

## Chapel Hill bus-rapid transit plan expands, triples in cost

The News and Observer-Chapel Hill News By Tammy Grubb December 6, 2016

CHAPEL HILL – A multimillion-dollar plan to connect north and south Chapel Hill with bus-rapid transit has tripled in cost as it moves toward federal support, with funding and other details to be worked out next year.

Bus-rapid transit, or BRT, relies on dedicated lanes, priority at traffic signals and platform-level boarding to deliver more efficient bus service.

The North-South Corridor plan started as a \$24.5 million, 7.3-mile link between Eubanks Road and UNC's campus. New Chapel Hill Transit buses and related amenities were expected to cost an additional \$7 million.

Further study and community conversations have extended the route to 8.2 miles, from Eubanks Road to Southern Village, said Chapel Hill Transit director Brian Litchfield.

The cost has reached \$97 million to \$106 million, including buses, stations and signal priority systems.

Local officials hope Small Starts funding from the Federal Transportation Administration will cover 70 percent of that cost. The BRT was accepted into the Small Starts project development phase in November, Litchfield said. (Watch a conceptual video at [vimeo.com/148875630](https://vimeo.com/148875630))

The local funding – up from 25 percent to 30 percent now – still needs to be worked out. The Chapel Hill Transit partners – Chapel Hill, Carrboro and UNC – could provide the bulk of that money.

The Orange County bus and rail investment plan, which would also help pay for the light rail line between Chapel Hill and Durham, would provide at least \$6.1 million, GoTriangle officials said.

Litchfield said the higher BRT cost was expected. The project will have a better chance at FTA funding if it can show a higher level of local support, he said.

"As we move through the project development phase, I think we'll have a better sense of how to refine those costs, but also have a better sense of what the federal share is and the local share is," Litchfield said.

The next steps are refining the plan, securing financial commitments, and completing the environmental review, preliminary engineering and design work.

Transit officials will meet with the partners and the Town Council early next year before getting started, Litchfield said. The current timeline has construction starting in 2019 and BRT service hitting the road in 2020.

The plan so far is for 12 buses to serve 16 stations along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, South Columbia Street, Pittsboro Street and U.S. 15-501 south to Southern Village. A connection to a future light-rail station at UNC Hospitals is being considered, he said.

Roughly 85 percent of the route could operate in dedicated bus lanes, using either existing or new, standalone traffic lanes. The rest, especially downtown, could operate in mixed traffic.

The goal of project development is finding the best ways for people to get around and access stops along the corridor, Litchfield said, from incorporating the town's plans for bike and pedestrian improvements to rerouting buses so they better serve riders in other areas.

BRT is expected to increase Chapel Hill Transit's average daily ridership in the corridor by 43 percent, to 8,575 trips a day.

"Someone utilizing the system is either going to be a pedestrian or cyclist on one end or both ends of their trip likely, so providing those accesses are going to be important, as well," Litchfield said.

## Durham councilman: Can city afford more money for light rail?

The News and Observer-Durham News By Virginia Bridges December 8, 2016

DURHAM – At least one City Council member wonders whether Durham County governments can afford to support the Durham-Orange Light Rail Project given a new request to kick in up to \$135 million over a 10-year period.

“This is a project that we desperately need in Durham,” said City Councilman Charlie Reece. “But I don’t know how we can carry this much of the weight. I think it is a simple fact that there are often programs that would be great that we simply can’t afford given all the other things we want to do.”

Reece expressed his concern about the \$1.87 billion light-rail plan at a Thursday City work session. The session gave council members an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about items on the Dec. 19 meeting agenda, which includes a vote on approving a letter of support for the light-rail project. The letter includes a commitment to work with Durham County to identify additional local funding for the project. Durham County plans to vote Monday on a non-binding letter of intent to help GoTriangle identify additional funds.

GoTriangle officials requested the letters as they try to fill a \$254 million funding gap for the 17.5-mile line from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to N.C. Central University. Initially the light-rail plan called for the state covering 25 percent of the cost or \$467 million. The legislature has since capped state support at 10 percent. GoTriangle asked Orange County to help find up to \$40 million more in local funding and [Durham County to help find up to \\$135 million](#). The money would be paid over a 10-year period.

While Orange and Durham counties are being asked to make the commitment, the city is expected to help fill the funding gap, said Mayor Bill Bell.

“We haven’t decided how the dollars will be determined and who is going to do what,” Bell said.

