

Federal Transportation Administration: Letters of support not enough to advance light rail plan

The Herald -Sun By Tammy Grubb March 2, 2017

CHAPEL HILL -- The Federal Transit Administration has told GoTriangle that letters of support from Orange and Durham counties will not be enough to move the \$2.5 billion Durham-Orange Light-Rail Transit project into the next phase.

GoTriangle General Manager Jeff Mann updated the boards of commissioners in an email Thursday, noting that the FTA needs to have updated versions of the Durham and Orange bus and rail investment plans in hand. The FTA needs a commitment for at least 30 percent of the project's local cost – \$371.1 million for the 17.7-mile light-rail line – before letting Durham and Orange start the engineering work.

GoTriangle officials have noted the current plans for both counties commit a combined \$455.7 million from the half-cent transit sales tax, vehicle registration fees and a car rental tax.

The commissioners agreed last month to delay a vote on the plans until June after hearing that GoTriangle needed more time to finish the revisions. The FTA needs the updated and approved plans by April 30.

The project will stall if the counties miss the deadline, and any money spent between that date and the project's re-entry into the federal funding pipeline will not be reimbursed.

Mann noted in his email that there are no guarantees that the project, if resubmitted next year, would be considered for a federal grant of over \$1 billion.

"It is necessary for Durham County, Orange County, GoTriangle and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) to meet to discuss the options, next steps and best path forward for the planned light rail project," Mann said Thursday.

Orange County will talk about FTA's light-rail deadline Tuesday

The Herald -Sun By Tammy Grubb March 4, 2017

CHAPEL HILL -- GoTriangle will meet with the Orange County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, March 7, to talk about the latest turn in the path toward a \$2.5 billion Durham-Orange Light-Rail Transit system.

The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the Whitted Meeting Facility, 300 W. Tryon St. in Hillsborough.

The commissioners and GoTriangle officials will discuss how to address the Federal Transit Administration's April 30 deadline for Orange and Durham leaders to approved updated versions of their respective bus and rail investment plans.

The FTA needs a commitment for at least 30 percent of the project's local cost – \$371.1 million for the 17.7-mile light-rail line – before letting Durham and Orange start engineering work on the \$2.5 billion light-rail project.

GoTriangle General Manager Jeff Mann told the boards of commissioners in an email Thursday that proposed letters of support to the FTA will not be enough to move into the next phase. The letters noted that the counties' current plans commit a combined \$455.7 million from the half-cent transit sales tax, vehicle registration fees and a car rental tax.

The commissioners agreed last month to delay a vote on the plans until June after hearing that GoTriangle needed more time to finish the revisions. (CONTINUED...)

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Bicycle 'superhighway' along I-40 could connect Raleigh, RTP

The News and Observer By Henry Gargan March 6, 2017

RALEIGH – If you commute along Interstate 40 in Wake County, Commissioner Sig Hutchinson wants you to imagine yourself there now. Imagine the skin-of-your-teeth merges, the swaying 18-wheelers, the stop-and-go monotony of rush hour.

"Now imagine sitting in traffic and watching bikes fly by you," he said, "people who'll be home playing with their kids before you get off the interstate."

A recent push from Hutchinson for a bikeway along the north side of I-40 in western Wake County could bring this scenario closer to reality. The Triangle Bikeway, as the concept is known, would allow cyclists to travel unimpeded for about five miles between Trenton Road in West Raleigh, near I-40's Wade Avenue split, and Airport Boulevard in northwest Morrisville.

Hutchinson, a well-known cycling advocate in the Triangle, proposed the project at a Feb. 17 meeting of the Triangle J Council of Government's core subcommittee, which consists of local government officials from the Cary, Durham and RTP areas.

"It's an age-old problem we've been thinking about for years," he said. "How do you connect Raleigh to RTP and Durham? Triangle J had designed some routes through Umstead, through some circuitous routes around Morrisville. Nothing was really direct. I said, 'Why not shoot straight up I-40?'"

Like the highway it parallels, Hutchinson's proposal features exits onto roadways designed to allow through-cyclists to travel its entire length without once encountering an intersection. It would even have a speed limit – between 16 and 19 miles per hour.

"I want this to be a bikeway superhighway," Hutchinson said. "I would like to start thinking about interchanges and bore through them so you don't have to come up at a grade and stop. I just want a straight shot, so you can be going 15 to 17 miles per hour on your bike, just cruising up that road."

Hutchinson said there's a need for such a route in western Wake County, where thousands of people use congested roads, including I-40, to travel short distances to work every day. Many of them would like to bike, he says, but don't have access to a safe route that would encourage them to do so.

Five miles might not seem like a lot. Wake County is home to almost 300 miles of greenways, with another 274 miles on the way. But this project would provide a critical link between existing and proposed bike route systems that would otherwise be practically isolated from one another. Future riders could potentially continue on toward Durham's section of the American Tobacco Trail or Chapel Hill via other proposed greenways that would extend from the bikeway's Airport Boulevard terminus northwest toward Durham County. (CONTINUED...)

"For years now, there's been a sense that it's really hard to connect over in the area of the airport and Lake Crabtree," said John Hodges-Copple, regional planning director for Triangle J. "You have a lot of natural features that are barriers, and you have I-40 that's a barrier. But through the Wake greenway plan and more discussions among members, people have decided shooting straight up I-40 may make some sense."

Making it happen

This new-found enthusiasm for an I-40 bikeway is due in part to the region's growth and an increased interest from commuters in avoiding traffic and staying fit. It also owes much to Wake County's January adoption of its first-ever regional bike plan, which aims to integrate municipal greenway systems as a region-wide network.

"A lot of the municipalities are doing great work but tend to be focused on their own municipal area greenways," said Eric Staehle, senior facilities project manager for Wake County.

Notably, the I-40 route is being called a bikeway, not a greenway. Greenways are typically handled by county and municipal parks departments, which don't have access to the kinds of federal funding or regional planning resources available for major transportation projects. The Triangle Bikeway's envisioned use as a commuter corridor is what could qualify it for federal money through the Capitol Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Hodges-Copple said he believes the project has a shot at making CAMPO's 2045 long-range list of projects, which will be crafted this summer and fall. That, he said, would give the project an air of viability.

Kenneth Withrow, CAMPO's senior transportation planner, is cautious discussing the project's future. He declined to make any predictions about when the bikeway might be built and said that the initial optimism that sometimes accompanies projects tends to set them up to disappoint.

"This would be a really big item," he said. "It has splash, it has pizzazz, and that's why I'd be leery of giving any kind of timeline for this to work out."

Julie Tisdale, a city and county policy analyst with the conservative, Raleigh-based John Locke Foundation, also urged caution. She said she'd want to see data showing that the investment would be worthwhile.

