

U.S. 1 freeway in Wake and a dozen other Triangle highway projects may be delayed

The Herald-Sun By Richard Stradling February 18, 2019

RALEIGH — The conversion of U.S. 1 into a freeway in northern Wake County, the widening of Wade Avenue near PNC Arena and the overhaul of U.S. 64 in Cary and Apex are among more than a dozen planned highway projects in the Triangle that will get started later than expected under the state's proposed 10-year transportation plan.

Every two years, the N.C. Department of Transportation produces a new schedule for hundreds of projects statewide, making changes that reflect shifting costs and priorities and the availability of money. The latest version of the State Transportation Improvement Program or STIP will be approved by the state Board of Transportation this summer and covers the decade beginning in 2020.

The proposed plan calls for some new projects in the Triangle. They include the widening of U.S. 64 to six lanes between Wendell and Zebulon, scheduled to begin in 2028, and the addition of ramp meters to moderate traffic getting on Interstate 40 between Wade Avenue and N.C. 54 in Chapel Hill, now set for 2025.

But the number and extent of the delays, some as long as three years, are "brutal," said Joe Milazzo, executive director of the Regional Transportation Alliance, a business group associated with the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce. He cited in particular the construction of a freeway on U.S. 1 from Interstate 540 north through Wake Forest, which is being pushed back three years to 2024.

"The removal of traffic signals from Capital Blvd. is something that many people from North Raleigh, Wake Forest, Rolesville, and Franklin County have been waiting on for a very long time," Milazzo wrote in an email. "Given the growth in that area, the commute isn't getting any easier, and we need that project sooner rather than later."

Another project that was a high priority for the transportation alliance — the addition of express lanes on the shoulders of I-540 across northern Wake County — has been pushed back from 2025 to sometime after 2029.

Several factors have resulted in the delays, according to NCDOT officials. In some cases, the expected costs have gone up because of inflation or as the true scope and details of the work comes into view. In other cases, NCDOT has determined that the tools it used to estimate costs had fallen short.

For example, the department has traditionally calculated the expected cost of buying right of way by simply adding on a percentage of the construction costs, said spokesman Sean Williams. In places like the Triangle, where the cost of land is relatively high, that approach under-estimated right-of-way costs, and NCDOT has begun basing its estimates on actual land values, Williams said.

"The cost estimation tool needed refinement to account for those right-of-way changes," he said.

Williams said NCDOT has taken other steps to improve its cost estimates, including hiring more outside contractors to review the scope and designs of projects in advance.

There are 1,833 projects statewide in the proposed STIP, which will cost an estimated \$27.8 billion over the decade. Highways and bridges account for about 94 percent of that spending, while the rest will go to non-highway projects such as bike paths, ferries and mass transit.

Statewide, 130 projects would be delayed from the timetable set out in the current 10-year plan. In the Triangle they include:

- The conversion of U.S. 70 into a freeway from T.W. Alexander Drive west into Durham County would be delayed 3 years, to 2025, between South Miami Boulevard and Lynn Road in Durham and indefinitely between South Miami and T.W. Alexander.
- The widening of Wade Avenue between the Beltline and I-40 near the arena would be delayed two years, to 2025.

- The widening of U.S. 1 between U.S. 64 in Cary and N.C. 55 in Apex would be delayed two years, to 2028.
- The widening of U.S. 64 in Cary and Apex, including the conversion of intersections into interchanges, would be delayed two years, to 2024.
- Construction on a new segment of McCrimmon Parkway from Morrisville west toward N.C. 540 would be delayed four years, to 2027.
- The widening of N.C. 55 from U.S. 1 to Olive Chapel Road in Apex would be delayed three years, to 2024.
- Several projects would be delayed one year, including the addition of lanes to the Durham Freeway near Research Triangle Park and to I-40 between Lake Wheeler Road in Raleigh and U.S. 1.

NCDOT is taking feedback on the proposed 2020-2029 STIP through April 15. You can see the plan at www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/stip/ and submit comments at publicinput.com/2020-2029-STIP. Residents of NCDOT's Division 5, which includes Wake, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Person, Vance and Warren counties, can review maps and ask questions about the STIP at the division office at 2612 North Duke St. in Durham between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. any day this week.

DOT officials: This rural road is one of North Carolina's most dangerous

WRAL.com By Rick Armstrong and Gerald Owens February 18, 2019

JOHNSTON COUNTY, N.C. — State transportation leaders have their eyes not just on highway safety but also on rural roads.

According to the North Carolina Department of Transportation, one of the highest risk country corridors is within the greater Triangle area.

After commuters escape the busy highways of Wake County, many find their way home along rural routes like Old Fairground Road, which stretches through Johnston County and into Harnett County.

Crash data and maps

The road twists, dips and rises, and narrow shoulders leave very little room for error.

"Some of these rural roads don't have the safety features built into them because they are very old roads," explained state traffic engineer Kevin Lacy.

For that reason, a National Governors Association conference recently challenged states to pursue a Rural Route Safety Initiative. North Carolina is focused on a total of eight corridors with high crash rates and highway deaths.

