

## Durham leaders want to change your mind about driving downtown

WRAL.com By Brian Shrader, WRAL Reporter March 2, 2018

**DURHAM, N.C.** — The Triangle is growing fast, especially around downtown areas in Raleigh and Durham, which is putting parking at a premium.

To try to alleviate the congestion, the City of Durham is now using a recently received \$100,000 grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to try to change the way people think about getting downtown.

Durham was one of 35 cities competing for money to try bold ideas to solve problems. Over the next several months, city officials will use the money to try four pilot programs to reduce the number of cars downtown.

"For most people, they just know their car's in the driveway, they've paid for it, their car keys are on the kitchen table, they grab them and go," said transportation planner Mo Devlin. "We want to think that through." 2

Devlin said the city will tout the benefits of using other forms of transportation, like carpooling, buses and bike sharing. The goal is to reduce demand for parking instead of spending money on new parking decks.

With automated vehicles on the horizon, Devlin said it's hard to envision what parking will look like in 20 or 30 years. 2

"If we make investments counting on the revenue stream from parking, we might be setting up Durham for our kids and grandkids, where they have these big buildings that aren't working," Devlin said. 1

The city is working with Duke University on the project, and will apply in August for a larger grant. In October, Bloomberg will award some cities \$1 million, and one city will get \$5 million to pursue these new ideas.

The Town of Cary also won a \$100,000 Bloomberg grant in the competition. The town is going to [measure opioid content in sewage](#) and help people in areas with high concentrations of opioid abuse.

## Durham's Bull City Connector Could Soon See the End of the Road

Indyweek.com By Sarah Willets February 21, 2018

On Thursday, the Durham City Council will hear about a proposed revamp of Durham's bus system that might not include a free bus service like the Bull City Connector.

GoDurham, the agency that operates Durham buses, is reviewing its entire system as part of a five-year plan. It will present a recommendation drafted after two rounds of public input. While the recommendation fits within the city's budget for the system, its major service changes require council approval.

GoDurham says the proposal offers more frequent, direct, and simplified service, adding 9.3 miles of fifteen-minute all-day service. But it doesn't include a fare-free route, and getting across downtown would require changing buses at Durham Station.

For any GoDurham route to be fare-free, the city council will have to find more money to support it. In the past, the city has covered about two-thirds of the \$1.1 million annual bill for the BCC, with Duke University contributing the other third. However, this fiscal year, the university cut its funding in half, to \$175,000, after finding it could better serve students and faculty by operating its own shuttles between campus and downtown. And beginning this summer, the university will no longer fund the BCC at all. (CONTINUED...)

Preserving and improving the BCC has been a sticking point since 2015, when several stops were eliminated (notably Durham Station, which had been the busiest stop on the line but also made it hard to keep a frequent, on-time schedule) and others were added near Duke. The Durham Human Relations Commission and SpiritHouse have pushed for the BCC—or something like it—to not only be maintained as a free service but also expand to serve more of east Durham and N.C. Central.

In 2015, 52 percent of BCC riders earned less than \$15,000 per year, and 57 percent were African American. Most used the service to get to work or school, as well as appointments at the VA and Duke Hospital.

But BCC ridership is relatively low (numbers declined after the 2015 changes), and public input indicates that what most people like about the service is that it's free—not the route itself, says transit planner Mary Kate Morookian. In 2016, the BCC's average weekday ridership was 1,299, compared with 3,291 on the popular route 3.

"If a lot of people aren't riding it even though it's fare-free, that should be a flag to a planner that something is wrong with the routing and something is wrong with the service," Morookian says.

Not stopping at Durham Station makes it harder for BCC riders to transfer to other routes, Morookian adds. The proposal tries to address this by keeping BCC stops while splitting the route at Durham Station.

Under the proposal, three buses would serve the current BCC stops, stopping every fifteen minutes as opposed to every seventeen minutes now. Route 2 would use BCC stops from Durham Station to Alston Avenue before continuing on to Brier Creek. Route 12 would be tweaked to use the same BCC stops downtown, rather than traveling on N.C. 147 as it does now. Route 11 would use BCC stops from Duke and the VA hospital to Durham Station.

