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METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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May 25, 2022

To: Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO Technical Committee
 From: Aaron Cain, Staff Working Group Administrator, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO
 Re: Material Changes to the Durham County Transit Plan

Summary. As part of the appropriations process for the Durham County Transit Plan (Transit Plan), an annual Work Program is developed which produces a budget for the upcoming fiscal year. During the development of the FY23 Durham County Transit Plan, several items that are to be incorporated into the preferred scenario are proposed to be incorporated into the FY23 Work Program. Per the interlocal agreement (ILA) that governs the Transit Plan, and/or per the request of the Durham Staff Working Group (SWG), the following items are considered “material changes” and must be approved by all three governing boards of the ILA in order to be incorporated into the FY23 Work Program.

The projects that are deemed to be material changes are:

- North Durham Improvements on the GoDurham Route 9/9A/9B and new crosstown service;
- Durham Station Improvements;
- Increased funding for Durham Bus Stop Improvements; and
- New Paratransit Maintenance Facility.

The Durham County Board of Commissioners will review this item at its May 2 work session and consider a vote on the item on May 23. The DCHC MPO Board will review this request on May 11, and consider a vote on June 8. The GoTriangle Board of Trustees will review this request as part of its consideration of the FY23 Work Program when it votes on the budget at its June 22 meeting.

Background. In 2013, the Durham County Board of Commissioners, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO), and GoTriangle adopted an ILA to govern procedures for amending the Bus and Rail Investment Plan, which was originally adopted in 2011. In 2017 a new Durham Transit Plan was adopted by the three partners, and the 2013 ILA remains in effect for that plan. In 2020, after the discontinuation of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) project, an effort began to create a new Durham County Transit Plan that will address current needs and future financial planning for Durham’s transit tax fund.

While the ILA states that only bus service budget increases of greater than \$500,000 require an amendment to the 2017 Durham Transit Plan in order to be incorporated into an annual Work Program, all of the items listed above were deemed by the Durham SWG to be of enough significance that they should be considered material changes, and therefore subject to approval by the three partner boards. All of the projects selected for review by the three partner boards are included in the draft Durham County Transit Plan, which is planned to be released for public review and comment in June 2022. In addition, all of these projects have undergone financial review and can be afforded within the expected revenues of the FY23 transit tax fund budget. A short description of each project is given below, and the project sheet for each project is attached.

North Durham Improvements; GoDurham Routes 9/9A/9B and Crosstown

As a priority from the development of the new Durham County Transit Plan, this project will improve service for neighborhoods in North Durham that are dependent on transit. The proposed improvements include:

- Crosstown service from Duke Regional Hospital to Duke/VA Medical Center; and
- Frequency improvements on GoDurham Routes 9A and 9B to every 30 minutes at night Monday through Saturday as well as on Sundays.

These service improvements are consistent with projects in the Durham Transit Plan. Service is planned to begin in late 2022 or early 2023. These new services will improve access to major employment destinations and make transit a more dependable option at night and on Sundays.

The funding request is for approximately \$1.2 million in FY23. That funding will be for a partial year of service. The funding request increases to \$2.95 million in FY24 for a full year of service, with standard inflationary increases after that.

Durham Station Improvements

GoDurham is planning improvements to Durham Station to expand equitable access to transit, improve station amenities, and increase connections to employment, healthcare and education opportunities. GoDurham's system-wide average daily weekday ridership has increased since Durham Station opened in 2008 from 8,000 to 14,000 riders (21,000 pre-COVID). With this ridership growth, existing conditions at Durham Station do not effectively serve the needs of riders and provide limited opportunities for increased transit service. Improvements will serve a large portion of GoDurham riders, 80% of which are minorities, 90% of which earn less than \$35,000 a year, and 68% of which that do not have access to a personal vehicle.

The existing conditions provide limited seating and covering for passengers. The canopies cover only 30% of the bus island, which can result in passengers standing in poor weather conditions and walking through water. The improvements to the bus island will include expanded canopies to protect 80% of the bus island and host solar panels, additional seating, new restrooms and a customer service security kiosk. These new amenities respond to rider-identified improvements to assist in quick transfers and a better waiting experience.

In addition to passenger amenity improvements, eight additional bus bays, redesigned bus lanes and new pavement will improve transit operations and safety at Durham Station. Space for future electric bus charging will also be provided. The existing site layout is at capacity with existing transit operations and will not be able to accommodate future improvements and service expansion being developed in the Durham County Transit Plan.

The requested \$1.8M will provide a match for a federal grant awarded to the City of Durham to complete this work; thereby leveraging nearly \$10 million in federal funds for this project.

