

Glory days of rail travel in NC were gone by the 1950s

THE NEWS & OBSERVER – PAST TIMES BY TERESA LEONARD NOVEMBER 5, 2015



Passengers at Raleigh's Seaboard Station could look forward to modern comforts in their travels. File photo

Railroads offered excursions to the beach

World War II boosted train travel

Passenger train comfort had improved

By the mid 20th century, traveling around the country by rail was starting to give way to more modern modes of transportation. In 1956, Associated Press writer Reese Hart took a look at the history and state of train travel in North Carolina.

Remember how families used to flock to railroad stations on Sunday afternoon to see passenger trains come and go? They held a fascination for young and old. And remember the pot-bellied stoves in the depot waiting rooms?

These are nostalgic memories of a by-gone era in North Carolina's history of passenger trains. In the early twenties, passenger train travel in North Carolina swept to a record peak. Today, it has dwindled to its lowest point, according to Clarence H. Noah, Traffic Director for the State Utilities Commission.

In contrast, railroad freight service is in the midst of its best business in history, Noah said.

Of 30 railroads operating in North Carolina, only four now have passenger trains: Southern Railway, Atlantic Coast Line, Seaboard, and Norfolk & Western.

Automobiles, buses and airplanes have combined to make deep inroads into train travel. Noah said automobiles "have been just as injurious to bus travel" as to trains.

Passenger trains enjoyed their best business during the twenties. Then came the bleak depression years and business was poor. In an effort to bolster sagging revenues, some railroads operated excursions at reduced rates. As an example, the Seaboard once ran an excursion from Hamlet to Wrightsville Beach and return for \$1.25 per person.

Beach excursions were a part of the passenger train picture in the twenties, Noah recalled.

"They ran beach excursions," he said "just about every weekend during the summer. I thought I was missing something if I didn't go on one of the excursions. Most of my trips were from Raleigh to Norfolk. We would stay up all night during the trip, singing and having a good time. At dawn, we would arrive at the beach and go fishing or swimming. That night on the return trip we would get some sleep."

In those days a round trip excursion fare from Raleigh to Norfolk – a combined distance of 346 miles – was \$4. At present, the regular coach fare for a round trip is \$8.70.

Passenger train rates are cheaper than they were 33 years ago. Noah pointed out that the present rate is 2.78 cents per mile, compared with 3.03 in 1922 and 3.51 in 1848. The lowest rate was 1.92 in 1942.

During World War II, railroad travel boomed. Gasoline and tire rationing caused many motorists to turn to trains or buses. The heavy flow of servicemen swelled travel. But after the war years the railroads began to feel the pinch worse than ever.

Noah said some railroad men are "very optimistic" that new type passenger trains will help solve their maintenance and operating costs and at the same time lure people back to railroad travel.

New type trains, offering more comfort to travelers and more economy for the railroads, are being used experimentally on the Pennsylvania Railroad, The New York Central, and the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

Except for terminals in the big cities like Charlotte, Winston-Salem and Raleigh, railroad stations are all but deserted today, a silent reminder of a once busy era.

The familiar water tanks at depots have gradually disappeared with the passing of the steam locomotive. The Norfolk & Western, Noah said, is the only railroad operating in the state which still uses steam locomotives. A few years ago when Southern Railway switched to diesel locomotives, complaints came in from some persons living near the tracks, bemoaning the passing of the steam whistle. The Southern restored the whistle in place of the diesel horn, but it didn't have a true "steam" tone.

Digging into files and books on railroads, Noah came up with some interesting facts on North Carolina railroads. The earliest passenger trains were not heated. He said that "in the 1840's urchins along the railroad earned small change by selling hot bricks and hot stones to passengers for foot warming.

