly, said he'll drop his price if the tax goes down.

"I can't tell you my competition would follow," Brame said. "The retail customer won't know the difference, at a penny."

The new law cuts the tax a few pennies over the next 21 months, while preventing it from dropping much more sharply. If current law was left unchanged, North Carolina drivers would see the tax fall nearly 8 cents a gallons, to 29.6 cents, in July.

### **A new formula**

Besides setting fixed gas tax rates through the end of 2016, [the legislation](#) will replace a formula that moves the rate up or down every six months to reflect changes in wholesale fuel prices, which have plunged since late 2014.

Starting in 2017, a new formula will adjust the tax rate just once a year, based on changes in two measures. North Carolina's steadily growing population gets a 75 percent weight in the calculation, and the national price index for energy costs gets 25 percent.

Our population is growing at about 1 percent a year. The energy index portion of the consumer price index rises and falls, but it is less volatile than the price of gasoline.

While the CPI gas component fell a whopping 32.8 percent in the year that ended in February, the larger [energy number dropped only 18.8 percent](#). Energy costs are expected to rise again in coming years.

So after the gas tax falls to 34 cents at the end of 2016, state economists figure it will start climbing slowly again in 2017 – an average of 2.3 percent a year.

"The new adjustment formula is designed to provide the state with a stable source of revenue to help meet its transportation needs," Barry Boardman, the legislature's chief economist, said by email. "Population growth is a strong determinant for transportation needs, and it receives the most weight in the formula."

### **Cheaper south of the border**

Speaking from his Kenly truck stop, Brame said he recognized that the state needs a dependable source of money to keep roads and bridges in shape.

But after years of suffering the brunt of North Carolina's high gas taxes – he knows how many truckers wait to fill their tanks with cheaper fuel in South Carolina – Brame had been looking forward to a 7.9-cent tax cut that would have taken effect just before the July Fourth holiday.

"Really, this tax decrease is a tax increase above what it should have been, if we had played by the (old) rules," Brame said. "Now that the old formula doesn't benefit DOT, we have to change it."

## **'Road diet' planned for U.S. 15-501 Business in Durham**

Plan would reduce car lanes, add bicycle lanes

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER BY JIM WISE 04/03/2015 8:00 AM

DURHAM -- City Hall has a makeover in mind for the Business spur of U.S. 15-501, aka Chapel Hill Boulevard, and Claudia Kemmet-Cooper is glad.

"It is a fantastic thing," said Kemmet-Cooper, who owns the popular Guglhupf restaurant and bakery on the five-lane highway. "Way overdue."

The makeover involves reconfiguring the road from the Chapel Hill Road bridge to its end at University Drive. Instead of five motor-vehicle lanes, there would be three – one each way with a left-turn lane in the middle – with bicycle lanes on either side and on-street parking.

The idea is to make the road safer all around while still accommodating projected vehicle traffic. The city transportation office is holding a meeting to get public reactions at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at Rogers-Herr Middle School.

Adding bike lanes to 15-501 Business is part of the city's 2006 Comprehensive Bicycle Transportation Plan, but actually doing them, or the other changes, "isn't anything that's been on the docket," said Pete Nicholas, project manager with the city transportation department.

"It's just what we thought was a great improvement to implement," he said, "under the circumstances."

Those "circumstances" were that the state Department of Transportation, which controls U.S. 15-501, put the road on its resurfacing list for 2015. That came out in December, Nicholas said.

"Typically," he said, once the list comes out the city staff does "a quick evaluation of what the possibilities are for making some changes and improvements."

Putting down new pavement was an opportunity to put down new lane stripes. DOT has the final say on what the city wants to do, but, "at this point, they do support the concept," Nicholas said.

### **'Lots of interest'**

Whether DOT still supports it when it's time for a go/no-go decision depends in part on what the public has to say.

Residents of the nearby Tuscaloosa-Lakewood neighborhood have thought changes were needed for years, according to Susan Sewell, the neighborhood's representative to the InterNeighborhood Council.

"All are anxious to see specifics. ... There is lots of interest," she said.

A traffic study done at the neighborhood's request found that 80 percent of the cars on the road were speeding, Sewell said. "Of interest for us is safe cross turn lanes, safe walking, biking and waiting for the bus."

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission plans to have members attend the meeting to support the "road diet," said Chairman Erik Landfried, "and offer any comments that we can that we think would strengthen the project."



The commission has already written the City Council backing the reconfiguration. With sidewalk improvements, their letter said, it “would increase the livability of this street and may spur additional investment in the corridor.”

