

Questions and Answers about the Durham Bus & Rail Investment Plan

Why are transit improvements and investments needed?

The Triangle Region is now home to 1.5 million people and the U.S. Census estimates that the area's population will increase to 2.5 million people by 2035. High levels of congestion are now common and are anticipated to worsen as we grow. We need a better multi-modal transportation system which offers transportation choices - including improved bus and rail transit service.

Where can I find the Durham Transit Plan?

Information about the Durham Bus & Rail Investment Plan (often called the Durham Transit Plan) can be found at www.ourtransitfuture.com. You can also find information on the Web site of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) at www.dchcmpo.org.

What's the plan?

The Durham Bus and Rail Investment Plan includes the following:

- Bus service improvements
- Increased frequency on existing high performance routes
- New and expanded bus service across the region and to RDU Airport
- 37 miles of commuter rail between Durham, RTP and Raleigh with 4 commuter rail stations in Durham County
- 17 miles of double track light rail between downtown Durham and Chapel Hill with 12 light rail stations in Durham County

What rail investments are proposed in the Durham Plan?

Light Rail from Downtown Durham to Chapel Hill - The 17-mile alignment begins at Alston Avenue near NC Central University in East Durham, continues through downtown Durham, then roughly parallels the US 15/501 highway until it reaches the west side of I-40. The alignment then heads south near I-40 exit 270 and then parallels NC 54 to the Friday Center, Dean Smith Center and UNC Hospital. Light rail is the technology being recommended in this corridor.

Commuter Rail from Downtown Durham to RTP and Raleigh – The 37-mile corridor follows the existing North Carolina Railroad corridor from Durham through the Research Triangle Park, Cary and Downtown Raleigh to East Garner. Commuter rail is the technology being recommended in this corridor.

What is the difference between Light Rail and Commuter Rail?

Light rail (or LRT) uses lightweight rail cars operating on a fixed guideway and driven electrically from an overhead power line. They typically operate in short trains of up to four cars, and are well suited for closely-spaced stations. Light rail usually operates on its own exclusive track within a railroad corridor or in city streets next to travel lanes

Commuter rail (or CRT) is rail service that often makes use of existing freight and passenger rail (Amtrak) tracks. Regional CRT service typically operates in peak travel periods, such as the morning and evening weekday commute times or rush hours. The Durham Plan also includes limited midday and evening service. The trains are usually powered by diesel engines and stations are farther apart than with LRT.

Why is light rail the technology for the Durham to Chapel Hill rail line and commuter rail the technology for the Durham to RTP and Raleigh rail line?

The different technology choices for the Durham to Chapel Hill and Durham to RTP and Raleigh rail systems were chosen to best respond to the characteristics of the travel markets in each corridor.

Durham to Chapel Hill Light Rail: This 17-mile corridor already has high traffic, a demand for transit and features three travel markets that include all-day trips and many short trips:

- Work and student trips to Duke University/Hospital and Downtown Durham from the west
- Work and student trips to UNC-Chapel Hill/Hospital from the east
- Low-income work and shopping trips from East Durham to retail districts along 15-501

Additionally, the corridor features significant special event attractions such as DPAC, Brightleaf Square, Ninth Street, and UNC Dean Dome. Some of the most-densely populated census tracts in the Triangle including UNC's main campus and Duke's east campus are within a short walk to rail stations. This rail corridor is also well-positioned to capture the already-existing 3,000 to 4,000 daily bus transit riders from points east traveling to UNC via park and ride and Triangle Transit services such as bus 805 in Woodcroft in South Durham.

Durham to RTP and Raleigh: This 37-mile corridor features multiple travel markets with long trip lengths:

- Work and student trips to NCSU/Downtown Raleigh
- Work trips to Duke Medical Center
- Work trips to Research Triangle Park

The corridor features considerable work trips but comparatively less non-work trips than the Durham-Chapel Hill corridor. There is existing heavy transit demand for NCSU, and considerable transit demand for employment trips to downtown Raleigh. These long transit trips remove large amounts of vehicle miles traveled from regional highways, and the higher average speed of commuter rail over great distances makes it the ideal technology to attract motorists out of their cars with speeds that will most likely be unachievable by car during rush hour in the future.

Are there initial ridership estimates available for the planned light rail project and commuter rail service?

The anticipated ridership for the Durham to Chapel Hill light rail project is currently estimated to be approximately 12,000 boardings per day. The anticipated ridership for the Durham to Raleigh Commuter Rail project is approximately 7,000 boardings per

day. Predicting ridership is not an exact science. The regional transportation model's accuracy may improve as more information becomes available.

Who's going to implement the system?

Once voters in Durham decide to approve a transit referendum to pay for future improvements, the Durham Board of County Commissioners along with the DCHC MPO and Triangle Transit will decide on a timetable for the projects. For now, the assumption is that Triangle Transit will coordinate and implement light rail. The commuter rail project may be subject to a future agreement with our partners, including the State of North Carolina and the North Carolina Railroad Company (NCRR).

