

Report: NC needs to spend more to save drivers time, gas as Triangle grows

WRAL.com By Julia Sims May 11, 2017

RALEIGH, N.C. — A national report released Thursday finds that many of North Carolina's roads and bridges are in bad shape. In order to keep our state moving in the right direction, more funding is needed for infrastructure improvements.

The TRIP report, "Keeping North Carolina Mobile: Progress and Challenges in Providing an Efficient, Safe and Well-Maintained Transportation System," examines road and bridge conditions, travel trends, economic development, highway safety and transportation funding.

North Carolina is in better shape than many states. The report credits Durham, Orange and Wake counties for recent support for a half-cent sales tax to fund a transportation plan that would take some of the stress off the roads. The City of Raleigh is considering a transportation bond for road improvements, and the North Carolina Department of Transportation is working its way through billions of dollars worth of projects.

But maintenance and growth mean there is a constant demand for more.

"I think they could be a lot better," driver Jaime Weathersby said of Triangle-area roads. "You have to dodge potholes and all that."

Carmen Wells agreed. "You have bad road conditions everywhere, holes and potholes," she said.

The TRIP report concluded, "Over the next decade, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) will have funds available for only 17 percent of needed transportation projects."

According to TRIP, the DOT's \$1.3 billion budget for 2017 falls about \$600 million short of what's really needed, and drivers are paying for it.

"In Raleigh, the average driver loses 31 hours each year stuck in traffic congestion, and cumulatively, the area's drivers waste over 9 billion gallons of fuel because of traffic congestion," according to TRIP spokeswoman Carolyn Bonifas Kelly.

TRIP found 44 percent of North Carolina's urban and major roads are in poor to mediocre condition.

"Many of the state's roads are simply deteriorated and congested," Kelly said.

Key findings of the TRIP report: Keeping North Carolina mobile

- Since 2000, the state's population has grown 26 percent; Population is projected to increase another 20 percent by 2035.
- Vehicle miles of travel (VMT) in North Carolina increased 29 percent from 2000 to 2016.
- Traffic crashes in North Carolina claimed the lives of 6,668 people between 2012 and 2016, an average of 1,334 fatalities per year.
- North Carolina's overall traffic fatality rate of 1.23 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is higher than the national average of 1.13.
- The traffic fatality rate on North Carolina's non-Interstate rural roads was more than four times higher than on all other roads and highways in the state in 2015.
- 18 percent of North Carolina's major locally and state-maintained urban roads and highways have pavements in poor condition. (CONTINUED...)

- 10 percent of North Carolina's bridges are structurally deficient, meaning there is significant deterioration to the major components of the bridge.

The driving factor is growth. North Carolina is the fourth-fastest-growing state in the country.

North Carolina Chamber President Lew Ebert says investing in bridges and roads is vital to boosting the state's economy and keeping its competitive edge.

"It's not Austin or Atlanta, but we have congestion too," he said. "So, I think companies are busy thinking about congestion, traffic, things like completing (Interstate) 540."

The report suggests that North Carolina needs to invest more in roads and bridges to make sure the Triangle doesn't become another Atlanta or Houston.

Durham removes some downtown parking meters, extends others

The Herald -Sun By Virginia Bridges May 11, 2017

Durham – Downtown diners who use paid on-street parking will soon have two hours to finish their lunch, and those running errands can choose to only pay for 10 minutes.

The city's Transportation Department is planning to increase the one-hour time limit for paid on-street parking within the city's downtown loop to two-hours, said Thomas Leathers, the city's parking administrator. Drivers will also be able to pay for parking in that area in 10-minute increments versus the current minimum of 30 minutes.

Those changes should go into effect by June 15, Leathers said.

The changes address [concerns by downtown small-business owners and users](#) who were frustrated by the one-hour limit or wanted to pay for less time to run a quick errand.

"That is perfect. That is awesome," said Gray Brooks, co-owner of downtown's Pizzeria Toro and Littler. "I love that they were flexible and open to responding."

In addition the city is removing nine downtown pay stations, including ones on Rigsbee Avenue and Hunt Street near the [Durham Center for Senior Life](#).

In February the [city installed new meters to charge \\$1.50](#) per hour for 1,000 spaces in and near downtown, the American Tobacco Campus, the Durham Performing Arts Center, West Village, the Brightleaf District, Durham Central Park, the Durham County Human Services Complex and the North Corporation and Geer Street District.

