



Date: January 18, 2011

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: Theodore L. Voorhees, Deputy City Manager
Mark D. Ahrendsen, Director, Transportation Department
From: Andy Henry, Transportation Planner
Subject: Briefing on Regional and Local Transit Studies

Executive Summary

The purpose of this briefing is to update the City Council on ongoing planning efforts concerning regional and local transit. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) has identified two regional rail corridors that are in Durham City and County for more detailed study. The light rail transit corridor extends from UNC-Chapel Hill to Duke University, downtown Durham and to Alston Avenue. The commuter rail corridor extends from west Durham (near Fulton Street) through Durham and RTP to the Durham/Wake county line (and beyond to Raleigh and the Wake/Johnston county line). TTA is in the midst of conducting an Alternatives Analysis to study the financial, ridership, environmental and public input aspects of these corridors. The study results (which will be available by March 15, 2011) will inform the process to conduct a potential local referendum to use new local revenue sources, such as a ½ cent sales tax, to fund bus and rail transit investments, and to apply for a federal New Start funding grant for light rail transit.

In addition, staff from the City, Durham County, TTA, and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) have developed a plan for proposed improvements to local and regional bus service that is coordinated with the aforementioned rail projects.

The briefing will cover the status and schedule of these planning efforts with an emphasis on the financial impacts and options.

Recommendation

Receive the staff presentation and provide comments.

Background

Several years ago, the Triangle region was notified that the proposed regional rail project would not qualify for federal New Start funding. This action motivated the appointment of a regional commission to study transit, called the Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC), which submitted its recommendations to the regions two MPOs in May 2008. The recommendations included rail transit extending from Raleigh to Durham to Chapel Hill, and bus transit investments to expand service coverage and quality. The DCHC MPO incorporated the STAC recommendations into the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (2035 LRTP). The Congestion Relief/Intermodal Transport bill was approved in August 2009, enabling local areas to fund public transportation using an increase in the sales tax, car registration fees and special district property taxes, and requiring a Transit Plan to guide the use of such funding. The Durham Board of County Commissioners could be asked to act on the Transit Plan called for in the bill and consider authorizing a referendum for a ½ cent sales tax for transit and/or approving a motor vehicle fee of up to \$7 for transit.

The presentation to City Council will provide an update on two important planning efforts that have resulted from these previous events. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) has implemented the Triangle Regional Transit Program (TRTP) to study the financial, ridership, environmental and public input aspects of a regional light rail system and identify a light rail segment for application of federal New Start funding. In June, the TRTP held a series of workshops throughout the Triangle region to gather public input on a regional transit vision. Subsequently, the TRTP Transitional Analysis studied six light rail corridors in Durham County and twelve corridors in Wake County to compare the mobility, financial, land use, and socioeconomic performance of the corridors. This screening process identified the top two light rail corridors in terms of performance and these two corridors have proceed to the Alternatives Analysis stage for more detailed study and possible submission to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for New Start funding. One of these two light rail corridors is in Durham County, i.e., the corridor extends from UNC-Chapel Hill to Duke University and downtown Durham and to Alston Avenue. In addition, the Alternatives Analysis will provide comparable financial and ridership data for a commuter rail corridor that extends from west Durham (near Fulton Street) through the RTP and Wake County to the Johnston County line.

There is also a planning effort to improve local and regional bus service. The Durham County Element of the Regional Transit Plan identifies proposed improvements to local and regional bus service for six scenarios that are coordinated with the financial and service expectations of various light rail and commuter rail corridors. Each scenario assumes a different light rail transit system will become operational and assumes that the bus transit improvements will be funded by sharing the proceeds of the local options sales tax and car registration fees with the rail system. A single scenario will be developed into the Durham County Element of the Regional Transit Plan. As required by the Congestion Relief/Intermodal Transport legislation, the Durham Board of County Commissioners would have to approve that plan before authorizing a referendum for a ½ cent sales tax to support the recommendations of the plan.

Issues/Analysis

The local option sales tax referendum and Durham County Element of the Regional Transit Plan do not require action by Durham City Council. However, City Council has an interest in these issues given that the majority of the transit services that are provided and the majority

of the collected tax revenues will be in the City of Durham. In addition, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) will need to approve the Regional Transit Plan, and the Durham City Council has two members on the DCHC MPO policy board (called the Transportation Advisory Committee, or TAC).

Alternatives

1. Receive Presentation and offer comments
2. Receive Presentation but defer comments to a later date

Financial Analysis

This agenda item does not have an immediate impact on the City budget. However, if implemented, the regional and local transit plans will have a significant financial impact on the City budget and City of Durham citizens. This financial impact will become clearer when the ongoing transit studies are completed and decisions on the alternatives are made.

SDBE Summary

This item does not require review by the Office of Equal Opportunity /Equity Assurance.

Attachments

- Attachment A: Regional and Local Transit Studies: Update and Financial Model Components