

Wake County does the Durham-Orange Light Rail plan a big favor

The Herald-Sun By Zachery Eanes February 7, 2018

Durham Mayor Steve Schewel is feeling confident about the [Durham-Orange Light Rail](#) project.

"This is actually going to happen, yo," he said at a transportation summit Tuesday at the Durham Performing Arts Center.

"I really believe it now."

One particular reason the first-term mayor was feeling confident was because Wake County officials recently did the \$3.3 billion light-rail plan a big favor.

Two weeks ago, in an under-the-radar move, Schewel said, the [Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) (CAMPO) removed its bus rapid [transit project](#) from the current round of state funding competition – a pot of state money that projects must compete for.

"In order for us to get enough funding from the state we need very little competition in the regional pot," Schewel said. "We asked them to withdraw those projects for now to give the Durham-Orange Light Rail a clearer path to funding, and they did. ... It would've been a big hit if they hadn't."

CAMPO is responsible for the planning of Wake County and several surrounding counties' transportation systems. It is the eastern Triangle counterpart of the [Durham-Chapel-Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization](#).

"It was a very generous move on their behalf," said Patrick McDonough, manager of planning at [GoTriangle](#), who said this will allow the light rail to maximize its amount of state funding.

The light-rail project, which is in the federal engineering phase currently, is [continent on federal money](#) to pay half of the light-rail construction cost and state money to pay up to 10 percent. The counties would share the remaining \$1.8 billion local cost and interest on debt that will bridge the years until state and federal money is available.

Schewel's comments came at the "[Connecting to Opportunity](#)," which was organized by GoTriangle, Triangle J Council of Governments and Gateway Planning. The summit brought together experts and local leaders to discuss how to best take advantage of a massive new transit system.

Schewel spoke alongside Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger. Both mayors touted the light rail plan as essential to their cities' growth.

"No offense to our neighbors ... but we don't want to become north Raleigh," Schewel said, adding that Durham is adding about 20 new residents a day.

"We are filling up one of those four-story apartment developments every month ... and if we want to avoid north-Raleigh-like sprawl, we got to have light rail to help us steer that growth. The light rail will be the organizing mechanism for growth by its very existence."

Growth and development is going to revolve around the 18 light-rail stations between N.C. Central University and the UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill. Both mayors said it would be absolutely necessary to make sure that development would be equitable to all citizens, not just wealthy ones.

Chapel Hill is hampered on what it can do with its six stations, since half the sites are owned by the university and another one around the Glenn Lenox area is already heavily developed, Hemminger said. (CONTINUED...)

But, Schewel said, Durham is committed to making sure all Durhamites, especially people of color, will be able to take advantage of the growth the transit line brings. The city and county are currently hoping to use four public properties – one on [Jackson Street downtown](#), two on [East Main Street](#) and [Fayette Place](#) – to create affordable housing near light-rail stops.

However one of Durham's main strategies for ensuring poor Durhamites are not crowded out from the growth was dealt a [blow by the federal tax cuts](#) enacted by the Trump administration last year.

"The new tax law has cut the value of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit," Schewel said.

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit has been responsible for 90 percent of affordable rental units across the country. But because the tax credit is tied to the corporate tax rate, which was lowered, the credits are worth less money now.

Schewel said that because of the tax cuts, the number of affordable units created by the tax credit will be reduced by 250,000 nationally over the next 10 years.

"We are all working in partnerships (to build affordable housing)," Hemminger said. "When one half of the partnership gets cut to the bone it makes it really impossible."

Schewel added that it could hurt the city's ability to build 80 affordable rental units at its planned Jackson Street project.

"It hurts our ability, and every city's ability, to build affordable housing for people," he said. "We are relying on being able to get a tax credit for (Jackson Street), but that tax credit is going to produce less equity now. ... That means funding will have to come from more local funding or cuts in the project."

"Somehow that gap will have to be covered, or less affordable housing gets built."