"We have limited transportation dollars, so we have to be smart about how we use them," Tisdale said. "I don't think there has been much demonstrated demand for these kinds of bike lanes in Wake County and Raleigh. Governments should be responding to demand rather than trying to push it in a certain direction. But if there's demand, if people say they'd use this, then OK."

The project's cost could also vary greatly depending on whether the design follows Hutchinson's vision and tunnels under roads near interchanges. Hutchinson said the ballpark metric used to estimate greenway costs is about \$1 million per mile and that he expects this project's cost would be "something comparable to that." An 18-mile bikeway along a highway between Denver and Boulder, Colo., cost about \$16.6 million.

But Withrow said he expected a feasibility study paid for jointly by Wake County and CAMPO should be underway in a month or two and complete by the end of this year.

The right-of-way for this project would fall outside the I-40 corridor. It would need to be obtained from two primary property-owners: Raleigh-Durham International Airport and Umstead State Park, both of which border nearly the entire stretch of I-40 the proposed bikeway would follow. That simplifies the property question, but it also raises the stakes when it comes to getting the two parties on board with the project.

Withrow said that proposals to build multi-use paths along interstate-type roadways "are not unusual." A similar bikeway parallels a portion of I-66 in Virginia near Washington, D.C.

"It's kind of a transportation truism that if you have a major travel corridor like I-40, that can be a corridor for something other than cars," Hodges-Copple said. "That's why you built them there – because there's a large travel market to use them."

GoTriangle, Orange County plan light-rail reports, vote for April

The News and Observer By Tammy Grubb March 8, 2017

HILLSBOROUGH – Updated bus and light-rail investment plans should be available for Durham and Orange counties to review and approve before the Federal Transit Administration's April 30 deadline, GoTriangle officials said Tuesday.

The boards of commissioners in each county also will vote in late April on updated agreements for implementing their respective plans and for sharing the local costs of a \$2.5 billion [Durham-Orange Light-Rail Transit](#) system. The 17.7-mile light-rail line would run from UNC Hospitals to N.C. Central University.

GoTriangle officials and an independent consultant that Orange County hired to review the financial plan will make separate reports to the Orange County Board of Commissioners at an April 18 public hearing. The commissioners agreed Tuesday to compile a list of questions they want GoTriangle and staff to answer.

GoTriangle will discuss a revised schedule with the Durham County Board of Commissioners on Monday, March 13.

The FTA recently told GoTriangle that the counties must be committed to paying at least 30 percent of the project's local cost, or \$371.1 million, before the project can be approved for engineering work. GoTriangle's Board of Trustees could approve a \$70 million engineering contract once the FTA signs off.

The project will stall if the counties miss the April 30 deadline, and any money spent between that date and the project's re-entry into the federal funding pipeline will not be reimbursed. There are no guarantees that the project, if resubmitted next year, would be considered for a federal grant.

Durham and Orange counties are counting on the federal grant to pay at least 50 percent of the light-rail project's cost. The state has capped its share at 10 percent, leaving 40 percent, or roughly \$990 million, for the counties to pay.

The current cost-sharing formula requires Durham County to pay 77 percent of the local light-rail cost – roughly \$762 million – and Orange County to pick up the nearly \$228 million.

GoTriangle General Manager Jeff Mann has said the current plans commit a combined \$455.7 million from the half-cent transit sales tax, vehicle registration fees and a car rental tax.

The decision to consider the revised bus and rail investment plans in April comes about three weeks after the boards were asked to delay their vote until June. FTA officials rejected letters of support for the project that GoTriangle proposed submitting last week as an alternative to the approved financial and project plans.

Nearly 30 people addressed the commissioners Tuesday, most asking questions that they said should make the county reconsider moving ahead with light rail.

Commissioners Chairman Mark Dorosin, after hearing the concerns, noted GoTriangle's updated financial plan and a separate report from Orange County's independent consultant would be available by early April.

"Obviously, if we've got this April 30 deadline from FTA, all of these questions that the residents have raised, all of the questions that all of us have raised and continue to raise, they have to be answered," he said.

Among the biggest concerns were if sales tax revenues would continue growing as planned, light rail's limited corridor in Orange County, and whether it makes sense to mortgage the system's construction through 2062.

(CONTINUED...)

Several citizens noted other technologies, such as bus rapid transit, ride-sharing and driverless vehicles, could make light rail obsolete by its launch in 2029. Others pointed out that the route wouldn't serve future Chapel Hill growth areas.

While her northern Orange County neighbors support the goal of public transportation, Rachel Hawkins said, they cannot endorse spending billions for a single corridor that supports only a few citizens.

"We're even more concerned about how the plan burdens our children and grandchildren with nearly a billion dollars in debt that they'll be paying for decades. Because of the enormous pricetag, there's little money left to provide transportation services to those who genuinely need it," she said.

"We are most concerned about the way this is unfolding," she added. "We have watched repeatedly as the commissioners are asked to hurry up and make decisions with partial information, only to have everything changed a short time later."

Ramona McGee, a Chapel Hill attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, and others countered that light rail would be a key piece of the region's future transit network.

"In an Orange County without light rail, car-oriented development would likely continue to creep across the county, meaning more roads, more pollution-emitting private cars and more sprawling land use, which requires the paving over of wetlands and cutting of forests," McGee said.

"In contrast, with the light rail, Orange County can balance the demands of a growing population with dense compact development along the light rail line while protecting our natural areas from sprawling land use."

DOT, other groups ask for public's input for NC 98 study

The News and Observer By Madison Iszler March 9, 2017

As part of a study examining a 27-mile section of N.C. 98, the public is encouraged to share their thoughts and issues on the corridor with Wake County and state planners.

The study – launched by the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Agency, the Durham Chapel Hill Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization and the North Carolina Department of Transportation – runs through July 2018. The three groups will assess current and future roads, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, safety and transit uses on a stretch of N.C. 98 that runs from U.S. 70 in Durham County through Wake County to U.S. 401 in Franklin County.

People can post their comments on traffic, safety or other issues at a specific intersection or piece of the corridor anonymously using [an online map](#) found at NC98Corridor.com through April 6. Some of the questions people are asked to consider when commenting include: What areas are challenging for you to navigate? Where do you see major issues? Do you have any environmental or safety concerns?

Public meetings will also be held on March 21 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Wake Forest Town Hall and March 23 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Reaching All Minds Academy in Durham.

"During this comment period the input from the crowdsourcing map will be used to identify problem areas and opportunities that the study team will address as we develop recommendations for the corridor," said project manager Will Letchworth, in an email. WP-Parsons Brinckerhoff, the consulting firm Letchworth works for, was chosen to perform the study.

Wake County Commissioner Greg Ford said he hopes many residents, commuters and business owners participate and share their thoughts for the study. (CONTINUED...)

"The goal of the study is to get as much public input as possible," Ford said. "Input is so important because this is a crucial corridor, and feedback will help produce a vision for it."

Car crashes and traffic along the stretch of N.C. 98 have increased recently, Ford said.

