

## GoTriangle sets light-rail shop, route preferences

The News and Observer - Durham News By Jim Wise June 8, 2015



Map compares walking distances to light-rail station sites east and west of Alston Avenue, from a future bus stop at the westbound Durham Freeway exit ramp.

The News and Observer - Durham News By Jim Wise June 8, 2015

**DURHAM --** GoTriangle's light-rail planners have ruled out a station and maintenance shop east of Alston Avenue – for now.

At Saturday's last public meeting on the project before the fall, their decision pleased some and saddened some.

"It's just a big relief for us," said Edgar Orr, who lives off Pettigrew Street near a site considered for the shop, or "Rail Operations and Maintenance Facility." "We were thinking we were going to have to move."

Daryl Odom has the opposite perspective. GoTriangle has a parking garage planned for a station west of Alston Avenue, where Odom's home now stands on Murphy Street.

His grandfather built the house, he said. "You've been here all these years ... we don't want to move."

Others remained skeptical of GoTriangle's reasoning, that space constraints, possible delays and extra costs make bridging Alston Avenue for a station and shop on the east side less than feasible.

"I'm not comfortable we've seen enough evidence," said John Hodges-Copple, regional planning director with the Triangle J Council of Governments.

"I think there's a litany of responses to those concerns. ... I hope this is still being kept open," said Jim Svava of the Northeast Central Durham Leadership Council.

"Right now," said Dave Charters, GoTriangle's design and engineering manager, "we're set."

## **Other locations**

The west-side Alston station, and two other possible maintenance facility locations, are among GoTriangle's preferences for a "Draft Environmental Impact Statement" the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) requires before the project can apply for federal funding.

In late summer, the FTA is scheduled to publish the impact statement, with a 45-day public comment period to follow. Those comments are for use in a final environmental statement, due in February 2016.

As it stands, the transit agency's maintenance facility preferences ([nando.com/1ci](http://nando.com/1ci)) include either of two sites, each about 20 acres, for the shop: one at the former Pepsi-Cola bottling plant location off Cornwallis Road, the other roughly mid-way along the line on Farrington Road.

The Farrington site is the less expensive, at an estimated \$62 to \$93 million, but would displace six homes and require a time-consuming rezoning and land-use approval process.

Building at Cornwallis could cost \$74 million to \$111 million. It would involve displacing an under-construction mini-storage facility, but has met opposition from members of the neighboring Judea Reform congregation and Levin Jewish Community Center.

## **Crossings**

GoTriangle has also stated preferences for routes crossing Little Creek, near the Durham-Orange county line, and New Hope Creek near the Patterson Place shopping center on U.S. 15-501.

At New Hope Creek, the favored route – called "NHC2" – runs along U.S. 15-501 before curving off to loop around existing businesses near the highway. That route accommodates both the business owners, who had objected to a longer alternative near 15-501, and environmentalists who objected to an alternate farther south across an undisturbed bottomland.

The favored Little Creek alignment, called C2A, runs along the south side of N.C. 54, accommodating environmental concerns with an alternate, C1A, crossing bottomlands farther north. However, residents south of N.C. 54, especially the Downing Creek neighborhood ([nando.com/1ax](http://nando.com/1ax)), strongly oppose that route due to potential safety hazards and traffic backups at grade crossings carrying up to 140 trains a day.

GoTriangle, though, estimates the N.C. 54 route will carry 1,000 more riders per day and cost less – \$14 to \$22 million versus \$36 to 54 million – than the bottomland crossing (which has also been opposed by residents in the Meadowmont neighborhood of Chapel Hill).

## **WHAT'S NEXT**

The Durham-Orange Light Rail system is planned as a 17-mile line between UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill and Alston Avenue in East Durham. Trains would run seven days a week, every 10 minutes during peak commuter times and every 20 minutes at other times, along separate eastbound and westbound tracks, powered from overhead electric wires.

GoTriangle, lead agency on the project, has submitted its route preferences and supporting data, including analyses of the line's effects on the natural and built environments, to the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) as part of an application process for federal funding.

The FTA will publish a Draft Environmental Impact Statement, based on its review of GoTriangle's data, in late summer, and set a 45-day period for public comment. During that period, GoTriangle plans to hold two public information sessions and two public hearings to receive comment. Durham, Chapel Hill and Orange County governments may hold hearings of their own during that time.

After receiving comment, GoTriangle has until late February 2016 to complete and submit its final Environmental Impact Statement. If it meets FTA approval, the light-rail project will go on to a final engineering phase expected to take three years and finish requirements to make formal application for federal money.

If all goes well, trains would begin running in early 2026.

## **RTP COO to retire at the end of 2015**

The Herald-Sun By Alex Dixon Jun. 08, 2015 @ 05:17 PM

DURHAM — Elizabeth “Liz” Rooks, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Research Triangle Foundation, will retire from the organization at the end of this year.

Rooks has worked for the nonprofit, which serves as the steward for Research Triangle Park, for more than 25 years.

“I have enjoyed working for an organization that is so well respected across the state,” she said, adding that RTP has changed “tremendously” during her time there.

When Rooks started, she said the southern portion of RTP was undeveloped woodland, without even a road.

Rooks oversaw implementation of the master plan to develop the approximately 2,500-acre southern portion in 1990, which has grown to house many companies including Cisco, NetApp, Biogen and Lenovo.

She also oversaw the preparation and provided technical insight for the RTP Master Plan, completed in 2012, which was the first comprehensive master planning effort in RTP since 1960.

Rooks said RTP has the infrastructure necessary to continue to grow as it adopts a “collaborative” kind of development pattern with plans for the Park Center.

RTP opened the Park Center's first building, a 142,000-square-foot mix of offices, co-working space and free meeting areas, earlier this year.

Rooks received her master's degree in city planning from the Georgia Institute of Technology and worked in the Chapel Hill and Durham city and county planning departments for a combined 15 years.

Rooks' COO position will be assumed by current vice president of business development Mason Ailstock.

“Liz Rooks is an institution,” Bob Geolas, president and CEO of the Research Triangle Foundation said in a statement about her retirement. “Without her insight, the RTP would not be on the path forward it is today.”

## Legislators could complicate 'road diet' in Durham

The Herald- Sun By Jim Wise June 10, 2015

DURHAM -- State legislators could complicate a proposed "road diet" for U.S. 15-501 Business, which comes up for City Council approval Monday night.

"Nothing would surprise me," City Manager Tom Bonfield said Thursday afternoon.

Durham transportation engineers have suggested re-striping the state-maintained road ([nando.com/151](http://nando.com/151)) to reduce its current five lanes to three, with bicycle lanes on each side. The intent is to discourage speeding through a commercial area where vehicles routinely travel well above the 35 mph posted limit.

But a bill in the state Senate, HB 44 ([nando.com/1d6](http://nando.com/1d6)), would allow lane reductions to accommodate bicycle lanes only after they are approved by the state Board of Transportation. If the bill passes in its current form, Durham would have to ask state permission for 15-501's re-laning, according to Mike Kneis of the state DOT's Durham office.