### **Holding steady**

According to the city’s and state’s figuring, two travel lanes and a center turn lane is enough for the traffic using the road, now and for at least the next 25 years, Nicholas said.

Currently, 15-501 Business carries about 14,000 vehicles a day between Chapel Hill Road and University Drive, a figure that, on average, has held steady for the past decade.

Despite population growth and increasing traffic on other Durham roads, state DOT models for future traffic volumes on 15-501 Business show that level holding, or rising only slightly, through 2040, Nicholas said.

As it is, Kemmet-Cooper said, “It’s Russian roulette trying to cross the boulevard.” Two of her employees have been hit by cars, and “I can’t tell you how many wrecks I’ve seen.”

Patrick Edwards, general manager at Foster’s Market next to Guglhupf, was more reserved.

“I was going to go to the meeting and see what they had to say ... before I could make any kind of decision about it,” Edwards said.

Wise: 919-641-5895

### **OPINIONS WANTED**

A public meeting on the proposed reconfiguration of U.S. 15-501 Business is from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesday in the Rogers-Herr Middle School media center.

The format is “drop-in,” with no formal presentation, but staff members from the city and state transportation department will be on hand to explain the project, answer questions and hear comments.

## **Road Worrier: NC air quality agency wants to reduce auto emissions tests**

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Bruce Sicheloff 04/07/2015 1:13 AM

RALEIGH -- North Carolina legislators have reduced the number of cars that must undergo an emissions inspection every year, and state environmental officials say they can cut back even more without making the air unhealthy.

Under a 2012 law that took effect last week, the emissions test is [no longer required for the newest cars](#) – those less than three model years old and with less than 70,000 miles on the odometer.

Also last week, the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources said North Carolina should [end emissions testing altogether in 27 to 31 of the 48 counties](#) where it is required now. The proposed change, starting as soon as January 2016, would eliminate the required inspection for more than 1.4 million cars and trucks, out of 5.4 million that get the emissions test each year.

“North Carolina’s air quality has improved significantly since emissions testing requirements were expanded for motor vehicles in the early 2000s,” DENR Secretary Donald R. van der Vaart said in a news release. “We studied the air quality improvements ... and concluded that we could eliminate emissions testing for motor vehicles in numerous counties without harming air quality or violating federal standards.”

Environmental advocates argued against moving quickly to cut back on emissions tests.

"Our recommendation is just to proceed cautiously," Molly Diggins, state director of the Sierra Club, said.

North Carolina is one of 32 states where emissions tests are required for some cars. Until this month, it was among the few that did not exempt newer cars – which are the ones least likely to flunk the test. Vehicles due in 2015 for a safety inspection now can skip the emissions test (a \$16.40 saving for the driver) if the model year is 2013 or newer, and if the car hasn't passed the 70,000-mile mark.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the exemption for newer cars. Safety inspections are still required for all vehicles in every county, at a cost of \$13.60.

While most of the state's metropolitan areas were in violation of ozone and other air quality standards when the state began extending inspections to 48 counties, all are in compliance today, said Mike Abraczinskas, DENR's deputy air quality director.

The new DENR study, requested by the legislature, calculates that the state would remain in compliance after trimming the list of counties – and even after an announcement, expected by October, that the EPA will move to a more strict standard for ozone pollution. EPA is considering two different standards.

### **Impact in the Triangle**

DENR's proposed list would continue emissions tests in the busiest urban counties, including Wake, Johnston and Durham. In the Triangle region, tests would no longer be required in four counties: Chatham, Franklin, Harnett and Lee.

Orange and Granville are among four counties that also would have to continue testing only if the new EPA ozone air standard is set at 65 parts per billion; the counties would be removed from testing if EPA allows a less rigorous standard of 70 ppb, DENR said.

If the EPA and the legislature agree, these cuts would end the tests in counties where the Division of Motor Vehicles administered 1.4 million to 1.7 million emissions inspections last year.

The DENR study said American car emissions will be significantly cleaner after 2018 after the EPA implements new rules to raise emission standards and reduce the sulfur content of gasoline.

But Terry Lansdell, program director for Charlotte-based Clean Air Carolina, said DENR was wrong to count on new emission rules that won't affect cars on the road now.

"Even short-term exposure to the airborne particles in vehicle exhaust can aggravate asthma, heart and lung diseases and diabetes," Lansdell said. "Emissions testing of vehicles that are currently on the road is especially important to protect the health of citizens with these conditions."