Durham County leaders to hear public input tonight on development of 2 downtown areas

WNCN By Lauren Haviland February 7, 2018

DURHAM, N.C. (WNCN) — Durham County leaders want your input when it comes to developing two areas of downtown.

Currently the two locations, which are owned by the county, are parking lots in the 300 and 500 blocks of E. Main Street.

The plan is to redevelop the spaces into one of four options: parking, affordable housing, retail and commercial space, or attract a private investor.

Durham County is giving the public multiple opportunities to voice their opinion.

Some Durham residents CBS North Carolina spoke to were split on what they thought should be done with the areas.

"More parking — lots of people come downtown, just more parking," said Mevlin Payne Jr.

Karen Lynn said the area really needs more than just one of the options. (CONTINUED...)

"I think they're in a pickle, because we need affordable housing, but we also need more parking," she said. "...we need housing desperately in Durham, we are desperate for housing in Durham. But I also work here, so I need parking. So I am hoping they do either or."

Dezrick Dixon was also split like Lynn was.

"I would go with parking, because the employees need parking and the people that they serve need parking, as well," he said. "It could be considered like a retail space — it would be good for retail, too, considering all the revitalization."

The first of three public input sessions is tonight at 6:30 at the Human Services Building.

Here's what they're tearing up at RDU now

The News and Observer By Richard Stradling January 31, 2018

MORRISVILLE – If you glance outside Terminal 2 at Raleigh-Durham International Airport, you may notice workers with machines tearing up the concrete.

It's the first stage of a two-year effort to replace most of the taxiway that planes use to get to and from RDU's main runway. The \$26.5 million project involves digging up 17 inches of concrete and another 23 inches of gravel and replacing them.

The work is hard to miss.

"It's very loud and very visible," said airport spokesman Andrew Sawyer. "They're hammering apart the pavement."

About 65 percent of the 10,000-foot-long taxiway will be replaced because it has reached the end of its useful life of about 30 years, Sawyer said. The other sections of the taxiway were replaced just before the opening of Terminal 2 in 2011, he said.

The work in front of the terminal will be done in stages that will require closing three gates at a time; there are enough open gates at any one time that passengers won't be affected, Sawyer said. The ramps, where planes park at the gates, are not being replaced.

The taxiway concrete will be recycled on site. The contractor, Anthony Allega Cement Contractor Inc. of Cleveland, has built a plant on the west side of the airport that will allow it to reprocess the material it removes and use it to make new concrete.

RDU is also replacing the taxiway in front of Terminal 1 on the east side of the airport. That taxiway is made of asphalt, and the replacement work that began last fall had to be suspended because of the cold weather, Sawyer said. It should be finished by the end of the year.

More buses, sidewalks and housing: what Durham residents want

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan January 31, 2018

DURHAM – Durham Mayor Pro Tem Jillian Johnson says budgets are moral documents that show a city's values by what they spend money on.

Judging from public input at a "Community Conversation" this week, the people want some of that money spent on buses.

More bus routes. Free bus fare. Bus shelters. Faster bus routes.

New this year, the city and county governments are holding community conversations on a variety of topics as they start planning the next fiscal year budget that starts July 1.

More than 100 people came out on a cold Tuesday night to the Durham County Human Services building downtown. City and county leaders gave a brief overview of government services before small groups discussed what they want for Durham's housing, health and transit future.

What the people said they want most:

Transportation

- Bus shelters.
- More sidewalks.
- More bus services.
- Better customer service on buses.
- Shorter bus routes.
- Rapid bus transit.
- More affordable buses.
- Light rail sooner rather than later.
- Free bus service.
- Fill in ditches.
- Safety for bikes and pedestrians.
- Safety for children riding buses.
- Make more bus routes.
- Decrease transit time.
- Expand the Bull City Connector.
- Multiple bus hubs with rides at 20-minute intervals.
- More frequent bus stops.
- More bus routes.
- More bike lanes.
- Fix up Alston Avenue.