In developing their recommendation, GoDurham staffers were instructed to stay within the constraints of current funding. But at the request of the city, the agency is looking at what it would take to make the entire bus system free or offer some other fare-free service.

"We had to consider the resources for each and every route, and that includes the Bull City Connector," Morookian says. "We do not take it lightly that the Bull City Connector is fare-free. We know that's going to be an issue to some folks. If that's going to go away, we want to make sure the changes are of high value."

The draft proposal increases frequency overall, particularly for stops at Southpoint, a popular park-and-ride spot, and Brier Creek, where riders can connect to Raleigh routes. There would also be more frequent stops at N.C. Central during weekdays and more service from east Durham to RTP and Southpoint.

Some routes in east Durham would also be amended. Route 2B would be eliminated, and route 3C would be restructured to stop at The Village shopping center and travel along Taylor and Driver streets to the intersection of Angier and Alston avenues. There, riders can connect to expanded Route 12 options connecting downtown, Hillside High School, Southpoint, and RTP.

The proposal also adds "on-demand zones," where—if additional resources are allocated—taxi, Uber, or Lyft fares would be subsidized. Morookian says agreements would have to be reached with providers to ensure there would be enough drivers in the on-demand zones.

The proposal places one such zone over part of Northeast Central Durham, from Wellons Village to Southern High School, south to Sherron Road. Another on-demand zone would be served by GoDurham shuttles. The area, near RTP, was previously served by shuttles, so the carpooling service could use existing stops. A ten-year plan proposes additional on-demand zones.

Morookian says the drafting process will continue after Thursday; with an almost entirely new city council, it's possible the agency will come before the body again to answer questions. GoDurham will take more public input and conduct a required "disparate impacts analysis" to evaluate the effects of the changes on minority and low-income populations once route changes are firmed up. (CONTINUED...)

"A lot of the passengers are concerned when these changes will take place," Morookian says. "I want people to understand we are doing outreach now to see if this is even something people would be OK with. But before we do anything, we would go out for another round of outreach, letting people know what's coming."

You can view the proposed changes by route and take a survey at [GoDurhamTransit.org](http://GoDurhamTransit.org).

## **Durham and Cary got the same grant. One's going into the sewers.**

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan February 21, 2018

DURHAM – Durham and Cary are among 35 cities getting Bloomberg grants for their innovative ideas to fix urban problems.

In Durham, that's downtown parking.

In Cary, that's the opioid crisis.

The two cities will receive up to \$100,000 to test their ideas as "[Champion Cities](#)" in the Bloomberg Philanthropies' [Mayors Challenge](#). They were among 320 cities to pitch their urban innovations.

### **Durham's problem**

Too many people drive alone in their cars to downtown Durham, and the city wants to find alternatives to driving and parking there. The city's parking and street maintenance departments can't keep up, negatively affecting about 30,000 downtown employees and residents, according to the city.

Durham applied for the Mayor's Challenge grant when Mayor Bill Bell was in office. City Manager Tom Bonfield said whenever there is a grant opportunity, they brainstorm what the city's pressing issues are. In this case, it's downtown parking, he said.

### **Durham's idea**

The city will test incentives for not parking, helping people plan their daily commutes, and lotteries for free GoDurham bus cards, among other ideas.

Maureen Devlin, a city transportation planner, said they're constantly working to improve services and promote alternatives to parking, including riding the bus, biking and walking.

### **WE DON'T WANT TO HAVE A CITY THAT'S CAR DEPENDENT.**

Durham Mayor Steve Schewel

"Durham is a city that's really trying to figure out how to have successful multimodal transportation," Mayor Steve Schewel said. "We don't want to have a city that's car dependent."

Ryan Smith of the i-team said Durham, like many mid-size cities, is growing and outgrowing its infrastructure. That's why the city is looking at how to change commuter's behavior now.