"We want to make it friendly to multi-modal use again," he said.

Public meetings and events discussing the study will also be held, but the dates have yet to be announced. When the study is finished, it will include recommendations from the public, interest groups and agencies along with traffic analysis, implementation strategies and cost estimates, according to the project's website.

The N.C. 98 corridor is the only east-west highway that connects east Durham and northern Wake County, as well as northern Wake County and southern Franklin County. It provides access to various thoroughfares, including U.S. 1, U.S. 401, U.S. 70 and N.C. 50.

A model used by NCDOT and other planning agencies to predict future traffic volumes shows that the corridor exceeds or is approaching capacity, according to NC98Corridor.com. If improvements aren't made, the majority of the stretch is projected to exceed capacity by 2040. The study is also part of the 2045 long-range transportation plan for DCHC MPO and CAMPO, which MPOs are required to produce.

Other proposed improvements in the area including widening and converting U.S. 1 and widening Northern Durham Parkway and N.C. 50.

Madison Iszler: 919-836-4952; @madisoniszler

HAVE YOUR SAY

Residents can comment online by clicking the "How to Get Involved" tab at NC98Corridor.com, scrolling down and selecting "Crowdsourcing Map," or by visiting NC98Corridor.com/crowdsourcing/map.

To learn more about the N.C. 98 corridor study, people can visit NC98Corridor.com or contact consultant lead Will Letchworth at 984-269-4652 or letchworthw@pbworld.com.

How transit partnerships will make your Raleigh-to-Charlotte train trip easier

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge March 13, 2017

A new partnership between the N.C. Department of Transportation and 11 local transit systems means rail passengers from Raleigh to Charlotte can more easily reach their final destinations.

After getting on a train, they can use a transit pass to hop on a bus, something officials hopes is a "seamless" way to connect passengers to where they're actually trying to go – and not just the rail station.

The NC By Train transit pass will be available March 18 to passengers on the Piedmont and Carolinian trains in select cities for no additional charge.

Paul Worley, director of the NCDOT's Rail Division, says his team has been working on this partnership for much of the past year. "The last mile, it's been something we've been trying to solve," he says. "We need to continue to work on trying to make the customer experience good on the Piedmont Corridor, so this is a part of that."

The rail improvements– with the exception of Raleigh's Union Station– will be complete by the end of the year, he says. "Now we'd like to make the service more convenient and attractive to travelers who want to move onto the final leg of their trips." (CONTINUED...)

And it's one example of how NCDOT is trying to increase convenience. Last year, NCDOT announced a new pilot partnership between the state and growing Durham transportation technology upstart TransLoc that aims to integrate Uber and transit with passenger rail.

To get the new transit pass, passengers request it from conductors while on the train. Then they can present it when boarding the transit partner's bus. It's valid for one ride and one transfer only on the day of travel, and can be used with the following transit partners:

- GoRaleigh;
- GoCary;
- GoTriangle;
- GoDurham;
- Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation;
- Greensboro Transit Authority and Higher Education Area Transit;
- High Point Transit System;
- Rowan Transit System;
- Salisbury Transit System;
- Concord Kannapolis Area Transit; and
- Charlotte Area Transit System.

Report shares ideas from Chapel Hill light-rail station workshops

The News and Observer By Tammy Grubb March 14, 2017

CHAPEL HILL – Light-rail stations offer more than transportation, a consultant said Monday, from planning for regional population growth and economic development to building on Chapel Hill's affordable housing foundation.

Monday's report to the Town Council covered six days of community workshops in which consultants collected ideas and drafted development suggestions for 18 stations along the 17.7-mile light-rail transit line. Chapel Hill and Durham paid for the work with a \$1.69 million Federal Transit Administration grant.

While the Orange and Durham counties' boards of commissioners have the final say about the light-rail transit project, the council would decide on projects proposed for the stations within Chapel Hill. Durham's City Council would approve projects at a dozen rail stations within its jurisdiction.

The work is continuing today as regional officials delve more deeply into the affordable housing issue, said Patrick McDonough, GoTriangle's planning and transit-oriented development manager. Bus and rail station connections will be another key component, he and others said.

The Chapel Hill Alliance for a Livable Town and Orange County Voice also will hold a conversation about Orange County transit at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 14, at Extraordinary Ventures, 200 S. Elliott Road in Chapel Hill. (CONTINUED...)

Four factors – connectivity, local character, economic development and equity – were critical to the draft plans, said Gateway Planning founder Scott Polikov.

There is a “tremendous opportunity” to attract economic development to the Gateway station at Interstate 40 and U.S. 15-501, for instance, he said. Civitech founder Tony Sease noted the potential for bike and pedestrian links across I-40 and U.S. 15-501.

Smaller-scale residential buildings might be appropriate along Old Durham Road, Sease said, while the remaining area could hold a dense mix of retail, offices and parking garages, including one with 500-plus park-and-ride spaces accessible from the I-40 East on-ramp.

“There’s lots of options,” Polikov said, “but the key is how it’s designed for future expansion that both creates opportunities for additional parking but doesn’t consume it through permanent surface parking that eventually becomes a barrier to redevelopment.”

Some residential development also is possible at the UNC Hospitals and Mason Farm stations, Polikov said, along with a small amount of ground-floor retail and campus amenities. While planning for UNC land doesn’t guarantee an outcome, he warned, the Friday Center station was envisioned with existing buildings, more institutional or commercial uses, and residential housing, particularly for staff and employees.

While citizens who spoke generally supported transit, most urged the town to stop wasting resources planning stations for a light-rail system that they said has questionable finances and social benefits.

The decision has been made, Council member Maria Palmer responded, and the town needs to take advantage of its opportunities.

“We have to take risks. We have to move forward. I believe in progress, and I believe that millennials are getting out of their cars and they want this, and for Chapel Hill to stay competitive, we have to provide modern transportation,” Palmer said.

The town can’t wait until the stations are built, Council member Sally Greene added.

“The reason we’re doing it now is because, as it was pointed out and is very easy to imagine, if we were to wait until the moment if or when station stops are dedicated and they’re real, then overnight, the price of land is going to go (up),” Greene said, “so if we’re going to have meaningful planning, particularly for the affordable housing, we have to be doing it now.”

Council member Nancy Oates offered a different perspective, noting that light rail is nice, but may not be affordable or offer much benefit to Orange County.

“If this does get passed, then we’re going to be paying a lot for the light rail, and then we’re going to be paying a lot for affordable housing, so I want to know exactly how much, not just have it dangled out there, oh, you’ll get affordable housing,” Oates said. “We won’t get it; we’ll have to buy it, and how much is it going to cost?”

Affordable housing won’t be a free ride, Polikov said.

“Affordable housing policy is a citywide policy for Durham and a townwide policy for Chapel Hill, and I think it’s inappropriate to suggest that somehow the light-rail project should absorb and take over and direct the affordable housing question,” Polikov said. “It’s an opportunity to expand affordable housing, but there’s no way to know what the total cost would be relative to the light rail system itself.”