Housing

- City-supported co-housing, elderly housing and aging in place.
- Raising developer permit fees.
- Higher standards for landlords.
- Raise tax for affordable housing.
- Funds to renovate properties for affordable housing units.
- Help people pay for home repairs and stay in their houses. (CONTINUED...)

- Tiny homes.
- Streamline process for accepting Section 8 vouchers.
- Increase affordable housing stock.
- Understand what affordable housing means to different groups of people.
- More attractive upkeep of affordable housing.
- Help people stay in their homes.
- Include public housing and low income housing when talking about affordable housing.

Access to county health and social services

- Walk-in behavioral health clinics.
- The phone tree prompt for “Spanish” to be in Spanish.
- More protection for children.
- Weekend hours for social services.
- Mobile social services.
- More mental health providers in schools.
- Expand access not just on the internet.
- Access to home delivery of nutritious food.

Each table was led by a government official, from Durham County Commissioner Brenda Howerton to Durham City Council member DeDreana Freeman. City and county staff were spread throughout. After more than an hour of table talk, the groups shared their lists of what they want the city and county to make priorities about each topic.

Mayor Steve Schewel said they would take the comments really seriously and use it for their budget and strategic plan.

The third and final “Community Conversation” is about education and jobs. It will be held at 7 p.m. Feb. 6 at Brogden Middle School.

Duke’s travels are impacting the environment. Here’s what it’s doing about it.

The Herald-Sun By Ray Gronberg January 29, 2018

DURHAM – Every year, students, professors and administrators at Duke University take to the air to get to conferences, research sites and assignments around the country and the world.

Whether or not they like or even think about it, each of their airline trips harms the environment in some way, including when the plane’s engines deposit more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

That’s a problem for Duke leaders given that they’re on-record as promising to make the school “carbon neutral” by 2024. So they’ve been looking for a way to offset the effects of university-related air travel, and are now testing one possibility with Delta Air Lines.

Duke and Delta are splitting the cost of a joint project that involves both the purchase of “carbon credits” to compensate for 5,000 metric tons of emissions and the planting of 1,000 trees in Durham and other parts of the Triangle to provide further environmental benefits. The deal’s worth about \$60,000. (CONTINUED...)

It's supposed to offset the effects of university-related travel on Delta flights in 2017. For now, it's a one-time thing, an experiment whose effectiveness Duke officials will assess as they get closer to 2024 and the point they have to make decisions about how they'll actually fulfill the carbon-neutrality pledge.

"We're looking at piloting projects like this to see if they're ones we can expand over time," said Tavey Capps, Duke's sustainability director, adding that the experiments the university's undertaken to date have been "implemented at a smaller scale than we'd probably need in the future."

Campus officials think that along on-campus emission reductions, they need to find ways to offset about 185,000 metric tons of [Duke-related, off-campus emissions](#) for such things as air travel and employees' car commuting.

Neither the carbon-credit purchase nor the tree plantings are new, as Duke has done both before. It's also tried such things as investing in a [Yadkin County hog farm](#) that installed equipment to capture gas from hog-waste storage lagoons and use it to generate electricity.

In the Delta project, the university and the airline agreed to buy carbon credits through a Greensboro-based group called [Urban Offsets](#).

The credits are modeled on the sort of cap-and-trade markets regulators have encouraged to allow the trading of emission rights for other types of closely controlled pollutants. But carbon credits, at least the ones Duke and Delta are dealing with, don't actually work like them because carbon dioxide emissions in this country aren't as yet tightly restricted.

Instead, carbon credits function as a sort of [GoFundMe](#) to help finance projects investors hope will ultimately act to reduce carbon emissions.

Rather than putting money into such projects on the front end, credit buyers are essentially paying into ones an assortment of environmental watchdogs think are working as intended.