### **Few failures**

Statewide, DMV reported that an average 51,000 vehicles flunked the test over the past three years – a failure rate of about 1 percent. Failure means that the car's onboard diagnostic computer shows a malfunction in the catalytic converter, oxygen sensors or other pollution equipment that must be repaired.

"These days those failures are happening a lot less frequently," Abraczinskas said. "The emission controls on the vehicles are lasting longer and are less prone to malfunction."

The DENR proposal to exempt dozens of counties could find favor among legislators. In anticipation of the new report, a House committee last week postponed action on one bill to remove a handful of counties from the requirement for emissions tests.

## Rail isn't dead in Wake County transit plan

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Andrew Kenney 04/09/2015 3:53 PM

RALEIGH -- Light rail, once the darling of Wake County's transit advocates, is dead on the tracks. The capital county's transit-planning group has nixed the idea of lighter-weight electric trains that could thread through tight urban areas.

Instead, consultant Jarrett Walker has guided the formative plan toward "rail rapid transit," or "regional rail," an approach he says could bring high-frequency train service at a lower cost per mile.

"It is looking to us like a way to get around some of the serious problems associated with light rail," Walker told the Transit Advisory Committee, a group of people from across the county who are shaping scenarios for a long-awaited transit program, on Wednesday.

"Rail rapid transit" actually is a new name for an approach the county tried to advance in the 2000s. Under the new potential plan, the county still would build new rail lines and stations. However, the electric lines would be replaced by heavier diesel-fueled trains.

As with light rail, the trains could come every 15 minutes on the busiest part of the network. The stations would be farther apart – about a mile at the closest, compared to a quarter-mile for light rail.

Rapid rail might cost \$50 million per mile, compared to \$100 million per mile for light rail, according to Richard Adams, a consultant with the design consulting firm Kimley-Horn.

Rough plans show a high-frequency line that runs from near Research Triangle Park, through Morrisville and Cary, along the south side of downtown Raleigh and north along Atlantic Avenue to Interstate 440.

Commuter extensions, with less frequent service, could stretch past Triangle Town Center in the northeast and north toward Wake Forest. A southeastern spur could follow Garner Road to the Johnston County line.

The potential price tag: \$1.4 billion for the main line and \$800 million for the extensions, plus perhaps \$62 million per year to run the whole thing.

The county's 2012 transit plan, which was basically discarded, would have covered less ground at a higher installation cost, according to the consultants.

The new alternative is cheaper to build than light rail because the heavier vehicles can run closer to existing freight rail lines, potentially making it easier to build new lines.

The self-propelled rail cars, also known as "diesel multi-units," don't require overhead electric lines, although the system could be converted to electric power later, according to Walker. However, they won't be able to swoop through parts of downtown Raleigh, as light rail might have.

Instead, Walker suggested that the county might build a station near the Raleigh Convention Center.

So far, the plan is emerging as a clear favorite among the scenarios that the consultants will present to the public on May 11.

Walker, based in Oregon, has presented rapid rail as the consulting team's suggestion. More than 90 percent of the advisory panel voted to eliminate light rail and commuter rail from consideration. They didn't vote on the rail rapid transit idea.

A similar plan was under consideration until 2007 for Wake County, according to Eric Lamb, a city of Raleigh transportation planning manager. The plan got far enough along that local governments were showing off train cars in downtown Raleigh. The idea died when federal funding dried up.

"It kind of changed for us overnight," said former city councilwoman Anne Franklin. And now the idea's coming back around.

"It's like, back to the future," said Wake County Commissioner Sig Hutchinson. That future could take 10 to 12 years or longer to arrive, the consultants estimated.

Meanwhile, Durham and Chapel Hill are preparing to build a light-rail line linking their downtown areas. There are no plans for a Durham to Raleigh link, but Durham County could link up with Wake County's system near RTP.

Rail, of course, isn't the only option on the table. Wake County plans to release four general plans to the public on May 11.

"We're soon going to get to see what transit really could look like for Wake County – and, most importantly, everybody, the public, will get to have a say," said Karen Rindge, director of WakeUP Wake County, a member of the transit group's technical team.

Two of the scenarios will focus on the new rail-rapid transit system, while two will feature bus expansion more heavily, including segments of "bus rapid transit," which puts buses in their own dedicated lane to bypass congestion.

Those plans will be circulated through the summer, with locals invited to weigh in and recombine elements as they like.

Then it's up to the Wake County Board of Commissioners to take the matter to the voters. They likely would ask voters to approve a half-cent sales tax in a 2016 election to pay for the new system.