"It's just another step," he said.

DOT has scheduled U.S. 15-501 Business for resurfacing later this year or early in 2016. State highway officials have told Durham they will restripe the road for three lanes with bike lanes if that's what the city wants, but they need a decision before July.

A City Council vote on reconfiguring the one-mile section of 15-501, also called Chapel Hill Boulevard, was scheduled for June 1, but council members put off their decision after hearing opposition from business owners who said lane reduction would cut traffic volume and hurt their businesses.

HB 44, titled "Local Government Regulatory Reform 2015," passed a second reading in the Senate Thursday. Durham state Sens. Floyd McKissick and Mike Woodard said they expect the third and final reading Monday night.

Both McKissick and Woodard voted against the bill Thursday, after Woodard's proposed amendment to strike the lane-reduction clause failed to win approval. Both Durham senators said they expected there would be changes in its text before the next vote.

McKissick said the bill aroused "a lot of concern" due to various "negative impacts on local government."

Because the current bill is a revised version of the House original, which concerned overgrown vegetation, whatever the Senate passes must go back to the House for a concurrence vote. If it fails there, a joint committee would try to reach a compromise.

Currently, the bill requires state approval for lane reductions to accommodate bike lanes on state roads inside city limits. Woodard said the measure was first advanced last year, in response to a reduction proposed for a highway in another town that carries a much higher traffic volume than Durham's 15-501 Business.

Woodard did not know what town that was, but said, "It wasn't Durham."

## Trucks hit same Durham bridge hours apart



Trucks hit same Durham bridge hours apart Monday morning.

abc11.com By [Tamara Gibbs](#) Posted June 22, 2015

DURHAM (WTVD) -- Two trucks collided with a railroad bridge in Durham on Monday, highlighting the need for additional safety measures at the intersection of South Gregson between West Peabody and Pettigrew Streets.

The metal roof of an Enterprise Rental truck peeled back after hitting the head bar that protects the bridge. The driver suffered a minor head injury.

Four hours later, another rental truck made the same mistake. Two people inside that vehicle were treated at the scene.

"We've seen two in a week maybe," said Jurgen Henn. "But two on the same day--that's a first!"

Henn has a bird's eye view from his office. He set up cameras in April 2008 and routinely posts video of stuck trucks on his [website](#).

He's seen 92 collisions at the bridge including the two incidents on Monday.

"There were a few times we came down here really worried about the truck driver," he added, explaining that there have been some near-misses for pedestrians.

"We've seen some pretty close calls of pedestrians getting hit by flying shrapnel so that's pretty dangerous as well," said Henn.



The NC Department of Transportation agrees. In addition to the head bar and flashing lights already in place, the DOT plans to make this a lighted intersection. Drivers in all directions will stop when there's an over-height vehicle.

"It will go to red when an over-height vehicle is detected and force them off the side street," explained John Sandor, a DOT Engineer. "Signs will illuminate that an overheight vehicle was detected and they must exit the road."

Sandor said safety changes are also coming to the railroad bridge at Pettigrew and Roxboro in Durham, but more funding is still needed.

Until then, the truck collisions will remain both a mystery and a bit of a joke at a local gift shop where they sell t-shirts commemorating the frequent crashes.

"I've been working here nine years and I've heard quite a few crashes," said a shop employee.

## POUNDING PAVEMENT: Walking movement leaves footprint on Bull City

The Herald-Sun BY ADEN HIZKIAS Jun. 23, 2015 @ 06:55 PM



Matt Tomasulo, chief instigator for WALK [YOUR CITY], puts up a sign near CCB Plaza to encourage walking through downtown Durham on Tuesday, June 23, 2015. Thirty-eight signs will be placed through downtown Durham to educate and encourage people that the walk is "not too far." The Herald-Sun | Christine T. Nguyen



WALK [YOUR CITY] signs are being placed throughout downtown Durham to encourage walking. The Herald-Sun | Christine T. Nguyen

DURHAM —“It is an 8 minute walk to coffee, burgers, and music.”

That was the first of 38 signs put up in downtown Durham Tuesday to promote walking and awareness of the location.

“It was kind of a guerrilla project and grassroots-y and now it’s become a formal approach. A lot of communities are starting to look at the Triangle as a precedent and as a leader trying to figure out how to make it work,” said Matt Tomasulo, so-called “chief instigator” of WALK [YOUR CITY], on Tuesday afternoon.

WALK [YOUR CITY] — [walkyourcity.org](http://walkyourcity.org) — is an organization that uses street signs to inform the public of the locations of restaurants, entertainment venues, landmarks, parks and more as well as the distance it takes to walk to them. The signs are all made through the [walkyourcity](http://walkyourcity.org) website and the first to be placed in Durham was set on the intersection of Parrish and Corcoran Tuesday.

The signs are simple and feature conversational text that tells pedestrians where certain locations are and how many minutes it will take to get there. Each sign is color coded, either green, purple, blue or orange. The colors were inspired by the highway signs that are based on the type of destination. Green is public/open space, purple is commercial, blue is institutional, and orange is amusement/recreational.

There is also a code on the bottom right that can be scanned which will take the person to a mobile website that will have directions and digital information about the campaign.

“We look forward to this pilot project catalyzing a more permanent and comprehensive WALK [YOUR CITY] campaign in Durham,” said Matt Gladdek, director of government affairs, who notes that Durham is a center of growth in the region and for this reason, it is a good time to encourage everyone to walk more.

Gladdek talked about Durham Downtown Inc.'s involvement with WALK [YOUR CITY] and said that it overlapped well due to the increased construction sites in downtown Durham. Gladdek says, "When I saw Matt do this project in Raleigh when we were both in grad school at UNC, it was really exciting. It was a simple way to show people that it really wasn't too far. We really want to encourage people to park once and walk all over downtown."

The importance of walking was a clear motivator for the organization and the involvement of Durham officials to get involved in this project. "Durham county government allows workers to take a break during the day for 30 minutes to take a walk. The next step would be government employers encouraging their workers to go on a walk," said Gayle B. Harris of Durham's public health department.

"An initiative like this that gets people walking is so important. That's the way our city is going to be as healthy as it needs to be," said Steve Schewel, Durham city council. Schewel added, "We need to promote our parks and walking on our sidewalks. This is an awesome way to do it. I think this is so cool."

"We're always looking for creative ways to get North Carolinians active and healthy. WALK [YOUR CITY] program certainly lends to that in a creative way," said Ryan Vulcan of sponsor Blue Cross Blue Shield NC.

Vulcan added that Blue Cross would like to expand the program and make it sustainable across other cities in North Carolina.

Tomasulo believes that as the city grows throughout the upcoming years, there is going to be a need for either parking decks or more people. And that he liked the idea of more people as opposed to cars.

"I associate the choice to walk as part of my independence," Tomasulo said. "Having that choice gives me the freedom to move how I want."