How will the transit system be connected?

Bus and rail depend on each other. Successful rail programs have a well supported and coordinated bus system. Expanded bus service will be the first phase to be rolled out. Improved scheduling, additional service and longer hours will be implemented to ensure that this expanded network will adequately connect to the rail lines.

Who's going to coordinate to make sure bus and rail connect?

As the region's transportation's agency, Triangle Transit will work closely with DATA, Durham City staff, Durham County staff and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization staff to coordinate the various systems.

How much will this cost?

Total spending for the Durham Bus/Rail Investment Plan includes:

- Rail Capital: \$1,669 million
- Rail Operations: \$283 million
- Bus Capital: \$47 million
- Bus Operations: \$151 million
- Debt: \$136 million

How would these bus and rail transit investments be funded?

The Durham County Board of Commissioners voted to hold a one-half cent sales tax referendum on November 8th. If approved by voters, funds from the locally collected sales tax would be used along with state and federal funding for the expansion of local and express bus services and rail projects.

Why is Durham the only county in the Triangle moving forward with a transit referendum?

Durham County was better positioned than Wake and Orange County to lead with a referendum because Durham was the first to put together a transit plan that met the approval of the Durham County Commission. Both Wake and Orange counties are refining their transit plans and are considering moving forward with a referendum next year.

Isn't the use of a sales tax to fund transit regressive?

It's important to note that the transit sales tax will not apply to food, medicine, utilities, gasoline and housing. This lessens the regressive impact of the tax. The sales tax is one of several revenue sources (3 of which are already in place) that would be used to fund Durham's transit plan. Others include:

- An additional vehicle registration fee
- Vehicle rental tax (approved by the General Assembly in 1997)
- Local property tax revenues, which already make up a significant portion of local funding for local transit services
- Fares for service
- Federal and state participation

The funding provided from the sales tax would go exclusively to public transit, a public service that provides disproportionate benefits to low and moderate income citizens.

What was the starting point for the bus and rail investment plan we have today?

- In 2007, Triangle Transit, the region's two metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the Triangle J Council of Governments and Regional Transportation Alliance developed a strategy to meet future mobility needs of the region by creating a 29-member Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC)
- The action generated a new region-wide transit vision and funding recommendations
- The STAC's recommendations formed the basis of the Joint 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan which was adopted by the Capital Area MPO and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO in 2009
- The 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan is the basic foundation for the Durham Bus & Rail Investment Plan

Why was a prior effort not successful?

In 1995, Triangle Transit began to develop a planned regional rail system that would operate between Durham and north Raleigh, with future extensions west to Chapel Hill. Global demand increased the cost of construction materials and the federal government imposed stricter financial guidelines and performance criteria for transit projects nationwide. The earlier project was withdrawn in late 2006 when it became apparent that the local funding source could not support the increased cost.

Who ultimately makes the decisions on transit plans for the Triangle?

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have been established by federal and state governments to make decisions about transportation investments in jurisdictions. Both regional MPOs are comprised of elected and appointed officials as well as Triangle Transit. State legislation also requires that the Durham County Board of Commissioners review and adopt financial plans for the transit projects within their boundaries. As the implementing agency of the transit plans, the Triangle Transit Board of Trustees will also vote on the projects.

Why does the region need these projects now? The region's not dense enough for transit.

- We have the opportunity to begin to fix the problem of increased congestion – waiting will only see more congestion
- Building a rail system takes several years – waiting until our roads are totally congested may be too late
- The region continues to grow at a rate greater than the national average
- Beginning the environmental and engineering process now avoids future costs due to inflation
- Lower interest rates for borrowing
- Rail projects have the ability to create more local jobs

For what you're projecting to spend, wouldn't it be cheaper to just buy me and my next door neighbor a BMW?

The argument is one often used by those questioning the benefit of investing in transit. If you have a BMW, you'll pay for a lease, fuel and maintenance costs and you've not even moved it out of your driveway. You'll drive on a highway so you'll have to pay for the freeway, its interchanges and maintenance. Figure in parking and the percentage of revenue the city will lose by turning over land that could be valuable commercial property for surface parking. Otis White of Governing Magazine amortized the capital costs of BMW's and transit for 15,500 transit riders over a 50 year period in Minneapolis. The price tag for taxpayers for transit: \$17 million a year. The price tag for those BMW's: \$166 million a year.

Transit has a small number of trips - why not just build more roads?

We will not be able to pave our way out of congestion. Commuters need alternatives that can expand service through increased frequency, increased capacity, and guaranteed travel times. Even though transit carries a small proportion of all trips, a rail alignment in the most congested corridor will produce a greater portion of the total trips.

What's the current ridership on DATA in Durham? Do people use it?

