

Legislation Text

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Memorandum of Understanding for Next Phase of Study on Commuter Rail Transit (20 minutes)

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Two high-level studies have been conducted on a potential Greater Triangle Commuter Rail (GTCR) project. The first study, the Major Investment Study (MIS), looked at the feasibility of commuter rail from Durham to Garner, as well as four Bus Rapid Transit corridors in Wake County. That study, completed in spring 2019, concluded that commuter rail could operate in the North Carolina Railroad (NCR) corridor from Durham to Garner. Subsequent to the MIS, a second study was undertaken to look closer at potential scenarios with an eye toward potential federal funding eligibility. In addition, this second study expanded the scope of potential commuter rail in the NCR corridor from Mebane to Selma.

The second GTCR study found that there are two potential scenarios that may be eligible for federal funding, pending additional analysis: West Durham to Garner and West Durham to Clayton. 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. For GTCR to proceed, further study is required to further define the project, engage community members, municipalities, and institutional stakeholders, and better understand key project risks. This study would conduct preliminary engineering analysis in areas of concern along the corridor, model rail traffic on the corridor with the inclusion of commuter rail to better define infrastructure needs, and better refine cost and ridership estimates. This study will also address the concerns brought forth by Durham Mayor Steve Schewel in his letter to the GTCR parties (see attached).

For the next phase of study, staff recommends that all partner agencies adopt a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to outline the roles and responsibilities of each party. A draft MOU is attached. The draft MOU outlines the objectives of the next phase of study, which includes, but is not limited to:

- Developing a preliminary project management plan
- Preparing and implementing a community engagement plan
- Preparing and implementing an agency coordination plan
- Initiating consultations with federal agencies
- Performing a detailed screening of the NCR corridor to confirm engineering and constructability risks
- Completing field survey and preliminary engineering design for areas of key engineering and construction risk
- Identifying sites for park-and-rides and maintenance and layover facilities
- Developing updated schedule and cost estimates
- Defining and evaluating project metrics including equity measures

- Performing RTC modelling to determine operating plans and necessary infrastructure improvements
- Engaging with local land use authorities and major institutions
- Facilitating a cost sharing negotiation among funding parties and securing local government commitment of funds

As shown in the MOU, Durham's share of the cost of the next phase of study for the GTCR project is not to exceed \$2,700,000. This includes an additional approximately \$2,235,000 from the Durham Transit Tax Fund.

TC Action: Recommended approval of the GTCR MOU.

Board Action: Adopt the GTCR MOU.