## **Jeff Mann moves from NCDOT to GoTriangle**

The News and Observer Road Worrier Blog By Bruce Siceloff Posted June 24, 2015

Jeff Mann, a state deputy transportation secretary and former Amtrak executive, was named Wednesday as general manager of GoTriangle, the three-county bus service and transit planning agency formerly known as Triangle Transit.

Mann, 46, joined the state Department of Transportation in 2014 as deputy secretary for transit, a job once held by David King, his predecessor at GoTriangle.

He worked for Amtrak in Raleigh from 2000 to 2012, ending up as assistant vice president for policy and development in the passenger railroad's southern region. He served for seven years on the Raleigh Transit Authority, including several years as board chairman. At DOT he directed the transit, ferry, aviation, rail and bicycle and pedestrian divisions.

"GoTriangle is proud to welcome Jeff Mann, who is well respected among transportation professionals across the country," Durham Mayor Bill Bell, the GoTriangle trustees' chairman, said in a news release.

GoTriangle served 1.8 million riders last year on 14 regional routes, 12 express routes and four shuttle routes. The agency is preparing a draft environmental impact statement for a proposed 17-mile light rail line between Chapel Hill and Durham.

Mann also has worked for Parsons Brinkerhoff and the N.C. Railroad Company. He is a graduate of the Babcock School of Business at Wake Forest University and has an undergraduate degree from UNC-Wilmington. He starts work July 27 at a salary of \$200,000.

"I look forward to working with Triangle communities and with this board as we continue to develop and provide the best transportation choices for area riders and residents," Mann said.



## Triangle at odds over traffic jams

WRAL.com By Joan Lowy, Associated Press Posted June 26

Raleigh, N.C. — Like many fast-growing parts of the country, North Carolina's Triangle region is trying to avoid being strangled by its own success: Traffic is thickening, drivers are getting stuck in it and there's no simple solution in sight.

On average, 78 new residents arrive each day. The population of the three counties that include Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill is forecast to grow by more than 40 percent, to 2 million, over the next two decades.

For most people, there's no practical alternative to driving. Bus service is often slow and unreliable.

As a remedy, local officials have discussed building a light rail system that would connect the region's three downtowns, three research universities, two major medical centers and Research Triangle Park, where about 45,000 people commute to work by car. The idea is to get people out of their vehicles and channel development to a transportation corridor to help contain sprawl.

Steve Errico is in the thick of the commuting hordes. On the three days a week he gets to work by 6 a.m., he drives the 15 miles from his home in Raleigh to his office at a pharmaceutical company in just under 20 minutes. The other two workdays, when he leaves nearly two hours later, traffic congestion makes the trip twice as long.

Extra highway lanes have relieved some traffic choke points, only to create others, Errico said.

"We're just moving the bottleneck around," he said. "I don't know that we're solving anything."

Remaining dependent on cars, local officials say, ultimately will hurt economic growth and erode the region's quality of life. Research Triangle Park, for example, was a recent finalist for Mercedes-Benz's U.S. headquarters but lost out to a Atlanta suburb with easy access to the city's rail system.

"It's a rite of passage," Roger Perry, a Chapel Hill real estate developer, said about the need to build mass transit in fast-growing regions. "You kind of say to the world, 'OK, stand aside, we're coming through. We're going to do the things that are necessary to be competitive.'"

Yet even in regions with growing traffic congestion, consensus on whether the benefits of a light rail system justify the cost and agreement about where to find the money are hard to come by.

The federal government has become an unreliable partner because Congress can't decide how to pay for transportation projects. The Republican-controlled North Carolina Legislature is unsympathetic, even hostile, to transit projects that would mainly benefit urban areas mostly represented by Democrats.

The tale is familiar in much of the Sunbelt, which continues to lead the nation in population growth. Building rail systems and beefing up bus service often mean raising taxes and choosing routes where some constituents win and others lose. Communities often wait to act until congestion becomes intolerable.

At a rally of light rail supporters in Durham in February, Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx urged Triangle-area officials to "think big" and build based on future transportation demands, not today's congestion.

"When we think of rail transit, it's not just New York City or Chicago or Dallas," said Foxx, a former mayor of North Carolina's largest city, Charlotte. "In the 21st century, states like North Carolina are going to become population centers ... This could be the example our country has been looking for, for how you build before the load overwhelms you."

Some cities are making efforts to build or expand transit systems, with varying results.

Rail systems in Denver, Salt Lake City and Portland, Oregon, earn high marks. New Mexico seemed to be looking ahead when it opened a 97-mile commuter rail line between Albuquerque and Santa Fe in 2006, but the gulf between the system's revenue and expenses has been widening, and there have been calls to abandon the line.

Others are playing catch up. Los Angeles is spending \$14 billion on new rail lines and highway lanes, one of the largest public-works projects in the country. Houston is radically redesigning its bus system to provide frequent service throughout the day. Atlanta is in the early stages of work on a "beltline" to encircle the city using old railroad right of way to connect 45 neighborhoods through a series of parks, biking and walking trails, as well as a light rail line.

In North Carolina, two of the three Triangle counties — Durham and Orange, which includes Chapel Hill — are working on plans to build a \$1.5 billion, 17-mile light rail system. Construction is tentatively targeted to begin around 2020, even though local officials are still \$225 million short because of unanticipated changes in the way the state allocates transportation aid.

Durham and Orange county voters approved a half-cent sales tax increase to help fund the project. Republican commissioners in Wake County, where Raleigh is located, refused to permit a ballot initiative on a tax increase.

A new Democratic-controlled board is considering less costly options, including diesel trains that would operate on tracks added to the existing freight rail right of way and more frequent bus service.

Said Raleigh City Councilwoman Mary-Ann Baldwin: It's "a compromise between what people would want and what we can afford."

The future of Research Triangle Park, where about 100 technology companies are housed in low-rise buildings surrounded by 7,000 acres of lush lawns, thick woods and parking lots, may hinge on what local officials decide.

When it opened in 1959, the park was on the cutting edge of commercial development and has been a bright spot in North Carolina's economy as tobacco, textiles and furniture have faded. But business leaders tell park officials that today's young workers don't want jobs on a sprawling campus where they have to get in their cars to reach a restaurant, bar or gym.

Plans are underway to turn 800 acres inside the park into a 24/7 destination with apartments, a hotel, restaurants, shops, outdoor amphitheaters and other amenities, including shuttle buses to the office. But key to the plan is a rail transit stop at the park.

"We can do some of it without transit," said Bob Geolas, the park's chief executive, "but we cannot ultimately accomplish the larger economic goals and aspirations without transit."

## **RDU embarks on 2040 plan**

The Herald-Sun By Alex Dixon Jun. 29, 2015 @ 09:59 PM

DURHAM — Raleigh-Durham International Airport held its first of multiple meetings over the next 18 months to identify the airport's development goals through 2040.

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

"It's infrastructure driven," said Bill Sandifer, senior vice president and COO of RDU. "You want to try to anticipate what's going to happen in a dynamic and changing industry."

RDU, along with aviation consultants Ricondo and Associates, will gather data to provide a financially feasible framework for airport development to satisfy future aviation demand, said Michael Landguth, president and CEO of RDU.