## **Gov. McCrory wants NC bond referendum in November**

Road projects, state building renovations would be on ballot in low-turnout election

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Colin Campbell 04/10/2015 6:59 AM

Gov. Pat McCrory's administration wants the legislature to schedule a special election this November to let voters decide on a pair of proposals to borrow up to \$2.8 billion to build new roads and renovate or replace state government buildings.

Transportation Secretary Tony Tata told the N.C. Chamber on Thursday that the bonds likely will be on a statewide referendum ballot Nov. 3.

If legislators agree, the proposals to borrow money for state construction needs would be decided in a low-turnout election, when the bonds would be the only item on the ballot for many voters.

Many towns and cities will have municipal elections in November, but there is no statewide vote scheduled until 2016. McCrory's plan would require many counties to spend more to open the polls this fall.

Melanie Jennings, a spokeswoman for the state budget office, said legislation to schedule the bond referendum will likely be introduced in the House before next Thursday's filing deadline. She declined to release further information until the bill is filed.

McCrory unveiled the two bond proposals during his State of the State address in February. He wants the state to borrow \$1.2 billion to \$1.4 billion for transportation projects, and an additional \$1.2 billion to \$1.4 billion for state government buildings.

### **Few bond details**

In the February speech, McCrory said the transportation bond would “allow for the quicker construction of projects in the 25-year vision plan,” funding projects on that list that are ready to start construction. He said the second bond would “revitalize buildings that can be saved, tear down those that can’t, and build new, workable and efficient facilities that will be points of pride.”

While few details of the building projects have been released – the McCrory administration is still studying facility needs – the Department of Transportation released a list of 19 projects that its bond would pay for.

In the Triangle, the list includes \$60 million for Wake and Franklin counties to finish the four-lane widening of U.S. 401 between Raleigh and Louisburg. The most expensive project is the Interstate 74 eastern bypass of Winston-Salem, costing \$300 million.

Other major projects include \$173 million to improve the interchange of interstates 40 and 77 in Statesville, \$42 million to build a new U.S. 74 bypass of Shelby and \$20 million to build a new Interstate 485 interchange at Weddington Road in Mecklenburg County.

Republican leaders in the House and Senate haven’t said whether they’ll support putting the bonds on this year’s ballot. A spokeswoman for Senate leader Phil Berger said Thursday she couldn’t comment until McCrory releases more details about the referendum.

After McCrory’s State of the State address, Berger said the \$2.8 billion in total bonds was “more than we’ve been talking about,” and he said voters should approve any borrowing.

“There clearly are great needs in North Carolina. It’s just a question of whether or not we have the support to go forward with a particular program,” Berger told reporters after the speech.

If legislators agree to the Nov. 3 referendum date, the bonds would be the only item on the ballot for many voters. Most voters who live outside town and city limits aren’t scheduled for an election this year.

Voters in many cities and towns, including Durham, Chapel Hill and Charlotte, will elect their mayors and council members on Nov. 3. Raleigh’s mayoral and City Council elections are scheduled for Oct. 6 – the city’s polling places would only be open on Nov. 3 if a runoff is needed.

### **Unusual election schedule**

Michael Bitzer, a politics professor at Catawba College, said bond referendums typically coincide with other statewide elections.

“It’s kind of unusual to have that big of an issue placed before the voters in a historically very low turnout year like this,” Bitzer said.

He said this year could see higher turnout among Democrats, who form a larger majority in urban populations where mayoral races draw attention. That could help the bonds’ chance of passage.

“Democrats may be more willing to support that kind of public bonds and infrastructure request,” Bitzer said. “But coming from a Republican governor who’s going to be the salesman of this, that may have some turnoffs for Democrats as well.”

The two bond proposals would be the biggest borrowing package put to North Carolina voters since 2000, when 73 percent of voters backed a \$3.1 billion bond for new community college and university facilities.

That referendum occurred in a presidential election year when 59 percent of registered voters went to the polls, according to N.C. Board of Elections statistics. By contrast, just 10.5 percent of registered voters in Durham cast ballots during the municipal election there in November 2013.

Bitzer said holding the bond referendum this year – instead of in 2016 – could be a political risk for McCrory. On one hand, passing the bonds this year means he won't have to campaign for them during his 2016 re-election bid. But if the bond issue is defeated, the governor would look weak, he said.

"You don't want to go the year prior to your re-election bid suffering a defeat at the polls," Bitzer said.

The transportation bonds are expected to get a big push from the N.C. Chamber, which has already been running TV commercials highlighting the dangers of crumbling bridges and infrastructure.

One jarring [ad in the chamber's](#) campaign describes a bridge collapse "with a school bus full of children."