GoTriangle must show local support for at least 30 percent of the project’s cost in its Federal Transit Administration engineering application due Dec. 31. In April, Orange and Durham governments will be asked again to signal support as GoTriangle will spend \$60 million to \$70 million on engineering work before the governments are asked to make binding commitments in June 2018.

On Thursday Reece said he was having a hard time understanding why he should support the city letter when it would result in spending about \$6 million through April on a project that lacks a clear funding plan.

[Orange County commissioners voted](#) last week to support a non-binding letter to help find up to \$40 million more for its share of local funding but also indicated they want to renegotiate with Durham County, likely asking for it to pay a larger share.

“I have yet to be convinced that there is a local funding option that makes sense for the people of Durham,” Reece said.

Bell and Councilman Steve Schewel said the project is worth the risk.

Bell said the letter gives the project time to find funding answers for an important project.

“Simply, we believe enough in this project that we don’t want to stop it now,” Bell said.

Schewel said when the city is taking steps toward a huge infrastructure project such as this one there are always risks.

“We would be risking the \$6 million expenditure, but we are risking it for something that I think is just so kind of generationally important,” he said. (CONTINUED...)

Schewel also noted the costs of not moving forward, considering adding another lane to Interstate 40 can cost \$500 million.

"It's not local funds, but it makes me think what (is) the alternative is to that," Schewel said. "Which I just think is very, very expensive gridlock."

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## WHAT'S NEXT

Durham County commissioners plan to consider Monday a non-binding letter of intent to assist GoTriangle in seeking additional revenue locally and from other community partners to make up a shortfall. The 7 p.m. meeting will be held in Commissioners Chambers on the second floor of the administrative building at 200 E. Main St.

The City Council plans to consider a approving a letter committing to work with Durham County to identify additional local funding for the project. The Dec. 19 meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers at 101 City Hall Plaza.

## Officials question future light rail transit funding

The Herald-Sun By Rachael Riley December 8, 2016

DURHAM -- As both Orange and Durham counties are asked to support a memorandum of understanding to address a \$250 million "funding gap" for the future Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project, the outstanding question is who's picking up the check.

Orange County commissioners voted 5-2 for the memorandum of understanding on Monday night, with Commissioners Earl McKee and Renee Price voting against it.

"No one wants to be the one to stop the train," McKee said, voicing concerns and questions.

Orange Commissioner Barry Jacobs supported the MOU, but asked county staff to look into a few matters, including discussing renegotiating which county pays what.

Jacobs said Durham County added N.C. Central University as a stop and hosts more stops on the 17.5 mile planned route than Orange County.

Although GoTriangle representatives say they are not asking counties to change their levels of funding at this time, a presentation made to both counties states a way to resolve the funding gap is if Durham County commits 77 percent, or \$13.5 million annually, during the next 10 years and Orange County 23 percent, or \$4 million annually, over the same period.

During a Durham City Council workshop on Thursday, Councilman Charlie Reece questioned if the numbers in the presentation are still correct and referenced Orange County's decision.

"I am skeptical that without a more robust state funding solution to this problem I have yet to be convinced that there is a local funding option that makes sense for the people of Durham," Reece said.

Project Director Danny Rogers said the numbers are what GoTriangle is actively working into its financial plan.

"We have brought in a financial adviser that is helping us and we do anticipate getting some revisions but everything we've seen so far makes it look like it's going to get better instead of worse so the numbers are still good," Rogers said. (CONTINUED...)

Reece described it as “astonishing efforts” for Durham officials to consider filling a gap of at least \$135 million, or more, if Orange County’s request is considered.

Rogers said it’s a matter for both counties to consider.

“And we’ll provide information that you guys will have to negotiate that,” he said.

Another concern for Reece were references to filling the gap with congestion mitigation air quality (CMAQ) funds managed by the local metropolitan planning organization and currently used for bike lane or sidewalk projects in Durham.

Rogers said using the CMAQ funds is an option to look at, but a group is being put together to look at other ways to resolve the funding gap left from the state lowering its contribution to the project from 25 to 10 percent.

Examples, Rogers said, are right-of-way donations or private donations.

A timeline going forward is Durham County will be presented with its memorandum of understanding on Monday, Rogers said. From that point, the project will be submitted to the Federal Transportation Administration, which is expected to fund the project at 50 percent, if approved.

April 2017 is marked as a key date for spending to finalize the design contract and move toward the full engineering phase.