And the airport is seeking input from the public.

The first of eight public meetings was held at Durham City Hall Monday evening, and officials are encouraging public comments about the airport throughout the planning process.

"We will be conducting an intensive study and analysis of the airport's infrastructure, facilities and available property," said Richard (Dickie) Thompson, chairman of the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority Board. "We strongly feel that involvement from the public and stakeholder engagement will be a vital part of this process."

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

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

Ricondo and RDU will go through five steps to develop a final plan by the end of 2016.

These include: taking inventory of existing physical and operational conditions, creating an aviation forecast by evaluating activity patterns, analyzing facility requirements to determine future needs, preparing concepts to meet the future requirements along with an environmental overview, and identifying the implementation layout with phases and financing.

The FAA must approve both the aviation forecast and the final layout plan.

"We're in the very early end of it...we're also beginning to collect the data on our inventory and we're beginning to collect the data that will underpin the forecast," said Colleen Quinn, vice president of Ricondo.

The public workshops will coincide with each step in the process, Quinn said, with the next one expected this winter.

The four workshops will contain a date for Durham and a date for Raleigh.

Raleigh's meeting will be held Tuesday evening.

## **Truck strikes overpass, halts traffic**

The Herald-Sun From Staff Reports Jun. 30, 2015 @ 12:37 PM

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DURHAM —Another Durham railroad overpass was the site of a truck collision Tuesday afternoon.

The bridge over West Chapel Hill Street near Durham Station was struck by a truck about 10:48 a.m., police said.

A Kimbrell's Furniture delivery truck struck the overpass, which has a clearance of about 12 feet, and turned on its side. Police said no injuries or spills were reported.

Police moved the truck out of the roadway, but the collision prompted delays and closures near downtown Durham in the early afternoon.

Police said eastbound Chapel Hill Street near Pettigrew Street would be closed as they clear the accident, as well as Pettigrew Street through Ramseur Street.

This is the third bridge-versus-truck collision in the past 10 days. On June 22, two trucks hit the overpass bridge between Pettigrew and Peabody streets. The first happened about 7 a.m., then second just after 10:30 a.m.

## **Road Worrier: Rivalry between NC Senate and McCrory includes competing road-building plans**

The News and Observer By Bruce Siceoff July 6, 2015

RALEIGH -- Gov. Pat McCrory and state Senate leaders worked together two years ago to improve how North Carolina sets spending priorities for transportation projects, but this year they're at odds over how to raise more road money and where to spend it.

McCrory is pushing a bond issue to borrow \$1.37 billion for new roads and – as part of a second \$1.48 billion bond for infrastructure improvements – another \$300 million for ports, railroads and other nonhighway transportation needs. House leaders have set money aside in their budget to start repaying the borrowed money.

Senate leaders oppose McCrory's road bonds. Their budget would bump up state spending for highway construction and port improvements every year, instead of taking on debt.

"Fiscally, (with) this bond, we're borrowing money to do projects that the Senate doesn't have to borrow a penny to do," said Sen. Bill Rabon, a Brunswick County Republican who co-chairs the Senate Transportation Committee.

The governor claims credit for inspiring legislators to find more road-building money.

"That discussion wasn't even on the radar screen within the legislature just a short five months ago when I gave my State of the State speech," McCrory said in an interview for [Domecast](#), a News & Observer podcast. "Initially, I think, they were surprised to hear the major emphasis on the need for infrastructure and preparing our state for the next generation. ... So just to get that dialogue going is a major success."

The rival proposals come with competing lists of road projects that would be added to the state Department of Transportation's work schedule over the next decade.

McCrory and Senate Republicans say they are guided by the [Strategic Transportation Investments](#) law that they and House leaders enacted in 2013. DOT uses the law to rank projects across the state according to consistent, objective and transparent criteria.

A redesigned interchange or widened road might score better than other projects, for example, if it does more to reduce traffic congestion, promote economic development or improve safety. The new law is supposed to remove political influence from decisions about how to spend money.

### **Different lists**

The governor and the senators say they would spend the new money on projects that would have been included on DOT's 10-year construction schedule already, if they'd had that money in the first place.

But they don't apply the new law in the same way. McCrory doesn't want to promise that his bonds will pay for a new road if DOT has not secured all the necessary environmental permits to start construction. So his list bypasses some higher-ranked projects that don't have all their permits in favor of lower-scoring ones that are ready to go.



The Senate doesn't consider permits and doesn't skip anything on DOT's ranking list. That doesn't sound like a big distinction, but the different approaches produce two mostly different lists. Only five DOT projects, including the U.S. 401 widening in northern Wake County, make the cut on both the Senate and McCrory rosters.

Rabon says DOT's objective guidelines have been circumvented in McCrory's approach.

"It sort of goes against what we worked so hard for in the Strategic Transportation Investments," Rabon said. "Because it doesn't go straight down the list. In my view, it's putting politics back in it. ... We can't just pick and choose projects here and there."

### **Dirt roads**

He also objects to one item on McCrory's list: \$50 million to pave dirt roads.

"Most of them are less than a mile long, and 76 are dead-end roads," Rabon said. "I don't see borrowing money to pay for dirt roads."

McCrory and the Senate would make around \$1.3 billion available for additional road needs in 10 years, but the governor's bond money would become available more quickly and could be spent sooner than what the Senate would provide in a decade.

"My issue is, I don't think that's enough money for the new roads we need throughout the state," McCrory said. "But we're making progress."

### **COMPETING PLANS FOR NEW HIGHWAY SPENDING**

The list of additional highway construction projects that would be covered by the Senate budget shares only five projects in common with Gov. Pat McCrory's road bond list.

One of these is in the Triangle: \$35 million to widen U.S. 401 in Franklin and northern Wake counties. Both plans also promise \$217 million for Interstate 40 upgrades in Iredell, Forsyth and Davie counties.

Both proposals would spend more in Forsyth County than anywhere else, mostly for the long-delayed Winston-Salem Beltway. But the competing plans advance different sections of the Beltway.

Here are other highlights from each plan:

#### **McCrory transportation bonds**

Borrows \$1.37 billion for highway projects, including:

**Wake:** \$26 million to tunnel Blue Ridge Road beneath Hillsborough Street and railroad tracks at State Fairgrounds.

**Forsyth:** \$448 million for five I-74 Winston-Salem Beltway projects.

**Cleveland:** \$134 million for three U.S. 74 Shelby Bypass projects.

**McDowell:** \$89 million for two U.S. 221 widening projects.

**Beaufort/Martin:** \$72 million to widen U.S. 17.

**Cumberland/Robeson:** \$54 million for part of the I-295 Fayetteville loop.

**Statewide:** \$50 million to pave dirt roads.

McCorry's \$1.48 billion infrastructure bond list also includes:

- \$125 million for the Morehead City port.
- \$75 million for the Wilmington port.
- \$50 million for railroad improvements.
- \$50 million for other nonhighway transportation.