"We can't afford to wait," the narrator in the commercial concludes.

## Road Worrier: New life for an old rail transit idea

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Bruce Sicheloff 04/14/2015 10:43 AM





Triangle Transit displayed this full-scale mockup of a diesel multiple unit railcar in 2005 to promote its plan for a 28-mile regional transit line, which was shelved in 2006.

RALEIGH -- Fifteen years after it was endorsed in the Triangle's first, failed transit plan, an odd-duck sort of train has found new life as the vehicle most likely to bring rail transit service – some day – to Wake County.

The dismally named diesel multiple unit, or DMU, can share standard-gauge tracks with Amtrak and freight trains. It doesn't need a locomotive. Each rail car is powered by its own diesel engine, much like the ones that are found in tractor-trailer trucks.

Credit Jarrett Walker, an Oregon consultant guiding Wake through its latest round of transit hoping, with the DMU's resurrection here.

[Last week](#), Walker helped the latest citizen advisory committee conclude that DMUs are less expensive and in some ways more flexible than light rail for providing high-volume, high-frequency service between Research Triangle Park and downtown Raleigh. These self-propelled rail cars may also prove a better choice than locomotive commuter trains for rush-hour transit in Durham County as well as in Wake.

"It really is a very nice alternative," Wake County Commissioner Sig Hutchinson said. "The price is more reasonable than the light rail, and I think it can give us greater coverage than the commuter rail."

DMUs were featured in a planned 28-mile rail transit line for Durham and Wake counties that died in 2006. The Federal Transit Administration concluded that it was too expensive and would attract too few riders.

That wasn't so long ago, but it seems like ages. The Triangle Transit Authority has changed its name twice since 2006 – and staffers still struggle with their new identity, Go Triangle, when they answer the phone.

And Wake is developing its second transit plan since then. The last plan called for light rail from Morrisville to downtown and North Raleigh – plus a separate commuter-rail line, with locomotives pulling standard train cars, from Durham through RTP to Garner.

The new idea is that diesel multiple units can provide service every 15 minutes from RTP to downtown, and pointing north from downtown to Highwoods.

"It's the best case we can put forward for rail," said Tim Gardiner, a county transportation planner overseeing the new Wake transit plan. "There is a lot of potential for this technology with the network we have."

He said the same trains could be extended in future years to run every 30 minutes during weekday rush hour – north to Wake Forest, east to Garner and Clayton, and west to Durham, where a planned light-rail line will connect to UNC-Chapel Hill.

If the county commissioners settle on a transit plan this year, they could schedule a referendum in 2016 on a half-cent sales tax that would help pay for transit improvements. Planners would like to have the trains running by 2026 – if the county decides to include trains.

Wake's transit committee will deliver four different transit scenarios – two with trains and two without – for public comment on May 11.

Two versions will feature beefed-up bus networks designed around a bus rapid transit spine – with buses that travel faster than automobile traffic, in vehicles that are like train cars on rubber tires. The other two will build this spine with DMU rail service. Walker calls this "rail rapid transit."

### **Light rail vs. DMU**

Light rail's lighter trains use narrower rails that, for safety reasons, must be built farther away from freight tracks. That means more land acquisition and bridge construction would be needed than for DMU trains. And light rail trains are powered by electricity, adding the expense of overhead power lines.

Light-rail trains can squeeze through downtown streets, unlike DMUs. But DMUs are getting the nod here for the same reason they were favored by Triangle Transit, aka Go Triangle, in 2000.

They can use existing railroad corridors, mostly the N.C. Railroad combined with some CSX tracks. The tracks run through most of the Triangle's major employment and activity hubs, from Duke University and downtown Durham through RTP, the State Fairgrounds, N.C. State University and downtown Raleigh.

DMU trains are doing urban and suburban transit duty in Oregon, Colorado, Texas, south Florida and southern California. Walker says they could be a good fit for Wake and the Triangle.

"Because they are cheaper than electric light rail, and easier to phase in, I expect DMUs to be increasingly popular in cases like yours where a primary demand corridor follows an existing heavy railway line – and where the relatively low density suggests the value of something that can be phased in ... as demand grows," Walker said by email.



## Unanimous House votes to repeal Map Act, a big money-saver for NCDOT

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Bruce Sicheloff 04/16/2015 7:44 PM

RALEIGH -- The House voted unanimously Thursday to get rid of the state Map Act, which enables the state Department of Transportation to cut its right-of-way costs by preventing landowners from developing property it expects to buy for future highway projects.