Id Fairground Road is one of them.

"People do not obey the speed limit in this area," said Joshua Fincannon, who uses Old Fairground Road for his commute to work. "I mean, the speed limit is like 55 and I've seen them coming and flying like 70, 75."

Fincannon lives and works on the Harnett County side of the road, and he told WRAL News he'd like to see more law enforcement presence to slow down traffic.

According to Lacy, that's one part of what traffic engineers call "the big E's."

"Enforcement, engineering and emergency response," said Lacy. "Those E's are very critical, but the most important E here is "everyone" who uses the road."

Lacy said locals tend to think the problems are caused by those who aren't familiar with these roads, but studies on the problem corridor, show the majority of crashes involved people who live nearby.

"They're not from somewhere else. It's us," said Lacy. "Neighbors running into neighbors or neighbors wrecking on their local roads."

The study also revealed that Robeson County ranks worst in the state for overall crashes.

Lacy said raising awareness about the dangers of distracted driving will be a big part of the DOT's safety efforts.

Crash Data <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/safety/pages/crash-data.aspx>

Apartments next to proposed light rail stop sell for \$42M

Triangle Business Journal By Ben Graham February 8, 2019

An apartment complex next to a stop on the future Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project has sold to an out-of-state investor, generating a \$10 million gain in sales price in less than three years.

Massachusetts-based Chartwell Management Inc. bought the Lenox at Patterson Place complex from the Connor Group for \$42 million.

The Connor Group, based in Dayton, Ohio, previously acquired the property in 2016 for \$32.7 million.

Built in 1998, the garden-style complex sits just off SW Durham Drive, east of I-40 and next to the Patterson Place shopping center, which is slated to be one of the stops on the planned light rail line.

Rents at the complex range from \$899 for a 500-square-foot one-bedroom apartment up to \$1,499 for a three-bedroom, 1,160-square-foot unit.

Chartwell Management Inc owns another complex in the Triangle — the Concord Apartments in northwest Raleigh, according to its website.

Groups say Duke University impasse threatens to kill Durham-Orange light rail project

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb February 7, 2019

DURHAM – John Lee has been a Durham resident for almost 14 years and “religiously” rides the bus to work, appointments and leisurely trips across Durham, and to Orange and Wake counties.

The city needs the proposed Durham-Orange light-rail project to provide its less-wealthy residents with more opportunities, Lee said. The only thing holding up the project, he and over 100 others said Thursday is Duke University's willingness to be a community partner.

The 17.7-mile line would connect UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill with Duke and N.C. Central universities in Durham, and points in between.

“Light rail would mean for me an opportunity for better housing and employment,” Lee said. “I expect Duke as a great corporate citizen of Durham to support the light rail.”

Right now, Duke is putting the project — and the housing, jobs and economic development it could bring — in danger of failing, local coalitions and transit supporters said at Thursday’s rally outside the downtown Durham Station.

They called on Duke President Vincent Price to resolve the university’s and medical center’s concerns about the \$3.3 billion project by the end of February. The project cost includes an estimated \$852 million to \$947 million in interest on short- and long-term debt, according to GoTriangle documents.

The rally was sponsored in part by Durham CAN (Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods), the Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit, Durham Congregations in Action and the People’s Alliance, and included more than a dozen current and former leaders from Durham and Orange counties.

Supporters also were encouraged to email Price and express their concerns. The project is at a crossroads, said Wib Gulley, a former Durham mayor and state senator. He and Nick Tennyson, a former mayor and former secretary of the N.C. Department of Transportation, have advocated for light rail as an investment in the city’s future and regional transportation.

Gulley, who spoke Thursday, said those who came to the rally represent the “rich diversity” that is Durham. He also acknowledged Duke’s concerns about the safety of its hospital, research buildings and patients, but said the community is “strong together and can do great things together.”

“This is not the only rail system in this country,” Gulley said. “It’s not the only rail system whose station is aligned or adjacent to hospitals in this country, and those communities, they have found a way to get the job done and work it out.”

Michael Schoenfeld, Duke’s vice president for public affairs and government relations, responded to the planned rally in an email Thursday afternoon.

“We are working with Go Triangle to address the university’s continuing concerns about aspects of the construction and operations of the light rail system that could compromise community health, research and patient safety at Duke,” he said.