The prospect of securing such future investment factors "into the financial decisions" and calculations of a project's organizers, giving them an incentive to move forward, said Tani Colbert-Sangree, program coordinator for the [Duke Carbon Offsets Initiative](#).

In this case, Duke and Delta are putting money into emission-reduction projects that are improving the energy efficiency of trucks, encourage industrial composting and cut back on the release of greenhouse gases like methane from landfills, Colbert-Sangree said.

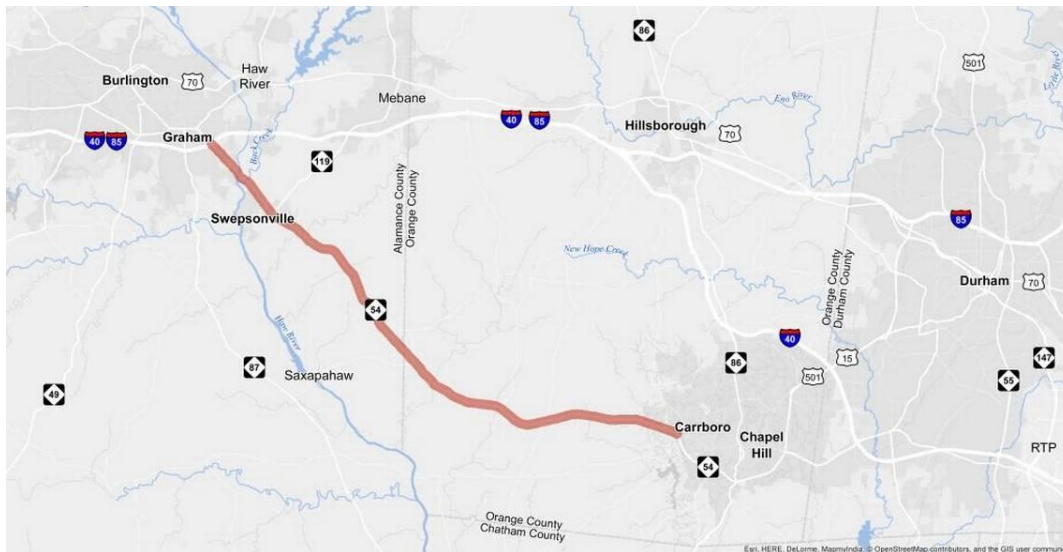
The tree plantings, however, will consume the majority of the joint investment. About half of them will go into "historically disadvantaged" neighborhoods in the Triangle ignored in 20th century street-tree planting efforts that mostly benefited well-to-do white communities.

Concerned about traffic, growth on NC 54 west of Carrboro? Here's your chance to help

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb January 22, 2018

CARRBORO – Three meetings this week will kick off an in-depth look at the future of the N.C. 54 corridor stretching 25 miles from Old Fayetteville Road to Interstate 85/40 in Graham. (CONTINUED...)

At one time, N.C. 54 was a sleepy, scenic road through farmland, forests and crossroads communities between Carrboro and Graham. Now, it's a vital east-west corridor for rural residents, commuters, freight trucks and UNC game day travelers, averaging 6,000 to 15,000 daily trips.



VHB Contributed

While that's not a lot of trips, regional officials say, the highway's inadequate intersections, heavy turning conflicts and the substantial number of trucks using the corridor add to the congestion.

A yearlong [NC 54 West Corridor Study](#) – a partnership among the town of Carrboro, city of Graham, Alamance and Orange counties, the Triangle Area Rural and Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro planning organizations, and the N.C. Department of Transportation – will plan a vision for N.C. 54 and its surrounding communities.

Information about the project, including the study team's initial findings and existing conditions, will be provided this week at three drop-in public [meetings](#). The public also can submit comments and questions online at www.nc54west.com.

The team wants to hear from the public what it thinks are the unique areas and resources that should be preserved along the highway, its challenges and potential solutions that could be completed in the short term, regional officials said. They are looking for lower-cost, immediate solutions, as well as long-term plans for transportation investments, land use and market development aimed at preserving the highway's environment and its economic vitality.