“That’s when we ramp up the spending,” Rogers said. “So we do need to be comfortable that we do have financial plans that everybody is accepting and willing to go forward with (by April).”

By June, he said, commitment of local funds would need to be at 50 percent, and the next step would be to try to get the project into the federal budget.

Reece said he thinks the project is “desperately needed in Durham,” but is having a hard time approving the MOU without more information about local funding.

“It’s a simple fact that there are often programs that would be great that we can’t simply afford, given all the other things we want to do ... Reece said. “I mean I don’t even know -- are we talking about just a straight tax increase for 10 years to get us to \$13.5 million a year? Are we looking at some kind of multi-year bond issue that would go to the voters of Durham County -- I don’t even know what it would look like.”

Councilman Steve Schewel said he is concerned if filling the gap comes from CMAQ funds and agreed there are risks, but he considers it a “generational challenge” for officials to make decisions to impact the future.

“I just think that with this kind of program and this kind of project there is a certain extent to which you push it forward on faith, but I just think that in this case it’s well worth it because I think the payoff is so critically important,” Schewel said.

## **Use of TriEx picks up as traffic worsens on western Wake roads**

The News and Observer-Traffic By Kathy Trogdon December 12, 2016

**RALEIGH** – For much of the day, the Triangle Expressway is a sprawling, six-lane road where only a few cars can be seen sporadically. (CONTINUED...)

But traffic picks up during rush hour, and commuters who spend up to \$9.30 per day using the road consider it a godsend that helps them avoid the traffic headaches on western Wake roads, particularly N.C. 55. TriEx, which opened in 2012, parallels N.C. 55 for most of its 18.8 miles from Holly Springs to Research Triangle Park.

"If you're living in Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, if you're living in Apex, I don't know why anybody who is working in RTP would subject themselves to Davis Drive and 55," said Jason Barron, an attorney who lives just outside Cary and uses the road three to four times a week.

Traffic has increased about 24 percent per year since the last leg of the Triangle Expressway opened in late 2012. Daily traffic on the road's busiest section – from N.C. 147 to N.C. 55 – has increased 72 percent since 2013 to an average of 44,700 vehicles per day.

"We're pleased to see that usage is exceeding expectations," said Beau Memory, executive director for the N.C. Turnpike Authority. "The community has embraced this project, and we think it will continue to be successful in years to come."

The use of the toll road remains concentrated during the morning and evening commutes. On Thursday, Dec. 8, for example, when nearly 25,000 vehicles headed southbound on the busiest section, 20 percent of the traffic – about 4,400 vehicles – passed through during one hour, between 5 and 6 p.m. In contrast, only 900 vehicles made that same trip between 10 and 11 a.m.

In the last four years, stand-still rush-hour traffic on N.C. 55 and other local roads has sent commuters like Barron flooding to use TriEx, despite increasing tolls, as western Wake County continues to explode with new residents.

"In the beginning, nobody was really using it," said Jayna Huffines of Holly Springs, a teacher who uses the road two to three times a month. "But now I feel like people are really catching on."

### **More connectivity**

While TriEx may look empty at times now, the road was built to accommodate traffic over the next 30 years, according to NCDOT officials. Wake County, which hit 1 million residents in 2014, was part of the nation's [16th fastest growing metropolitan area](#) last year, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

Realtors and municipalities, in particular, cite the toll road as an asset to attract new residents and businesses to the area, touting how quickly people can travel to and from work. These groups already are talking up two planned interchanges that NCDOT anticipates opening on the Triangle Expressway within the next couple years – one at Old Holly Springs-Apex Road in early 2017 and the other at [Morrisville Parkway](#) in 2019.

Once they open, the state's first modern toll road is expected to [generate even more growth](#), particularly in western Holly Springs and southern Apex. There already are several planned subdivisions and mixed-use developments that are expected to spawn thousands of new homes – and more drivers.

There also are longtime plans to [extend the expressway](#) from Holly Springs to Interstate 40 to Knightdale to complete the 540 Outer Loop. The NCDOT anticipates construction will begin on the first leg of the extension in a couple years. Forecasts show traffic at the southern end of the Triangle Expressway, where the extension would connect, is expected to increase by as much as 35 percent once the project is complete.

"I have to believe with the continued residential growth in (Apex and Holly Springs) that ridership is going to increase," Barron said. "If not, people are just being stubborn."

