

**DURHAM • CHAPEL HILL • CARRBORO**  
**METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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To: DCHC MPO Board  
 From: Ellen Beckmann, Durham County Transportation Manager  
 Aaron Cain, Planning Manager, DCHC MPO  
 Re: Update on Durham County Transit Plan  
 Date: October 13, 2021

**Summary.** Durham County and MPO staff, who are jointly managing the development of a new Durham County Transit Plan, will present an update to the Board.

**Background.** The Durham County Transit Plan is required by state legislation that enabled the local option half-cent sales tax for public transit improvements. The plan must be adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, the GoTriangle Board of Trustees, and the DCHC MPO Board. The sales tax is the primary funding source, but the plan also incorporates funding from vehicle registration fees and the rental car tax that are managed together in a Triangle Tax District. Durham County funding sources generate approximately \$35 million annually. The plan was first adopted in 2011, with an update in 2017, and was centered around the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project. In 2019, GoTriangle discontinued the light rail project, and there is now a need for a new Durham County Transit Plan.

The plan update is being managed by Ellen Beckmann, Durham County Transportation Manager, and Aaron Cain, Planning Manager at the DCHC MPO. There is a multi-agency Durham Transit Team guiding the plan development. The public engagement process is following the City of Durham's Equitable Engagement Blueprint. Outreach for the plan was initiated in coordination with the Durham Comprehensive Plan from October 2019 to February 2020 through the Listening and Learning sessions. In 2020, the MPO contracted with Kimley-Horn and Associates to provide consultant support for the transit plan. Kimley-Horn is using several subconsultants on the plan, including community partners for public engagement services.

Staff will provide a brief review of the first round of public engagement that was completed in fall 2020 and how it was used to develop three representative transit scenarios. The purpose of the three scenarios is to facilitate public discussion and input on potential projects that are to be included in a preferred scenario for the Durham Transit Plan. The second phase of public engagement, which was on the scenarios themselves, occurred in July through early September 2021. These scenarios were, in short:

- Scenario A – A focus on local and regional bus service, with increased frequency, extended hours, and more new routes for the GoDurham and GoTriangle systems. With the focus on increasing the hours of bus service over the life of the plan, while there will be more buses running more often and during more times of the day, the lack of dedicated lanes means the buses may run less efficiently.
- Scenario B - A bus-oriented transit system with greater emphasis on dedicated lanes on major corridors through central Durham, US 15-501 to Orange County, and connections to Wake County. Bus Transit Corridors on GoDurham Route 10 and Route 4, similar to projects that the City is currently developing on Holloway and Fayetteville streets in the Better Bus Project, are also funded. Because there is increased spending on capital improvements that allow the buses to operate more efficiently in this scenario, less funding is available for service improvements.

- Scenario C – This scenario includes commuter rail service that will provide a reliable and fast commute between Durham and Wake County, with a potential extension to Johnston County. Some local and regional bus infrastructure and operations improvements are included, but there are fewer and with later implementation than in scenarios A and B due to funding availability.

The second round of public engagement included an online survey, Engagement Ambassador survey outreach, and stakeholder meetings. The survey asked residents which elements of each scenario best addressed their transit needs, which important projects were missing in each scenario, and asked residents to prioritize the outcome metrics that were most important to them for the final plan.

### **Issues and Analysis.**

The Durham Transit Team is currently working towards creating a preferred scenario, with the goal of having that complete in Winter 2022. The preferred scenario is expected to include elements that were deemed of highest importance from the public engagement process with consideration of equity, technical, funding, and scheduling issues. This preferred scenario will be compatible with the DCHC MPO 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, but the MTP can include additional projects due to the 2050 horizon year and additional funding outside of the Transit Plan.

The preferred scenario will include projects through 2040. The Durham Transit Team wants to allow new priority projects to be implemented in FY23, which means that they will need to be identified in early 2022 and adopted in the plan and annual work program by June 2022. These new projects will focus on the needs of current bus riders. Staff recommend coordinating a decision on funding for the commuter rail project with the results of the GoTriangle Commuter Rail study which is currently scheduled for completion in Spring 2022. However, there are currently schedule delays with the Commuter Rail study due to the rail capacity modeling, and staff may need to modify the schedule for approval of the plan.

Equitable engagement on the Durham Transit Plan is a high priority for the Durham Transit Team. The first round of engagement demonstrated the success of using multiple ways to engage the public, including the use of Engagement Ambassadors. The Durham Transit Team directly used the results of the first round of engagement to craft the scenarios, making sure to address the needs identified by current transit riders, low-income residents, and persons of color. The Durham Transit Team used similar engagement efforts for the scenarios. The Engagement Ambassador program was again very successful in expanding participation from persons of color and regular bus riders in the survey. Specific feedback from these focus groups is highlighted in the presentation. Equitable engagement also meant that the survey and presentations did not promote any solution or project but presented all options in a neutral and factual way. County, MPO, and consultant staff conducted the engagement efforts.

The Durham Transit Team developed an analysis of the scenarios based on a series of metrics including service miles, frequency, reliability, accessibility, access to jobs, and schedule. Each of the scenarios demonstrated improvement with some performing better than others on the various metrics. This analysis

demonstrated that all of the scenarios had their pros and cons. There have been requests for improved communication and refinement of the metrics in the final preferred scenario, and the Durham Transit Team will work to address these concerns.

The plan also must be coordinated with transit plan updates occurring in Orange County and recently adopted in Wake County. Any regional project, such as the potential for Bus Rapid Transit to connect to Chapel Hill or Wake County or the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail project, which will provide service to Cary, Raleigh, and potentially Johnston County, must be coordinated in both funding and schedule with the neighboring counties. Commuter Rail and Bus Rapid Transit projects in the scenarios assume fifty percent federal funding, no state funding, and fifty percent local funding shared between the counties. The potential Bus Rapid Transit Project to Chapel Hill was assumed to be split by mileage in each county, and the Commuter Rail project was assumed at a 20 percent Durham share which is consistent with Durham's current adopted transit plan. Wake County's adopted transit plan assumes a 67 percent Wake County share for the project. In Durham, negotiating a cost-share for a regional project is the responsibility of the County. An expected outcome of the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail study led by GoTriangle is a cost-sharing agreement.

Concurrent with adoption of the Durham County Transit Plan, the Board of County Commissioners, GoTriangle Board of Trustees, and DCHC MPO Board will also need to adopt an updated Interlocal Implementation Agreement (ILA). The ILA was approved in 2013 and outlines the roles and responsibilities of each agency for the administration of the funding, the process for adoption of the annual work plan by the GoTriangle Board, the definition of a material change that requires approval by all three boards, the membership, voting procedures, and administration of the Staff Working Group, and other issues. The current agreement references the discontinued light rail project and is oriented towards the funding and delivery of a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts regional transit project by GoTriangle.

The new agreement should be tailored to the delivery of projects funded in the updated final Transit Plan. It is also an opportunity to add stronger plan oversight and accountability processes and re-define the role of County, MPO, GoTriangle, and City staff in the implementation of projects. Durham County staff have initiated a Transit Plan Governance Study in coordination with Orange County to develop new ILAs in each county and update policies and procedures for plan implementation. Interviews with key staff and elected officials occurred in September, and the consultant team is organizing a workshop among the participants in early November. A report on the current content of our ILA and policies is in development. The Governance Study will proceed in parallel with the Durham Transit Plan and is a critical opportunity to address the plan's goal of increasing community trust related to the delivery of transit projects and use of the county taxes and fees.

**Recommendation.** Staff recommends that the MPO Board receive the update report on the Durham County Transit Plan.