"We are looking at a skyline rapidly going up," Devlin said. Because people see parking as a pressing need, they want to look at how to use available city land for issues like affordable housing rather than more parking garages. (CONTINUED...)

Durham has received money from Bloomberg Philanthropies before. The city is already part of Bloomberg's Innovation Teams program. It's in the first year of a three-year \$1.2 million grant to help people re-entering the community from prison.

This week, the city also got a behavioral fellow-in-residence, Joseph Sherlock, from the [Center for Advanced Hindsight](#) at Duke University. There's no cost to the city for Duke's help thinking about how local government can apply behavioral science.

### **Cary's problem**

North Carolina has had a 800 percent increase in lethal opioid overdoses over the past decade and needs timely data for public health efforts to solve the crisis. Cary Mayor Harold Weinbrecht has made fighting opioids a priority.

"Opioids are a problem in Cary," said Cary Deputy Town Manager Mike Bajorek. In 2017, the town had 46 opioid overdoses, six of which were fatal. That's a 70 percent increase from the year before, Bajorek said.

### **Cary's idea**

The town will generate geo-localized opioid consumption data by measuring opioid metabolites in sewage to enable proactive interventions. That means collecting, monitoring and testing metabolites in wastewater.

Rather than collecting from the wastewater treatment plants, the town will put a collection device in manholes. That gives them a sample size from 4,000 to 5,000 people. The data will give public health officials a clearer picture of what's going on in their community, Bajorek said. And the testing could be expanded to more cities.

[Biobot Analytics](#) in Boston will do the chemical analysis. While metabolite testing isn't new, testing specifically for opioids in Cary is.

"We're very excited. There are places with much worse opioid problems than Cary, but [Weinbrecht] wanted to get involved because we have the people, the financial backing and really have the will to do something about this," Bajorek said.

### **What's next**

Over the next six months, the 35 cities will test and adapt their ideas. In March, teams from each city will go to Bloomberg Philanthropies Ideas Camp in New York City, and then they'll get the money and support to work on their innovations. In August, they'll apply to be one of four cities that will get \$1 million, and then one of those will get \$5 million.

Durham and Cary are competing with cities such as Boston; Washington, D.C.; Pittsburgh; Phoenix; Philadelphia; Los Angeles; Miami; and Detroit.

The 35 "Champion Cities" were picked for their idea's vision, potential for impact, implementation plan and potential to spread to other cities. Former Ambassador Caroline Kennedy and former Xerox Chairman and CEO Ursula Burns chaired the selection committee.

## **How Durham is trying to get affordable housing at light-rail stops**

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan February 20, 2018

DURHAM – Want to live near a future light-rail station but not sure you'll be able to afford it? (CONTINUED...)

Durham leaders want that too, so they're offering developers more incentives. But they're not sure they will work.

On Monday night, the City Council voted to offer interim density bonuses for affordable housing in compact neighborhoods near [Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit](#) stops. The amendment revises existing incentives to make voluntary inclusion of affordable housing more attractive.

[Compact neighborhoods](#) near Durham light-rail stops were designated in the future land-use map near the Patterson Place, South Square, Erwin Road, Ninth Street, Leigh Village and Alston Avenue stations.

In 2015, the City Council and Board of County Commissioners set a goal of having at least 15 percent of housing units within a half-mile of stations be for residents earning less than 60 percent of the average median income (AMI).

A two-person household earning 60 percent of the AMI in Durham makes \$33,940 annually, so they could afford \$750 per month for housing. Housing is considered affordable at up to 30 percent of a household's income.

City-county planner Hannah Jacobson told the council that 70 percent AMI housing bonuses would give them a better chance with developers, but the city-county resolution calls for 60 percent AMI housing at the transit stops.

"Will developers desire to take advantage? Of course this is something we'll find out," Mayor Steve Schewel said.

Council member Mark-Anthony Middleton asked the Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit and residents to stay engaged and send their ideas in case the density bonuses don't work.

Council member DeDreana Freeman cast the sole negative vote on the density bonuses. She said she wants to believe the 60 percent AMI will work for the bonuses, but thinks the 70 percent AMI would work.