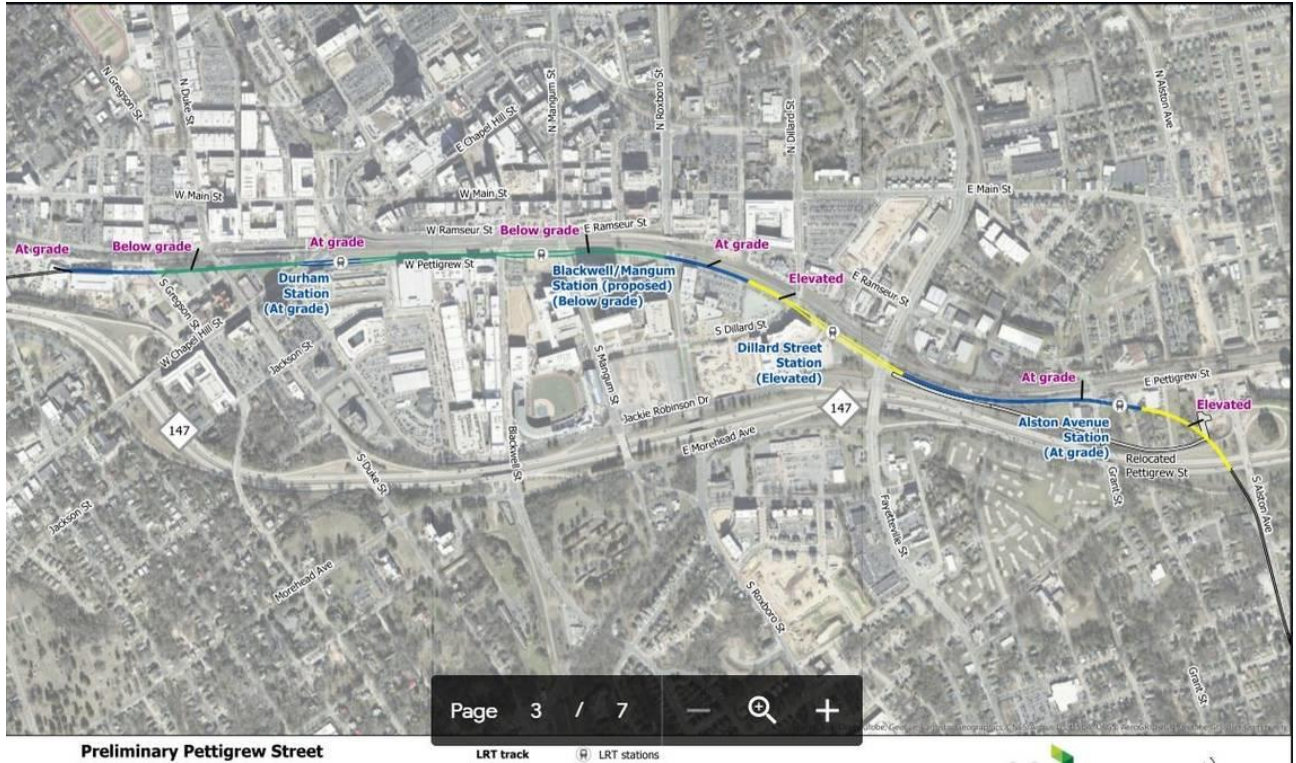
AGREEMENTS DEADLINE

GoTriangle officials have until April 30 to get 11 critical agreements signed, including the one with Duke, and submit an application for \$1.23 billion to the Federal Transit Administration. The deadline must be met in order to get federal funding by Nov. 30 — a deadline set by the state for receiving \$190 million in state money for the project.

Durham and Orange counties would pay the rest — and any interest on debt — through a dedicated half-cent sales tax and car rental and registration fees.

The project has gone through many changes since first being proposed more than 25 years ago. The latest version has undergone even more changes since engineering work started in 2017.

Some of the biggest changes, including a \$90 million elevation of the light-rail tracks along Erwin Road by the Duke and VA medical centers and an \$81 million plan to add a tunnel and two bridges to Pettigrew Street in downtown Durham, have arisen in the last six months.



This map released by GoTriangle on Friday shows where the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit line would run underground through downtown Durham and then run on elevated tracks on two proposed bridges.

GoTriangle

FTA officials are still reviewing the tunnel and bridge system, which was designed as a way to avoid closing the Blackwell Street railroad crossing to cars and pedestrians between downtown Durham and the American Tobacco campus.

The proposed closure of the crossing prompted Michael Goodman, senior vice president of Capitol Broadcasting Co., and Brad Brinegar, chairman of the advertising agency McKinney, to resign from the nonprofit GoTransit Partners fundraising board in November.

Although neither man has returned to the board, Capitol Broadcasting agreed in January to donate the required right-of-way for the light rail project, a spokesman said. He did not elaborate on the value of that donation, but said it would require the Blackwell Street crossing to be maintained for cars and pedestrians, as well as “other critical infrastructure issues related to the most recent proposal.”

GoTriangle must raise \$102.5 million in private cash and land donations the project needs. Aside from the Blackwell Street right-of-way, the only other donations so far are \$15 million in land from UNC and N.C. Central universities. A separate donation of federal land from the Durham VA Medical Center does not count toward the local donations needed.

DUKE LETTER

Duke President Price cited the downtown crossing, before the tunnel was proposed, in a November letter to GoTriangle as a reason that Duke could not support the project's design. Duke is also concerned about how the project will affect its medical and research facilities on Erwin Road.

Among the concerns, Price noted the concrete barriers and piers for the elevated track might "create difficult and perhaps dangerous conditions" for ambulances. The light-rail route also would pass just steps from Duke Hospital — the city's only Level 1 trauma center — raising issues of how noise, vibrations and construction could affect those facilities, patients and a vital hospital utility line, Price said. A required 100-foot buffer around the Global Health Research Building also is critical, he said.