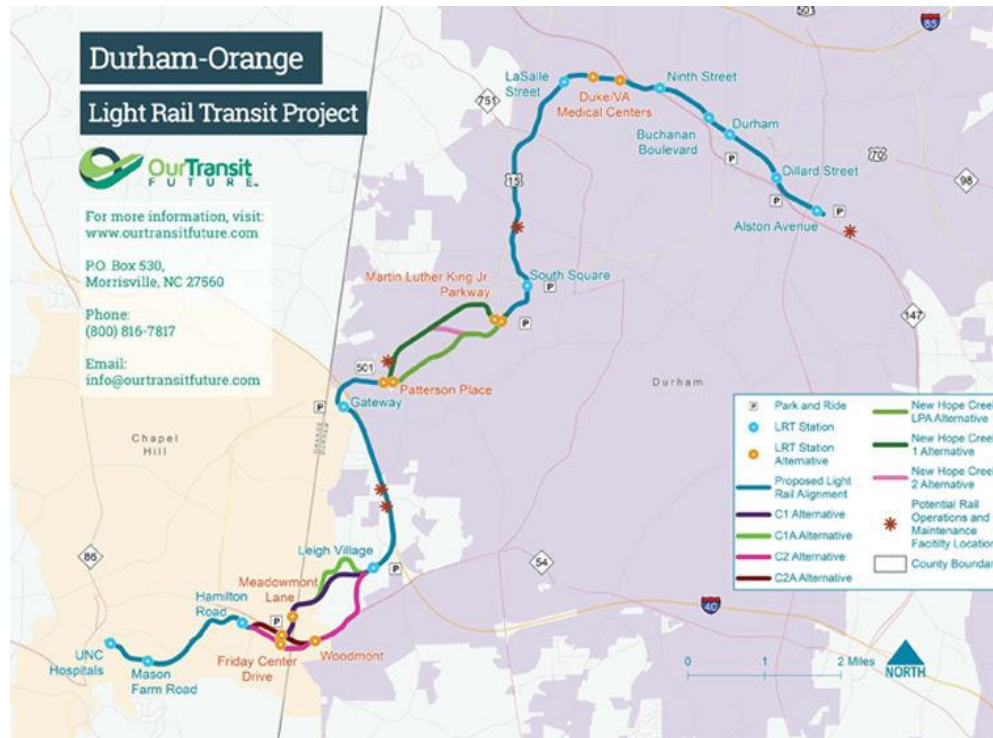
"Gradually, wood-burning or coal-burning stoves were introduced. These were usually installed at the ends of the car, but in some instances the stove was in the center of the car. Hot water heaters gradually replaced stoves during the 1860's and 1870's." Today, modern passenger cars are air-conditioned.

Noah said that in 1952 a streamlined train consisting of a two-unit diesel locomotive, nine passenger cars, a dining car, mail car, and a baggage car cost approximately \$1,700,000.

No figures are available for North Carolina, but in 1920 – the peak year of passenger train travel – railroads in the southern states transported 150,917,730 passengers. **THE N&O JAN. 29, 1956**

Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project gets another OK

THE HERALD-SUN BY LAUREN HORSCH NOVEMBER 11, 2015



DURHAM — The latest piece of the billion dollar puzzle come to be known as the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project has been put into place.

The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization on Wednesday endorsed the Durham-Orange light rail (DOLRT) line from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Alston Avenue in Durham.

The 17-mile, 17-stop route will cost an estimated \$1.6 billion. Funding for the project is still up in the air thanks to a provision inserted into the state's current budget that capped funding for light rail projects at \$500,000.

But that's not stopping GoTriangle from moving full-steam ahead with the project.

Patrick McDonough, GoTriangle's manager of planning and transit oriented development, said more than 1,339 comments from 575 unique individuals were received over a 45-day comment period for the project's draft environmental impact statement.

Of those comments 36 percent favored light rail, 33 percent were neutral and 31 percent opposed the project.

Durham County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow said the comments were "in general satisfactory."

However, she noted that GoTriangle is still in the process of responding to questions and will be adding more context to the responses at a later date.

Reckhow elaborated that more work on the answers to comments will be done.

Durham City Councilman Steve Schewel, along with the rest of the MPO board, were vocal about the importance of the project.

"This is probably the most important vote I will have cast (since taking office)," Schewel said. "This is game changing for our region, in a way that nothing else I vote on is."

He said the vote would be a "monumental, positive decision" for not only the region, but for the state.