Ridership on DATA is increasing. Monthly ridership gains averaged 10% to 20% for the first eight months of 2011. Annual ridership increased 15% from FY 2006 to FY 2009, to 5.1 million passenger trips. For the fiscal year ending June 2011, preliminary ridership numbers show that DATA delivered 5.6 million passenger trips, a 13% increase over 2010.

Is the DATA bus system productive?

Peer agencies were compared based on the population of the urban area, vehicle miles operated, operating budget, population density, and percent of low income residents, among other variables. Compared to the top 5 most similar transit agencies, the DATA system operates on par or better in terms of productivity and cost effectiveness.

Won't bus suffer if rail is implemented?

Bus and rail complement each other. Successful rail systems are bolstered

by effective bus connections. As in any transit expansion with rail, the bus network will be reoriented to serve the rail stations. This is expected to enhance the connectivity of all forms of transit.

Why does East Durham not have a commuter rail station?

A light rail station is shown for East Durham at Alston Avenue/NC Central University. A commuter rail stop was not initially considered because of the average spacing of commuter rail stations at 3 to 5 miles to maximize commuter rail's efficiencies. However, neighbors and residents of East Durham have asked that a potential commuter rail station be studied at the light rail site. Triangle Transit will evaluate adding a station in the Alston Avenue/NC Central University area during the next phase of project planning.

What's in the transit plan for Northern Durham County?

We will work with Northern Durham residents to identify bus stop locations in the heart of the community, and the best locations park-and-ride lots. We also expect to locate a park-and-ride lot in north Durham between Northern High School and Rougemont. The bus route will provide access to jobs at Duke Medical Center and downtown Durham. We will also evaluate whether bus stops at Durham Regional Hospital and Northgate Mall are warranted. The service is currently programmed as hourly commuter service with 4 trips into Durham in the morning and 4 trips returning in the afternoon. This is the same frequency of service that Triangle Transit has used to start commuter express services elsewhere in the region. As customer demand warrants, we have been able to improve the frequencies.

What will the transit plan do to increase the number of jobs?

A major investment in light rail, commuter rail and new and expanded bus service in Durham County will have a positive impact on job creation. New train and bus operators, supervisors, mechanics and dispatchers will be needed. Initial estimates project 6,400 new construction jobs and related professional service jobs from the transit improvements. The bus and rail investments will also provide better connections to local and regional jobs for residents.

What will it cost me to ride?

The cost to ride new bus and rail services in the Triangle has not been established. Transit fares would be set shortly before the new service begins. It's highly unusual for there to be a wide disparity between bus and rail fares. Often, the fares for bus and rail are the same. For example, Charlotte, Phoenix and Dallas currently each charge \$1.75 for a bus or rail trip in one direction.

How do I get to the airport?

RDU International Airport is currently – and will continue to be – served by Triangle Transit which links passengers to Raleigh, Durham, Cary, Chapel Hill and surrounding towns. The RDU Airport Authority is planning on providing a seamless “people mover” connection from the commuter rail station in RTP directly to the terminals. This concept will provide efficient connections to the airport.

How will you make sure that activity centers (towns, universities, main attractions) are included in transit plans?

We have received feedback from public and private sector employers, local governments and community and business groups including but not exclusive to Chapel Hill, Durham, the Research Triangle Park, Morrisville, Cary, Raleigh and Wake Forest. UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke, NC Central, Durham Tech, NC State, Meredith, Peace, and other institutions will be served by either the rail network, or shuttles. Stations will be designed to ensure maximum usage to these and other activity centers.

Triangle Transit took some lumps after the first rail project was not successful. What makes them qualified this time?

Triangle Transit is acting as a regional transportation planning agency in coordination with the region's two MPOs and has collectively concluded a region-wide planning effort that focused on the best transit corridors for investments. The reason for the previous project not meeting Federal standards had nothing to do with the qualifications of the agency or its employees. The project was not implemented because it did not have an adequate local funding source and could not meet revised Federal criteria which changed during the project's engineering phase.

What about those who don't utilize transit?

All Triangle residents will benefit from a regional transit network, even if they choose not to use it. The denser, mixed-use development typical of station areas will enhance the tax base. People living and working around stations will be able to walk, bicycle or drive shorter distances to access goods and services. The reduction in the rate of traffic growth in higher density areas will make driving easier and improve the environment. The implementation of a regional transit system will also create new construction jobs and expanded permanent employment in transit operations and maintenance.

What are the economic impacts and benefits of public transportation?

- Provides travel options
- Can reduce travel time and delays
- Enhances travel reliability
- Creates regional connectivity
- Can create jobs and improve access to employment centers
- Can stimulate economic development around station locations
- Increases the region's economic competitiveness
- Saves money by lowering out-of-pocket expenses
- Reduces the dependence on fossil fuels
- Reduces growth of future traffic congestion
- Conserves energy

What happens if we don't receive federal or state funding?

With the approval of the one-half cent sales tax and an increase in the vehicle registration fee, Durham County could use the new revenue to invest in a commuter rail connection to RTP and Raleigh and provide more bus service than originally proposed.