GoTriangle has made many adjustments to the plan to meet Duke's concerns, said Carrboro Alderman Damon Seils, chairman of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO, a regional transportation planning board.

They shifted the light-rail track alignment, and then elevated it, he said. They moved a Duke station on Erwin Road, studied alternate routes, promised a safe pedestrian connection to the Durham VA and better access to Duke Hospital. Engineers are studying more changes right now, he said.

"We've made these changes at great expense," Seils said. "Tens of millions of dollars of expense, not because these changes are necessary to operate an excellent light-rail system in the city, but because Duke asked for it."

Price has appointed Duke Executive Vice President Tallman Trask III as the principal liaison for the project, with "sole authority to provide information and make decisions on all operational issues."

However, neither side appears to have resolved Duke's concerns. GoTriangle officials have referred questions to Schoenfeld, who responded in a Feb. 4 email to questions about the negotiations: "We'll decline to comment."

Duke also has declined requests since November for interviews with Price, Trask and other university officials.

MORE THAN A TRAIN

Light-rail supporters said the issue is about more than a train connecting three major employers in Durham and Orange counties. It's also about affordable housing, jobs and economic development at the 19 planned stations, most of which will be in Durham.

The light-rail line will be different from another major transportation project — the Durham Freeway — that divided and devastated Durham's affluent black community in the 1960s and '70s, said Christina Robinson, with Durham CAN.

"We are yet still trying to recover," Robinson said. "This plan for light rail has a chance to reverse some of that negative impact by connecting people of color with opportunity. Opportunities like living wage jobs, connections to housing, jobs, entertainment, education and health care — that is, if Duke cooperates with the rest of Durham."

Anthony Scott, chief executive officer with the Durham Housing Authority, noted that Durham's public housing residents earn an average of \$13,000 a year and pay an average rent of \$238 a month. The unemployment rate among residents is 60 percent, he said.

Meanwhile, the authority is rebuilding its housing to be five times more dense, with a greater mix of incomes and commercial opportunities, Scott said. At least half of the households will be a 15-minute walk from a proposed light rail station, he said.

Project critics have said those things can be achieved without light rail, and that better bus routes and bus-rapid transit, which is a large part of Wake County's transportation plan, would serve more people for less money. Others note the rapidly changing field of transportation, which could include more driverless cars and ride-sharing services,

and the falling rates of ridership for existing transit.

A group of southwest Durham residents also has filed a lawsuit to stop the proposed light-rail maintenance yard planned for their neighborhood. The lawsuit claims the city council's rezoning of land for the Farrington Road facility is illegal spot zoning, because it differs from the zoning of the mostly residential land around it.

Staff writer Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan contributed to this story.

Neighbors take fight against Durham-Orange light-rail yard to court

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan February 1, 2019

DURHAM – Southwest Durham residents have filed a lawsuit to keep a proposed light-rail maintenance yard out of their neighborhood.

The complaint against the city of Durham and GoTriangle seeks to overturn the City Council's rezoning for the rail yard site off Farrington Road near Interstate 40.

Brown & Bunch law firm in Chapel Hill filed the complaint on behalf of six neighbors: John Gunter, Patricia Gunter, Virginia Meihaus, Betty Ray Hoffman, Jon Hoffman and Joan Hart.

The lawsuit claims the council's rezoning was illegal spot zoning, because the 25-acre site's new light industrial zoning is different from the suburban area around it.

David W. Owens, a professor at the UNC School of Government, said the plaintiffs have a better chance of the court overturning the council decision if it is deemed spot zoning.

"The burden is on the city to show that what they've done is reasonable," Owens said.

Durham City Attorney Patrick Baker said the city has not reviewed the complaint yet.

"At some point in time in the near future we will brief Council on the matter," he said in a statement. "We will respond on behalf of the City at some point likely through our legal filings."

Owens said a judge will determine if the council acted reasonably, looking at the size of the site, consistency of the plan, and the benefits and detriments to the landowners.

"It's like a landfill or something else — nobody wants to live next to trash — but if you have a light-rail system you need a maintenance yard," Owens said.

19-stop rail line

The Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project would connect UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Duke and N.C. Central universities in Durham, with stops in between.

The council voted to rezone the land for the rail yard for the planned 19-stop, 17.7-mile project in December. Homeowners in nearby Culp Arbor and Prescott Place, as well as parents of Creekside Elementary School students, opposed the rezoning, concerned about potential noise, lights and property values.

Hoffman, one of the plaintiffs, visited Charlotte with council members to see the Charlotte light-rail yard and building.

"We were hoping we'd like the ROMF [rail operations and maintenance facility], but instead we left Charlotte more concerned than when we went," Hoffman told council members in December.

The Durham Planning Commission did not recommend the rezoning, splitting 4-4. The facility would be open all the time and have space for light-rail administration offices, rail car maintenance and storage.

