

CAMPO Executive Board
Commuter Rail Subcommittee

Meeting #1

Feb 28, 2023

Meeting Summary

In Attendance:

Vivian Jones, Wake Forest, Executive Board Chair

Butch Lawter, Johnston County, Executive Board Vice Chair

Corey Branch, Raleigh

Harold Weinbrecht, Cary

Ken Marshburn, Garner

Sig Hutchinson, GoTriangle Board of Trustees

Susan Evans, Wake County

TJ Cawley, Morrisville

Chris Lukasina, Executive Director, CAMPO

Shelby Powell, Deputy Director, CAMPO

Anna Stokes, Wake Transit Program Manager, CAMPO

Meeting Summary:

Welcome and Introductions – Chair Jones opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Feasibility Study Phase II Update – Katharine Eggleston and Chuck Lattuca from GoTriangle presented information related to the recently-completed Phase II study. The Feasibility Study looked at the details of implementing a commuter rail project in the NCRR rail corridor. The Study found that there was a cost of \$2.8 Billion - \$3.2 Billion (in year-of-expenditure dollars) to implement the project from the Auburn station to the West Durham station. This is higher than was anticipated for planning purposes during the development of the Wake Transit Plan. As such, the Feasibility Study explored options for phased implementation.

The study found that in the Western section of the corridor from RTP to West Durham, there is a need for double track and some 3-track areas due to the active freight rail yard in East Durham. There are also expensive improvements needed through downtown Durham to accommodate the project.

In the Central portion, from Ellis Road in Durham to Raleigh, the study anticipates the need for several agreements between rail operators that may be difficult to negotiate.

In the Eastern section, from Raleigh to Auburn station, the study found that this would be the least complex to deliver in terms of there being fewer active NS and Amtrack trains to contend with.

Ms. Eggleston noted that GoTriangle is interested in building out the full commuter rail corridor, but that it is not as competitive for federal funding as desired. There is the potential for things to happen that could increase the attractiveness of the project to federal opportunities in the future. These things include additional population density along the corridor that would increase the projected ridership. This would require local governments along the corridor to focus land use development along the corridor near potential stations and commit to land use changes in those areas. It is also still unknown as to how the grant formula for Capital Infrastructure Grants (CIG) will change in the future and how that might affect the project's score.

The Feasibility Study explored other funding that could be leveraged along the corridor, such as safety funding, rail capacity funding and funding for Amtrak station improvements that would benefit the commuter rail project.

Next steps for the project include working with partners to finalize the proposal in the second calendar quarter of this year to decide how to move the project forward.

Ms. Eggleston reported that the GoTriangle Board of Trustees have a work session scheduled in March to look at some additional information they had requested about other potential delivery options. They will also review the results of the recent public engagement efforts, which included several thousand responses to their survey. Mr. Lattuca added that the time for making a decision is coming up soon. The recent comment period was 45 days long and included 20 in-person and online engagement events that garnered 5000 comments. After the GoTriangle Board of Trustees meeting on March 29, the group will need to make a decision on what corridor to choose to move forward.

Commissioner Evans asked if the GoTriangle Board would be reporting on the public engagement results and making a proposal on how to move the project forward.

Mr. Lattuca responded that the engagement review and the review of the additional information will help the GoTriangle Board of Trustees have a high-level discussion at their workshop.

Mayor Cawley stated that he looked forward to a recommendation from the GoTriangle Board of Trustees on a path forward.

Wake Transit Program Overview – Anna Stokes from CAMPO reviewed the original Wake Transit Plan, including the “four big moves” the plan was based on (Connect the Region; Connect All Wake Communities; Provide Frequent Reliable Urban Mobility; and Enhance Access to Transit). She stated that the Commuter Rail project was included as part of the Connect the Region big move, which also included the cross-county Bus Rapid Transit and Express Bus projects. The original Wake Transit Plan was adopted in 2016 and is anticipated to be delivered using the voter-approved half-cent transit sales tax and other Wake Transit revenue sources as outlined in the Interlocal Governance Agreement between CAMPO, Wake County and GoTriangle. The Wake Transit Plan was updated in 2021 to extend the original 2027 time horizon out to 2030 to match up to the MPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan horizon year, and was an update to cost and schedule projections in the plan.

Ms. Stokes briefly highlighted the administration of the Wake Transit Plan, including CAMPO's programmatic responsibilities and the operation of the Transit Planning Advisory Committee (TPAC).