The interim bonuses, to be offered while a long-term plan is developed, expands on the existing incentive that offers developers three more market-rate units for every one unit of affordable housing they build.

The enhanced bonus passed Monday will also give developers a density of 75 units per acre for new development and waive parking requirements. Height restrictions will also be eased, depending on proximity to urban and suburban neighborhood tiers.

The bonuses will be given a year to see if they attract developers. If they don't, the council will revisit the idea.

Jim Svava of the Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit called the interim bonuses an important step.

"These lower-income persons need access to light rail," Svava said. "Access to stations should not be an amenity reserved for high-income persons."

## **Chapel Hill, Hillsborough forced to sacrifice in light rail funding bid. Here's why.**

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb February 19, 2018

CHAPEL HILL – Durham officials used an unusual move recently to remove [Chapel Hill's bus rapid transit \(BRT\)](#) plans from the queue for state funding to give the \$3.3 billion Durham-Orange light rail project a better shot.

The move was similar to what [Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization officials did](#) a few weeks ago in removing Wake County's bus rapid transit project from the state process. The light-rail project, now in the engineering phase, needs \$1.2 billion in federal dollars and up to \$247 million from the state. The remaining costs, including interest on loans, would be split between Orange and Durham counties. (CONTINUED...)

State funding is inadequate to accommodate North Carolina's growing transportation needs, Durham County Board of Commissioners Chairwoman Wendy Jacobs said. The concern was that without 10 percent funding from the state, it could kill light rail, she said, and while BRT is important for Chapel Hill, everyone had to make sacrifices.

"It's part of the overall network that we're creating between all three of our counties ... but if we don't get this basic rail infrastructure, the spine down, we can't move forward with all the other pieces," Jacobs said.

Chapel Hill Transit director Brian Litchfield said the decision shouldn't negatively affect the [North-South BRT](#) project. The MPO supports BRT, he said, but if the project scored well in the state funding process, it wouldn't guarantee any money but could lower the light-rail project's maximum score.

What made last week's decision interesting was how Durham used a rare voting method to overcome Orange and Chatham County opposition to removing projects from the state's Strategic Transportation Prioritization, or SPOT 5.0, funding process. Chapel Hill could resubmit the BRT project in a couple of years.

MPO board decisions typically rely on majority vote, but a longstanding agreement allows any member to ask for a weighted vote. The weighted system is based on population and gives the city of Durham 16 votes; Durham and Orange counties four votes each; Chapel Hill six votes; and Carrboro, Hillsborough and Chatham County two votes each. GoTriangle and the N.C. Board of Transportation each have one.

So, Durham, with the help of Durham County and GoTriangle, was able to delay the BRT project by a vote of 21-16. The board, in separate, unanimous votes, also delayed regional bus funding requests, including for Orange Public Transportation's Hillsborough circulator bus and a 10 percent share of the cost for new Chapel Hill Transit buses.

It was the first time he had seen the move used in 10 years of working with the MPO board, Litchfield said. Wendy Jacobs said it was necessary to ensure the light-rail project remained a priority.

Orange County Commissioner Barry Jacobs, who rejected the move, said it followed a "horrible" MPO staff presentation and was based on "highly speculative" reasons. Orange County might talk with UNC Hospitals and Durham Technical Community College, which has a campus in Orange County, about another way to fund the \$30,000 Hillsborough circulator expansion, he said.

"The Durham representatives had come with their minds made up that they weren't going to do anything to risk the light rail, so every other government voted to leave the BRT in ... but Durham invoked the weighted voting," Barry Jacobs said. They "vowed that we'll help you find the money, but it's \$12.5 million, so whether it'll go forward or not, frankly, we don't know."

Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger was in meetings Friday and deferred calls to Town Council member Michael Parker, who did not return a call.

Litchfield said there is a silver lining for BRT, because there is now more time to work out the details.

The proposed 8.2-mile, [high-capacity bus line](#) could run from the Eubanks Road park-and-ride lot near Interstate 40, down Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to UNC and Southern Village in Chapel Hill. A work group is now studying how to extend the route to Durham Tech's Orange County campus in Hillsborough.

