



Legislation Text

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Orange County Transit Plan and Proposed Commuter Rail Update.

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Organization:

Chapel Hill Transit

GoTriangle

Overview: The [Orange County Transit Plan <https://gotriangle.org/sites/default/files/publications/orange-county-transit-plan_170424_app.pdf>](https://gotriangle.org/sites/default/files/publications/orange-county-transit-plan_170424_app.pdf) (the plan) was last updated and adopted in 2017. It contains a program of transit services and projects to be funded by local revenues for transit in Orange County through 2045.

The plan needs to be updated due to the discontinuation of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project and the Interlocal Implementation Agreement for the Plan requires it to be updated every four (4) years.

The plan directs the spending of four dedicated revenue streams:

- Article 43: Half Cent Sales and Use Tax
- Article 50: Five Percent Vehicle Rental Tax for Regional Transit Authority
- Article 51: Thr e Dollar increase to GoTriangle Regional Vehicle Registration Fee
- Article 52: Sev n Dollar County Vehicle Registration Fee

The revenue sources in the plan were expected to generate around \$8.5M in FY21 and \$8.9M in FY22. Orange County Transit Plan funding is critical to the annual operating budget of Chapel Hill Transit, providing around 10% of our annual operating budget (including the expansion of Sunday Service). It has helped meet vehicle replacement needs, fund bus stop improvements and provide the local match (\$14.1M) for the North South Bus Rapid Transit Project.

The Board of Orange County Commissioners approved a planning framework for updating the Transit Plan in 2019. They also developed a Policy Steering Committee to provide guidance on the vision and goals of the Transit Plan Update and help prioritize the types and quantities of service improvements and infrastructure investments that will best serve the communities they represent. The Committee includes:

- Barbara Foushee, Town of Carrboro Council Member
- Michael Parker, Town of Chapel Hill Mayor Pro Tem
- Mark Bell, Town of Hillsborough Commissioner
- Patty Philipps, City of Mebane Commissioner
- Mark Dorosin, Orange County Commissioner
- Sally Greene, Orange County Commissioner

The Policy Committee has met five (5) times. The agenda and some of the minutes are available at the following link: [<https://octransit2020.com/learn-more/policy-steering-committee/>](https://octransit2020.com/learn-more/policy-steering-committee/). The Committee is supported by Orange County staff and a Consultant Team. The County and the Consultant Team has released a Draft Regional Connections Opportunities Report ([<https://octransit2020.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OC_RCO_review_draft.pdf>](https://octransit2020.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OC_RCO_review_draft.pdf)) following the initial work of the committee and a public engagement effort that took place in October 2020.

The Proposed Commuter Rail project, as originally included in the Wake and Durham county plans, would run 37 miles along the North Carolina Railroad Corridor between Garner and West Durham with stops at downtown Raleigh, N.C. State, Cary, Morrisville and Research Triangle Park (

https://gotriangle.org/sites/default/files/commuter_rail_map.png). The original plans call for up to eight trips in each direction during peak hours with up to two trips each way during midday and evening hours, for a total of 20 weekday roundtrips. A project team that includes Durham County, Wake County, Orange County, Johnston County, CAMPO, DCHC, the North Carolina Railroad Company, NCDOT, the Research Triangle Foundation and GoTriangle is working together on preliminary feasibility studies. Jay Heikes, a Senior Transportation Planner for GoTriangle, will provide a presentation updating the Council on the current status of the project.

 **Recommendation(s):**

That the Council provide direction on priorities for the Orange County Transit Plan Update.

Transit staff has provided the County with the following overall priorities:

Regional Connectivity

Short Term:

- Maintain existing capital funding for NSBRT and identify options for transit plan investment in operating the route.
- Identify and prioritize investments in local and regional transit that increase connections and frequency between Orange County and Durham County along 15-501 (East-West BRT) and NC-54, providing convenient, safe and reliable service and crucial connectivity within and between jurisdictions.
- Identify and develop high-capacity transit service that connects Orange County and Durham County along 15-501, including service to UNC Health and UNC-Chapel Hill Campus, supporting regional economic well-being and higher-density development plans.
- Identify high-capacity transit service options that connect Orange, Durham, Wake and RTP.
- Evaluate options for improved coordination of regional demand response trips to improve service for customers and reduce the number of required transfers.

Mid Term:

- Identify options for the development of transit/transfer hubs in key regional corridors and areas, including near UNC Health, Eastowne area, South Road near Student Union and NC 86.
- Identify high-capacity transit options for extending NSBRT to Chatham County, including connections to Chatham Park.
- Identify high-capacity transit options for connections to RTP and Wake County rapid transit investments, in coordination with City of Durham and Durham County. Well-situated and well-designed transit hubs can significantly improve one of the most inconvenient parts of a transit trip for customers: the transfer experience. Transit hubs enable more connected transit route design and can more easily accommodate amenities for transit drivers and operations staff, help raise awareness of transit availability and may provide development opportunities.

Long Term:

- Identify corridors and key areas for the planning of new transit investments over the next 25 years and develop a long-range vision for transit connections in the Triangle and Triad.
- Identify opportunities for regional maintenance and training facilities.

Local Connectivity

Short Term:

- Identify Transit Plan funding for unfunded priorities in the adopted Chapel Hill Transit Short Range Transit Plan, priorities include improving frequency, strategically expanding weekend service and extending weekday hours of service - to improve access to jobs and community places and ensure transit is accessible, especially for those who depend on it the most.
- Continue to identify Transit Plan funding for bus shelter and bus improvements that prioritize transit customers, including curb-extensions at bus stops, bus shelters, walking routes and crossings, transit signal priority, dedicated bus lanes and queue jumps to ensure transit services are fully accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Including assistance in funding staff to better facilitate and implement these critical investments.
- Continue to identify Transit Plan funding for investments in replacement and expansion transit vehicles, with a priority on electric (non-diesel/gasoline) vehicles, consistent with Chapel Hill, Carrboro and University Sustainability Plans.
- Identify funding to assist with same-day demand response trips for EZ rider customers - improving access and mobility for those who depend on it the most.

Mid Term:

- Identify funding for solar power generation options currently under review by Chapel Hill Transit.
- Evaluate options for new park and ride facilities in the White Cross and Chatham County areas, consistent with the adopted Chapel Hill Transit Short Range Transit Plan.

Long Term:

- Identify key areas for the planning of new transit investments beyond 2030 and develop a long-range vision for local transit services in Orange County.

Fiscal Impact/Resources: The update to the Orange County Transit Plan could impact Chapel Hill Transit's annual operating budgets and the NSBRT project.



Attachments:

- Hyperlinked: [Orange County Transit Plan <https://gotriangle.org/sites/default/files/publications/orange-county-transit-plan_170424_app.pdf>](https://gotriangle.org/sites/default/files/publications/orange-county-transit-plan_170424_app.pdf)
- Hyperlinked: [March 2020 Adopted Short Range Transit Plan for Chapel Hill Transit <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/transit/about-chapel-hill-transit/projects/short-range-transit-plan>](https://www.townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/transit/about-chapel-hill-transit/projects/short-range-transit-plan)
- Chapel Hill Transit Unfunded Service Improvements
- Chapel Hill Transit Capital Plan

The Agenda will reflect the text below and/or the motion text will be used during the meeting.

PRESENTER: Brian M. Litchfield, Transit Director
Jay Heikes, Senior Transportation Planner, GoTriangle

The purpose of this item is for the Council to provide direction on priorities for the Orange County Transit Plan Update.