“This is the best location, even with its problems,” Mayor Pro Tem Jillian Johnson said before voting Dec. 3 for the rezoning. “I think this project is really important for our community.”

What’s next

Owens said the the lawsuit could take nine months to a year to wind through the court, longer if there is an appeal.

“The rezoning is presumed valid until the court says otherwise,” Owens said. “It doesn’t put the city’s zoning on hold. The city has rezoned it; it will stay in the zone until the judge says otherwise.”

Meanwhile, GoTriangle’s final application to the Federal Transit Administration for the federal share of light-rail funding is due at the end of April.

Durham getting 8 more miles of bike lanes and 1st ‘buffered’ bike lane downtown

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan January 29, 2019

DURHAM – If you ride a bike in Durham and have been frustrated by the lack of bike lanes, more are on the way.

And if you drive a car, prepare to share the road some more.

The city’s first buffered bike lane is also coming downtown, with flexible plastic posts to remind motorists the bike lane is there.

“I think it’s a great place to start,” said Jessalee Landfried, a bicycle and pedestrian advocate. “I say the more the better.”

Landfried lives in Old North Durham and rides her bike downtown, to Northgate Park and to the Durham Co-op, among other places.

Many cities already use vertical delineators, she noted.

“They’re a visual reminder, and for a sober driver in the daytime, that’s probably going to be enough to keep them out of a bike lane — but as we all know that’s not every driver,” Landfried said.

“We also have a problem in Durham of people parking in a bike lane, and vertical delineators can help because it makes it much more clear you’re not supposed to park there,” she said.

Interim Transportation Director Bill Judge said they chose East Main to test the delineators because the city-owned street already has painted buffer lines.

The posts will be placed every 35 feet, with 50 to 60 posts in each direction on the roughly half a mile of East Main Street between Roxboro and Elizabeth/Fayetteville streets.

“We have had many requests for separated bike lanes in Durham,” said Dale McKeel, the city’s bicycle and pedestrian coordinator. “Separated bike lanes with flexible posts provide an increased sense of comfort for bicyclists and can encourage more people to ride.”

That section of East Main Street also has several large, green rectangles on the road at intersections called “bike boxes,” where cyclists can safely move ahead of cars. Smaller green rectangles show where the bike lane continues across the intersection.

8 miles of new bike lane

The eight miles of new bike lanes will cost \$829,170, mostly from federal money. The lanes grew out of the 2017 Durham Bike + Walk Implementation Plan, which called for more bicycle lanes and better connections between lanes and trails.

“The more bike routes that we have and the more connections that we have between those routes, the easier it will be for people to use bikes for transportation,” McKeel said.

One of the complaints from bicyclists is inconsistent bike lanes on their routes to work, trails and shopping, he said. “We’re just trying to build out our network,” he said.

Here is where the bike lanes are going:

- American Drive between Constitution Drive and Morreene Road
- Stadium Drive/Olympic Avenue between Horton Road and North Roxboro Street
- Meriwether Drive between East Carver Street and Old Oxford Road
- North Miami Boulevard between East Geer and Raynor streets
- Raynor Street between North Miami Boulevard and Liberty Street
- Liberty Street between Oakwood Avenue and South Miami Boulevard
- Fayetteville Street between Umstead Street and East Main Street
- East Lakewood Avenue between Duke Street and Fayetteville Street
- East Cornwallis Road between Roxboro Street and Fayetteville Street

What’s next

“I think Durham is making good progress. We’re getting better,” said Landfried, who serves on the city-county Environmental Affairs Board. “[But] even compared to our peer mid-size cities, we’re pretty far behind.”

The posts for the buffered bike lane downtown will be installed this spring.

For the new bike lanes, Judge said the design work is nearly finished, and the project will be put out to bid this summer. The lanes will be under construction by Sept. 30.

5 scooter companies want to come to Durham. When you’ll start seeing them.

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan January 25, 2019

DURHAM – Hundreds of electric scooters will arrive on Durham streets this spring. All that’s left is paperwork before the city grant permits to five companies who have applied: Lime, Bird, Spin, Lyft and Gotcha.

At least 600 scooters will be allowed, likely starting in March.

Bird and Lime are already in Raleigh. Spin already lists Durham and Duke University on its website as a city and campus where they have scooters, as well as Charlotte and other cities.

Lyft scooters are in the Washington, D.C. area, in California, Nashville and Atlanta, among other large cities. Gotcha scooters are mostly found on college campuses.

Lime and Spin bikes are already in Durham.

Interim Transportation Director Bill Judge said the goal for granting the permits is March 1, but it could be later. The city will grant permits to all companies at the same time.

While the Raleigh City Council passed its scooter rules months after the electric scooters arrived there, the Durham City Council asked Bird and Lime to wait while the council figured them out.

“We were happy, I guess, that we didn’t encounter what other cities did, where they just brought [scooters] before they were ready,” Judge said.

The Durham City Council passed its ordinance in October. While Raleigh is charging a \$300 per scooter fee, in Durham it is only \$100. Durham also requires a \$1,000 initial application fee.