That is exactly what NCDOT envisioned all along.

"As the region continues to grow, completing the 540 Outer Loop will provide an alternate route to existing roads with high traffic volumes," Memory said. "The Complete 540 project will not have traffic signals and will utilize all electronic tolling, providing a 70 mile-per-hour connection between Apex and Knightdale." (CONTINUED...)

## Worth the cost?

When the last leg of the Triangle Expressway opened in December 2012, it cost N.C. Quick Pass electronic transponder owners \$2.64 for the full drive from Holly Springs to Interstate 40 in RTP. For cars without transponders, drivers would receive bills in the mail for \$4.04.

By [January 2016](#), the cost of the same trip had risen 15 percent, to \$3.04 for Quick Pass customers and \$4.65 for bill-by-mail customers. The toll is expected to rise again by 3.5 percent on Jan. 1 as part of an annual increase based on the financing requirements of the project.

Toll revenue is used to help pay off the bonds sold to finance the \$1.1 billion highway, as well as pay for maintenance, including repairs, signs, mowing and snow plowing.

State law requires that the toll be removed once the debt is repaid, which is estimated to be by 2050.

"I have no idea how much money I've spent on tolls over the last two years, and I don't even really care," said Barron, who drives in the opposite direction from his Morrisville office to get to TriEx and still shaves 10 to 12 minutes off his drive. "It's well worth the investment."

Apex resident Lori Drum, a clinical trials IT project manager who uses the road daily, said even though traffic is picking up, she does not believe that it pulls enough cars off roads like N.C. 54 to relieve congestion in those areas. Drum said cost is a deterrent for many people, and some who can afford it still don't want to pay to drive on a highway that is free north of I-40 and across North Raleigh.

"I think generally it was well built and implemented really well," she said. "But it is essentially unfair that the southern part of the Raleigh area has to pay to use 540 and the northern part does not. They should make it all toll or no toll."

## NCDOT releases planned Triangle projects for 2018-2027

The News and Observer-Traffic By Kathy Trogdon December 13, 2016

**RALEIGH** – Construction of a \$26.2 million interchange at the intersection of Hillsborough Street and Blue Ridge Road near the N.C. State Fairgrounds could begin in the next 10 years if the project makes it into the state's next transportation plan.

The N.C. Department of Transportation released a [list](#) Tuesday of Triangle projects that are anticipated to be included in the draft 2018-2027 plan, which is expected to be released in January.

In addition to the Hillsborough Street interchange, NCDOT expects the draft plan to include the widening of McCrimmon Parkway in Morrisville from Davis Drive to north of Church Street to a four-lane, divided road.

Altogether, 12 bicycle and pedestrian, two aviation and 10 highway projects made the list for Division Five, which includes Wake, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Person, Vance and Warren counties.

A public comment period will be held on the draft plan before the final version is adopted by the N.C. Board of Transportation, likely in June 2017.

Other local projects anticipated for Division Five include:

- Constructing a 6.6-mile Wake Forest Bypass Greenway.
- Widening Ten Ten Road from Apex Parkway and Reliance Avenue in Wake County to a four-lane road.
- Widening Fayetteville Road from Woodcroft Parkway and Barbee Road in Durham County to a four-lane, divided roadway with sidewalks and bike lanes. (CONTINUED...)

- Realigning the intersection of West Lyon Station Road and N.C. 56 near Interstate 85 in Butner.
- Completing a missing gap in the Black Creek Greenway from Old Reedy Creek Road to West Dynasty Drive. This will require about five bridges over creeks and wetlands.

The projects will be funded through the state's Strategic Transportation Investments Law, which allows the state to use data and local input to prioritize funding for transportation projects at three levels – statewide, regionally and locally.

Larger projects would be funded at the statewide or region level, while the smaller project list released Tuesday is expected to be funded at the division level. The top-scoring projects on these lists will be scheduled into the 10-year plan based on available funding and other factors.

"Our robust transportation network supports our strong economy and improved quality of life," Gov. Pat McCrory said in a statement. "Through the new transportation funding formula, we took the politics out of transportation planning to ensure roads and other important infrastructure are prioritized based on data, while providing flexibility to meet local needs. The new funding formula allows us to make smart decisions that keep North Carolina moving and these projects demonstrate the process is working as intended."

## **Feds approve future light rail station at NCCU**

The News and Observer-Durham County By Kathy Trogon December 19, 2016

DURHAM – The Federal Transit Administration has approved adding a station at N.C. Central University as part of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project, according to GoTriangle.

