



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF DURHAM

October 2, 2019

Ms. Ellen Reckhow
Chair, GoTriangle Board of Trustees

Ms. Shelley Blake
Interim CEO, GoTriangle

Dear Ellen and Shelley,

The City of Durham strongly supports a robust multi-modal transportation system that both serves local transportation needs and connects our residents to educational, employment, and recreational opportunities outside of Durham. An important element of this transportation system is the planned commuter rail project between Durham and Wake counties that connects the three largest cities in the Triangle and Research Triangle Park. I strongly support this project, and the City has previously expressed support for this project through its participation in the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) Board's approval of transportation plans that have included this project. The City has also adopted land use policies that identify commuter rail station areas as compact neighborhoods and suitable for more density and transit-oriented development.

As I have expressed in previous GoTriangle board meetings, the City wants to make sure that early stages of the process moving forward set us up for success. In light of the obstacles and challenges experienced during the design of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project, the City has significant concerns with proceeding with planning and design of the commuter rail project without more certainty on several fronts. This includes a clear understanding of what the North Carolina Railroad plans to charge us for the use of their right-of-way, in addition to agreement on critical indemnification and liability issues that proved so difficult during the DOLRT negotiations. I know that you all are already engaged in important discussion with NC RR on these points.

In particular, with this letter, I want to elevate two critical City concerns. The first is the concern about the railroad crossings through the City. The second is about the creation of an inclusive and meaningful public participation process.

The railroad is integral to the City's history and present geography, and as a result, a robust multi-modal transportation system must also include multiple safe, convenient, and aesthetically pleasing crossings of the railroad through the City. Candidly, the City has great apprehension about proceeding with the commuter rail project without full awareness of the requirements of the North Carolina Railroad Company and Norfolk Southern particularly, but not exclusively, in the downtown area. We ardently seek to avoid a situation where we invest significant time, effort, and resources in a project and later learn about costly and impactful design requirements. We strongly support efforts to coordinate with the North Carolina Railroad early in the project development process and have a binding and clear agreement about railroad infrastructure and grade crossing treatments. It is extremely important that municipal partners be included in this coordination process.

The Major Investment Study for the commuter rail project was completed earlier this year. This study identified potential stations at West Durham, Downtown Durham, East Durham, Bethesda, North RTP, and Metro Center RTP. We recognize that public transit has a great opportunity to provide low cost, reliable, and convenient transportation for all residents and this study included a station equity analysis based on affordable housing access, minority access, low income households, and transit dependent access. Please note, however, that the study did not include a public participation process and many residents of these station areas are not aware of the project and how it may affect their communities. We believe strongly in the importance of equitable engagement and seek opportunities for residents to understand and provide key input on the direction of the project before options are limited. The City is eager to partner with GoTriangle and other regional partners in developing and carrying out an equitable public engagement process for the commuter rail project.

We appreciate GoTriangle's leadership on advancing public transportation projects in the Triangle. Public transit is essential to maintaining an affordable, equitable, and sustainable city. We believe that the commuter rail project has great potential to improve regional connectivity and provide an alternative to our congested roadways. However, we must address resolutions for issues related to cost, indemnification and liability, railroad infrastructure, grade crossing treatments, and the apportioning of costs for this project. And we seek to work with you to create a clear plan to implement an equitable public engagement process before this project proceeds further. Please let me know if you have any questions about the City's positions on this project.

As an enthusiastic supporter of the commuter rail project, I want us to succeed. I know that success rests in significant part on our ability to resolve critical cost and design concerns early in the process, and in having the public support that will come with a robust public engagement process.

Sincerely,



Steve Schewel
Mayor, City of Durham

C: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Scott Saylor, NCRR
Members, GoTriangle Board of Trustees