The unanimous endorsement came after numerous discussions of how the project got to where it is today.

"For me the planning process for the project goes back 21 years," Chapel Hill Town Council member Ed Harrison said. "This is not a new thing."

The plans for a regional transportation route have been around for decades — and the DOLRT is just one portion of that plan.

"We're talking about a decades long ... planning process and implementation process for this rail line and, like other transportation infrastructure programs of the past, it will inspire growth along it," Chapel Hill mayor and MPO chairman Mark Kleinschmidt said.

Reckhow said Durham and Orange counties are "leaders" in terms of transportation in the area, but also rebuffed complaints that Wake County isn't buying into the plan.

She said in the bus and rail investment plan from 2011 there were three components — including the expansion of bus service, commuter rail from west Durham into downtown and east to Raleigh and light rail.

"We had a structure, the good news is that we won't know for several months what the final plan for Wake County will be, but it's my understanding that while buses are their first step also ... they do have a later step in their current plan to do commuter rail," Reckhow said.

She said once a partner in Wake County is identified, she'd support reaching out to that portion of the Research Triangle Park.

Orange County Commissioner Bernadette Pelissier echoed Reckhow's comments.

"Wake County just didn't opt in yet," Pelissier said. "This is what happens when you really don't have a regional authority."

Orange County Commissioner Barry Jacobs said projects like these have a long time frame.

"Planning is long term, and first we need to have a vision of where you're going, and then you have to create the infrastructure for where you're going," he said.

The next steps for the DOLRT is to have the Federal Transit Administration review comments from the environmental impact statement and conclude its work on the environmental impact statement and "record of decision" by Feb. 25.

To build or not to build?

THE HERALD-SUN (WEB ONLY) BY LAUREN HORSCH NOVEMBER 12, 2015

With the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization's endorsement of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (DOLRT) project I thought it would be a Orange decent idea to look through at all of the endorsement so far from not only Durham institutions, but also County ones as well.

The endorsements cover these criteria for the DOLRT:

- The C2A alignment over Little Creek
- The NHC2 alignment over New Hope Creek
- The Trent-Flowers station location near Duke and V.A. hospitals
- The Farrington Road Rail Operations and Maintenance Facility

The “build” option

The last two bullet points have been contentious, with numerous neighborhoods on the Durham-Orange county line advocating for the maintenance facility to be built on another location (either Cornwallis Road or near Alston Avenue in Durham). And the loudest voices about light rail in the Triangle have come from those who oppose it.

In fact, the Durham City Council’s endorsement came with a caveat that GoTriangle work with residents of Downing Creek to ensure that “residents have safe and convenient access to NC 54.”

The Durham City Council also urged GoTriangle to be “sensitive to impact on all communities, especially low income communities along the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit alignment.” The city wants to ensure there is “continued availability of existing and future development” of affordable housing.

Durham County’s endorsement of the DOLRT came with caveats as well. One was the concern of how closing Pettigrew Street to two-way traffic would impact the Durham County jail. There were also concerns about utility lines during construction times.

The county’s letter also addressed citizen’s concerns, including “community and roadway impacts” stemming from the proposed park and ride facility near Leigh Village.

The endorsements from Chapel Hill Town Council were not as extensive as Durham’s but, it still mentioned the need to examine the future extension of the DOLRT to the west and insuring bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the light rail corridor.

Other endorsements came from the Orange County Commissioners and from Carrboro.

While the local endorsements have been given, GoTriangle is still awaiting approval from the Federal Transit Administration, which would fund half of the project. The rest of the money for the \$1.6 billion line is set to come from local and state funding sources. However, the state funds are up in the air thanks to a state budget provision that caps funding for light rail at \$500,000.

GoTriangle said over the 45-day comment period for the draft environmental impact statement, more 1,330 comments were received from 575 unique individuals.

Of those comments 36 percent were in favor the project, 33 were neutral or had no preference, and 31 percent opposed.

In February we should learn more about FTA’s response to the project, but for now, the one question remains. And it’s not whether it should be built or not. Rather, will it be built?

To read or download copies of the endorsements click [here](#).

