

MEMORANDUM

TO: DCHC MPO Board
FROM: GoTriangle
DATE: November 30, 2020
SUBJECT: Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Study Update

Executive Summary

In early 2020, following the preliminary results from the first phase of the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail study, the study's project management partners including Durham County, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO), and GoTriangle developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to express the roles, responsibilities, and cost share of the project management partners for the next phase of study. This memorandum provides an update on the study activities that have occurred since the most recent update to the DCHC MPO Board in August 2020.

Background

The DCHC MPO Board received an update on this project at its August 2020 meeting. For the project to proceed, additional work is required to further define the project including; engage community members, municipalities, and institutional partners; better understand key project risks; and build consensus among, and seek formal endorsements from, funding partners, municipalities, railroads, and institutional partners.

Phase I of the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Study, found that there are two potential scenarios that may be eligible for federal funding, pending additional analysis including the Durham to Garner, and the Durham to Clayton scenarios. This study also refined ridership estimates based on the STOPS model and the Triangle Regional Model, and provided more definitive, but still planning-level, infrastructure assumptions and cost estimates for these scenarios. The final results report for the Phase I study is online at the following link:

http://goforwardnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/0098D_RPT_GTCR-Phase-I-Results_FINAL.pdf

In early 2020, the project management partners developed a MOU to express the roles, responsibilities, and cost share of the project management partners for the next phase of study for the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project. The MOU has now been approved and executed by all eight parties, including GoTriangle, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro (DCHC) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Capital Area MPO (CAMPO), Durham County, Wake County, Johnston County, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and North Carolina Railroad Company.

The current phase of study, targeted for completion in 12-18 months, includes:



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- Facilitating proactive and comprehensive community engagement to share information and get feedback from the public.
- Refining what railroad infrastructure improvements and construction would be needed.
- Evaluating critical success factors to the project.
- Deciding, based on the findings of this study phase, whether to allocate additional local funding in Durham, Wake or Johnston counties to begin to implement the project and pursue federal funding.

Issues and Analysis

Study activities are underway, with effort on the majority of the tasks described in the MOU having started in May and June. A brief update on key early tasks relevant to Durham is included below.

Coordination with City of Durham – GoTriangle has developed a detailed project schedule and coordination plan for each municipality in the corridor. Staff at GoTriangle and City of Durham met several times over the summer to develop and finalize a coordination approach for this phase of study. The plan includes monthly meetings between GoTriangle and City staff to discuss jurisdiction-specific issues, City of Durham staff participation in monthly meetings with the project management partners and a stakeholder group composed of municipalities and major institutions throughout the Durham-Wake-Johnston project area to obtain input on corridor-wide study elements, and quarterly briefings to Durham City Council. Durham County and DCHC MPO staff are also invited to participate in each of these activities.

GoTriangle and City of Durham staff have also agreed to an approach for GoTriangle reimbursement of City of Durham expenses for participation in the study and review of study materials developed by GoTriangle and GoTriangle's consultant. An inter-local agreement memorializing that approach was approved by the GoTriangle Board of Trustees on November 18, 2020, and is scheduled for consideration by Durham City Council on December 10, 2020.

Community Engagement – Community engagement for this study is currently planned to occur in three rounds. The first round of engagement ran from late September to early November.

GoTriangle received input from more than 2,700 individuals during this engagement period, and is currently reviewing and evaluating comments and developing a summary report documenting input received and actions to be taken by the study team as a result of the input.

GoTriangle used a variety of approaches during this process to engage a diverse group of stakeholders:

- Email campaigns, including geotargeting to residents across BIPOC communities in the study area
- In-person events focused on outreach to current transit riders, including pop-up survey centers at Durham station and the Village
- Maximizing participation initiative – partnering with trusted community partners who are essential providers, working directly with community members during the pandemic including Meals on Wheels of Durham, Advance Community Health, and North Carolina Society for Hispanic Professionals



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- Virtual community outreach, including presentations and Q&A at several meetings of Durham community organizations and partnerships with media outlets including Spectacular Magazine and Univision

Following the close of this comment period, GoTriangle is planning to form focus groups from subsets of participants. These sessions will be used to dig into the themes that have emerged from input obtained during this initial round of engagement and obtain input to shape future public engagement approaches.

The goals of the first round of engagement were as follows:

- To inform the public on what aspects of the project are being studied in this phase, as well as the timeline for the current study, and how those findings will be made available to the public
- To obtain community feedback on the project metrics to be evaluated over the study period, including project benefits, non-monetary costs, and equity measures
- To identify community members that are typically underrepresented in the process to form focus groups that will inform the next phase of outreach

Study of Downtown Durham Engineering Challenges – Engineering and urban design challenges in downtown Durham have been identified as a key risk for the commuter rail project, both for cost and project viability. This task will include a limited scope of environmental screening focused on constraint mapping, and screening for historic resources and noise-sensitive receptors. The preliminary engineering analysis will include survey, track, private utilities, roadway, stormwater, structures, public utilities, traffic, and station siting, and will include development of visualizations and renderings to support stakeholder and community engagement.

GoTriangle held a kickoff meeting in September with Durham City and County staff and representatives of Duke University, North Carolina Central University, Downtown Durham Inc., North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), DCHC MPO, and North Carolina Railroad Company (NCRR). GoTriangle has also held subsequent meetings with City of Durham, Duke University, and Downtown Durham Inc. staff to obtain further detailed input on the study design, and continues to coordinate with NCDOT and NCRR.

Technical work on the study is underway, with necessary upfront work including field survey in the railroad corridor completed in early November. GoTriangle will continue to coordinate with City of Durham staff and other stakeholders as preliminary study outputs are developed into early calendar year 2021, and will work with partners in Durham to develop a public and stakeholder outreach approach specific to this study component.

Resource Person

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Attachments

DCHC MPO Board Presentation dated December 9, 2020



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