The roughly \$125 million project is in the engineering analysis and environmental impact review phase of the Federal Transit Administration's Smart Starts grant program and is on track to begin construction in the early 2020s, Litchfield said.

FTA approval could bring up to 80 percent federal funding, he said, with another \$6 million from Orange County sales taxes and vehicle fees. The focus now is finding another \$12.5 million in state, private, local and grant sources, Litchfield said, and filling a roughly \$30 million local funding gap.

Wendy Jacobs said Durham is dedicated to helping find the money. (CONTINUED...)

"This is part of what it means to work together as a region," she said. "It means that we're working together across county lines, because we already have people that are working living and playing in all three counties – Durham, Orange and Wake – and I firmly believe that our futures are tied together."

## **Need wheels? A look at which of the 3 bike-share services in Durham you should use**

The Herald-Sun By Zachery Eanes February 12, 2018

DURHAM – Some see them as something to celebrate – others as a nuisance, or even a threat.

But for the past two months, the shareable bikes [that have exploded](#) around Durham have generally just been a curiosity.

Critics consider them an eyesore or worry they could impede pedestrian traffic on sidewalks. One business owner thinks they could hurt his bikeshop.

But, proponents see the bikes as the latest evolution in public transport – a cheap, smartphone-activated connection between the end of a bus ride or car drive and a final destination, and a reason for Durham to invest more in the [city's cycling infrastructure](#).

The city isn't paying anything to bring the private companies' bikes to Durham. And competition between the [three bike companies](#) seems to be keeping prices low for consumers – Ofo recently extended its free-trial period through the end of February.

"To me the bike is probably the most efficient vehicle in an urban space outside of a subway," advocate Erik Landfried said. "As downtown continues to develop ... bikes are going to become the preferred mode (of transit). To be able to offer that for free at no cost to the taxpayer – except for some staff time – that to me is hard to argue that it is not a complete win."

The city will do a six-month review sometime in the spring, and the number of bikes on the ground isn't expected to increase in the interim. The bikes were launched in the middle of winter, so the real test will likely come once temperatures rise.

"As with any new product we have received both positive and some negative questions about the process and the companies but we have received more positive comments," said Terry Bellamy, director of Durham's Transportation Department. "The biggest question centers around re-balancing and the placement of the bicycles. ... The goal is to not block driveways, sidewalks or entrances to businesses or homes."

Bikes being left haphazardly or directly on sidewalks has been the biggest complaint.

Bellamy believes as the companies collect more data on Durham, they will find their "sweet spots" and will clump particular areas less often.

Will there be three companies on Durham streets in two years? Possibly not, Landfried said. He thinks the real winner could be the company that brings an [electric bike](#) to the city first.

"First one to bring that to Durham could have an advantage," he said. (CONTINUED...)

### **Which bike should you use?**

For now, in which of the three services, if any, should you place your loyalty? The Herald-Sun recently tried them out.

What we found? They're a lot alike.

Overall, LimeBike, Ofo and Spin offer customers the same thing: the ability to ride a bike wherever you want and leave it wherever you want.

The bikes themselves are nearly carbon copies of each other: a beach cruiser body, a basket with a solar panel for charging the headlights and a three-speed gear changer. The bikes all come with bells.

Ultimately, the average rider should probably pick up the closest bike to them – or whichever one has the best deal at the time. (Similarly to how people choose whether to use a Lyft or an Uber – which is closest? Which is cheapest?) But, beyond color preferences, there are some small differences.

#### **Price:**

Ofo is technically the cheapest, as it lets you rent the bike in hour-long increments rather than 30-minute ones (plus it's free through the end of February). But if your ride is under 30 minutes, there is no difference.

**LimeBike:** \$1 per 30 minutes

**Spin:** \$1 per 30 minutes

**Ofo:** \$1 per one hour

#### **The body:**

All three bikes lock the same way and have a three-gear shift. These bikes are not high-performance vehicles – and the seats aren't the most comfortable – which might ensure that the serious everyday rider should probably still invest buy their own.

