

# DURHAM • CHAPEL HILL • CARRBORO METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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**November 9, 2022**

TO: DCHC MPO Technical Committee  
FROM: Aaron Cain, Planning Manager  
Ellen Beckmann, Durham County Transportation Manager  
SUBJECT: Durham County Transit Plan Preferred Scenario and Release for Public Comment

**Summary.** Soon after the discontinuation of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) project in 2019, the development of a new Durham County Transit Plan (DCTP) was initiated. In spring 2020 a consultant, Kimley-Horn and Associates, was hired to manage the development of the new DCTP. With the third and final phase of community outreach completed in the summer of 2022, a final recommended preferred scenario has been developed and the final drafting and review of the plan document is near completion. The DCHC MPO Board is requested to release of the draft Durham County Transit Plan by the end of November 2022.

**Background.** A Durham County Transit Plan, including a financial 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 Durham County Board of Commissioners, the GoTriangle Board of Trustees, and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Transportation Organization (DCHC MPO) Board. The half-cent sales tax approved by Durham County voters in 2011 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. These funding sources generate approximately \$35 million annually. The first plan, the Bus and Rail Investment Plan, was adopted in 2011, with an update in 2017 that was centered around the D-O LRT 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 has guided the plan development. In 2020, DCHC 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 a local Durham small business for Engagement Ambassador management and public outreach.

**Issues and Analysis.** The public engagement process has followed the City of Durham's Equitable Engagement Blueprint. The first phase of 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. This first phase focused on identifying high-level goals and objectives and seeking feedback on the universe of projects and services that residents would like to see included in the plan.

Two over-arching core principles were identified for the plan:

- Equity
- Community Trust

And four high-level goals were identified:

- Accessibility
- Connectivity
- Convenience
- Sustainability

The Durham Transit Team directly used the results of the Phase 1 outreach and technical analysis to develop three representative transit options for how the funding could be used through 2040, making sure to address the needs identified by current transit riders, low-income residents, and People of Color. This second phase of outreach occurred in summer 2021. The results of the Phase 2 outreach were presented to boards in fall of 2021. The key takeaways from the Phase 2 outreach were:

- Regular Transit Riders and People of Color consistently identified later/weekend bus service, more bus frequency, and more reliable bus service as their highest priorities.
- All respondents supported getting more improvements more quickly.
- All respondents supported bus rapid transit or the elements of bus rapid transit such as 15-minute service, bus-only lanes, and traffic signal priority.
- The commuter rail project has support, but it is not the highest priority for any group. The commuter rail project has less support from People of Color and Daily Transit Riders.

The results of the Phase 2 outreach and technical analysis provided the basis for a preferred scenario that was brought to the public for comment in summer 2022. The Phase 3 outreach results were generally supportive of the preferred scenario, indicating that it should be used as the basis for the final recommended plan. Upon the completion of that outreach and analysis of the feedback, the preferred scenario has been refined and tested against projected revenues to ensure compliance with the financial model. This final preferred scenario will be reflected in the final recommended plan that is to be brought to the three governing boards over the next three months for adoption.

Durham County, and the entire Triangle region, has many more transit needs than available funds can provide. A key purpose of the draft Durham County Transit Plan is to identify and prioritize those needs within fiscal constraints. The preferred scenario in the final recommended plan balances community needs for improvement to the existing local and regional bus systems and planning and building for future travel needs as the Triangle grows.

When available, the final plan report will be posted on the plan's Engage Durham website:

<https://engagedurham.com/101/Durham-Transit-Plan>

The preferred scenario focuses on four key themes for improvements:

- Improve the Current System
- More Projects Sooner
- Connect the Region with Quick and Reliable Service
- Better Experience at Stops and Stations

Project highlights include:

- All services currently being provided through the Durham County Transit Plan will continue
- Improvements at all bus stops in Durham County
- Increased midday service on the GoTriangle 400/405 and 700 routes
- New GoDurham crosstown routes in north and east Durham;
- Additional frequency on GoDurham Routes 3, 4, and 9/9A/9B
- Extend Sunday GoDurham service to midnight on all routes
- Construction of bus stop and access improvements on five high frequency Bus Transit Corridors
  - Route 5 (Fayetteville Street)
  - Route 3 (Holloway Street)
  - Route 10 (Chapel Hill Road/University Drive)
  - Route 9 (Avondale Drive/Club Blvd/Dearborn Drive)
  - Route 4 (Roxboro Road)
- Construction of new transit centers
  - The Village
  - North Duke Crossing
- Construction of improvements at Durham Station
- Construction of a new Regional Transit Center in RTP
- Construction of a new paratransit maintenance facility
- Construction of improvements to the GoTriangle and GoDurham Bus Operations and Maintenance Facilities
- Study to determine needed improvements for GoDurham and GoTriangle ACCESS and funding for implementation
- GoDurham Connect (microtransit) zones in north and east Durham
- Subsidized vanpools to Durham County employment sites
- Transit Signal Priority to improve bus speed and reliability on congested corridors.
- Bus speed and reliability improvements on downtown streets near Durham Station, including bus only lanes, signal upgrades, routing changes, and other infrastructure improvements.
- Study for potential Bus Rapid Transit or other bus speed and reliability improvements and funding towards the construction of those improvements.
- Durham County's financial contribution towards the construction and operation of commuter rail service between Durham and Wake counties or other fast, reliable, regional service initiatives

The improvements listed above do not address all of the transit needs that Durham will have over the next 20 years. The Durham County Transit Plan will acknowledge the unmet transit needs and explore the further development of and identification of funding for a greater vision for transit in Durham County that is consistent with the DCHC MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Furthermore, consistent with the plan's focus on community trust, the final recommended plan includes implementation metrics that will be used to monitor and report on project delivery and

outcomes. Additional staff administration resources are also programmed to facilitate project delivery, report on progress, and improve equitable contracting and transit-oriented development efforts.

**Next Steps.** The release for public comment of the final recommended Durham County Transit Plan is the first step in the formal adoption process. Per state law, the Durham County Transit Plan must be approved by three governing bodies: the DCHC MPO Board, the Durham Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), and the GoTriangle Board of Trustees. Below is the anticipated schedule for the plan's adoption:

#### Presentation of Preferred Scenario

BOCC – November 7  
 DCHC MPO Board – November 9  
 GoTriangle Board of Trustees – November 16  
 Durham City Council – December 8

Release final recommended Durham County Transit Plan for minimum 21-day public comment period – November 30

Public hearing for Durham County Transit Plan (at BOCC) – December 12

DCHC MPO TC Recommendation of the Durham County Transit Plan – December 21

#### Votes for Adoption of the Durham County Transit Plan

BOCC – January 9  
 DCHC MPO Board – January 11  
 GoTriangle Board of Trustees – January 25