The town has several tools now, including density bonuses, financing and tax credits, land acquisition and government subsidies. Housing experts will look at other options, McDonough said. He also noted more light-rail financial information will be out soon and urged everyone to also read the financial analysis expected from the county’s independent consultant.

How transit partnerships will make your Raleigh-to-Charlotte train trip easier

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And it’s one example of how NCDOT is trying to increase convenience. Last year, NCDOT announced a new pilot partnership between the state and growing Durham transportation technology upstart TransLoc that aims to integrate Uber and transit with passenger rail.

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Lauren Ohnesorge covers information technology and entrepreneurship.

Trump budget could derail Durham-Orange light-rail plan

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb March 17, 2017

CHAPEL HILL – A federal budget proposal released Thursday has the potential to leave Durham and Orange counties holding the bag for light rail if approved.

President Donald Trump's 2018 budget plan would only fund New Starts projects with existing grant agreements from the Federal Transit Administration.

GoTriangle plans to seek funding from the New Starts program in 2018 to pay for half of the \$2.5 billion Durham-Orange Light-Rail Transit project. The current schedule anticipates a funding agreement for the project in 2020, GoTriangle spokesman Mike Charbonneau said in an email.

The current plan is to pay the other half using local and state money, with Durham and Orange counties picking up at least 90 percent, or \$990 million.

The counties' attorneys met Friday to discuss a revised cost-sharing agreement under which Durham could pay more of the local cost. The current cost-sharing agreement leaves Orange County with 23 percent of the local bill – roughly \$227 million – and Durham County paying 77 percent.

However, the counties would have to pay at least 90 percent of the project's total cost, or \$2.25 billion, under the president's proposed budget. The General Assembly has capped state funding at up to 10 percent of total project costs.

Without federal money, the light-rail project could not move forward, Charbonneau said.

"GoTriangle is confident that federal budget negotiations will recognize the many values of transit investment, including access to jobs and education, and that essential funding for transit projects will continue," he said. "We will monitor the budget process and work closely with our partners, including the North Carolina delegation in Washington, D.C., to advocate for continued federal funding for transit projects."

The proposed change is meant to streamline federal Department of Transportation spending and activities, the budget states. It emphasizes significant national and regional infrastructure projects, while reducing or eliminating projects "that are better delivered by states, localities, or the private sector."

The \$16.2 billion budget would represent a 13 percent cut in the department's 2017 budget.

GoTriangle officials plan to [meet](#) with the Durham and Orange boards of commissioners in April to get their approval for revised plan agreements and financial plans. The regional transit agency must submit those documents by April 30 to enter the New Starts engineering phase.

The engineering work must be completed before the FTA will approve the project for full funding.

RDU budget to propel capital projects forward

The Herald -Sun By Kathryn Trogon March 22, 2017

MORRISVILLE – Raleigh-Durham International Airport will soon kick off a multi-year capital improvement program that will bring a reconstructed runway, a new consolidated rental car facility and parking renovations to the airport in response to passenger growth. (CONTINUED...)

And the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority's proposed budget reflects this shift, as design and construction for many of the planned projects begins in the upcoming fiscal year, which begins April 1, RDU spokesman Andrew Sawyer said. The airport authority, an eight-member board, will vote on the proposed budget Thursday.

The \$175 million budget projects a 19.6 percent increase in operating income and a 17.5 percent rise in operating expenses, which will help pay for new projects and the additional staff needed as more customers travel to and from RDU. The airport plans to add 41 positions to its staff of about 300.

RDU expects a 6.8 percent increase in passengers this coming fiscal 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.

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 the product of these efforts – a 25-year master plan – in [October](#). Sawyer said now that the planning process is largely completed, this year's focus will be on implementing the projects in the plan.

"This year is all about laying the foundation for the projects that are to come," Sawyer said. "We're setting the stage for the future."

The most significant project for the airport is the \$280 million relocation and reconstruction of the longest [runway](#), known as 5L-23R, on the western side of the airport in the next three to five years before it reaches the end of its useful life.

The runway will be built parallel to the existing one, which will be turned into a taxiway, but work can't begin until the Federal Aviation Administration approves the airport's 25-year master plan. That approval is needed to receive federal funding for the project.

RDU officials also expect to begin planning the new \$200 million consolidated rental car facility, which would be between terminals 1 and 2, adjacent to the parking garage, putting rental cars within walking distance of the terminals.

"We are putting in motion our plans for the future to better connect people to the places that matter most," Sawyer said. "This is the start."

Durham wrong-way crash serves as sign of bigger problem in NC

WRAL.com By Sarah Krueger March 22, 2017

DURHAM, N.C. — The crash that killed two people and injured others on Interstate 85 near East Club Boulevard in Durham Monday morning serves as a sign of a bigger problem.

In the last 16 years, there have been more than 500 wrong way crashes on North Carolina's freeways and interstates. Those accidents killed 145 people and injured 643 more — numbers that spurred the DOT into action.

The Department of Transportation is currently involved in a number of studies, at the state level and internationally.

In North Carolina, the DOT said there aren't that many wrong-way crashes. But it's a big concern because the ones they do have are so often deadly.

Robbin Williams' cousin, 49-year-old Aretha Chavis, got on I-85 in Durham Monday morning, going the wrong way. A cross marks the spot where two people lost their lives. (CONTINUED...)

"As soon as we laid the cross, we just all broke down crying," Williams said. "Just to see the debris and stuff still on the road. It was so hard, especially with her kids there and her grandkids."

Police said she hit an SUV with nine people in it. Both Chavis and the other driver, 29-year-old Jerry Alamo of Rhode Island, died instantly. All others in the SUV were injured.

Kevin Lacy with the State DOT said they're involved in multiple studies to prevent wrong-way crashes.

In known trouble spots, they've added reflective strips to get drivers' attention. They're also working on initiatives that can use technology to detect wrong-way drivers.

"It's not hundreds or thousands of crashes," Lacy said. "It's a very small number of crashes, but when they do occur, they're pretty tragic."

Tragic accidents that Williams hopes no other family will experience. She said the more the DOT can do better.

"So this wouldn't happen to another family," Lacy said. "There's two families lost here, not just our family, but another family. And I want to give my condolences and prayers to that family also."

Of the eight others injured in the crash, one still has critical injuries. The other seven have been released.

Police haven't been able to figure out for sure where the wrong-way driver got on the highway around here.

UNC-Chapel Hill poised to start increasing parking charges this summer

The Herald-Sun By Ray Gronberg March 22, 2017

CHAPEL HILL – The cost of parking on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus is going to rise, thanks to a plan that started making its way through campus trustees' approval process on Wednesday.

Parking permit prices are scheduled to go up by 1 percent starting this summer, with further 1 percent per year increases to follow in fiscal 2018-19 and 2019-20.