Ms. Stokes reviewed the funding in the draft Wake Transit FY 24 Work Plan, explaining that the Work Plan anticipates \$136.7 Million in revenues in FY 24. She described how the Commuter Rail project is included in the FY 24 draft Work Plan as a placeholder with the assumption that two of the three corridor options identified in the Feasibility Study would move forward in the 2030 time horizon of the Wake Transit Plan. She also noted the differences between what was anticipated in the original Wake Transit Plan for the project and what is currently assumed in the draft FY 24 Work Plan. This includes changes to assumptions around costs, project mileage, schedule and financing. Originally, Wake County's cost share for the 38-mile project was assumed to be \$0.7 Billion; the draft FY 24 Wake Transit Work Plan assumes Wake County's share will be \$1.4 Billion. Additionally, the original Wake Transit Plan assumed the Commuter Rail project would be completed in FY 2030 using federal grant funding and a 30-year debt term with a FY 2059 payoff date. The updated assumptions indicate a 30 mile project being delivered in phases, with the first phase being delivered in 2033 and the second phase being delivered in 2037, using federal loan funding and grant funding, with a debt term of 35 years with a 2072 payoff date.

Ms. Stokes noted that the Wake Transit Plan will be updated starting in FY 2024 to extend the horizon of the plan out to 2035, and that the decisions pertaining to commuter rail in Wake County will be included in that plan update.

Mayor Cawley asked who represents Morrisville on the TPAC. Ms. Stokes reported that Danielle Kitteridge is the TPAC representative for the Town.

Open Discussion - Mayor Marshburn asked what the anticipated lifespan of this committee is. Mr. Lukasina responded that that is up to the committee itself and the Executive Board. The committee was created to advise the MPO on decisions related to the Wake Transit plan, Wake Transit funding, and MTP projects moving forward. The committee was originally established about 18 months ago in anticipation of working with GoTriangle on this issue, and, having not been formally incorporated into the Commuter Rail project decision-making process, had determined to meet at the January Executive Board meeting.

Mr. Lukasina briefly explained the differences between decision-making for the transit plan investments in Durham County versus in Wake County, noting that the Durham County Commissioners have a stronger role than in Wake County, where the decision-making has been more delegated to the MPO in the interest of regionalism and full-county participation.

Several members asked about the viability of the Western section moving forward. Mr. Lukasina stated that the DCHC MPO was working with Durham County to put together a group similar to the CAMPO committee so that we could have those conversations with those partners.

Mayor Cawley asked if the project completion date in the presentation was equal to the project start of service date. Ms. Stokes will check with GoTriangle for clarification, but understands the first phase anticipated start of service to be 2033.

Mayor Pro-Tem Branch asked about the project delivery timeline, and whether it was expected to be delivered in 8 years then another 10 years then another 12 years in the phases discussed by GoTriangle,

or if it was expected to be the first phase in 8 years, then phase 2 in another 2 years, and phase 3 another two years after that. Ms. Stokes will check with GoTriangle for clarification.

Mayor Pro-Tem Branch asked if there was opportunity for cost savings from NCDOT's S-Line project. Mr. Lukasina stated there may be some opportunities for that. He explained NCDOT's approach to leveraging funding for smaller projects along the S-Line corridor, such as grade separations or crossing closures using state funds, to match larger federal grants for corridor development activities. He noted that this approach has been taken somewhat along this corridor, as both MPO's have submitted projects along this corridor during several rounds of statewide prioritization to get funding in the STIP. Some of these projects have been successfully programmed, such as the Maynard Road grade separation. He also reported that DCHC is attempting to swap out one of their existing STIP projects to enable the funding of the Beryl Road and Trinity Road grade separation projects.

Mayor Pro-Tem Branch stated that Mecklenburg County is lobbying for authority for a one-cent transportation sales tax and asked if Wake County should do the same. Mr. Lukasina stated that the region has included that assumption in the MTP's financial planning, but that it would be for all transportation modes, not just transit. We would need enabling legislation to make that happen, and a one-cent sales tax would net approximately \$200 Million / year in revenues for the County.

The group discussed the probability of legislative support for such an authorization in Wake County and noted that the need for connecting rural areas into urban areas for employment and medical purposes could be done via these rail projects and would be a good use of those funds. If this corridor were expanded from Mebane to Selma, with this commuter rail project being the first implementation piece, the legislature may view that favorably.

Ms. Powell asked what other needs the group has for more information, or what might be helpful for them to have at their future meetings.

