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METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

101 City Hall Plaza • Durham, NC 27701 • Phone (919) 560-4366 • dchcmpo.org



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To: DCHC MPO Board
From: Aaron Cain, Planning Manager, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO
 Brooke Ganser, Planner, Durham City-County Planning Department
Subject: Update on Durham County Transit Plan

Executive Summary

Since the last time the City Council was updated on the progress of the Durham County Transit Plan in August, development of the Plan has entered the first phase of public outreach. The goal of this phase of public outreach, which builds on input that was gathered during the Listening and Learning process for the Durham Comprehensive Plan in winter 2020, is to hear from the Durham community on goals, objectives, and priorities for the Plan.

Phase 1 outreach consists of several components:

- An online survey on goals, objectives, and priorities for the Plan
- Stakeholder interviews with key Durham institutions
- Use of Engagement Ambassadors to ensure that input from previously marginalized communities is obtained

The online survey remains open. Stakeholder interviews are nearly complete, and work continues with the Engagement Ambassadors. The input received through these processes will inform the development of potential transit scenarios, which are scheduled to be released for public comment in the latter half of January 2021.

Recommendation

To receive an update from staff on the Durham County Transit Plan.

Background

With the discontinuation of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) project, a new Durham County Transit Plan is necessary to determine the priorities and projects that are most important and beneficial to Durham. Kimley-Horn and Associates (KHA) was selected as the lead consultant to spearhead the effort of drafting a new Durham County Transit Plan.

Initial public engagement for the Transit Plan was conducted in conjunction with the Durham Comprehensive Plan from November 2019 to February 2020. Over 1,200 comments were received regarding the transit needs and priorities of residents of Durham. These comments shaped the current phase of public involvement on goals, objectives, and priorities, which will in turn form the basis for the transit scenarios that will be presented to the public in winter 2021.

In addition, a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) for GoDurham is being conducted. The COA will provide recommendations on GoDurham operational procedures, maintenance protocols, and administrative policies. The kickoff for the COA took place in late June and data gathering and analysis is underway. The next step is to conduct peer and document review.

Issues and Analysis

The team of consultants and staff developing the Durham County Transit Plan are following the Equitable Engagement Blueprint as developed by the City of Durham. There are three aspects to the current public engagement effort. The first is an online survey that has circulated through a myriad of organizations throughout Durham County. While the survey has provided good information for the Transit Plan team, the demographic makeup of the respondents does not match that of Durham as a whole. Therefore, additional efforts are being made to reach all Durham residents.

Staff has set up interviews with a variety of organizations and civic institutions in Durham to gain the perspective of their leaders and members on how transit can best serve their needs. These include:

- Educational institutions, such as Duke University, North Carolina Central University, and Durham Technical Community College
- Civic committees such as the Human Relations Commission and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission
- Advocacy organizations such as the Transit Equity Campaign, including the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People and Bike Durham, and Downtown Durham, Inc.

In addition, following the blueprint created by the Durham Comprehensive Plan's Listening and Learning sessions a year ago, the Durham Transit Plan is utilizing Engagement Ambassadors to reach communities in Durham that can be hard to reach through traditional means. Engagement Ambassadors are community members who use their networks to get input. Engagement Ambassadors receive training and are provided a stipend for their work. Engagement Ambassadors must be a member of, or have direct access to people, within one or more of the following communities:

- Transit Riders;
- Public Housing Residents;
- African-American;
- Latinx;
- Youth;
- Seniors;
- Persons with Disabilities;
- Justice Involved Persons; or
- Rural Areas of Durham

COVID-19 has made standard engagement practices difficult, so flexibility on the methods that Engagement Ambassadors can use to obtain input from their fellow community members is allowed. The Durham Transit Team is committed to reaching out to all communities within Durham as much as possible, and the public engagement plan reflects the commitment to continue those efforts.

Financial Impact

GoTriangle serves as the financial administrator for the Durham County Transit Plan, and in this capacity prepares estimates of expected revenues and expenditures associated with currently implemented and planned uses of Transit Plan funds. GoTriangle staff recently updated the Transit Plan financial model to reflect changes to revenues due to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the implementation of operating and capital awards made for FY 2021. Revenues come from three sources: the half-cent sales tax (90% of total revenues in FY 2020), vehicle registration fees (8%) and rental car taxes (2%). Despite the impacts of the pandemic in FY 2020, total revenues of \$33.7 million exceeded the prior year by nearly 2%. Looking ahead, the updated model assumes a year-over-year reduction in total revenues of 5% in FY 2021, recovery to FY 2020 levels in FY 2022, and average annual growth of approximately 4% from FY 2023 through FY 2040. The total projected revenue from these sources through FY 2040 is \$1.05 billion.

Transit Plan awards since 2014 have been used to advance major projects and to implement new bus service and infrastructure, funding vehicles required for new service as well as operational costs, while improving bus stop infrastructure. The Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (DOLRT) project, discontinued in 2019, has received the highest share of funding of any project to date, approximately \$160 million in total.

With the discontinuation of DOLRT, the current update to the Transit Plan will identify the best uses of funds according to the goals and objectives identified through community engagement. The plan must be fiscally constrained, programming funds available from current revenue sources. The baseline assumption of the financial model is that expansion services implemented since 2014 will continue to be supported with operating funds and capital funds for fleet renewal as vehicles reach the end of their useful life, and that infrastructure such as bus stops will continue to be installed and maintained in a state of good repair using Transit Plan funds. The expected cost of these baseline assumptions requires 34% of expected revenues through FY 2040. The Transit Plan update process will consider scenarios for investment of the balance of funds, approximately \$693 million through FY 2040, averaging \$35 million in annual funding over the next two decades.

The Durham Transit Team has begun work on developing a set of three to four initial scenarios, which will be presented to the public for review in winter 2021. These scenarios will provide a variety of transit options, from commuter rail transit (CRT) to Wake and Johnston counties, to bus rapid transit (BRT) options throughout Durham and the Triangle, to improvements to local GoDurham and GoTriangle bus service. Each of these scenarios must be fiscally constrained within the projected revenues of the financial model. From these initial scenarios, a final scenario will be selected as the basis of the Durham County Transit Plan. The final scenario may be a combination of projects from each of the scenarios, and must also be fiscally constrained.

GoTriangle's Transit Plan financial model contains placeholder cost estimates for the transit improvements and projects to be considered for scenario development. As the placeholder cost estimates stand now, the Transit Plan revenues as forecasted in the Transit Plan financial model will not be able to support all of the proposed transit improvements and projects within the 20-year time horizon within in a fiscally constrained plan. Therefore, tradeoffs will need to occur between the options of commuter rail, bus rapid transit, and/or expanded bus service with associated infrastructure improvements.

One of the key assumptions that could be refined as part of the scenario development is Durham's cost share for regional capital projects, such as the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail project. For example, the Wake County Transit Plan assumes that Durham will fund one-third of the 50 percent non-federal share of the project's capital cost. By contrast, the 2017 Durham Transit Plan and DCHC Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) anticipate a one-fifth share. Cost share assumptions for any multi-county CRT or BRT project will be critical in determining the availability of funds for other investments.