### **Senate budget**

Increases the annual construction budget to provide \$1.3 billion over 10 years for added projects, including:

**Wake:** \$73 million to widen N.C. 50, \$7 million to widen Avent Ferry Road.

**Wake/Harnett:** \$27 million to widen N.C. 55.

**Johnston:** \$24 million to widen N.C. 242.

**Orange:** \$11 million to widen Buckhorn Road.

**Forsyth:** \$537 million for three I-74 Beltway projects.

**Wayne:** \$230 million for U.S. 117 freeway upgrade.

**Scotland/Hoke:** \$163 million to widen U.S. 401.

**Gaston:** \$124 million to widen I-85.

**Dare:** \$106 million for two improvements to U.S. 158.

**Transylvania:** \$87 million for new section of N.C. 215.

**New Hanover:** \$84 million to upgrade College Road.

**Buncombe:** \$74 million to widen Wilma Dykeman Riverway.

**Carteret:** \$72 million to widen Arendell Street and U.S. 70 bridge.

## **McConnell Casts Doubt on House's Plan for Transportation Bill**

The New York Times By JONATHAN WEISMAN JULY 16, 2015

WASHINGTON — More than 30 times over the past six years, Congress has mustered the money only for short-term extensions of the federal highway trust fund, the equivalent of repeatedly putting \$5 of gas in an empty tank.

With the highway fund set to hit empty on July 31, the House on Wednesday passed another modest squirt into the tank, an \$8 billion, five-month transportation patch, by a vote of 312 to 119. It did so with a promise that by Dec. 18, Congress will pass — and President Obama will sign — a major overhaul of the international business tax code that will yield a windfall to fund a long-term transportation bill.

But that approach has one important doubter, Senator [Mitch McConnell](#), a Kentucky Republican and the majority leader, who thinks the prospects of such largess are about as likely as winning the lottery.

"There are a lot of people who are skeptical outside the committee," said Representative Dave Reichert, a Washington Republican who leads the House Ways and Means subcommittee on taxation. "But every effort we make, I have to believe, is possible."

Highway funding, which once routinely had bipartisan support, has now become yet another source of division, this time within the Republican Party that controls Congress. House Republicans — bolstered, oddly enough, by the White House and a top Senate Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York — are adamant that by keeping the pressure on, the highway trust fund could be the ticket to a long-sought rewrite of the corporate tax code.

Mr. McConnell wants to be done with the highway bill before it gets pulled into the maw of presidential politics. He is trying to cobble together enough spending cuts and tax-law enforcement provisions to fashion a highway bill that will, at the very least, get the trust fund through the end of 2016.

Democrats — and some Republicans — say the answer has been staring Congress in the face for years: Raise the federal gas tax, which has become a less effective source for financing the nation's crumbling roads, bridges and other infrastructure because cars and trucks have become more fuel efficient and drivers are buying less gas.

"There's no excuse to keep torturing people," said Representative Earl Blumenauer, Democrat of Oregon who is pushing a 15-cent-per-gallon fuel tax increase. "This is a fool's errand. We ought to step up."

An estimated 140,000 bridges are breaking down across the country, and about 40 percent of the nation's pavement has broken down to the point that it can no longer be tarred over but should be dug up and rebuilt, said Representative Peter A. DeFazio, Democrat of Oregon. But for years, battered roads, aging transit systems and overtaxed airports have been no match for Republican vows to never raise taxes and Mr. Obama's 2008 campaign promise to raise taxes only on families earning at least \$250,000.

The most ardent conservatives in Congress have even argued that the federal government should get out of the infrastructure business and let state and local governments deal with the nation's transportation system.

But in the last two years, an idea that began as an outlandish proposal by a freshman House Democrat, John Delaney of Maryland, has evolved into the closest thing to consensus on infrastructure funding.

The idea: Rewrite the tax code governing United States corporations operating internationally to end the unintended incentive for those companies to leave trillions of dollars in profits overseas, and add a component taxing those overseas profits. Much of the windfall on that one-time "transition" tax would be dedicated to infrastructure spending.

Currently, the federal corporate income tax of 35 percent applies to overseas profits only when they are brought home. That has persuaded companies to leave an estimated \$2 trillion abroad, either in cash or reinvested in overseas operations. Policy makers would like to create some kind of minimum tax that would be paid annually on such profits, whether they are brought home or not, ending the incentive to leave the money overseas. A one-time tax would be levied on the money that has accumulated over the last decades.

Mr. Obama's Treasury Department has written a version of the plan that would produce \$220 billion for a major infrastructure program. Former Representative Dave Camp, a Michigan Republican and the Ways and Means Committee chairman, wrote one before retiring last year that his successor, Representative Paul D. Ryan, a Wisconsin Republican, has embraced. And last week, Mr. Schumer and Senator Rob Portman, Republican of Ohio, produced their own.

"This plan gives us our best opportunity to produce and pass a long-term bill to rebuild America's roads, bridges and other infrastructure this year," Mr. Ryan said after the House vote.

The Senate, however, was unmoved.

"We're not interested in a short-term bill," said Senator James M. Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma and chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "We're the Senate. They're the House."

Even Mr. Schumer appeared on Wednesday to be taking a more realistic view of the prospects of a major corporate tax bill by the end of the year.

"The House prefers the international tax way to do this. It certainly gets you a large sum of money that would get broad bipartisan support," Mr. Schumer said. "But let's face it. There are a lot of details that would have to be worked out in tax reform, so if there's another, more immediate proposal that would be long term and have a robust funding increase, it's something I'd look at."

Senators are struggling to find ways to pay for a longer-term bill without a tax increase. Mr. McConnell has put together a series of proposals, many of them measures to tighten tax-law compliance, others to trim spending. One envisions selling [oil](#) from the nation's [Strategic Petroleum Reserve](#), which is supposed to be tapped only for energy emergencies. Another idea would tap the huge legal settlements that the largest banks have reached with the government over the housing issues that precipitated the financial collapse of 2008.

Altogether, they would approach \$60 billion, enough roughly for a four-to-five-year highway bill. But Democrats are protesting one of the largest parts, a cut to the way federal employee retirement benefits are calculated.

"We've already asked federal employees to contribute more to their retirement," Mr. DeFazio said. "We killed the Civil Service pension program, and now we're going to cut their rate of return?"

Without that element, about \$10 billion and a year would have to be shaved off the highway bill. Protests are also likely over drawing on the bank settlements and the petroleum reserve. Mr. McConnell plans on having a bill on the Senate floor much of next week. Just what it would look like is still unknown

## **NCDOT: Growing pains driving need for new Triangle Expressway interchange**

Triangle Business Journal Jeff Jeffrey Friday, July 10, 2015, 5:58pm EDT

Population growth in the Triangle has driven the N.C. Department of Transportation to embark on the first major expansion of the Triangle Expressway since its final phase was completed in 2013.

Construction work is expected to begin later this month on a new interchange on the toll road at Old Holly Springs-Apex Road, just south of Apex. NCDOT says the \$18.4 million project was necessary due to the increased traffic the toll road is expected to see in the coming decades.