Servando Esparza of Bird said in October that the company wants to deploy at least 100 scooters in Durham. “We tend to start with a number, and grow with demand,” he said. “In a larger city like Durham, it will be more than [100].”

When the scooters will arrive

Durham’s transportation department had two big departures recently: director Terry Bellamy, who left for a job in Prince George’s County, Maryland, and Bryan Poole, who left for a job in Portland, Oregon. Dale McKeel, who is now handling scooters, said the permitting is taking a little longer as a result. Poole had said in October that he expected scooter permits to be granted in January.

McKeel said that details left to work out include making sure the companies can follow all the regulations, like reducing barriers to low-income residents. The companies will need to include payment options for riders who don’t have a smartphone or credit card, as well as deploy at least 20 percent of their scooter fleets in low-income areas.

“We believe all five can comply with the ordinance and meet our requirements,” Judge said. “Market forces will determine whether all five choose to launch [here].”

Fewer bikes now

The scooter ordinance passed in October also dealt with bicycles.

Judge said they set the scooter cap at 600 because they capped bike shares at 1,200. But with no applications for bike permits and few bike share bikes on the street, that could mean more scooters. There are about 200 bike share bikes in Durham today, Judge said, down from 500. But that’s also because it is winter, he said.

Durham scooter rules require riders to:

- Be at least 16 years old and wear a helmet.
- Follow traffic laws.
- Not ride on sidewalks.
- Not ride on greenway trails.

Federal support for RDU's new runway for China flights may fall short, airport president says

The News and Observer By Richard Stradling January 16, 2019

MORRISVILLE – Raleigh-Durham International Airport plans to replace its aging main runway in the coming years with a new parallel one that will be long enough to launch flights to the far side of the Earth.

RDU President and CEO Michael Landguth says he has expected that half or more of the runway's estimated \$350 million cost would be covered by the federal government, with the rest divided between the state and the airport.

But last fall, during a meeting at the Federal Aviation Administration's regional office in Memphis, Landguth says FAA officials told him RDU should expect only about \$35 million in federal money for the project, or about 10 percent.

If that prediction holds true, Landguth said, it would mean the airport and its customers likely would have to make up the difference. Because the FAA's grant money largely comes from taxes on jet fuel and passenger tickets, Landguth reasons RDU travelers are entitled to get more of it back in support for their airport.

"We've already paid the taxes," he said. "If we don't get our fair share, then we have to pay again."

The FAA helps rehab or build runways, terminals and other facilities through a program that makes hundreds of grants each year to airports of all sizes across the country. Among the 11 grants to North Carolina airports last year was one for nearly \$12.6 million to help RDU rebuild a taxiway.

But Congress has kept funding for the grant program steady at \$3.35 billion in recent years, and has authorized the same spending over the next five years, Landguth said. He said FAA officials told him not to expect more than \$35 million for the runway because the demand for those grants far exceeds the available money.

"They point back to the fact that they've had only so much and that Congress has kept that spending flat," he said.

The FAA could not respond to requests for comment because of the federal government shutdown.

RDU has been talking to the FAA about its plans for a new runway for several years. It's a big part of the airport's 25-year master plan that the federal agency approved in December 2017.

The 10,000-foot runway, on the west side of the airport in front of Terminal 2, is nearing the end of its useful life. In late 2016, the airport said its pavement engineers had recommended the runway be rebuilt within 3 to 5 years and that it had already replaced several concrete slabs that had deteriorated.

The airport chose to build a parallel replacement runway so it could keep its main one open during construction. And it plans to make it 1,500 feet longer so a large jet full of passengers, luggage and the extra fuel and provisions needed for a flight to Asia can take off in all weather conditions. The longer runway is key to RDU's ambitions to persuade an airline to establish nonstop service from the Triangle to China by 2025. (The airport's other runway is 7,500 feet long, too short for even trans-Atlantic flights.)

The FAA won't commit to providing any money for the runway until the airport makes a formal request, and that won't happen for another two or more years while environmental studies are being done, Landguth said. In the meantime, RDU officials plan to enlist the help of North Carolina politicians and business groups to make a case for more federal funding.

"The public has time to weigh in on this conversation," he said.

The Regional Transportation Alliance, a program of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, will be happy to "articulate the importance" of RDU and the new runway to any level of government, said Joe Milazzo, its executive director. The airport's main runway is crucial to the continued success of the region's business community, Milazzo said, and extending it will ensure RDU can handle longer distance flights in the future.

“This is, in essence, the most important two miles of pavement in the region,” he said. “And we’d like it to be just a hair longer than two miles.”

Landguth shared his concerns about federal funding for the runway with the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority in December. He said the airport will begin trying to build support for more federal money later this year.

It will have the support of U.S. Rep. David Price, a Democrat whose district includes RDU and who will lead the House Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee.

“RDU provides tremendous economic benefits for the Triangle and remains a key asset for our region,” Price said in a statement Wednesday. “Replacement of their runway is a top priority, and I will continue working with RDU officials, the FAA, and my colleagues in Congress to provide robust funding for airport infrastructure improvements.”