UNC officials also intend to institute weeknight parking fees, starting in 2019-20, said Cheryl Stout, the university's director of transportation and parking.

Those changes, and associated increases in student fees, are a package that's supposed to help UNC raise about \$14.5 million over the coming five years to cover increased costs for transit, construction debts and inflation.

Stout said the proposal grows out of more than year's worth of in-house debate on campus, and that the administration understands it will have to continue explaining it to groups on campus.

Refining and implementing its night parking element in particular will "require a lot of communication to the community" between now and 2019-20, she told the trustees' finance committee on Wednesday.

The student fee end of the package calls for 3.5 percent increases in what students pay for parking in 2017-18 and the following year. In dollar terms, student parking charges would rise \$11.08 over the two years.

Except for first-years, students would also be on the hook for weeknight parking charges starting in 2019-20, to the tune initially of \$6 a year and \$10 a year by 2012-22. (CONTINUED...)

Beyond raising money, a key objective of the package is reducing the existing cross-subsidy that bus services like Chapel Hill Transit get from campus parking revenue. Student fees help support the bus systems, which also include things like the university's P2P shuttle.

Beyond student fee and parking permit increases, officials also figure to increase curbside parking meter charges and the hourly rate for the use of such visitor parking areas as the Raleigh Road surface lot and the Rams Head parking deck. Each would go up by 25 cents an hour.

The trustees' finance committee endorsed the proposal, sending it to the full Board of Trustees on Thursday. The full board almost invariably supports committee recommendations.

Durham-Chapel Hill 4th-fastest-growing metro area in North Carolina last year

The Herald -Sun By Zachery Eanes March 24, 2017

DURHAM – The Durham-Chapel Hill metropolitan area grew by 1.5 percent to nearly 560,000 people last year, making it the state's fourth-fastest-growing metro area, according to recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

The Durham-Chapel Hill metro area, which consists of Durham, Orange, Chatham and Person counties, trailed only the Raleigh, Charlotte and Wilmington metro areas in the year ending last June 30.

From 2010 to 2016, the Durham-Chapel Hill area saw the third-fastest growth of any metropolitan area in the state: 10.9 percent. That growth rate trailed only Raleigh (15.3 percent) and Charlotte (11.6 percent).

That rapid growth makes regional planning more important, especially in regard to improving transportation, said Matt Gladdek, director of policy and planning at Downtown Durham Inc.

The greater Durham area has seen some of the sharpest growth in the state.

The N.C. Office of State Budget and Management predicts Durham County will grow by 25,000 people every five years through 2035, Gladdek said in an email.

"This growth isn't slowing down, and we need to make sure we are planning and building for growth where we want it, and where it makes the most sense environmentally," he said.

From 2010 to 2016, the Durham-Chapel Hill area has seen the third quickest growth of any metropolitan area in the state – growing by 10.9 percent.

The 2016 estimates make Durham-Chapel Hill the fifth-largest metro area in the state.

The Charlotte and Raleigh metro areas are the two biggest by far with 2.5 million and 1.3 million people, respectively.

Durham also trails the Greensboro-High Point metro area (756,000) and Winston-Salem (662,000).

[\[Database: 2016 Census population estimates for North Carolina\]](#)

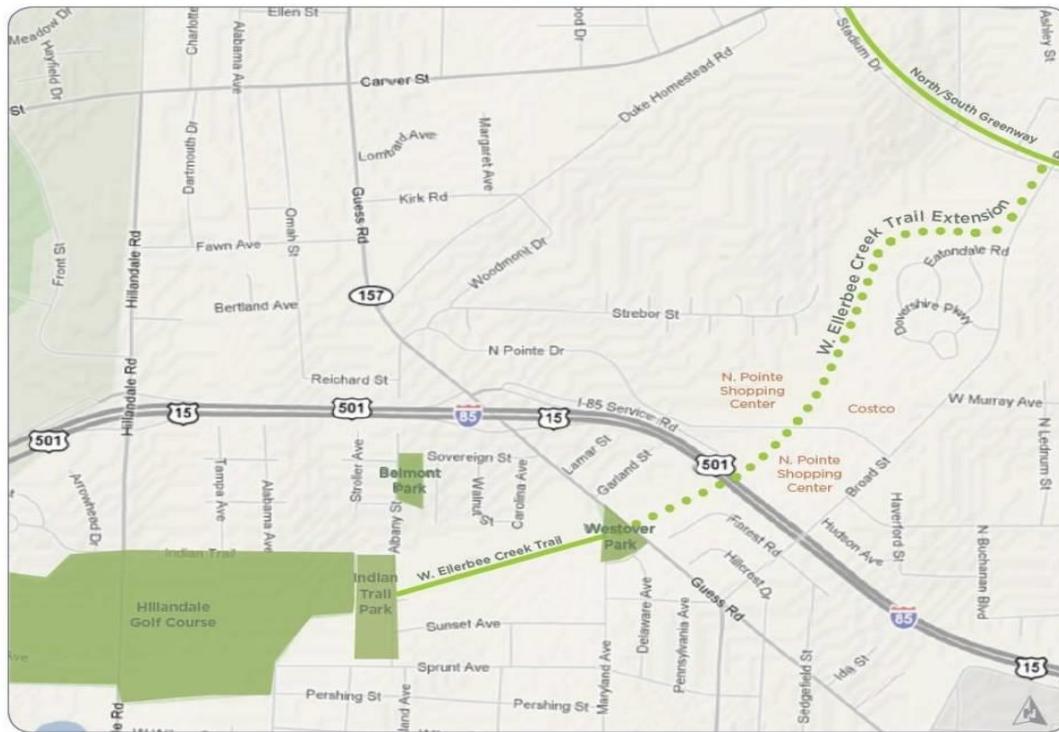
While urban centers such as Raleigh, Charlotte and Durham grow, the census bureau's numbers reveal a rural-urban divide in terms of population change. Since 2010, 48 counties have lost population, mostly in rural areas.

Findings from the census report:

- The Durham-Chapel Hill metro area's growth was led by Chatham County, which has grown 13.8 percent to 72,000 residents since 2010. Durham County has grown 13.4 percent to 306,000 people. Orange County has grown 5.7 percent to nearly 141,800 people. (CONTINUED...)

- Person County is the only county to have its population decrease in the Durham-Chapel Hill metro area since 2010. Its population fell by 0.4 percent to 39,284.
- Mecklenburg County remained the most populous county in North Carolina at an estimated 1,054,835 residents last July 1. Wake was a close second at 1,046,791.
- The northeastern part of the state has seen the largest losses since 2010, led by Northampton County at an estimated 9.5 percent decrease. In total, 11 counties have lost 5 percent or more of their population since 2010 with all but one of them north and east of Rocky Mount.