Currently, traffic along Old Holly Springs-Apex Road amounts to about 1,900 vehicles per day. But by 2035, the number of daily vehicles is expected to grow to 34,900, NCDOT says.

Wake County's population has grown by nearly 11 percent since 2010, according to U.S. Census figures. That puts the county's growth at nearly twice the statewide average and well ahead of the rest of the nation.

The new interchange is expected to take until May 2017 to finish, but drivers may be able to access the interchange ramps by November of next year.

NCDOT says drivers of two-axel vehicles will likely pay \$0.20 and \$0.31 the toll rate for each of the two new toll zones at the interchange. The project will not affect the price of the entire Triangle Expressway or any other toll rates at existing toll zones, NCDOT says.

Blythe Construction, Inc. of Charlotte landed the contract after coming in about \$2 million less than anticipated. The contract includes work for road widening, milling, resurfacing and shoulder reconstruction as well as bridge widening, toll site infrastructure and intelligent transportation system (ITS) upgrades.



In recent months, NCDOT has issued contracts for 21 road and bridge projects, worth a total of \$229.3 million. NCDOT says that's about \$9.1 million below NCDOT engineers' estimated cost.

## **Survey sheds light on need for bus stop shelters**

The Herald-Sun By Lauren Horsch Jul. 25, 2015 @ 02:58 PM

DURHAM -- A recent survey released by GoTriangle concerning the performance of GoDurham and the Bull City Connector showed an increase in rider satisfaction, but also showed where the service needs to improve.

The survey was given earlier this year, and compares to a similar survey given in the spring of 2011.

"It gives us a better idea of who the customers are," Jon Dodson, GoTriangle and GoDurham Transit Service Planner, said.

Indeed, the survey pinpoints the demographics of the rider, including economic and social factors such as income, age and employment.

Hugh Clark, of CJI Research Corporation, presented the results of the survey, and was able to address City Council questions at the Council's work session this week.

Councilman Eugene Brown raised a question about what Clark believes the city should continue to look at in terms of creating a better service for the riders.

"One thing that surprised me ... was the low rating for comfort at the bus stops," Clark said. "That has a spillover effect."

According to the 2015 survey, GoDurham buses riders who took the survey gave it a 4.6 out of 7 possible points while waiting for the bus. For the Bull City Connector, that rating was slightly higher at 5.5 out of 7.

There are multiple factors to help alleviate that feeling of discomfort while waiting for the bus, like providing information through multiple networks and making sure stops are in good condition.

Councilwoman Diane Catotti asked about bus shelter installations throughout the city.

"Our plan is to install 20 per year," Mark Ahrendsen, director of the city's department of transportation said. He said funding is already in place to create those shelters.

"We know clearly the whole issue of comfort has to deal with covered shelters," Catotti said.

Mayor Bill Bell said the city needs to do something about its bus stops.

"That is really something that we need to find a way to improve," he said. "We need to do something about our bus stops."

He said there aren't enough covered bus stops.

Councilman Eddie Davis backed up Bell's comments asking about lighting concerns, especially at night.

"There is some potential for danger," Davis said.

Mayor Pro Tem Cora Cole-McFadden said she wants to ensure that the stops are safe, especially since she's seen people standing in the road waiting for a bus.

"I think people are raising important points," Councilman Steve Schewel said. "Is this a budget priority? Do we want to increase the number of bus shelters?"

Councilman Don Moffitt said the Council needs to look into how to allocate money wisely to fund bus shelters.

Ahrendsen said it costs about \$10,000 to add a shelter at a stop.

City Manager Tom Bonfield brought up lagging performances in bus cleanliness and behavior of riders on the bus.

"Maybe one of those is more in our control than the other," he said.

Officials with GoDurham said during the time of the survey there were some staffing issues which led to discrepancies in the cleanliness of the buses. Since then it has been addressed and a non-profit has started working with GoDurham to help clean the buses.

However, when it comes to rider behavior, it's harder to deal with because GoDurham doesn't want its drivers to become enforcers, but they do give out warnings and will call the police if an issue continues.

Schewel said constant improvements are being made to the service and hopes to continue providing the "critical public service" to the community.

## **SPEED TRAPS: Traffic cops set targets**

The Herald-Sun by Katie Nix Jul. 26, 2015 @ 02:56 PM

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DURHAM —Contrary to some public perceptions, the Traffic Services Unit of the Durham Police Department does not have a quota when it comes to writing tickets.

As a matter of fact, whether it's during a safety operation or routine stop for speeding it is up to the discretion of the officer what action to take.

"It all depends on the situation," Sgt. Brian Massengill said during a briefing before a pedestrian safety operation Thursday. "If you think it's severe enough, write a citation. If not, written warnings work."

Twelve officers from the unit participated in the statewide "Watch for Me NC" operation, in which officers crossed predetermined streets at the crosswalk and other officers pulled over drivers who did not adhere to letting the pedestrians cross the street.

"[The goal is] to reduce pedestrian and bicycle injuries and deaths through a comprehensive, targeted approach of public education and police enforcement," police spokeswoman Kammie Michael said.

Michael said during the operation, officers made 33 stops, issuing 11 citations and 22 written warnings at two crosswalk locations — Gregson Street near Brightleaf Square and the 700 block of Ninth Street.

That same day, the unit conducted a speed enforcement operation in a construction zone on a section of Interstate 70 near East End Avenue.

"We had about six or seven officers out there and they issued 30 citations over the course of a couple of hours," Cpl. Daniel Kuszaj said. "While that might seem like a lot, that's usually what we get in work areas."

Kuszaj said most people who are getting citations in areas where construction is going on are going 15 to 20 miles over the speed limit while workers are on the road.

"We usually only patrol the areas when guys are out there," Kuszaj said. "It's actually what makes it all worth it. When we go to leave an area, the workers almost always come over and thank us. They tell us 'Thanks so much. These [drivers] are crazy out here.'"

Tickets in work zones come with a little extra surprise when drivers get pulled over for speeding. There's a \$250 extra fee in addition to the citation and the court costs.

Kuszaj said in addition to checking out work zones, officers will often make visits to the 10 most dangerous intersections in the city, looking for people speeding.

Using a program called Traffic Engineering Accident Analysis System, or TEAAS, a diagnostic is run of all accidents that have occurred in Durham over the course of the previous three months' data.

"Two of the big lists we look are are highest number of crashes and highest severity of crashes," Kuszaj explained. "The severity's an important component because while an intersection might have a low number of accidents, if someone's been killed or critically injured there, we want to keep a closer look at that."

After looking closely at the lists, in addition to the estimated property damage at each intersection, the intersections are placed on the list and are there for a month and then another diagnostic test is run when the process starts all over again.

"If we're doing our jobs correctly, the intersections will gradually fall off the list," Kuszaj said. "But one of the most common things we see on the list is Interstate 40. It's just such a high-traffic stretch of road that accidents happen all the time."

July's list of most dangerous intersections include: Interstate 40 and Page Road; Holloway Street and Junction Road; N.C. 55 and Cornwallis Road; N.C. 147 and Fulton Street; I-85 and Guess Road; N.C. 54 and Hunting Ridge; I-40 and N.C. 55; N.C. 147 and Alston Avenue; I-40 and Fayetteville Road; and I-40 and N.C. 54.