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER NEWS COLUMNS & BLOGS BY BRUCE SICELOFF NOVEMBER 23, 2015

Road Worrier: With an extra \$1.6 billion to spend, NCDOT speeds up its road-building plans

168 highway projects are added to NCDOT work schedule or moved up on the construction calendar

Legislators also set aside more money to repave roads and replace bridges

A 30 percent increase in DMV fees provides some of the new funding

RALEIGH -- Gov. Pat McCrory argued for months that North Carolina needed about \$1.6 billion to catch up with serious transportation needs, and he said the state should borrow the money right away.

Legislative leaders agreed about the need, but in September they killed McCrory's proposal to issue transportation bonds. They said they could raise all this money – and then some – without borrowing a dime.

And they did. The budget they passed this summer included legislative changes that will give the state Department of Transportation an additional \$1.6 billion over the next 10 years to spend on construction projects. On top of that, DOT has an extra \$250 million a year for maintenance needs, to replace more bridges and repave more roads.

Last week the governor [released a list of 168 highway projects](#) that will be added to DOT's work schedule or moved up on the 10-year calendar – some to be built several years sooner – thanks to the increased construction spending.

Locally the added funds will accelerate the widening of routes including U.S. 401 in Franklin County and northern Wake County (construction to start in fiscal year 2019), McCrimmon Parkway in Morrisville (in 2018), Creedmoor Road in northern Wake (in 2025) and Interstate 40 in Orange County (in 2023).

Elsewhere, the Mid-Currituck toll bridge will move ahead two years to start in 2017, and a big I-485 interchange in Charlotte will happen three years sooner (2016). Forsyth County is a big winner, with construction advanced by several years for the Winston-Salem Northern Beltway (2018).

The extra money will help 11 of the 22 highways McCrory had targeted for bond money. Legislators ignored his call for \$50 million to pave gravel roads and another \$50 million for non-highway projects. But they improved upon his plea for the state ports, to the tune of \$35 million a year.

McCrory had proposed two bond packages totaling nearly \$3 billion, more than half of it for transportation. The [legislature deleted the transportation items](#) in September and agreed to borrow \$2 billion – if voters approve the bond issue in a referendum next March – for higher education, parks and other infrastructure needs.

DOT keeps gas taxes

Last week, when the governor announced the new timetable for building more highways more quickly, he was ready to claim part of the credit.

"The reforms I signed into law will get these roads built sooner," McCrory said in a news release.

Where does all this money come from?

A big chunk is from the "reforms" McCrory mentioned. The new budget halted the yearly transfer of \$216 million in gas taxes and other transportation revenues from the Highway Fund to the General Fund – where it had helped other agencies cover non-transportation needs. Now this money will stay with DOT.

And DOT will rake in an additional \$150 million a year from a 30 percent increase in fees collected by the Division of Motor Vehicles for everything from car titles to driver's licenses. In January, the yearly fee for renewing your car registration – not counting the local property tax you pay at the same time – will increase from \$28 to \$36.

Transportation Secretary Nick Tennyson said the spending surge shows that legislators “recognize the critical need we have to add to and maintain our infrastructure for the benefit of our citizens’ safety and convenience, and for our need to have a strong economy.”

But DOT will need more financial help in the future, to catch up on the state’s backlog of old bridges that need to be replaced.

“I don’t want to minimize the level of change that is involved” in the new budget, Tennyson said. “But this won’t be the last thing we’re going to talk about.”

Where might legislators find more money for transportation in coming years? They could revisit two ideas that were snubbed this year after objections from influential business leaders, including Board of Transportation members:

- An increase in the state’s 3 percent highway use tax on car sales, a rate lower here than in most of our neighbor states.
- A new fee schedule that would [let DOT recover the cost of services it provides](#) for free or for a nominal charge to a range of businesses across the state including utilities, developers and billboard advertisers. Drivers now subsidize these business services, worth millions of dollars a year, when they pay gas taxes.

Meanwhile, the budget also included a DOT money provision that McCrory and Tennyson will ask legislators to delete next year: A \$500,000 cap on state funding for light-rail transit projects.