Coming to Durham in 2018: West Ellerbee Creek Trail extension



The Herald -Sun By Virginia Bridges March 28, 2017

DURHAM – Just off Guess Road, sits 20 acres of floodplain forest that residents can duck into for a respite from the nearby city.

The area includes [the West Ellerbee Creek Trail](#), a paved trail that follows the creek, along with unpaved paths that meander through the wooded area.

After Steve Cohn noticed all the activity on the trail – pedestrians, dogs walkers and bicyclists – he started pushing for an extension. That push turned into a more than 10-year effort by Cohn, Larry Brockman and others who sought a greenway connection to other trails in northern Durham. (CONTINUED...)

After years of efforts, the trail extension is finally in reach.

The City Council recently approved a construction contract for the 1.08 mile West Ellerbee Creek Trail extension, adding to Durham's more than 30 miles of trails.

"My response is hallelujah," said Cohn, 67. "And maybe I will be able to walk and ride on it while I can still walk and ride."

After one more N.C. Department of Transportation approval, which is expected this week, the city can move forward with the construction that's expected to take nine months and be completed by early 2018.

The trail, which will cost \$2.9 million, begins at Watts Hospital-Hillandale Neighborhood's Westover Park, which is near the intersection of Guess Road and Wagoner Street. The trail follows the creek. It goes under Interstate 85 – through an existing tunnel – and between the shopping centers with Costco and the Home Depot. It continues northwest to the intersection of Stadium Drive and Broad Street where it connects to the North/South Greenway.

"It helps connect neighborhoods and people," said Brockman, 51, which is what these projects are all about.

On Monday night, the council approved a construction contract along with other actions to address a \$705,349 shortfall in the trail's budget that developed since the initial amount was set in 2009.

The city had previously received a \$1.1 million federal grant and set aside capital improvements funds to cover the initial budget.

To cover the higher costs, the City Council transferred \$346,709 from the Kelly Bryant Bridge South trail project, a trail planned to extend from the south end of the blue pedestrian bridge over the Durham Freeway that connects down to the N.C. Central University area.

The Kelly Bryant Bridge South trail project can't move forward until early 2018, when federal funding is available for the project's design phase. Staff is pursuing additional federal funding for the West Ellerbee Creek Trail, which if approved, would be used to replace Kelly Bryant Bridge South trail funds, said Jessica Kemp, senior construction project manager with the General Services Department.

A federal grant will cover the rest of the shortfall.

Kemp attributed the increased budget to general inflation since 2009, the current competitive bid market and additional costs incurred by contractors to meet state requirements.

Over the years, the project worked its way through a cycle that included figuring out where the trail would go through a public voting process and securing easements.

Chris Dreps, executive director of the [Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association](#), said the new extension will open up one of the prettiest sections of the creek to the public. The project is also near The Rocks Nature Preserve, a two-acre woodland along a rocky section of Ellerbe Creek.

"For the most part, we like the project," Dreps said. "We know it is going to have impacts, but we think the impacts will be outweighed by thousands of people getting to know the creek in ways that they never did before."

Pedestrian deaths spiked in 2016, distraction cited

The News and Observer-Traffic By Joan Lowy, Associated Press March 30, 2017

WASHINGTON — Pedestrian deaths are climbing faster than motorist fatalities, reaching nearly 6,000 deaths last year — the highest total in more than two decades, according to an analysis of preliminary state data released Thursday.

Increased driving due to an improved economy, lower gas prices and more walking for exercise and environmental factors are some of the likely reasons behind the estimated 11 percent spike in pedestrian fatalities in 2016. The figures were prepared for the Governors Highway Safety Association, which represents state highway safety offices.

But researchers say they think the biggest factor may be more drivers and walkers distracted by cellphones and other electronic devices, although that's hard to confirm.

Walking and miles driven are up only a few percentage points, and are unlikely to account for most of the surge in pedestrian deaths, said Richard Retting, safety director for Sam Schwartz Transportation Consultants and the author of the report. Meanwhile, texting and use of wireless devices have exploded, he said.

"It's the only factor that that seems to indicate a dramatic change in how people behave," Retting said.

The report is based on data from all states and the District of Columbia for the first six months of 2016 and extrapolated for the rest of the year. It shows the largest annual increase in both the number and percentage of pedestrian fatalities in the more than 40 years those national records on such deaths have been kept, with the second largest increase occurring in 2015. Pedestrian deaths as a share of total motor vehicle crash deaths increased from 11 percent in 2006 to 15 percent in 2015.

"This latest data shows that the U.S. isn't meeting the mark on keeping pedestrians safe on our roadways," said Jonathan Adkins, the safety association's executive director. "Every one of these lives represents a loved one not coming home tonight, which is absolutely unacceptable."

Traffic fatalities overall jumped 6 percent last year, pushing deaths on U.S. roads to their highest level in nearly a decade and erasing improvements made during the Great Recession and economic recovery, according to data released last month by the National Safety Council, a leading safety organization. The council estimates there were more than 40,200 traffic deaths in 2016. The last time there were more than 40,000 fatalities in a single year was in 2007, just before the economy tanked. There were 41,000 deaths that year.

But pedestrian deaths are sharply outpacing fatalities overall, climbing 25 percent from 2010 to 2015, according to Retting's research. Total traffic deaths increased about 6 percent over the same period.

"We cannot look at distracted driving solely as an in-vehicle issue," said Kelly Nantel, a spokeswoman for the safety council. "That discounts the impact distraction could have on pedestrians."

On the other hand, "walking is working," she said. "Just as we need drivers to be alert, pedestrians have to be, too."

Another factor in pedestrian deaths is alcohol. Thirty-four percent of pedestrians and 15 percent of drivers involved in fatal crashes were intoxicated at the time, Retting said. But there is no indication that there has been a change in drinking habits that would account for the spike in deaths, he said.

More than twice as many states reported an uptick in pedestrian fatalities than had decreasing numbers.

The problem is greatest in large population states that have urban areas where people do a lot of walking. Delaware, Florida and Arizona had the highest rates of pedestrian deaths relative to their populations, while North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming had the lowest. (CONTINUED...)

The striking increase in pedestrian deaths has grabbed the attention of the National Transportation Safety Board, the government panel that investigates accidents and makes safety recommendations. The board held a forum on pedestrian safety last year, and currently has an investigation underway to broadly examine the causes and potential solutions to the problem.

Pedestrians "are our most vulnerable road users," said NTSB member Bella Dinh-Zarr.

People are "more easily distracted than when we didn't have so many easily accessible, essentially, computers in our palms," she said. "We look at that as an increasing risk for pedestrians."

GoTriangle, Uber partnership could connect new markets to transit

The Herald -Sun By Kathryn Trogdon March 31, 2017

DURHAM – A partnership between Durham-based transit technology company TransLoc, public transit agency GoTriangle and Uber may one day help better connect commuters to public transportation, particularly in more suburban areas.