Kuszaj said it was important to note that the cross streets mentioned with certain interstates and state routes are actually the closest exits to the stretch of road in question.

"When the GPS system goes to evaluate a street, it matches it with the closest street within 150 ft.," he said. "They might not necessarily intersect."

Kuszaj also noted while it may appear that the Durham Police Department is giving out trade secrets, it's actually beneficial to have the list out and circulating.

"Most of our accidents are caused by people speeding," Kuszaj said. "If talking about where we're going to be slows people down and gets them to be more careful, that's what really matters."

## Tata resigns as DOT secretary

WRAL.com By Matthew Burns Posted July 28, 2015 10:53 a.m.

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — After squelching earlier rumors that he was leaving to run for political office, Transportation Secretary Tony Tata resigned Tuesday to focus on "personal and family matters," Gov. Pat McCrory said in a statement.

"Tony Tata has been a valuable partner in our efforts to reform and modernize North Carolina's transportation system," McCrory said. "His dedication to the people of North Carolina is in keeping with his long career of service to his community, state and country."

Before joining the Department of Transportation in 2013, Tata served as Wake County school superintendent. His two-year tenure was marked by political strife.

A new Republican majority on the school board intent on changing the way student assignment worked in the school district hired him in late 2010, but parental dissatisfaction with the process – and with Tata's redesigned bus routes that took hours to complete – helped Democrats regain control of the board in 2011. Tata then clashed with the new board over their priorities, and they fired him in September 2012.

Tata had a career in the Army, retiring in 2009 as a brigadier general. In recent years, he has become an author, writing four fiction books, and a frequent guest on Fox News shows.

In June, the National Journal quoted an unnamed source who said Tata was preparing a Republican primary challenge in 2016 to 3rd District Congressman Walter Jones, but the DOT issued a statement that Tata planned to stay with the agency.

As DOT secretary, he helped implement the Strategic Mobility Formula, which changed the way highway projects are funded to put more emphasis on relieving congestion, improving safety and the potential for long-term job creation. He also integrated airports, rail and ports into the state's 25-year transportation infrastructure plan.

Tata's staff changed office hours and implemented online driver's license renewals at the Division of Motor Vehicles to improve customer service. Most recently, his administration reached a deal with environmental groups to settle a lawsuit blocking construction of a replacement for the Bonner Bridge on the Outer Banks.

"While there is much more work to do, it is time for me to focus on personal and family matters as well as my passion for authorship," Tata said in a memo to DOT employees. "I have enjoyed our professional affiliation. ... I look forward to continuing to admire your service in the future."

Chief Deputy DOT Secretary Nick Tennyson has been named acting transportation secretary. Tennyson, a former Durham mayor, oversees DOT operational and support functions.

## **Ex-Durham mayor moves into NCDOT top slot**

The Herald-Sun By Lauren Horsch Jul. 28, 2015 @ 06:12 PM

DURHAM — Former Durham mayor Nick Tennyson has been named acting secretary of the N.C. Department of Transportation following the Tuesday resignation of Secretary Tony Tata.

Tennyson, chief deputy secretary under Tata, served as the mayor here from 1997-2001. He joined NCDOT in April of 2013.

Tata's resignation came after criticism for going on a book tour before an impending snowstorm. In a resignation statement, he said he wanted to focus on his family and book career.

Tata sent an email Tuesday to Transportation Department staff, listing his accomplishments during more than two years in office, including reducing wait times at the Division of Motor Vehicles and an agreement with environmental groups that allows construction of the Bonner Bridge to Hatteras Island to begin.

"While there is much more work to do, it is time for me to focus on personal and family matters as well as my passion for authorship," he wrote.



Tennyson told The Herald-Sun Tuesday that he'd known there was going to be a changing of the guard after some communication with the governor's office.

"Secretary Tata got some substantial momentum built, in a positive direction for NCDOT," Tennyson said of his predecessor's time with the department. "I want to do everything I can to see as many of those move to fruition."

Tennyson said he is proud and humbled to be named acting secretary.

"I am proud of the fact that I have developed a good enough relationship with the NCDOT employees, and the governor and the legislature that makes it believable (for me) to do this job," he said. "And then humbled, because it's a critical function for the state, and it's a huge challenge."

When he joined the department in 2013 he didn't think he'd be in the position he is today.

"I thought that Secretary Tata would be here as long as I was," he said.

His transition from local government to the DOT came after he got to know fellow Republican, Gov. Pat McCrory, back when they were both mayors, McCrory in Charlotte.

"I knew that we both had similar concerns, both from large cities, and so when he began to run for governor, I certainly wanted to see him be successful," Tennyson said. "When he was elected I was happy to have a chance to join the team."

On Tuesday McCrory praised Tata for his work. "Tony Tata has been a valuable partner in our efforts to reform and modernize North Carolina's transportation system," McCrory said in a news release.

Tata, a retired U.S. Army brigadier general, stoked controversy earlier this year when he left on a book tour hours before a predicted storm coated much of the state in ice, making roads treacherous. Tata has routinely made appearances on cable television news shows to serve as a conservative political commentator.

He is also the author of several novels, his latest a thriller about a disgraced special forces commando searching for an American traitor.

He has been widely rumored to be considering a run for Congress. WTVD-TV reported in June that Tata addressed the issue in an email that said he was humbled to be asked to run for office. Tata never directly said he wouldn't run, only that he was committed to serving the citizens of North Carolina.

Before being appointed transportation secretary, Tata served as superintendent of the Wake County schools for less than two years. He was fired in September 2012 by a board that cited a strained relationship with Tata.

Tennyson, who lives in Durham, said he doesn't know how long his tenure as acting secretary will run. Right now it's up in the air for how a new secretary will be chosen by the governor's staff.

"I have made it clear, if the governor wants me to continue in this position, I would," Tennyson said.

While the decision of who will take over as secretary remains in flux, Tennyson said he'd continue to work on areas close to his conscience.

"I am most disturbed by accidents and injuries and results of those mishaps across the state," he said. "I know Secretary Tata was focused on safety, and I will continue to be doing my best to see that we are doing the best to drive down the loss of life on our network."

EDITOR'S NOTE — The Associated Press contributed to this story.

## Senate passes 6-year highway bill, short-term patch needed

AP Wire Aug 2, 2015

Washington -- The Senate passed a long-term transportation bill, but with House lawmakers already dispersed for their August recess, the bill will become just one more sticky issue on a jam-packed congressional agenda in the fall.

The \$350 billion long-term bill was approved Thursday on a 65-34 vote with bipartisan support. It would make changes to highway, transit, railroad and auto safety programs, but its sponsors were only able to find enough money to pay for the first three years of the six-year bill.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., called the bill's passage, "a win for our country."

"Many thought we'd never get here, but we have," he said.