The plan will account for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and transit, team officials said. Construction of future projects will be based on local priorities and the availability of local and state dollars to pay for the work.

They've already gathered information about existing conditions and completed market and economic studies, and still are analyzing data about traffic speeds, crashes and how the volume of traffic varies throughout the day. The team also is reviewing a previously planned widening project that raised concerns for Carrboro and Orange County.

While that project is no longer on the NCDOT's [2018-2027 planning list](#), the agency is planning to spend \$820,000 this year on turn lanes and [improving](#) the Orange Grove Road intersection with N.C. 54. Another \$3.9 million is budgeted for upgrading N.C. 54 by 2022 for cars, bikes and pedestrians, from Orange Grove Road to Old Fayetteville Road in Carrboro.

Additional community meetings about the highway's future will be held this spring, and the team will use the information that is collected to draft a preliminary report with proposed projects by summer. A final report is expected later this year.

NC officials hope new technology can detect wrong-way drivers

WNCN.com By Amy Cutler January 19, 2018

RALEIGH, N.C. (WNCN) – Raleigh police are still investigating a wrong way crash on Interstate 40 that [killed two people and sent two others](#) to the hospital late Thursday night.

Officials said the driver of a Honda Civic was headed eastbound in the westbound lanes near Wade Avenue and caused the crash.

According to police, they received two 911 calls.

“It looked like he might have hit someone head-on,” a caller told the dispatcher in the second one.

Police told CBS North Carolina that two people in the Civic died and two others in it were rushed to WakeMed.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation said between 2000 and 2016 there were 507 wrong-way driver crashes statewide with a total of 145 fatalities.

Nearly half of them were alcohol-related.

Drivers are not surprised.

“Not at all,” Will Linthicum of Raleigh said.

“Yeah, I figured that. Yeah, that’s sad though,” Sabrina Toomer of Angier said.

In all, NCDOT said wrong-way crashes account for .2 percent of all crashes,

Still, the North Carolina Turnpike Authority is being proactive. In March, they’ll start testing upgrades on the Triangle Expressway.

They’ll rely on existing sensors on the ramps to determine if a driver is going the wrong way. Then signs will light up to alert that driver. Those sensors will also alert authorities.

“We picked that project — and that location is it’s our most advanced technology facility — to look at other ways that we can respond more rapidly to detecting and actively engaging a wrong way driver,” James Trogon III, the North Carolina Transportation Secretary said.

The NCDOT said there’s no surefire way to stop drivers who are impaired from going the wrong way, but they’re hoping the new technology will help.

Got ideas for the Durham-Orange light rail system design? Share them with GoTriangle

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb January 16, 2018

DURHAM – Do you have ideas for what visitors and residents should see and experience when they ride on the future Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit line? (CONTINUED...)

The 17.7-mile, \$2.47 billion system will link UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill with Duke and N.C. Central universities in Durham, along with points in between. There will be [19 stations](#), each of which could have its own unique appearance and feeling.

GoTriangle officials are holding two interactive workshops – today, Jan. 16, in Durham and Thursday, Jan. 18, in Chapel Hill – to hear what the public would like to see.

The workshops will encourage participants to explore how the system should look and feel to riders and passersby. GoTriangle officials want to hear what you think is important about Durham and Orange counties' characters and personalities, culture and history, and the other details that should be celebrated in the future.

GoTriangle has been working since last year with a Federal Transit Administration-appointed project management oversight contractor to complete the system's \$70 million [engineering phase](#), which will finalize its design, schedule, costs and funding sources.

The FTA will rate the final plan before awarding any New Starts grant money, expected to pay half of the system's construction cost. GoTriangle could submit the project for a federal budget recommendation this year. The money, if awarded, would be paid in \$100 million installments over the next 12 years.