With the station at NCCU, which enrolls 8,000 students, the 17.7-mile rail line will stretch from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to NCCU in Durham, connecting three major universities. The entire rail line is expected to support about 26,880 passenger trips per day by 2040.

The approval followed an environmental assessment and public comment period on the proposed extension.

"This is great news for our community," Durham Mayor Bill Bell said in a statement. "We sincerely appreciate the Federal Transit Administration's support of this important addition to our critical infrastructure project in Durham and Orange counties. This extension will provide even more opportunities and direct access to jobs and education."

## **McCrory's recommended \$1 billion transportation bond unlikely to 'find much traction' in the legislature**

The News and Observer-Traffic By Kathy Trogon December 20, 2016

RALEIGH – Gov. Pat McCrory has not given up on his support for a more than \$1 billion bond to pay for further transportation investment in the state after he announced it Tuesday as part of his budget recommendation for the upcoming fiscal year.

Less than two weeks before McCrory is to leave office, he outlined his [recommendations](#) for the fiscal year 2017-18 budget. State law requires the outgoing governor to submit a budget proposal.

The announcement, which he made in a [video](#), included changes in four key areas – education, mental health, the state's budget reserves and transportation. (CONTINUED...)

"My recommended budget supports a future transportation bond of over \$1 billion that will anticipate and prepare for future road needs," he said, adding that the bond would not require a tax increase.

No other details about the bond were immediately released.

McCrory proposed a [similar](#) \$1.4 billion transportation bond in 2014 to "kick start" a list of 19, mostly rural, transportation projects.

These projects included urban loops in Fayetteville and Winston-Salem, along with rural highway improvements across the state. The only Triangle projects were U.S. 401 in Franklin and northern Wake counties, and N.C. 42 and Booker Dairy Road in Johnston County.

But the Republican-dominated N.C. General Assembly did not include road projects in the Connect NC bond referendum that voters passed this spring. Lawmakers instead generated transportation money through budget changes.

"I would doubt at this point that that is going to find much traction in the Senate," Sen. Bill Rabon, co-chairman of the Senate transportation committee, said Tuesday.

He said he did not see the legislature, particularly the Senate, supporting a transportation bond until the N.C. Department of Transportation proved it could deliver projects in a timely manner.

"What the Senate does is going to be predicated by project delivery," Rabon said. "We are not going to be collecting money or borrowing money and the taxpayers are paying for it when the projects aren't being delivered. Pure and simple."

He said the possibility that the federal government could create a much-discussed \$1 trillion infrastructure fund also is something to consider.

Incoming Gov. Roy Cooper also has said he wants further investment in the state's transportation network, and on several occasions, has talked up the idea of a transportation bond, citing low interest rates and construction costs.

## **Durham City Council agrees to help find more light-rail funding**

The News and Observer-Durham News By Virginia Bridges December 21, 2016

DURHAM – The Durham City Council unanimously approved a letter of support for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project, signaling its continued backing as local governments are being asked to help garner millions more for the project.

"The D-O LRT Project is wholeheartedly supported by the city of Durham and is an essential element of our long-range transportation and land-use plans" the letter states. "The project is critical for our region's continued economic development, environmental sustainability, and the future mobility needs of Durham."

The letter includes a commitment to work with Durham County to identify additional local funding for the project. In recent weeks, regional transit agency GoTriangle has asked Orange County to help find up to \$40 million more in local funding and Durham County to help find up to \$135 million.

The money would be paid over a 10-year period to help fill a \$254 million funding gap in the \$1.87 billion project. (CONTINUED...)



City Councilman Charlie Reece has expressed concern about the increased costs. He voted in favor of the letter Monday night after Councilman Steve Schewel noted how GoTriangle will be spending \$6 million on the project between now and April.

In April, the board will be asked to signal its support again as GoTriangle prepares to spend \$60 million to \$70 million on engineering work on the project. Durham and Orange County governments will be asked to make binding commitments in June 2018.

Reece pledged to stay engaged in the project, to understand the funding alternatives and uphold the fiscal responsibility during the negotiations and conversations about the project.

Initially the light-rail plan called for the state covering 25 percent of the cost or \$467 million. The legislature has since capped state support of such projects at 10 percent.