Raleigh mayor to scooter company: Bird’s new \$2 fee ‘is not a tax’

The News and Observer By Anna Johnson January 9, 2019

Raleigh – Electric scooter company Bird is only trying to increase profits and unfairly blaming the city for a new fee the company is charging riders, says Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane.

Raleigh – Electric scooter company Bird is only trying to increase profits and unfairly blaming the city for a new fee the company is charging riders, says Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane.

She expressed her frustration during a City Council meeting Tuesday. Bird announced on Monday it was adding a \$2 transportation fee — on top of the \$1 needed to unlock the scooter plus 15 cents per minute to ride — because of increased city fees and regulations.

The company encouraged riders to email and tweet council members to “repeal this unreasonable fee.”

Lime, the scooter company that arrived after Bird, has not raised its prices but is also encouraging riders to contact city leaders about the rules.

“Since my computer is pinging consistently with emails, I do want to say something about the many emails that I have received about what Bird is putting out as Raleigh’s ‘transportation tax,’” McFarlane said.

“This is not a tax,” she said. “This is a rate increase for Bird that they are blaming on our requirement of \$300 per scooter. To be clear, that fee was added to help defer cost of increased enforcement around safety and other issues.”

Raleigh’s rules outline when and where scooters can be parked and ridden. The city also added the \$300 per scooter fee and limited each company to 500 scooters. Before the cap, Bird had more than 1,000 scooters throughout the city. The fee will generate up to \$150,000 each from Bird and Lime, the other company with scooters in the city.

“If they [Bird] choose to add a \$2 per ride to their rate, that is a business profit-making decision and has nothing to do with our requirements and certainly it is not a tax imposed by the city,” McFarlane said.

Bird and Lime have both called Raleigh’s fees one of the highest in the country. But McFarlane cited Nashville, Indianapolis and Portland as cities with higher fees.

- Between five companies, Nashville has more than 2,000 scooters on the ground although two companies have not launched yet, said Bill Fields, Nashville’s transportation licensing director. McFarlane initially said companies in

Nashville pay \$500 per scooter per day, but later corrected herself to say Nashville has a \$500 permit fee and a \$35 per scooter annual fee. Raleigh's application fee is \$290.

- Indianapolis has a \$15,000 license fee for companies and charges \$1 per scooter per day, according to the city's website. Indianapolis has no cap on the number of scooters but that may change, said Sonya Seeder, in that city's bureau of license and permit services.
- While McFarlane said Portland charges \$1 per scooter per day, the city actually charges 25 cents per ride, said Dylan Rivera, in Portland's Bureau of Transportation. The city also had a \$250 application fee and \$5,000 permit fees. During the city's 120-day pilot, three companies had more than 2,000 scooters that resulted in about 700,000 trips, he said. That would generate about \$175,000 in revenue to the city of Portland.

"The whole point is our \$300 scooter charge comes out to 16 cents per ride," McFarlane said.

"They say their average ride is five rides per day," the mayor explained. "So if you divide that out to 500 scooters that comes out to 16 cents per ride. So how are they justifying adding \$2 per ride? Not to mention they are misleading everyone by calling it a transportation tax."

The scooter companies arrived this summer without notice or coordination with the city of Raleigh.

Electric scooters 'taxed to death' by Raleigh's rules, Bird says

The News and Observer By Anna Johnson January 10, 2019

Raleigh – Electric scooter company Bird will drop its new \$2 fee on riders if Raleigh leaders agree to lift the city's "burdensome regulations."

The company made the statement in a letter to City Council member Stef Mendell after she criticized Bird for blaming the city for its fee.

"Bird is taking scooter users for a ride," Mendell wrote on Facebook. "By charging an extra \$2 per ride, not per day, Bird is clearly taking advantage of its customers."

Bird added a \$2 fee per ride — on top the \$1 needed to unlock a scooter and the 15 cents per minute to ride — this week. The California-based company said it had to add the fee because of the city's rules that outline when and where scooters can be used, cap the number of scooters to 500 per company and charge an annual fee of \$300 per scooter.

Mendell and Mayor Nancy McFarlane have both criticized Bird for increasing the fee for riders. Bird said it sent the letter, in part, to refute "the fast math" used by city leaders.

"It is true that we asked supporters of affordable mobility options in Raleigh to reach out to their city council representatives regarding these fees — something that is their right and privilege as constituents, and something that is your duty as an elected official to receive," said Servando Esparza, senior manager of Bird's government partnerships, in the letter. "Residents throughout Raleigh support Bird and do not want to see our service taxed to death."

Bird and electric scooter company Lime both arrived last year without communication or collaboration with the city. Both signed agreements with the city to follow its rules in December. Yet both companies also made adjustments to the insurance portion the agreement and must resubmit the agreements.

"Further, we want to make clear once again that the \$300 fee per vehicle, as well as the exorbitant insurance requirements, are the highest and most burdensome in the nation," Esparza said. "The average fee other cities are imposing per e-scooters is one tenth of what Raleigh is enforcing."