The [Map Act repeal bill](#) now heads to the Senate, where a half dozen senators are pushing a [counter-proposal](#) that would modify the Map Act while leaving much of DOT's power intact.

DOT uses the Map Act to draw corridor maps that sometimes handcuff property owners for decades, while their neighbors are free to develop their land and make it more valuable.

The legislature's fiscal research staff reported Thursday to the Finance Committee that the repeal bill won't affect DOT project costs in the next five years, but it will drive costs higher in the future.

The [fiscal analysis](#) indicated that DOT stands to realize substantial savings when it starts buying land – as it expects to do between 2016 and 2020 – for a planned extension of the 540 Outer Loop in southern Wake County.

Southern Wake was largely undeveloped in 1996 when DOT filed a corridor map for the 540 leg between Holly Springs and Garner. Since then, new residential and commercial development has flourished along both sides of the protected corridor. The legislature's fiscal research staff estimates DOT's right-of-way cost there, in the still-undeveloped project corridor, at \$5 million per mile.

But a strip in Forsyth County was already developed when a similar map was filed in the late 1990s for the Winston-Salem Northern Beltway, and fiscal researchers say DOT will spend \$12.5 million a mile when it buys that land.

A group of Forsyth landowners recently won a N.C. Court of Appeals ruling that DOT effectively took their property nearly two decades ago without paying for it.

Unless DOT wins a reversal in the N.C. Supreme Court, it will have to pay damages to the Forsyth plaintiffs. The Forsyth case could eventually benefit landowners in other counties, including Wake, that have filed similar lawsuits over the Map Act.

Jim and Carol Deans had hoped to subdivide their 21 acres on Bells Lake Road near Apex, but DOT blocked their plans when it filed the corridor map for 540 in 1996. They are among a group of Wake landowners who have sued to force DOT to buy their land for a fair price.

They were encouraged by the 114-0 House vote to repeal the Map Act.

"Apparently the legislators in the House have at least listened to the voice of the people and are trying to right a wrong that has existed for 20 years now," said Jim Deans, 79.

DOT has estimated that the property covered by Map Act corridor maps statewide could cost the state as much as \$600 million. Citing the pending lawsuits, a DOT spokesman declined to comment on the House vote.

Under the Senate proposal to modify the Map Act:

- DOT could not file a corridor map to freeze development until after it filed a final environmental impact statement that identified the chosen route for a new road. In southern Wake County, DOT still has not picked a 540 route or completed an environmental study.

- DOT would have to buy the land and start construction within 10 years after filing a corridor map. Under the current law, DOT can use a corridor map to block development indefinitely.
- DOT would have two years, instead of three under the current law, to either approve a development proposal for land controlled by a corridor map or purchase the land from its owner.

## NC House bill would slash gas tax and raise other taxes and fees

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Bruce Sicheloff 04/18/2015 6:26 AM

**RALEIGH** -- The state gas tax would be chopped down to 30 cents a gallon, but other taxes and fees would rise sharply, under sweeping legislation filed Thursday to change how the state collects money for transportation – and how it spends it.

The state Department of Transportation would be pressed to respond quickly whenever North Carolina residents report malfunctioning traffic signals, missing signs or other road hazards. The deadline for fixing a reported pothole would be two days.

Rep. John Torbett, a Republican from Gaston County who chairs a committee that oversees transportation spending, filed [a 20-page bill](#) that would upend – and go far beyond – gas tax changes adopted in March. It would:

- Cut the gas tax from 36 cents a gallon to 30 cents starting July 1 until January 2017. (The legislature voted in March to drop the tax in several steps to 34 cents during that period.) Starting in 2017, the tax would be expected to rise slowly according to a new formula that tracks state population growth and national energy inflation rates.
- Increase the state's highway use tax on car sales, now 3 percent, to 4 percent in January 2016.
- Increase the tax on car rentals, from 8 percent to 9 percent on short-term rentals and from 3 percent to 4 percent on long-term rentals.
- Phase out over four years the transfer of \$255 million in gas tax collections and other Highway Fund money to the General Fund, which is for non-transportation purposes. This proposal matches language in a Senate bill.
- Increase Division of Motor Vehicles fees for a long list of licenses, permits, titles and registrations. The annual car registration fee would rise from \$28 to \$42.
- Increase fees for trucks and fees charged by weight for property-hauling vehicles.
- Introduce a new 6.5 percent tax collected on automobile insurance premiums
- Make additional increases in gas and highway use taxes that would be triggered if federal transportation funds to North Carolina are sharply reduced.

Torbett also has proposals for how DOT would spend the additional money, directing specific sums to be used for contract resurfacing, state port modernization, city streets, bridge repairs and other needs.