That measure forced DOT to cancel its commitment to invest \$138 million over the coming decade in a \$1.5 billion light-rail line from Durham to Chapel Hill. Unless legislators change their minds about this, Tennyson said, this money will be redirected to other non-highway needs – mostly for projects that improve safety at railroad crossings.

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER NEWS COLUMNS & BLOGS BY BRUCE SICELOFF NOVEMBER 30, 2015

Road Worrier: States work to improve parking for truckers

Legal parking spots more plentiful in neighboring states than in North Carolina

A new I-77 rest area will add spaces for 55 more trucks

8 Midwestern states plan to provide parking updates on truckers’ smartphones

RALEIGH -- While North Carolina troopers write parking tickets for truck drivers who stop for naps on interstate highway ramps, efforts are underway here and in other states to provide a few more safe parking places – and to help truckers find them.

Kansas and seven neighboring states in the Midwest won a [\\$25 million federal grant](#) in November for a technology network that will tell truckers – using smartphones and electronic message boards – how many vacant parking spots are available at truck stops and rest areas on the road ahead.

On Interstate 77 in Iredell County, a new state Department of Transportation rest area is expected to open in 2018 with parking spots for 55 big trucks. In May, DOT opened a rest area on U.S. 17 in Beaufort County, with 18 truck spaces.

Even with the new construction, truck drivers may have more difficulty finding a parking spot in North Carolina than in neighboring states, according to results of a new [50-state survey](#). The Federal Highway Administration conducted the “Jason’s Law” truck parking survey, named for a driver who was slain when he parked for a nap at an abandoned gas station in South Carolina.

Long-haul truckers need to rest when they're sleepy or when they're running up against federal hours-of-service limits. When legal parking areas are full, they find illegal options.

North Carolina has 723 parking spaces for truckers at state-owned rest areas and 5,122 spaces at privately owned truck stops, according to survey results released in August. Parking is more plentiful in four bordering states, ranging from a combined 7,948 truck spots in South Carolina to 13,718 in Georgia.

Except for one measure that makes Tennessee look worse, North Carolina also trails its neighbors when parking spaces are measured against highway miles and truck traffic counts. While South Carolina has 211 truck spaces for every 100 national highway system miles in the state, North Carolina has only 93.

"There are so many trucks on the road nowadays," said driver Robin Metdepenningen of Concord, who was ticketed in June for parking beside an Interstate 77 on-ramp in Surry County. "There's really not enough room for everybody to park when they need to take a break."

Nearly 6 million commercial truck drivers are on the road every day.

"And with the surge in shipping around the holidays, you'll have additional drivers who are looking for parking," Caitlin Rayman, freight management and operations director for the Federal Highway Administration, said in an interview Monday.

Rayman said the federal agency will hold regional gatherings next year with truckers, truck stop operators and state transportation officials to find ways to ease a chronic truck parking shortage. Indiana recently added 80 truck spaces, and Wyoming added 43 with help from federal grants that are no longer available, she said, but states have the option to use other federal funds for this purpose.

More than 200 [North Carolina drivers were cited this summer](#) after the State Highway Patrol began vigorously enforcing an often-overlooked law against parking on interstate shoulders and ramps.

[\[McCrory donor sparked Highway Patrol campaign against napping truckers\]](#)

The crackdown started after a longtime political fundraiser complained personally to Gov. Pat McCrory. Citing data showing that parked vehicles are involved in about 25 percent of all interstate highway crash deaths, [McCrory said](#) the enforcement push was based on safety concerns.

Surry County businessman Charlie Shelton, who pushed for the no-parking enforcement, gave McCrory the results of his own truck parking survey.

On a single night in March, Shelton counted 240 trucks parked legally or otherwise along I-77 in Surry, Yadkin and Iredell counties, where there were only 150 truck-stop and rest-area spots. Along with I-77 ramps – the focus of Shelton's complaint to McCrory – truckers also slept in the parking lots of stores, gas stations and restaurants.

"That's unsafe," Rayman said. "We want to make sure drivers have a place where they can get adequate rest and be able to do their job."