



**Date:** September 6, 2016

**To:** Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager  
**Through:** Keith Chadwell, Deputy City Manager  
**From:** Terry Bellamy, Transportation Director

**Subject:** Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit – North Carolina Central University Extension

**Executive Summary**

In February 2016, GoTriangle received a Combined Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)/Record of Decision (ROD) for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) project from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Alston Avenue in Durham. In response to comments received during that process, GoTriangle has started to evaluate the option to extend the project south on Alston Avenue to a station near North Carolina Central University (NCCU). To add this extension to the project, GoTriangle needs to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and study the natural environment and community impacts in the coming months. The extension also needs to be included in the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

**Recommendation**

The Transportation Department recommends that the City Council receive a presentation from GoTriangle on the NCCU extension and endorse the amendments to the LPA and 2040 MTP to add the NCCU Station to the D-O LRT project.

**Background**

GoTriangle is developing the D-O LRT project, a 17-mile light rail transit project with 17 stations extending from UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill to Alston Avenue in Durham. The DCHC MPO Board adopted the LPA for the project in 2012 with these termini. The D-O LRT project was subsequently adopted as part of the 2040 MTP for the DCHC MPO and has been considered and incorporated into the City’s long-range transportation and land use planning. GoTriangle was authorized by the FTA to enter the Project Development phase of the project in February 2014 with the requirement to complete this phase in two years by February 2016. GoTriangle achieved this milestone with the issuance of a combined FEIS/ROD on the project by the FTA.

Since February 2016, GoTriangle has been preparing to enter Project Engineering. They have advanced analysis on a number of issues related to the project including preliminary study of an extension of the alignment to NCCU. They are also addressing funding constraints for the project that were imposed by the NC General Assembly over the past year.

The Federal Transit Administration has directed GoTriangle to apply to enter Project Engineering by February 2017. As a result, GoTriangle has urgency to finalize study of the extension to NCCU in the coming months. GoTriangle staff will provide a presentation on the potential extension and the process to analyze and consider adding it to the project.

### **Issues and Analysis**

In preparing the DEIS/ROD, GoTriangle had an extensive public outreach process that included multiple rounds of public meetings, meetings with individual stakeholder groups, presentations to elected boards, public comment periods and public hearings, etc. One common issue among those who provided public comments was concern that the project did not extend closer to NCCU. In response, GoTriangle initiated a review of the feasibility of adding this extension.

The proposed extension would require the Alston Avenue station to pivot to the southeast near the intersection of Pettigrew and Colfax streets. Then the alignment would fly-over the NC 147 and NC 55 (Alston Avenue) interchange and land in the median of Alston Avenue north of Linwood Avenue. The alignment would extend to Lawson Street with a station near the northeast corner of the NCCU campus.

While the D-O LRT project has an adopted LPA and is in the 2040 MTP, it is described as ending at Alston Avenue near the NC 147 interchange. The extension would add a 0.6 mile extension along Alston Avenue south to NCCU. The DCHC MPO Board will need to approve amendments to the LPA and 2040 MTP to add this extension. While the City Council does not have a role in approving the LPA or 2040 MTP Amendments, GoTriangle has requested endorsement by the City Council before the MPO Board considers this change.

GoTriangle staff will provide an overview of the proposed extension and the steps the agency plans to take to be able to include it in the project. They have prepared a memo on the issue.

### **Alternatives**

The City Council could not endorse the 2040 MTP Amendment. The DCHC MPO Board would likely consider the City's position in making their decision, but are not required to honor it.

### **Financial Impact**

There is no direct financial impact for the City of Durham related to this decision. However, the proposed extension has cost implications that could affect the competitiveness and financial viability of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project. The project's local funding share is to be provided by the local sales tax and vehicle fees administered by GoTriangle. There may be additional City of Durham costs related to station area infrastructure, impacts to economic development, impacts to City transportation facilities and utilities, etc.

### **SDBE Summary**

Department of Equal Opportunity/Equity Assurance did not review this item for compliance with the Ordinance to Promote Equal Business Opportunities in City Contracting.

### **Attachments**

GoTriangle Memo  
Locally Preferred Alternative Map