The recent changes to the on-street parking follow a 60-day analysis of the on-street metered parking, Leathers said. Leathers met with small-business owners and downtown advocacy nonprofit [Downtown Durham Inc.](#)

The parking meters were recommended as part of the 2013 Comprehensive Parking Study, and downtown has evolved significantly since then, he said.

"The department would like to thank our parking customers for their understanding as the city adapts to a downtown metered parking environment," he said.

The city is planning to remove the nine "underperforming" pay stations, which can cover up to 10 parking spaces, by Friday, Leathers said.

Parking meters on the 100 block of Jackson Street.; 100 block of Yancey Street.; 100 and 200 blocks of Hunt Street., 200 block of Broadway Street; and the 300 and 400 blocks of Rigsbee Avenue will be removed. (CONTINUED...)

The meters will be used in existing lots, to improve access to other paid parking and in other ways. No additional on-street parking will be created at this time, Leathers said. The city is also moving forward with a new parking study, Leathers said.

Durham Center for Senior Life officials and seniors have been complaining for more than two months [that paid on-street parking is limiting their access to the center on Rigsbee Avenue](#).

"We were really excited about it," Judy Kinney, executive director of the center, said about the removal. "Parking issues are an ongoing issue."

The center is about 35 parking places short for users and staff, Kinney said, and the roughly 15 paid on-street parking spaces made a big difference.

People who use the senior center wouldn't park at the spots, she said, pointing out that some have restricted incomes.

There has been a 10 percent reduction in the use of the center, Kinney said.

"We had class instructors who wouldn't teach a class here," she said. "And more than that, we saw people parking in very dangerous ways."

Residents, business owners weigh in on downtown parking issues

The Herald -Sun By Virginia Bridges May 14, 2017

DURHAM – One business owner was worried about making deliveries and returning to a parking space. Another wanted to know where their employees could park during the day.

Another wanted public transportation to be easy for employees to get to late at night. New and future residents wondered whether they would be able to find parking near a new home.

And others wanted to know where their customers could park.

The needs, outlined at a recent neighborhood meeting, were as diverse as Durham, but the source of the problem was the same: parking challenges in downtown.

"The parking is killing us. That is not an exaggeration," said Seth Gross, owner of downtown eateries [Bull City Burger and Brewery](#) and [Pompieri Pizza](#). "Business is down 20 percent."

Downtown users, residents, business owners and employees were invited to a recent Partners Against Crime District 5 meeting to talk about concerns and potential solutions to the downtown parking crisis. In response, city officials said they are working on it, but don't have any immediate solutions to a complex problem.

The city's waiting list for monthly parking at its decks is up to nearly 240 individuals as construction and related crews are taking up some of the spots and more [people are moving to, starting businesses in and visiting downtown](#).

[\[This is where Durham's largest developments are going\]](#)

[\[Downtown Durham booming, but can it stay diverse, keep homegrown talent?\]](#)

[\[Durham removes some downtown parking meters, extends others\]](#) (CONTINUED...)

Another complication

Complicating the crunch, at the end of February the city installed meters for paid on-street parking in and near downtown an effort to encourage more turnover. City officials recently announced a plan to take out nine of the “underperforming” pay stations and extend parking limits [within the downtown loop from a one-hour maximum to two.](#)

Meanwhile, a new city parking deck with about 670 parking spaces near the intersection of Morgan Street, Mangum Street and Rigsbee Avenue isn’t set to come online until early 2019. The city is also moving forward with a process to update the current parking plan. Officials are also exploring options to ease the immediate concerns.

“It’s a complicated type of process,” said Thomas Leathers, the city’s parking administrator, because everyone has different needs and expectations.

People are looking at how to get downtown from northern Durham County and Wake County, while some employers balk at the idea of their employees using a park-and-ride lot that they have to drive past downtown to get to, he said.

Leathers and Stephanie Loyka, employer outreach consultant with [GoTriangle](#), said they and others have been exploring solutions to the problems for months.

They are assessing park-and-ride options, possibly at the [Heritage Square](#) (401 E. Lakewood Ave.) and Lakewood (2000 Chapel Hill Road) shopping centers, and working with larger companies and developers to free up spots downtown and in public and private decks.

In the long term, officials need to continue to encourage downtown users to take public transportation, Loyka said.

“It requires a paradigm shift. People are not used to that, and that also takes time,” she said.

Temporary relief?