Durham Bus Stop Improvements

GoTriangle has embarked on a multi-year improvement program for GoDurham and GoTriangle bus stops in Durham County. In 2020, GoTriangle conducted a field inventory of existing conditions at all GoDurham and GoTriangle bus stops, which is used to identify where stop improvements are needed. GoTriangle prioritizes stop improvements based on factors such as ridership, safety, environmental justice communities, and access to destinations for youth, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

The Bus Stops Improvement Program connects GoDurham and GoTriangle customers with safe, comfortable, and accessible locations to board and disembark from the bus. The program is for the design and construction of ADA, accessibility, and amenities improvements at stops throughout the GoDurham and GoTriangle systems in Durham. Accessibility improvements can include landing pads, sidewalk connections, curb ramps, and crosswalks. Amenities can include seating, shelters, and lighting. The multi-year program includes the design and construction of approximately 75 additional stop improvements in FY23 at \$10,000 per stop for design and \$40,000 per stop for construction (or as many stops as can be designed and constructed until funds are expended). These cost estimates are based on current work; variation in cost for any particular stops is due to conditions at each stop.

A Durham Transit Plan amendment is requested because of the increase in funding in FY23 compared to FY22. The single-year funding in FY22 was \$3 million; the request here is to increase that annual amount in FY23 to \$3.75 million. GoTriangle is confident in this funding increase request because of efficiencies and economies of scale that have been built within the organization over the last two years and the expediency with which bus stop improvements can now be implemented.

New Paratransit Maintenance Facility

GoTriangle's recent fleet and facilities study is evaluating constraints and needs for maintenance, storage, fueling and servicing capacity as well as work-flow efficiency at the GoTriangle Nelson Road bus operations and maintenance facility. The outcome of this study will include site selection, schematic design, and cost estimates for a new and/or expanded facility. The study includes a regional coordination element to identify opportunities for shared facilities for vehicle storage, servicing and/or repairs.

This project is of critical importance as the region contemplates programming additional bus service as GoTriangle is exceeding the current capacity at its existing bus maintenance facilities. GoTriangle may be limited in their ability to deploy expanded service without bringing additional fleet and maintenance capacity online or identifying other mitigation strategies, and both systems will benefit from planning for passenger facility enhancements and expansion on a timeline that will prepare for construction tied to deployment of expansion of service. The ability to expand at the current Nelson Road facility is problematic. GoTriangle has been working with GoDurham to identify a location for a new facility to service the paratransit programs for both agencies, ensuring that the specific maintenance needs for paratransit vehicles can be addressed and improving efficiency for both agencies.

This FY23 request includes the following:

- Design for a GoTriangle/GoDurham paratransit maintenance facility relocation; and
- Land acquisition for relocated facility.

Given what will likely be multi-phased improvements for both GoDurham and GoTriangle, heightened federal funding opportunities over the next five years, and needs to improve employee spaces to enhance quality of life, initial projects need to advance sooner rather than later. A new coordinated paratransit facility unlocks the ability to expand both GoDurham and GoTriangle maintenance facilities. Relocating the paratransit maintenance facility will also open up expansion and renovation opportunities for GoDurham Fixed Route maintenance.

The funding request is for \$3.3 million in FY23 for site acquisition and design. Future funding for construction is expected to come from federal and/or state sources, with limited requirements for local funding.

Issues. These projects would add approximately \$6.1M in new spending in FY23 from the Durham Transit Tax Fund. A review has been conducted by GoTriangle Finance and DCHC MPO staff and finds that these projects can be added to the FY23 budget and remain within the expected revenues for FY23. In addition, all of these projects will be included in the preferred scenario of the new Durham County Transit Plan that is to be released in June 2022.

Recommendation. On May 12, 2022, the Durham SWG approved the inclusion of all four projects in the Draft FY23 Durham Annual Transit Work Program that was recommended to the GoTriangle Board of Trustees for approval.

Next Steps. The approval process schedule for these amendments to the current Durham Transit Plan is as follows:

- May 23 – Durham Board of County Commissioners considers approval
- May 25 – DCHC MPO Technical Committee makes recommendation
- June 8 – DCHC MPO Board considers approval
- June 22 – GoTriangle Board of Trustees considers approval, as part of approval of the Durham Annual Transit Work Program and GoTriangle budget

Contact. Aaron Cain, Planning Manager, DCHC MPO, 919-560-4366 x36443, aaron.cain@durhamnc.gov

Attachment.

Resolution Approving Material Change Requests