The plan relies on the state to pay up to 10 percent more, leaving Durham and Orange counties responsible for 40 percent of the construction cost, or roughly \$990 million. The counties also will be responsible for paying an estimated \$913 million in interest on short- and long-term debt through 2062. The local share is being paid for through a half-cent transit sales tax and vehicle registration and car rental fees.

GoTriangle also is working with a public-private Funding and Community Collaborative to drum up donations of cash and land to the project.

Tammy Grubb: 919-829-8926, @TammyGrubb

IF YOU GO

GoTriangle will hold an interactive workshop from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16, at the Hayti Heritage Center, 804 Old Fayetteville St. in Durham, and from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 18, at the Chapel Hill Public Library, 100 Library Drive.

Members of the public who plan to participate are asked to RSVP at bit.ly/2mNciOv for the Durham meeting and at bit.ly/2FI6NbB for the Chapel Hill meeting. Those who can't make the meeting can contribute through an online workshop at publicinput.com/2239 until Feb. 1.

Low downtown railroad bridge (not that one) claims another tractor trailer

The Herald-Sun By Joe Johnson January 10, 2018

DURHAM – Another big rig and trailer lost its top in Durham thanks to a low railroad bridge.

No, not that low bridge.

This truck vs. bridge encounter came near the intersection of Roxboro and Pettigrew streets. It has previously claimed wins over other tractor trailers but not nearly as many as the famously-low 11-foot-8 clearance down the way where Gregson Street goes under the same Norfolk-Southern tracks. (CONTINUED...)

Wednesday's incident happened around noon. Durham police were dispatched to the scene at about 1:15 p.m., according to a department spokeswoman. They directed traffic through the area until the truck was removed. The streets were reopened to traffic by 3:30 p.m.

This bridge does not have webcam coverage like at Gregson Street, nor does it not have a catchy nickname like "The Can Opener." The last truck-bridge incident there occurred on Nov. 2, 2017. A camera owned by Jurgen Henn, who records accidents at the bridge for his website, 11foot8.com, has captured an additional four incidents or close shaves.

Could electric-assisted bicycles be on their way to Durham?

The Herald-Sun By Zachery Eanes January 10, 2018

DURHAM – If pedaling up steep hills or shifting through multiple gears on a bicycle is keeping you from hopping on one of Durham's new dockless and shareable bikes, then a solution might be on the way.

Both LimeBike and Spin, which have been operating on the streets of Durham since late last year, have recently unveiled new electric-assisted bicycles that can travel up to 15 miles per hour.

The electric-assisted LimeBikes will cost \$1 per 10 minutes of ride time and will have a 62-mile maximum range. The electric-assisted Spin bikes will cost \$1.50 per 15 minutes and will have a range of 50 miles, according to Techcrunch.

The standard fare for both LimeBike and Spin's non-electric bike is \$1 per 30 minutes of use.

The electric LimeBikes are launching in existing markets this month – though it is unclear when they would be coming to the Durham area. A spokeswoman for LimeBike didn't have any specifics to share on the roll out of the new bikes.

"If Durham is interested in having e-bikes, we'd be happy to start a conversation with the city to discuss the possibility of bringing them there," said Mary Carolina Pruitt, a spokeswoman for LimeBike. "We see Lime-E, along with our existing fleet, as an integral part in solving that first and last mile transportation challenge."

It is unclear when the release of Spin's electric bikes will be. Efforts to reach the company were unsuccessful.

The Durham Transportation Department said that it would begin conversations about bringing both Spin and LimeBike's electric-assisted bikes to the Bull City.

"We also just recently learned that LimeBike (and Spin) were launching an e-bike option," Bryan Poole, a bicycle and pedestrian planner for Durham, said in an email.

"We will be discussing the possibility of bringing these to Durham with both of the companies. E-bikes have the same rules/rights as other bicycles as long as they are less than 750 watts and cannot go more than 20mph powered solely by the motor."