The Triangle recently became the first market for TransLoc's Uber upgrade to its bus and transit tracking mobile app. Through the app, called TransLoc Rider, passengers can plan their route and book an Uber to cover the trip to or from the bus stop.

The impact has yet to show up in GoTriangle's ridership numbers, which hover around 1.8 million passengers per year between 2013 and 2016. A customer service survey conducted by GoTriangle in 2016 found that about 8 percent of GoTriangle riders said they had used an Uber or Lyft in conjunction with a bus trip in the previous 30 days.

Officials said partnerships like this will be increasingly important to provide seamless mobility for everyone as bus services – and the boundaries of the Triangle – continue to push out in all directions.

"Our pilot with GoTriangle has proved to be another step toward overcoming the first-mile, last-mile obstacle many people outside urban centers face when trying to access public transit," said Josh Cohen, TransLoc's director of strategy and partnerships.

The TransLoc Rider app allows people to find the best route to get from place to place, whether that be through public transit, walking, Uber or a combination, as well as where their bus is and how soon it will arrive. Evelyn Cashen of public relations firm Antenna Group, representing TransLoc, said 105,000 people used Rider between February 2016 and 2017, but the company is not sharing figures for the number of people who used Uber during that time.

"The added value of the pilot is not about the specific numbers of people who are using transit and Uber but the ability to seamlessly integrate another transit mode that makes trip planning even easier for our riders," said Mike Charbonneau, GoTriangle director of marketing and communications.

The Uber pilot program in the Triangle has led to similar TransLoc and Uber partnerships in Memphis, Tenn., Gainesville, Fla., San Jose, Calif., and Clemson, S.C. TransLoc Rider also allows passengers of the Amtrak Piedmont and Carolinian trains to find transit options, such as public transit and Uber, to and from North Carolina's Amtrak stations.

Wake County's Transit Plan, which was approved by voters in November, is expected to increase the need for connections to other modes of transportation as the bus network extends into places such as Cary, Holly Springs, Apex, Knightdale and Garner. (CONTINUED...)

“As transit service abundance increases in the region, a broader range of customers will begin using the service,” Charbonneau said. “Most will use transit in conjunction with other ways of getting around – from bikes to ride-sharing to Lyft/Uber to driving their own cars.”

In some cases, ride-hailing services like Uber are a natural rival of public transportation. For shorter trips in particular, riders choose to take Uber or Lyft instead; GoTriangle’s customer survey indicated that 20 percent of riders surveyed had used the services to replace a bus trip within the previous 30 days.

But TransLoc and GoTriangle officials said in most cases, Uber and Lyft costs much more than public transit and complements – rather than competes with – longer bus trips, by providing connections on the front and back ends.

For example, a trip from downtown Raleigh to Research Triangle Park via bus on a Tuesday afternoon would cost \$2.25 plus an \$8 Uber ride for the last couple miles, while a similar trip completely using Uber would come in at \$42.

Charbonneau said relying solely on services such as Uber adds up if you are making daily trips, like commuting to and from work.

“This may be acceptable to some people on an infrequent basis (for example, a trip to the airport),” he said. “It would be truly rare for someone to accept these costs on a regular basis.”

As the Triangle’s population grows and transit options continue to expand, TransLoc and GoTriangle officials say they will continue to look for more ways to make it easier for riders to understand what transit choices are available. For example, GoTriangle is looking into TransLoc’s OnDemand Product for use in Research Triangle Park that could allow for more direct shuttle trips to and from employers, Charbonneau said.

GoTriangle also is exploring providing incentives for transit customers to continue riding the bus in exchange for credits to use for Lyft, Uber or taxicab trips when or where bus services aren’t available.

“The pilot speaks to GoTriangle’s commitment to the future of mobility and what it will look like,” Charbonneau said. “The pilot is one step in that direction, and there will be many more going forward.”

NCDOT: Refinancing saved the state \$94M on Triangle Expressway

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge March 31, 2017

The N.C. Turnpike Authority is refinancing a portion of the outstanding bonds paying for the Triangle Expressway – a move that, according to the N.C. Department of Transportation, saves the state nearly \$94 million.

Turnpike Authority Executive Director [Beau Memory](#) says that ratings firm [Standard & Poor's](#) recently upgraded the project from a BBB- rating to a BBB rating. “The market sees the strength of the project,” he says. And it put the project in line for the refinancing, which closed Thursday morning.

It’s too early to know what impact the savings might have on the highway. “We’re really only in our fifth year in operation ... but it does give us some long-term flexibility,” he says.

While the state says the current toll rate schedule will not change as a result of refinancing, if the project continues to perform as projected, other benefits could follow, according to NCDOT. Those could include a reduction in the state’s contribution for the Complete 540 project and future toll rate flexibility. Additionally, there’s a possibility that the state could pay off the project debt more quickly than anticipated, which would take tolls off the road earlier than planned.

Read: [Inside the state's \\$2.2B Complete 540 project](#) (CONTINUED...)

Toll revenues are used to help pay off bonds sold to fund the \$1 billion highway, as well as maintenance, including road repairs, signs mowing and winter weather response. Since the Triangle Expressway opened in 2011, revenues are 26 percent above the projections, according to NCDOT figures.

Memory says his department is “continually” looking for opportunities to bring more value to the project. “Our finance team saw an opportunity here,” he says.

The Triangle Expressway [was recently tapped as a federal testing site for driverless vehicles](#). Memory says planning is still underway.

Durham officials' grand plan to have you bike, walk to work

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge April 4, 2017

Walking or biking to work in Bull City is about to get easier. The city of Durham is soliciting comments on the final draft of its “[Durham Bike + Walk Plan](#).”

[Bryan Poole](#), a transportation planner with the city, says consultants, primarily Stantec, were tapped to help the city prioritize which projects they could feasibly address in the next few years.

To develop the plan, officials worked with a budget of \$125,000, he says. “There were more than 450 miles of bike facilities needs, more than 400 miles of sidewalks and 480 intersections that we looked at and prioritized,” Poole explains. “It shows the amount of needs, if we were going to address all the sidewalk and bike needs in Durham, that’s a lot of miles to improve.”

The city was able to narrow the list to 75 projects in its plan, published online Monday.

Poole calls the priority list the “first step” in improving connections for both pedestrians and bicyclists. Specifically, it’s about addressing both safety and accessibility, and it comes at the request of Durham residents.

He cites recent resident surveys asking the city to invest more in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The hope is to get a plan passed by council, with implementation beginning in July. “We’ll be focused first on constructing the gap project,” he says, referring to short gaps – less than 500 feet.

Poole says it’s tough to determine exactly how many people currently use bike and pedestrian facilities in Bull City.

Overall, 73.9 percent of Durham residents drive to work alone, according to a 2015 resident survey. Just 2.8 percent of residents walk to work. In some parts of the city, however, the numbers are higher, with nearly 25 percent walking on their commutes, points out Poole.