McFarlane and others have pointed to Indianapolis as a city with higher fees than Raleigh. That city charges companies a \$15,000 license fee and \$1 per scooter per day, but has no cap on the number of scooters in the city. Some other cities have banned the small vehicles entirely.

Mendell said she's responded to all of the emails she's received about the scooters.

"For Bird to say that the city has imposed a tax requiring them to charge \$2 extra per ride is disingenuous," she said Thursday. "I have very little tolerance for people who are trying to shade the truth and pull something over on people. I think it is absolutely reprehensible that they are trying to use their customers in this way."

The letter from Bird states more than 600 people have sent emails to city leaders.

"Residents throughout Raleigh support Bird and do not want to see our service taxed to death," Esparza said. "We hope you and the City Council will not ignore their pleas and work with us to establish a framework that is suitable for your community."

Bird and Lime both arrived last year without communication or coordination with the city.

Raleigh to Charlotte in 22 minutes? NCDOT transportation summit looks to the future.

The News and Observer By Richard Stradling January 9, 2018

RALEIGH – Among the speakers at the N.C. Transportation Summit on Wednesday was the representative of a company that has developed technology that he said could whisk a pod full of people or cargo through a tube from Raleigh to Charlotte in about 22 minutes.

The two-day summit at the Raleigh Convention Center was organized by the N.C. Department of Transportation to look at how people might get from place to place in the future and what governments at all levels should do to get ready. There were sessions on population growth, changing demographics and the need to find new kinds of revenue to replace the gas tax in the face of more fuel-efficient and electric vehicles.

But much of the focus on the first day was on new and emerging technologies, such as drones, self-driving cars and the use of digital and data analytics. Secretary of Transportation Jim Trogdon led a panel discussion on "disruptive technologies" that included representatives of GM and 3M and two local companies: TransLoc, which develops ways to make it easier to use mass transit, and drone company PrecisionHawk.

Trogdon opened with photos of Lime bikes and electric scooters and asked people to remember the day they simply showed up on the streets of Raleigh, Charlotte and other cities.

"These are examples of new and disruptive technologies and how these disruptions will change the very nature of our entire industry," he said. "How do we prepare for this change even though we cannot predict what is coming? How do we plan the transportation systems of the future when we don't really have a good idea of what the future holds?"

No form of transportation seemed more futuristic than the Virgin Hyperloop One, the tube that its inventors say can move people at speeds of up to 670 mph. NCDOT invited Ryan Kelly, head of marketing and communications for Virgin Hyperloop One, to come from Los Angeles to explain how it works.

In simple terms, an electric current moves magnetically-levitated pods through a long tube from which nearly all of the air has been removed, greatly reducing drag. Kelly described it as the first new form of mass transportation since the Wright brothers developed powered flight more than a century ago.

Hyperloop One built a 550-yard-long test tube in the Nevada desert, where pods moved at up to 240 mph in December 2017, according to the company; engineers said they could go much faster with a longer tube, where they wouldn't need to brake as soon. Kelly likened those tests to what the Wright brothers did on the Outer Banks.

"There's a huge difference between a Kitty Hawk moment and actually commercializing a system where passengers and cargo will ride," he said.

Kelly said industry, government and university groups are studying the possible use of Hyperloop One in Texas, Colorado and Ohio. In Missouri, officials are looking at the feasibility of building a tube down the median of Interstate 70 between St. Louis and Kansas City.

But the first hyperloop will probably be built in India, Kelly said, connecting Mumbai on the coast with the city of Pune, about 2.5 hours inland by car. Construction should begin this year, he said, with a system up and operating by 2028.

Kelly said the pods could run every few seconds and would operate without a conductor or operator on board. Construction costs would vary from place to place, he said, but the estimate in Missouri is about \$33 million a mile. At that cost, a hyperloop between Raleigh and Charlotte would cost more than \$5.5 billion to build, not including the cost of land.

Even so, the company estimates the system could operate in Missouri by charging about \$30 for a one-way ticket to cross the state in less than half an hour, a trip that takes more than six times that by car.

If the idea of going 670 mph through a tube sounds scary, Kelly says it shouldn't. He said starting a hyperloop trip will feel a bit like taking off in an airplane.

"We all fly in planes, and we've kind of gotten over that," he said. "Actually being in this closed environment, unlike a plane, you won't have turbulence, because we are a closed system. So when you take off using our propulsion system, you will glide and actually be levitating."

Deputy Secretary of Transportation David Howard, who visited the hyperloop test tube with students from N.C. A&T University last summer, said he'd like to see NCDOT explore the feasibility of using the technology in North Carolina. Nina Szlosberg-Landis, the vice chairwoman of the state Board of Transportation, said while Hyperloop One may seem "really out there," it's hard to predict the future.

"When you see how fast all these technologies are advancing, you really have to keep an open mind," Szlosberg-Landis said after hearing Kelly speak. "Obviously, this is very well-financed, people are investing in it. They've got projects that they are getting ready to put on the ground. I think we've really got to give it serious consideration, just like all the other stuff that's happening."