It's not clear how much money DOT would lose from the gas tax cut – each penny of the tax is worth about \$50 million in revenues – and how much money it would gain from the other increases. Torbett was not available for comment, but in a recent interview he said he would propose changes that would increase DOT funding by about \$1 billion a year.

## Construction begins on Durham's East End Connector

WRAL.com By Arielle Clay Posted April 22, 2015

Durham, N.C. — Construction crews broke ground Wednesday on the East End Connector in Durham, a project decades in the making that will ultimately link Interstates 40 and 85.

Durham city and county leaders tossed dirt to signify the start of the \$142 million project. When completed in 2017, the 4-mile stretch of asphalt will connect the Durham Freeway with the U.S. 70/N.C. Highway 98 intersection. Other related road upgrades will also be done.

The connector was first introduced in 1959, and it was not without controversy. Some in the community were upset that homes and businesses in the pathway would be demolished.

Durham Mayor Bill Bell said the project will have an important economic impact.

"Now we've opened up an opportunity for the development of northeast central Durham," he said Wednesday. "In terms of jobs coming out to Angier Avenue, hopefully, companies that now might want to relocate into the northern part of the county will no longer have an issue of getting down into Durham and to the airport as they do now."

Dragados USA Inc., of New York City, was awarded the contract to build the connector. The North Carolina Department of Transportation has said it will name the link Interstate 885.

## Bill would subject Uber, Lyft to NC rules – but not RDU fees

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER By Bruce Sicheloff 04/23/2015 6:29 PM

**RALEIGH** -- Raleigh-Durham International Airport has been aggressive over the past year in efforts to make Lyft and Uber drivers pay fees and obey curbside traffic rules, and airport officials don't want the state to take away their enforcement powers.

The General Assembly is considering legislation to establish state standards for smartphone-based personal transportation services and to prevent cities and airports from adding their own rules.

Mike Landguth, the RDU Airport CEO, says he likes proposals in [Senate Bill 541](#) to require state for-hire licenses, liability insurance and criminal background checks for these drivers.

But he says a provision to block local city and airport regulation could also, inadvertently, take away RDU's power to collect fees and enforce rules for taxis, car-rental shuttles and other commercial vehicles that drop off and pick up airport travelers.

"We control the curb so it's got some order to it," Landguth said. "We've got a lot of buses, a lot of cars, a lot of people dropping people off. And you can imagine what would happen if we can't regulate anybody."

When RDU receives federal grants, it pledges not to apply different requirements to similar businesses, he said. If the airport can't make an Uber driver pay a fee and park only at a designated spot on the curb, it might lose its power to enforce such requirements for other commercial vehicles.

"The government has told us you can't discriminate against one or the other," Landguth said. "You should treat everybody the same if they're in similar categories."

## **Drivers ticketed**

RDU police have issued about 800 tickets for trespassing to Uber and Lyft drivers over the past year, an airport spokeswoman said. Sometimes the drivers are threatened with arrest.

So far, 38 drivers for the two companies have capitulated, registering with RDU as transportation network company drivers. They get permits required by state law and put "vehicle for hire" tags on their cars. They pay RDU a \$125 annual fee and another \$50 for a transponder that reports their movements. For every trip they make to the airport, RDU collects \$1.50.

Driver Stephen Lorick registered with RDU after officers there slapped him with two tickets for trespassing, at a cost of \$50 apiece.

"With the airport, it works out pretty good," said Lorick, 53, of Raleigh. "I just wish that the Uber company and the RDU Authority would work something out where I wouldn't have to pay all these fees out of my pocket. But I still prefer that to getting threatened by the RDU police."

Uber driver Karen Hommema quit paying the RDU fees.

"I figure I can make more money just not going to the airport," said Hommema, 47, of Raleigh. "It's not worth their extortion fees. Uber is great, but the airport needs to just leave it be. I don't think they should be able to extort anybody any more. Anybody should be able to pick up and drop off at the airport."

An Uber spokesman said the company is willing to work with airports but supports the Senate proposal to prevent local towns and airports from adopting their own fees and regulations. Sen. Bill Rabon, a Republican from Brunswick County, is lead sponsor of the legislature's first attempt to regulate businesses known as transportation network companies, which use smartphone applications to link drivers with passengers.

## **Uber favors state control**

"It takes the right approach," Uber spokesman Taylor Bennett said. "The important part is having a consistent and uniform set of rules across the state, as opposed to doing it on an individual basis in each city. ... What this bill does is take that proper step in recognizing transportation network companies as a new transportation option."

