

August 2, 2012

Dear Chairman Coble, Vice Chairman Matthews, and fellow County Commissioners,

Thank you for taking the time to diligently consider the best way to move forward with an expanded transit plan for Wake County. As a chamber of commerce-based organization, we recognize the importance for the community to come together before embarking on an expanded and ongoing investment in public transit. From our polling and from the conversations at the Commission table, it is clear that that additional information will be essential to developing a consensus around the best way to move forward.

We offer the following observations about the environment for transit in Wake County:

- With a projected population increase of around 50-75% in the next 25 years, Wake County will continue to require additional investment in transportation and travel options
- The number of people who either cannot drive and/or do not want to drive for all of their work and personal travel will continue to grow
- The combination of multiple communities and employment centers across our region, limited barriers to growth, and the lack of north-south through Interstates has resulted in less congestion to contend with as well as a challenging spatial layout for transit countywide and will necessarily involve tradeoffs

The draft Wake County transit plan has a number of positive characteristics, including:

- The bus plan elements have been developed and reviewed by various transit partners and will result in a substantial increase in mobility options through the doubling of bus service in a five year period
- The draft transit plan is achievable in that the bus and commuter rail elements can be paid for with local resources
- The draft transit plan is explicit in noting that federal and state funding are required for both commuter rail and light rail in order for light rail to proceed
- The draft transit plan is flexible in that it provides a multi-million dollar fund balance that will allow for future changes

However, after a brief presentation on the draft Wake County transit plan at our annual planning retreat, RTA members identified a series of unanswered questions. That list of questions is included on the following pages.

Perhaps the most important question focuses on overall goals and priorities. Our understanding is that goals for transit among various segments of the community include: relieving traffic congestion or providing travel options to avoid it; connecting various municipalities with each other and to key employment and other travel destinations within the County including RTP; providing travel alternatives to avoid the expense or challenge of driving; improving existing transit service, particularly for transit-dependent users; attracting new riders to transit; focusing land use and future growth; attracting and retaining talent; enhancing economic development; reducing environmental impacts; providing a fiscally responsible plan that minimizes capital and operating cost risk; maximizing the return on the County's financial investment in transit, etc.

While many of these goals are complementary, the relative weighting of each of these goals would call for more or less emphasis on various plan elements. Therefore, we believe that it would be helpful for the Commissioners to highlight and prioritize their goals for transit and travel options, so as to evaluate how well the plan meets those needs, and to determine if any elements are missing or need to be reprioritized.

We invite your consideration of the questions on the following pages as you review the plan. We stand ready to assist the County with engaging the community in a robust discussion and outreach for the potential for enhancing transit in Wake County and the region.

Let's get moving,


Clymer Cease
2012-13 RTA Chair


Rick McNeel
2012 RTA Transit Chair


Joe Milazzo II, PE
RTA Executive Director

Questions about the draft Wake County Transit Plan

Compiled from discussion at Regional Transportation Alliance Planning Retreat on July 26, 2012

Overall goals and priorities for transit

- What are the Commissioners goals for transit, and how do they prioritize or weight those goals?
- How well does this plan meet those goals?

Plan goals and objectives

- What problem are we trying to solve with the proposed core and enhanced transit plan? Is it primarily to relieve traffic congestion or something else?
- What are the goals of the regional transit plan? What are the relative priorities of those goals?
- What are the goals of the proposed bus service expansion? Serve established communities? Land use? Serve educational facilities? Something else?
- What are the goals of the proposed commuter rail and light rail systems?

Plan tradeoffs and costs

- What is the reason that the light rail corridor overlaps the commuter rail for the majority of the length of the light rail – what is the rationale for selecting Downtown Cary to Millbrook Road?
- If connecting across the region is of prime importance and covered by commuter rail in the core plan, then is the enhanced plan / light rail necessary?
- What is the reason that we need light rail in a multipolar region? Could increased bus service serve the same purpose – that is, take the same number of people off the road?
- Can we have bus service expansion without light rail? Or, light rail without bus service expansion?
- What is the expected subsidy for buses, commuter rail, and light rail? Who pays the subsidy?
- How long will it take to build all of the elements in the core plan and the enhanced plan, assuming we get all of the federal and state funding assumed in the plan?

Connections and destinations

- What is the solution for the “final mile” – what happens to a commuter when they get off the light rail or the commuter rail – how will they get to their job?
- Will either the commuter rail or light rail be supported by a circulator service at stations?
- Is there a plan for a circulator within Research Triangle Park?
- Are there plans for a bicycle sharing program near the stations to facilitate ridership?
- Are there plans for wayfinding signage to facilitate ridership?
- How will stations be sited near the endpoints of the rail system?
- Why doesn't the proposed commuter rail stop at the airport? What are the airport's plans for transit, and how does the transit plan connect to them?
- How expansive is the proposed bus service expansion? What specifically will we gain – more routes, better frequency, more geographic coverage, etc.?

Using the system

- Please quantify “What is in this for me” – as an average citizen, how will this help my commute, both now and in the future?
- Will people use the system? How do you encourage ridership? Who are the most likely commuters?
- What are the advantages from a time and financial perspective to the individual using the proposed commuter rail system? Is the 30 minute wait time between trains acceptable?
- How do you plan to communicate how the system fits together, including the likely need to commute using multiple forms of transit?
- How much transit service is required across the county – from an individual user standpoint – for a typical transit user to be able to realistically forego one motor vehicle?
- What is the benefit of the transit plan for those in Wake County who do not live near the proposed commuter rail and light rail systems. How will enhanced bus help them?
- Why should members of the community have to pay for light rail if they will never use it?

(continued on next page)

RTA Questions about the draft Wake County Transit Plan *(continued from previous page)*

Understanding and communicating the benefits to our community of the plan

- How much relief in traffic congestion can we expect, and in what time frame, if we pass the ½-cent sales tax? How much of that relief would be due to bus service, commuter rail, and light rail?
- What will happen to our traffic congestion if we do not pass a ½-cent sales tax?
- What are the land use possibilities to go vertical along the corridor?
- What are the metrics to detail the environmental sustainability advantages of commuter rail?
- Is there an opportunity to launch a commuter rail solution to provide relief during the I-40 project? How much relief would that provide?

Economic impact and quality of life

- What is the expected economic impact of investing in an enhanced bus plan? What are the economic benefits of light rail and commuter rail?
- How does investment in transit impact recruiting for global economic investment?
- How does investment in transit impact employee quality of life?
- What is the expected increase in tax base as a result of investing in commuter rail and light rail?

Comparison with other markets

- What is the "right" amount of rail service for our community? How does our 30 minute commuter rail and 10 minute light rail compare to other areas?
 - How does our proposed bus and rail ridership compare to other areas?
 - Where can we find best practices regarding transit?
 - How does our population density compare to that of communities with successful rail programs? Give examples of those communities and their implementation timelines for rail.
-
-
-