Mr. Hutchinson shared his vision for decision making for the Commuter Rail project, noting that Wake County does a good job of working together to outline priorities. While he is agnostic to which phase goes first, he believes it is important for the Wake County communities to determine their priorities to communicate to GoTriangle to assist with decision making. Looking at the project phases that GoTriangle staff has laid out, it would be \$700 Million to get from Auburn to Raleigh; \$1 Billion to get from Raleigh to RTP; and \$1.6 Billion to get from RTP to Durham. That is 1/3 of the distance of the full project for 1/2 of the total cost. Mr. Hutchinson reported that GoTriangle Board of Trustees will discuss this at their March 29 work session, and that he will recommend the Board commit to supporting the full 37 mile project and recommend that GoTriangle staff reach out to the MPO's for further direction on the priorities for the segmentation. He suggested that this group could help determine what Wake County's phase one priority is, while the DCHC MPO group could help determine what the Durham County phase one priority is. He noted that it appears Wake County can afford to implement the segment from RTP to Raleigh, possibly extending that to downtown Garner. There was some discussion on whether the Wake Transit funds could be spent on an extension to Ellis Road. There are interpretations that say that Wake Transit revenues can be spent on projects in the Wake Transit Plan, and the full commuter rail project is included in the Wake Transit Plan. He noted that it's possible that Durham County could afford the piece from Ellis Road to Durham, depending on the priority they place on the project. He requested staff's help on the feasibility of financing these segments and determining the impact to the Wake Transit plan's other projects.

Commissioner Evans asked if there was an assumption that Wake County would pay 2/3 and Durham County would pay 1/3 of the commuter rail project. Mr. Lukasina responded that, while that idea had been discussed in general in terms of the length of project in each county, no explicit agreement regarding that cost share was ever agreed to.

It was acknowledged that the costs in the Durham County section versus the anticipated revenue in the Durham County transit plan left a very large gap. That County would need to discuss choices and tradeoffs on how to account for that. Similarly, in Wake County, we need to determine how big a priority it is to make that regional connection between Raleigh and Durham with this project, and whether it is important enough to forego other priorities in the Wake Transit Plan that this increase in funding would impact, such as future Bus Rapid Transit in the northern corridor, the Community Funding Area Program, or regular fixed route bus services. It was also acknowledged that the original financing of the project was anticipated to be a grant program, and now it is anticipated to be a loan program requiring repayment through Wake Transit revenues.

Mr. Lukasina reiterated that CAMPO staff wants to make sure the committee has all the information it needs to make an informed decision about these things, and that we know several other projects in the Wake Transit Plan and the MTP will need more funding than originally anticipated as well. He noted that we do not want to have an issue in Wake County where we continue to spend millions of dollars studying something that we cannot make progress on or deliver.

Mr. Hutchinson requested that the next time the group meets, there should be a financing briefing from GoTriangle's consultants. Mayor Marshburn asked about the possibility of funding the project all the way into Johnston County; Mr. Lukasina noted that had the same issue as funding it into Durham County – it is assumed to be allowed as long as it's in the Wake Transit Plan and to the benefit of Wake County. However, since Johnston County has no dedicated transit tax funding, there would need to be other funding to pay for operations of the service in that area if it were constructed.

Commissioner Evans asked if there was a possibility to take the project past Ellis Road closer to Downtown Durham. Ms. Powell replied that that was one of the things the GoTriangle Board of Trustees had requested information on that they would receive at their March 29 work session. Mayor Cawley stated he would be interested in knowing the costs for extending the central section into downtown Garner. Mayor Cawley asked if, given the recent public input on the three options GoTriangle had proposed for phase one, whether a decision that was not exactly one of those options could move forward without additional input. The group generally agreed that the presentation of those options did not lock in decision-making to be only about those three options, but that the leaders in the region needed to figure out what makes sense using those options as a baseline for discussion.

Mayor Cawley asked if a recommendation could just be presented from the GoTriangle Board. Mr. Hutchinson responded that he would appreciate the additional technical expertise of CAMPO and DCHC MPO staff to weigh in on that decision. Mayor Jones noted that, while an official recommendation could come from GoTriangle, the MPO Boards would need to sign off on that decision as well for it to move forward. Mr. Lukasina stated that he could see three options for moving forward: (1) continue spinning our wheels and spending our funding on studies with no concrete project moving forward; (2) decide that there are too many unknowns to move forward with developing a project right now and hit the pause button for a number of years, which would cause further cost escalation and delays; or (3)

evaluate our available funding, see what we can deliver for that funding and see if that project is a high enough priority for us to pursue using our funding.

Joint DCHC/CAMPO Board Meeting Agenda Review – Ms. Powell noted that this topic will be on the joint Board meeting agenda for the March 29 meeting. Mayor Cawley noted that we need to discuss this with counterparts in Durham as well, and determine what is the minimum segment that could happen in phase one for them to support the project, while still working to get the full corridor implemented eventually. The group agreed it would be good to hold an initial meeting with the DCHC MPO group to get their thoughts.

Next Steps - The group asked Ms. Stokes to work with Durham County and DCHC MPO to arrange a meeting between this committee and their committee prior to the joint MPO Executive Board committee meeting at the end of March. The group reached general consensus that Wake County would like to see Garner to RTP as a first phase of the project and would like information on the feasibility of moving that forward as phase one.