Some temporary relief may come after the 250-space parking deck in the former Jack Tar Motel, now the soon to open Unscripted Hotel, opens in the next month or so. Some of the spaces will be open to the public, said Zach Prager, a development analyst with Austin Lawrence Partners.

Emily Bloom, an employee at [digital agency Viget](#), didn’t understand what was so complicated about setting up a nearby van service or park and ride. Bloom suggested that she and others approach owners of the Lakewood shopping center and see if they can lease spaces.

Erik Landfried, GoTriangle’s transit service planning supervisor, discouraged such action, pointing out the liability and other challenges that come with such a service.

After the meeting, Vanessa and Yoni Mazuz, owners of downtown ice cream shop The Parlour, said beyond the changes to the on-street parking, they didn’t really have any solutions to share with their 25 employees after the meeting. But they aren’t necessarily disappointed.

“We kind of figured this was the beginning of a much longer process,” Vanessa Mazuz said.

They moved to Durham from Philadelphia, where public transportation was more robust and popular.

“I wish I could just make riding the bus cool, so more people would do it, so there would be more stops and it would go later,” she said. “And people would just know that it is an option because there are way more bus routes than people realize.”

Cycling to work

Gross, owner of Bull City Brewery and Pompieri Pizza, encourages his employees to bike to work by paying for fees associated with building and maintaining their bikes at Durham Bike Co-op. (CONTINUED...)

"We want to be part of the solution," he said.

Still, that along with the proposed park-and-ride option, doesn't necessarily solve the parking issue for customers.

Gross linked declines in revenue, weeks where he sees 15 to 20 percent decreases compared to the year before, to parking after talking with customers and other business owners.

"I think (city officials) need to hear that," he said. "Getting a place for employees is great but that doesn't bring customers unless it frees up parking."

About downtown's growth

In the last year, 15 new bars and restaurants opened downtown as well as 10 stores. The city expects to add over 100,000 square feet of retail space in the next three years.

Currently there are 1,700 residential units in downtown, and another 1,300 units are expected in the coming years — including the Van Alen, which will add more than 400.

About 1.2 million square feet is expected to be added in the coming years, which represents a 40 percent increase. That growth is much needed as real estate services firm JLL estimates the Bull City has a small 1.1 percent vacancy rate for class A office space and a 2.3 percent vacancy rate for all office.

Source: Downtown Durham Inc.'s annual report

RDU sees 38th straight month of passenger growth

Triangle Business Journal By Kathryn Trogon May 22, 2017

MORRISVILLE – Nearly 1 million people boarded or departed a plane at Raleigh-Durham International Airport in April – the airport's 38th consecutive month of passenger growth, according to airport officials.

The number of passengers leaving RDU rose by 8.9 percent over April 2016, and the number of passengers arriving increased 5.3 percent, according to RDU.

This brings RDU's passenger totals for 2017 to 3.4 million – a 7 percent increase over the first four months of last year. In [2016](#), the airport broke its record for the most passengers in a year when more than 11 million people traveled to and from RDU.

Because of the growth, passengers are now encouraged to arrive at least two hours before their flight.

Delta Air Lines, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines and United Airlines carried the most passengers to and from RDU in April. But the airport's newest low-cost carrier, Allegiant Air, saw the most growth – 35 percent over April 2016. Allegiant, which has several trips from RDU to Florida, recently added a new trip to New Orleans.

RDU officials looked at how to handle [growth at the airport](#) during an 18-month master planning process, called Vision 2040. The airport authority approved a 25-year master plan in [October](#).

"We did the master planning process to make sure we have facilities and infrastructure in place to handle growth in the coming years," said RDU spokesman Andrew Sawyer. (CONTINUED...)

Major capital projects in the next 25 years include reconstructing the airport's longest runway, building a consolidated rental car facility and [renovating the parking deck](#).

As part of a separate project this year, the airport will begin replacing its parking access and revenue control system, which is expected to make it possible for RDU to start its long-awaited [online parking reservations](#). The system will let travelers book and pay for parking online at [parkrdu.com](#), ensuring they have a place to park even at the busiest times of the year.

The online reservation system is expected to be fully in place by Jan. 1, but certain parts of the garage may see the service sooner as it's phased in. Online booking was expected to start in May 2016, but was delayed by software issues.