The plan contains several recommendations, from removing free-right turns for cars in bike corridors to keeping one-way streets two-way for bicycles to adding green paint at intersections. At West Chapel Hill Street, for example, the recommendation is to restrict parking and remove turning lanes to keep bicycle lanes continuous through the corridor. On a one mile stretch of Club Boulevard, one that already sees high traffic speeds and volumes, green paint at “conflict points” could make bicycles more visible, according to the report. And completion of a sidewalk along the southside of Cornwallis Road could improve pedestrian activity.

The plan, which spans several popular roadways and intersections, also recommends increased lighting in areas where people wait for buses.

Residents are asked to share their thoughts with the city by April 28. (CONTINUED...)

According to the city, Durham has constructed more than 30 miles of bike lanes, 25 miles of publicly-constructed sidewalk and 12 miles of shared-use facilities over the past decade. In total, the city has 44.3 miles of bicycle facilities, 543 miles of sidewalks and 39.1 miles of greenways. By the end of the year, the city will have started construction on another 8.9 miles of biking facilities and 16 more miles of sidewalks.

Between 2007 and 2013, more than 270 bicycle collisions were reported.

These are the locations of bicycle-focused project priorities listed in the report:

- Chapel Hill Street (from Ramseur St. to Swift Ave)
- Club Boulevard (from Washington St. to Broad St)
- Foster Street (from American Tobacco Trail to Monmouth Ave/Trinity Ave)
- Fulton Road (from Erwin Rd. to Durham Freeway)
- Liberty Street (from Cleveland St. to N. Miami Blvd)
- Morgan Street (from Great Jones St. to Main St.)
- University Drive (from Hope Valley Rd. to Garrett Rd.)
- Watts Street (from Club Blvd. to Morgan St.)

Light-rail funding plan leaves Orange County little room for error

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb April 5, 2017

HILLSBOROUGH – Orange County doesn't have a lot of room for error in building the \$3.3 billion Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit system, an independent consultant reported Tuesday after reviewing GoTriangle's financial plan.

While construction could cost \$2.4 billion, GoTriangle plans to finance part of the local share, adding another \$913 million in interest payments through 2062.

The project's annual payments leave Orange County with as little \$210,725 in 2045 to cover unexpected expenses, Davenport and Company consultant Ted Cole told the Orange County Board of Commissioners. An analysis shows the county's annual cash balance only surpasses \$10 million eight times in the next 45 years.

Durham County, on the other hand, maintains at least \$35 million in available cash through the last year of light-rail debt payments in 2062, he said.

The final cost of investing in light rail and other Orange County Bus and Rail Investment Plan projects will depend largely on the economy and construction costs, Cole said.

"When you look at this long-term model, when you look at the magnitude of the project, the magnitude of the budget, and you look at the cash balances attributable to Orange County, it's a very, very thin margin," he said. "We know that we're talking about 40-year projections and those are extremely difficult to do in an accurate fashion."

He noted that the revenue growth from Orange County's half-cent transit sales tax is critical. (CONTINUED...)

"On the sales tax, it's one thing to get from year one to year 40 and you're on a 4 percent track (in sales tax growth) over the long term. It's another thing to hit every single year of dollars growing, and what this model requires is you have the dollars every single year," Cole said. "A delay in the dollars and you make it up later doesn't necessarily work."

The county hired Davenport and Company to complete the independent report after GoTriangle came to the commissioners last fall for help finding \$40 million more for the project over 10 years. GoTriangle officials asked the Durham County Board of Commissioners to help find \$135 million more.

However, GoTriangle returned to both counties in January with a new financial plan that would only require the extra money if the project ran into future cost overruns or an economic downturn. That plan relies on roughly \$984 million in short- and long-term financing, and continued sales tax growth of 3 percent to 5 percent over the next 45 years. State revenue records show Orange County's transit tax generated almost \$6.3 million in 2014 but fell slightly in 2015 and 2016.

Orange and Durham commissioners are being asked this month to approve updated bus and rail plans, revised financial plans and a new cost-sharing agreement.

Missing an April 30 deadline would delay the rail project by at least a year and could risk future Federal Transit Administration grant funding. FTA approval would move the project into the engineering phase. GoTriangle wants to start light-rail construction in 2020 and launch the system in 2029.

While Orange County commissioners asked many questions and took public comment Tuesday, they kept their remarks to a minimum.

Commissioners Earl McKee and Barry Jacobs asked Davenport officials to examine how delaying the move to engineering might affect the light-rail project's long-term viability and the county's financial outlook. Jacobs also asked for a more in-depth look at the sales tax revenue forecast for Orange County.

Commissioners Chairman Mark Dorosin noted there might be cost-cutting opportunities.

Maybe Durham County could pick up even more of the tab for light rail, Commissioner Mia Burroughs suggested. The counties have been renegotiating how to split the project's \$1.9 billion local cost. Durham now pays 77 percent and Orange County pays 23 percent, based on how much of the light rail is in each county.

A proposed formula has Durham picking up 82 percent of the local cost, and Orange County picking up 18 percent. That doesn't work for her, Burroughs said.

"My genuine desire really, truly is I believe light rail is the right thing. I commute this particular area every day, so I see that, but I really need for you all to work hard to get Durham to understand that," she said. "There's all these other things we can do, there's cost shares, there's setting up tax districts where you share the revenue – that's too mushy for me. I need to see the Durham-Orange split (as) significantly different from what we have now."

The Orange County commissioners will hold a public hearing April 18 on the draft Bus and Rail Investment Plan and are expected to vote April 27. A public hearing will be held in Durham County on April 11; the Durham County commissioners will vote April 24.

SHARE YOUR OPINION

The draft Orange County and Durham County transit plans are open for public comment until Friday, April 21. Both plans are available at ourtransitfuture.com/plans.

Comments can be submitted via email to info@ourtransitfuture.com; or by mail at Our Transit Future, PO Box 13787, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709. Comments also can be submitted in writing at an upcoming public workshop or shared at a public hearing. (CONTINUED...)

Meetings ahead

GoTriangle will hold drop-in workshops from 5 to 7 p.m. in:

- Downtown Durham: Monday, April 10, Durham Station Transportation Center second floor, 515 W. Pettigrew St.
- Hillsborough: Tuesday, April 11, Orange County West Campus lower-level conference room, 131 W. Margaret Lane
- Durham: Wednesday, April 12, GoTriangle Administrative Office, Room 104, 4600 Emperor Blvd.
- Chapel Hill: Thursday, April 13, Chapel Hill Town Hall, 405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Public hearings are scheduled for:

- Durham County: 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 11, at the Durham County Administrative Complex, 200 E. Main St.
- Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO: 9 a.m. Wednesday, April 12, at City Hall, second floor, 101 City Hall Plaza
- Orange County: 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 18, Southern Human Services Center, 2501 Homestead Road, Chapel Hill