The bikes all have operating lights for nighttime use, and it's bring-your-own for helmets on all three services. The locking and unlocking mechanism for the bikes are all similar too, with a sliding bar under the wheel unlocking when you scan the QR code on the bike. You end the ride by sliding the bar back into place.

**LimeBike:** These felt like the heaviest and bulkiest bikes. They were also the most abundant. Without knowing officially how many bikes each service has in Durham, it always seems like a LimeBike is within eyeshot.

**Spin:** Spin bikes have probably the most aggressive and athletic frame due to their paint scheme and sleek profile. The feel of the ride was good but not exceptional. Of all the bikes we rode, the Spin bikes probably had the roughest gear change. The Spin bikes also might work best for those who are taller than average. Landfriend, who is over six feet tall, said he found the Spin bikes to work best for his taller frame.

**Ofo:** During the trial period of the bikes, we found Ofo to have the smoothest ride of the three services. Both it and Spin have a more athletic feel than LimeBike, but we would have to give Ofo the advantage on feel. The gears of the Ofo bikes were the easiest to change and easiest to steer. Ofo probably has the fewest bikes in the city, however.

#### **The basket:**

The baskets all leave something to be desired, in terms of keeping items stable. But that is probably just an issue with bikes in general, along with the bumpiness of roads. Our travel coffee mug routinely jumped out of each basket when the road wasn't flat.

**LimeBike:** Probably the deepest of the baskets, its wire cage seemed to be able to hold the most items.

(CONTINUED...)



**Spin:** The basket is fairly shallow and wasn't really effective at holding items.

**Ofo:** Same as the Spin bikes.

#### **The app:**

The thing that makes these bikes work – how you find them, how you pay for them, how you unlock them – is also where you find the biggest differences. All of the apps use GPS to locate the bikes, meaning they will be a drain on your phone's battery, because they have to be constantly running while you ride.

The apps all open on a map, showing where every respective bike is in the city. They also now show you – which wasn't available at first – recommended parking spots and no-parking zones. The no-parking zones are currently only located at Duke Medical Center and some parts of Duke's campuses.

Some people have complained about phantom bikes (bikes that show up on the app, but aren't actually there), but we didn't see that problem during our testing.

**LimeBike:** LimeBike's map is aggressively marked with slices of limes (where the bikes are) as well as bags of money, which are bonus bikes that help you earn free rides. It is the only one that offers an in-app game like that. The LimeBike app is the most interactive of the three.

It also provides a great ride history feature. It keeps track of every ride you take and traces your route on the map. It also lets you know how much carbon you saved by not using a car as well as how many calories you burned. It also highlights where businesses are located on the map.

**Spin:** The spin app is probably the most minimalist of the three services. It is stripped of any frills. The ride history aspect is lacking compared to LimeBike – it doesn't show you what route you took on the map or tell you how many calories you burned or the carbon you would've released into the atmosphere. The map on the Spin app does not highlight local businesses or locations.

**Ofo:** The Ofo app is more of a mix between Spin and LimeBike. It has a lot more interactive features than Spin (including a route tracker and calorie and carbon counter), but it doesn't offer any bonus opportunities like LimeBike. Like LimeBike, the Ofo app highlights where businesses and local attractions are located.

#### **Payment:**

How you pay for the rides, varies a little differently between the services as well.

**LimeBike:** LimeBike requires that you enter your credit card information manually and requires that you purchase credits. You can either load money in \$5, \$10 or \$20 increments and pay as you go – or pay \$29.95 a month for 100 rides a month.

**Spin:** Spin also makes you pre-load money on to your account (in \$5 increments). It also has an unlimited ride plan for \$29 a month. Spin also lets you use Apple Pay along with credit cards.

**Ofo:** Ofo also requires that you pre-load money via a credit card in \$5, \$10, \$20 and \$40 increments. It does not support Apple Pay. Ofo does not appear to offer a monthly plan.