Census: Suburban Triangle towns see population boom

The Herald-Sun By Kathryn Trogdon May 25, 2017

RALEIGH — Suburban towns in Wake County have been among the fastest growing North Carolina municipalities over the last six years, according to the latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Triangle has been spreading out for years as its universities and a strong local economy draw people to the region. Six of the state's 10 fastest growing towns since 2010 are former railroad towns and crossroad communities in Wake: Rolesville, Fuquay-Varina, Holly Springs, Wake Forest, Morrisville and Knightdale.

Rolesville, the county's smallest town, led the pack, growing 82 percent since 2010 to an estimated 6,962 as of last July 1, according to the Census Bureau estimates released Thursday. The populations of the remaining five towns have all grown by at least 28 percent during that time.

The expansion of the Triangle has begun to show up in small towns on the fringe of the region. Stem, in southern Granville County north of Durham, was officially the state's fastest growing town in the year ending last June 30, growing 20 percent to 565 residents. Swepsonville, near Graham in Alamance County, was the fourth fastest growing, at 11 percent, to 1,335 people.

[\[NC population growth continues to outpace the nation\]](#)

Here are other findings from the census report:

- Charlotte grew by 15,656 residents in the year ending last June, more than all but 10 other cities in the country during that time. The city has grown by 14 percent since 2010, to 842,051, making it by far North Carolina's largest city.
- Raleigh's population grew by 13 percent between 2010 and 2016, to 458,880. During that time, Cary grew 18.5 percent, to 162,320, while Durham's population grew 14.7 percent to 263,016. Durham remained the state's fourth largest city, and Cary the seventh.
- Chapel Hill and Hillsborough saw the least amount of population growth among Triangle towns from 2010 to 2016, at 3.1 percent and 6.7 percent respectively.
- Concord, just north of Charlotte, passed Asheville to become [North Carolina's 11th largest city](#). Last July 1, Concord had 89,891 residents, compared to 89,121 in Asheville.

The growth in North Carolina's cities reflected a national trend. (CONTINUED...)

"Overall, cities in the South continue to grow at a faster rate than any other U.S. region," Amel Toukabri, a demographer in the Census Bureau's population division, said in a statement. "Since the 2010 Census, the population in large Southern cities grew by an average of 9.4 percent. In comparison, cities in the West grew 7.3 percent, while cities in the Northeast and Midwest had much lower growth rates at 1.8 percent and 3 percent respectively."

NCDOT's new highway map is here

The News and Observer By Richard Stradling May 31, 2017

RALEIGH – In this era when seemingly everyone holds an interactive GPS-powered digital map in their hands, the state Department of Transportation still finds a ready audience for its paper road map of the state.

The latest version, for 2017-2018, just hit the street. It's free and available at DOT offices, state welcome centers and rest areas, and numerous local visitors centers and chambers of commerce. Maps also can be ordered online at www.VisitNC.com/StateMap or by calling 1-800-VisitNC.

DOT has printed 1.75 million copies of the map and expects to distribute them all over the next two years. That's 250,000 fewer maps than the previous edition and a half million less than in 2013-2014. The last time DOT printed so few maps was in 2008, when they were still being published annually; the maps have been published every other year since the 2009-2010 edition.

In a nod to the availability of digital maps, NCDOT notes that its paper products "can be accessed no matter the strength of a WiFi or cellular signal." But with millions in circulation, it's clear there are people who still prefer to unfold a paper map on a table or in the car, rather than continually adjusting an electronic screen, says NCDOT spokesman Steve Abbott.

And there are advantages to being able to see the whole state at once, Abbott said.

"For example, if you are going from Raleigh to Charlotte and looking for an alternate way besides I-40, on a paper map you can see all the alternate routes available and which towns you would be going through, and maybe see a stop or two you want to make, all right in front of you," he said. "Something almost impossible electronically."

Vicky Temple Huband says there's nothing like a paper map to help people see where they are in relation to other places. Huband works at the information desk at the N.C. Museum of History in downtown Raleigh, which also serves as the state's Capital Area Visitor Center. She's used to helping visitors from out of town, out of state and, increasingly, out of the country who may have used their phones to get to the museum but still don't know where they are.

"They're only GPS knowledgeable," Huband said.

So she stocks plenty of walking maps of downtown Raleigh, with a road map of Wake County on the back, and keeps a stack of DOT highway maps handy. Huband says she gives out about 250 of the DOT maps a year.

"When people ask, 'Where's Charlotte?' I pull out the map and show them where they are," she said.