Orange and Durham county commissioners both approved non-binding letters of intent earlier this month. While Orange and Durham counties are being asked to make the commitment, the city is also expected to help fill the funding gap, Mayor Bill Bell has said.

GoTriangle needs the governments' letters in an application to the Federal Transit Administration due Dec. 31 in order to move the project into engineering. The application must include commitments for at least 30 percent of the local and state cost. If the commitments aren't included, it could make the project less competitive in the process to receive federal dollars.

Meanwhile, the Federal Transit Administration has approved adding a station at N.C. Central University as part of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project, according to GoTriangle.

With the station at NCCU, which enrolls 8,000 students, the 17.7-mile rail line will stretch from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to NCCU in Durham, connecting three major universities. The entire rail line is expected to support about 26,880 passenger trips per day by 2040.

Recent studies suggest the NCCU station near East Lawson Street and South Alston Avenue could be the most heavily used station in Durham and the second-most popular station overall after the one near UNC Hospitals.

## **Durham's 'Can Opener' bridge upgrade reduces frequency of crashes**

The News and Observer-Traffic By Kathy Trogon December 28, 2016

DURHAM – Around noon on Dec. 13, Durham's famed "Can Opener" bridge claimed another hapless victim, crunching through the roof of a Ryder rental truck that tried to pass beneath it, ripping off half the vehicle's right side.

Signs warning of the 11-foot-8-inch tall bridge and a bright LED message that said "OVERHEIGHT MUST TURN" did not prevent the driver of the truck from barreling into the steel bar that protects the railroad bridge over Gregson Street.

Vehicles have been crashing into the bridge for decades. In May, the N.C. Department of Transportation installed a new laser-guided traffic signal at Gregson and Peabody streets to try to reduce the number of accidents, and DOT officials say that while the new system hasn't eliminated the problem, it has helped.

The DOT is aware of two crash reports that have been filed since the new signal was put in place. 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. (CONTINUED...)

Before the new signal was installed, Henn's camera captured a crash about every month.

"It's about what we expected," DOT spokesman Steve Abbott said. "Because you can't eliminate the combination of inexperienced drivers, especially many of those driving the rental box trucks, and the unfamiliarity of conditions, such as truck height, we doubt it will be completely eliminated. We hope to simply cut the number down as low as possible."

This is not DOT's first attempt to alert truck drivers on Gregson Street. An older laser sensor triggered flashing yellow lights on a striped "OVERHEIGHT" warning sign at Peabody.

Now, when a too-tall truck interrupts a laser beam above Gregson Street, a signal is sent to the new traffic light 100 yards away at Peabody, turning it from green to yellow to red. That gives drivers an extra 50 seconds to realize they tripped the LED message that warns them to make a left or right turn before the bridge.

While Henn said he hasn't noticed a significant improvement in the frequency of crashes with the new system, he thinks the new traffic light is making a difference. The trucks that still try to squeeze underneath are traveling at much slower speeds after being stopped at the light 50 feet in front of the bridge than if they were traveling 25 mph or faster.

"I think the bottom line is we just don't know yet," Henn said.

In a separate incident in December, a box truck got wedged underneath the bridge's safety bar.

"After they spent a half hour deflating the truck's tires, they finally managed to back the truck out from under the bridge," Henn wrote on his website.

### **Warnings 'only do so much'**

Most of the trucks that have gotten clipped or had their whole top ripped off by the bridge over the years were rental trucks with inexperienced or distracted drivers, Abbott said.

"Driver behavior will almost always play a role in situations like this," he said. "Warning systems can only do so much."

Low railroad bridges in the Triangle are not uncommon because many were constructed when there were different minimum clearance standards. Others include the bridge over Peace Street in Raleigh and another on Roxboro Street in Durham, a few blocks from the "Can Opener" bridge.

When asked why he thought the "Can Opener" bridge had a better-known reputation, Henn said, "I guess it is my fault."

"This is not a unique problem," he said. "It's just perhaps uniquely well-documented."

Henn said he sees "at least three or four trucks every day turning onto Peabody Street to avoid the bridge."

"Most of them – 99 point something percent of truck drivers are fine," Henn said. "The rest – they might end up on my website."

## Eno extension adds 4 miles to Mountains-to-Sea Trail

WRAL.com By Jodi Leese Glusco December 30, 2016

Durham, N.C. — A new year brings new trails to [the Eno River State Park](#), trails that help connect the statewide hike known as the [Mountains to Sea Trail](#). A 1.9-acre easement, secured by the Eno River Association, will help complete the trail through the state park.