Immediately after the vote, the Senate turned to a three-month patch previously passed by the House that extends the government's authority to process highway and transit aid payments to states through Oct. 29. Without congressional action, that authority expires at midnight Friday. House Republican leaders opted for the patch to give themselves more time to work on a long-term — and long-sought — transportation bill.

Lawmakers have said they are loath to take up yet another short-term transportation funding extension — this will be the 34th extension since 2009. But Republicans and Democrats don't want to see transportation aid cut off, and they are eager to pass an amendment to the extension bill that fills a \$3.4 billion hole in the Department of Veterans Affairs' budget. The money gap threatens to force the closure of hospitals and clinics nationwide.

The delay on House action on a long-term transportation bill adds one more messy fight to a fall agenda already crammed with difficult, must-pass legislation. Twelve annual spending bills face a Sept. 30 deadline but are being held up by a clash over the Confederate flag. Congress must also decide whether to approve or disapprove President Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal, and whether to pass a contentious defense policy bill that faces a veto threat from the White House. Another fight is certain over raising the nation's borrowing authority.

Spending authority for the Federal Aviation Administration expires Sept. 30. Since long-term bills to set aviation policy have yet to be introduced in either the House or the Senate, lawmakers acknowledge they will have to pass short-term extensions there as well.

The Senate's long-term transportation bill also renews the Export-Import Bank, which makes low-interest loans to help U.S. companies sell their products overseas. The bank's charter expired June 30 in the face of opposition from conservatives, who call it corporate welfare. A fight in the House over renewal of the bank is also likely.

The long-term transportation bill shores up the federal Highway Trust Fund for three years by using about \$45 billion in revenue increases and making spending cuts elsewhere in the federal budget. The largest source of funds is \$16 billion that would be saved by reducing the dividend rate the government pays to large banks.

The bill also attempts to speed up environmental reviews of construction projects and encourages states to impose user fees on electric vehicles because they use roadways but don't contribute to federal gas tax revenues. It also sets aside money for major projects and directs highway aid to major freight transportation corridors, starting with \$1.5 billion in fiscal 2016 and increasing to \$2.5 billion in 2021.

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The safety provisions are the most controversial transportation part of the bill both for what they include and what they don't include. The bill requires that rental car agencies fix cars subject to safety recalls before renting them, but it doesn't include language sought by safety advocates requiring car dealers to fix recalled used cars before selling them. It would double the amount the government can fine automakers who don't disclose safety defects from \$35 million to \$70 million — significantly less than the \$300 million sought by the White House. It would force the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to conceal from the public its safety ratings of trucking companies; the trucking industry says the agency's methodology is flawed.

## Communication at heart of light rail issues

The Herald-Sun Aug. 03, 2015 @ 08:53 AM By Lauren Horsch

DURHAM — It's estimated that GoTriangle has met with about 5,000 residents in Durham and Orange counties and held about 300 meetings concerning the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (DOLRT) project.

Beyond that GoTriangle has mailed many post cards to residents in areas where light rail is proposed.

Yet residents still feel out of the loop on how decisions are being made.

Alex Cabanes, a resident of Downing Creek, said that when rail alignment decisions were made, his neighbors and others concerned wanted to fully understand why the decisions were made.

"It's not been an open, forthcoming factual discussion," he said.

He's not the only one who's felt that way.

"The decision making on where they're putting these lines ... and how they came to the decision of where the light rail goes (is not talked about)," Trish Dean of Prescott Place said. "What is making the decisions? Is it money?"

### WRONG PROJECT?

There are thoughts that the project in and of itself is the wrong project for the area. Instead of bridging Orange and Durham counties, some believe it should have been built between Durham and Wake counties.

"Especially if it's a direct line between one and the other," said Trish Dean said.

"But I think overall, what we're seeing, is a project that really looks fundamentally flawed," Yuri Trembath of Prescott Place said. He believes some of the flaws lie in the proposed route and the data that is being presented.

"It's going to be a set route with no ability to change, and it's not going to be able to serve its purpose," he said.

Matthew Dean said the option of bus rapid transit is less capital intensive and would give multiple opportunities to re-evaluate routes depending on where development and growth occurs.

Some also think if the route was planned differently it would be able to serve more riders and alleviate traffic by using existing corridors that see heavy traffic.

"If you're looking to reduce congestion, you don't create more," Matthew Dean said.

### PUBLIC OUTREACH

While GoTriangle says it has a multi-phase system for notifying residents around the DOLRT, many residents don't believe that it's been a successful way of reaching out.

"Their communication has been horrendous," Trembath said.

Trish Dean said even information on the GoTriangle website is outdated, causing confusion, and she said she didn't receive any mailings.

Trembath said he received a mailing once and it came weeks after a meeting had occurred.

Natalie Murdock, interim manager of communications and public affairs for GoTriangle, said many of the notifications started in 2011 and 2012.

Most recently, mailings have been done for residents within a mile of the project on each side. In all she said there have been more than 50,000 addressed mailings sent through the U.S. Postal Service.

In certain places, Murdock said GoTriangle has been able to hand deliver information. A lot of the communication, she said, is being done through meetings set up in communities that will be impacted by the DOLRT. Those public meetings have drawn between 80 and 115 people each, compared to past public meetings where only 30 people showed up, Murdock said.

She believes GoTriangle has been successful in its efforts to notify residents, saying it's gone "above what is standard" for the project.

Local elected officials also believe that GoTriangle has done its due diligence in keeping residents involved.

"I think that GoTriangle has done an excellent job including the public," Durham County Commissioner Wendy Jacobs said. "This is the type of thing where not everybody is going to be happy."

Durham City Councilwoman Diane Catotti however believes there could be more publicizing done in some ways, because recently she's been hearing about residents who don't know about the project, even though portions of it have been in the works for decades.

"I am always surprised when people say they didn't know about it," Catotti said.

Dane Berglund, of Culp Arbor, said communication has always been lacking.

"For the most part, communication has been poor for several years," Berglund said.

Multiple people have suggested as the project continues to put up signs along the route marking where stations are set to be built — much like signs around town for proposed re-zoning matters.

"They need to be more open," Trembath said.

## **NCDOT road project in Durham aims to reduce traffic**

Triangle Business Journal By Jeff Jeffrey Monday, August 3, 2015, 10:07am EDT

The N.C. Department of Transportation is preparing for a road-widening project in Durham that department officials hope will alleviate traffic problems on North Roxboro Road.

NCDOT has proposed adding dedicated right turn lanes in both directions at the intersection where Latta Road becomes Infinity Road. NCDOT project engineer Natalie Lockhart says traffic in the area often causes significant delays for drivers trying to get through the intersection.

The department will hold a public meeting Aug. 10 to allow those who live and work in the area to weigh in on the proposal.

The intersection is near the Eno River and is home to the Eno Square Shopping Center. A Food Lion, a Durham Police Department substation and several restaurants are located nearby.

Lockhart says the project will likely take between 12 and 24 months to complete, which could affect businesses in the area.

"We hope the public meeting will give them a chance to hear about the long-term benefits of the project," Lockhart says. "We hope they understand that this is about improving safety and reducing traffic in the area."