Lyft did not respond to a request for comment. Both companies are based in San Francisco.

Landguth said his counterparts at airports in Asheville and Wilmington share his qualms about Rabon's bill. RDU receives only \$50,000 a year in tax money from its four local government owners – Raleigh, Durham, and Wake and Durham counties – and covers its operating costs by collecting fees from airlines and other businesses.

[Last week in Charlotte](#), city administrators and council members said the Senate legislation could complicate the city's efforts to address consumer issues surrounding Uber and Lyft, which began operating in North Carolina cities last year.

Hommema said she's OK with state regulation, but not with RDU's rules and fees.

"I don't have any problem with the state wanting us to have commercial tags," Hommema said. "That's understandable. I don't have any problem with the state wanting us to have liability insurance. But to have to pay for a permit and get charged every time you go through the airport, no. I'm not going to do that any more."

## Bike Month offers variety of options for cyclists here in May

The Herald-Sun From Staff Reports Apr. 30, 2015 @ 01:40 PM

DURHAM — National Bike Month will be celebrated throughout Durham in May and will include a variety of events including group rides, cyclist socials, giveaways, workshops and more.

Bike Month dates back to 1956 and is intended to raise awareness and promote safety for all road users.

"It is essential that we provide all Durham residents the knowledge and tools they need to stay safe on the road, and Bike Month activities accomplish this in a way that is fun and informative," Bike Durham chairman Christin Lampkowski said. "Whether a person commutes by bike daily or takes an occasional ride with their family, everyone has something to gain from Bike Month."

More information about Durham's Bike Month, including a calendar of events, can be found at [www.durhambikemonth.org](http://www.durhambikemonth.org).

Here are the highlights of the 2015 Bike Month:

— Saturday, May 2, 9 a.m.-noon: Bull City Bike Fest at Solite Park

Activities include pump track demos, rides on the ATT with the Duke and UNC cycling teams, a Kids Parade (open to the public), Gateway Trail rides and pump track challenges. Information booths will be present from many local cycling groups.

— May 7, 5-7:30 p.m.: 2015 Bike Month Kick-off at the American Tobacco Campus

Featuring speakers, giveaways and a family-friendly ride down the Tobacco Trail.

— May 9, 9 a.m.: Bike Durham Big Spoon Ride

A 23-mile Big Spoon loop out the Tobacco Trail around to the SoDu Farmers Market and back into downtown. The ride meets at Durham Central Park. The pace will be relaxed.

— May 10, 11 a.m.: Seven Stars Cycles CycloFemme Ride

A 10-ish mile social ride leaving from the Seven Stars Cycles shop at 104 W Parrish St. CycloFemme is a grass-roots celebration of women on bikes uniting all riders, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or bicycle preference to share in the joy of cycling.

— May 11, 5-7 p.m.: Seven Stars Cycles Bike-to-Work Week Social

A post-work social at Bull McCabes, 427 W. Main St., to kick off bike-to-work week.

— May 13, 20 & 27, 6 p.m.: Bike Durham Cyclists Workshops

Join Bike Durham Wednesdays in May for three free workshops for cyclists. All events will take place at Bull City Coworking, 112 S. Duke St.

Workshop topics include Bike Commuting 101, the Basics (May 13), Bike Commuting 201, Route Planning and Inclement Weather (May 20) and Understanding the Law and Liability (May 27).

— May 15, 7-9 a.m.: Bike to Work Day Pit Stops

Grab light breakfast refreshments and bicycle commuting information and hang out with other bike commuters on your way to work. There will be two Pit Stop locations: 359 Blackwell St. at Diamond View III Courtyard (near the "Snorting Bull" at Durham Bulls Athletic Park) and at the Bryan Center at Duke.

— May 16, noon-3 p.m.: Wheels at Westover

Join the Watts Hospital Hillandale Neighborhood for a celebration of bikes that includes safety skills, tips, a fix-it station, an opportunity to donate unused bikes, and information from local bicycle and bike-friendly groups. The event will take place at Westover Park.

— May 18, 5-7 p.m.: South Durham Cyclists' Social

Drop off the American Tobacco Trail at mile marker 5.75 and join us for free food and giveaways. The event takes place at 58Fifty Bistro, 5850 Fayetteville Road.

— May 20, 7 p.m.: Ride of Silence

Ride 5 miles in silence to honor cyclists who've been killed or injured while riding their bicycle. The event takes place at Research Triangle Park. Visit [www.rideofsilence.org](http://www.rideofsilence.org) for location and information.