"It's a happy new year for the Eno River Association and everyone who lives around here, I think," said Robin Jacobs, executive director of the Eno River Association.

Hikers will soon have access to trails that they didn't have before. The new section will connect the Pleasant Green access area with the Few's Ford access at Cole Mill Road.

"It's going to cross the river and continue up that side of the river, through the park, past the park headquarters and on to Hillsborough," Jacobs said.

"My hope is that it will help people get outdoors and connect with nature, with the earth and be inspired to want to make this happen over and over again."

There are still some pretty big gaps in the Mountains to Sea off-road path, but this addition fills in 4 miles smack dab in the middle of the state.

Hiker Dustin Huber, who said he visits Eno River State Park every couple of weeks, will soon have more to explore.

"It's so important for me to be able to get away from the city a little bit, just have the mind-clearing nature around you," he said.

Nate Mott also enjoys his hikes, and he sees the long-term benefit of conserving land for public use.

"I think it's important to have land set aside with no development on it so nature can be preserved to some extent," he said.

"If the park wasn't here, there would be houses, condominiums, beautiful river views from people's living rooms, and no one else would get to enjoy it," Jacobs said.

He'd like to see each new trail inspire people to fund more public land.

This easement was purchased with money from Duke Energy and Great Outdoor Provision Company. The Eno River Association is still in need of funding to help complete building the project.

## DEAL DONE: Cyclists, business owners compromise

The Herald-Sun By Anna Johnson December 31, 2016

CHAPEL HILL -- Mostly continuous bicycle lanes and other striping changes are headed for Rosemary Street as early as this week after a compromise was reached between the bicycle and business communities

Bicycle enthusiasts expressed their frustration that Rosemary Street -- after months of street improvements and repaving -- would not feature changes recommended by the town's Bicycle Plan. (CONTINUED...)

"Our expectation was at the end of the paving, there would be striping for bike lanes," said John Rees, president of the Bicycle Alliance of Chapel Hill. "About a month ago, we found out the town was planning on restriping it the way it was. ... Before all this construction there'd be a short stretch (of bike lanes) and then it would just end and pick up again later."

The thought, he said, is that if towns and cities wouldn't do that with roads then they shouldn't do that with bike lanes.

Rees and others circulated a petition, garnering more than 200 signatures, and requested the Town Council adjust the town's plan to accommodate the bike plan. After several meetings between town officials and representatives from the bicycle and business communities, a compromise was reached.

Business owners stressed they needed to keep on-street parking for patrons while cyclists wanted it taken off to accommodate full bike lanes. In the compromise, the eight-parking spots will move across the street and sharrows or shared-lane markings will be added so motorists know to expect cyclists. A loading area will also be added.

"The following has been endorsed unanimously and I have authorized public works to proceed with the striping of Rosemary Street accordingly," according to Town Manager Roger Stancil. "We all agree on the importance of monitoring this design and making future decisions based on the data we collect."

The striping, however, will not be permanent. Town officials will monitor the striping pattern over the next two years to evaluate safety, connectivity, traffic flow, public parking and productivity.

Here's how Rosemary Street will be restriped:

- No bike lanes on either side of the street from Henderson Street to Columbia Street with a reverse center turn lane into parking lots/decks and businesses;
- Continuous bike lane on north side of West Rosemary Street from just west of the Columbia Street intersection to Merritt Mill Road in Carrboro;
- Continuous bike lane on south side of West Rosemary Street from Merritt Mill Road in Carrboro east to Roberson Street and Mitchell Lane;
- Bike lane will be interrupted by eight-on street parking spots and a loading zone on south side of Rosemary Street between Roberson Street and Mitchell Lane. Sharrows or shared-lane markings will be in the travel lane where parking and loading zone is proposed;
- The bike lane will then continue east of Mitchell Lane to the beginning of the left turn lane at the intersection of Columbia Street;
- Turn lanes on Church and Roberson streets will be removed; and
- Signal phasing will be added to permit left turn/straight arrows westbound on Rosemary Street at Roberson Street.

The new striping for Rosemary Street comes at the end a months-long project to widen sidewalks, ensure sidewalk ramps are ADA compliant, install new light fixtures with LED lights, replace curb and gutter sections and driveway ramps and repave the street with \$1.6 million from the town's street and sidewalk bonds.

The bonds were approved by voters in 2015.