



CITY OF DURHAM | NORTH CAROLINA

Date: March 20, 2012

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager

Through: Theodore L. Voorhees, Deputy City Manager

From: Mark D. Ahrendsen, Director of Transportation
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Subject: Agenda Item –Designing Better Bus Service in Durham Draft Plan

Executive Summary

The City of Durham FY2012 budget includes a Comprehensive Operational Analysis of the DATA system, which has been given the name of Designing Better Bus Service in Durham. The analysis will be completed in June 2012 and the result will be a 3-year plan for DATA services aimed at improving the passenger experience for current riders and attracting new riders. As manager of the DATA system on behalf of the City of Durham, Triangle Transit selected a consultant, Parsons Brinkerhoff, to conduct the technical analysis and assist with the development of recommendations.

The analysis has involved extensive public engagement, which began in March 2011 with a survey distributed to passengers and the general public, and more than 20 community and stakeholder meetings. On November 22nd, 2011, Triangle Transit presented the initial technical memorandum of current conditions and a draft set of goals to guide the plan. The goals are as follows:

1. Create an environment that is safe and feels safe to our customers and employees.
2. Provide services that are reliable, convenient, easy to access, and courteous/friendly.
3. Focus services to meet basic mobility needs as well as diverse market demands in a cost-effective manner and pursue funding partnerships to supplement local tax dollars.
4. Develop services that support economic development, reduce carbon emissions, and connect citizens and visitors with affordable access to community life.

More than 50 public and stakeholder meetings and workshops have been conducted to collect feedback at critical stages in the process: Spring 2011, November-December 2011, January-February 2012. Triangle Transit has also established a Sounding Board of twenty-five (25) members of the public representing diverse interests and backgrounds of the Durham community. The Sounding Board has met regularly throughout the duration of the process with Triangle Transit and the consultant and will present their own report on the recommendations to the City Council along with the Final Draft Plan in June 2012.

On March 19, the Draft Plan was released to the public, and public meetings have been scheduled for March 21st, April 2nd, and April 3rd. A public hearing before the City Council has been requested for the regularly scheduled Council meeting on April 16th. Staff expects to request that the City Council adopt a Final Draft Plan at the June 18th, 2012 meeting. Once the plan is adopted, Triangle Transit and Durham City Transit Company (DCTC) will

implement the Scenario One changes in three steps – the first after 15 weeks, the second after six months, and the third at the beginning of the following fiscal year.

The key recommendations of the Draft Plan will:

1. Improve customer safety by reducing overcrowding and upgrading bus stop environments
2. Improve service reliability by redesigning routes to improve on-time performance from 61% to 90% of all trips
3. Focus services to meet mobility needs by matching service frequency to demand. This means providing 15-minute daytime service (like the Bull City Connector) on the busiest route segments, and maintaining service on most lesser-used route segments by reducing it to once per hour
4. Support economic development by providing more direct service to major employment centers and educational institutions, like the Duke/VA medical centers, The Streets at Southpoint mall, Durham Tech, and Durham's public high schools.

The system improvements are described in three scenarios that each assumes a specific funding level.

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that the City Council receive the Designing Better Bus Service in Durham Draft Plan and provide comments.
2. City Council members will hold a public hearing on the Draft Plan at the April 16th Council meeting.

Background

The City of Durham approached Triangle Transit in 2010 to discuss the possibility of Triangle Transit managing the Durham Area Transit Authority. The purpose of this arrangement was to improve the connections with regional transit services. In October 2010, Triangle Transit assumed the responsibilities for the planning, operations, and marketing for the Durham Area Transit Authority on behalf of the City of Durham. Included in the agreement was a request to conduct a thorough study of the transit system to assess the effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of the City of Durham residents. As such, the Durham City Council approved the allocation of \$125,000 in the FY2012 budget to conduct a Comprehensive Operational Analysis, also known as Designing Better Bus Service in Durham.

The most recent analyses of the DATA transit system have been conducted in 2003 and 2008. The current analysis has taken a fresh look at the existing DATA system to see how the City of Durham resources can better meet the needs of the Durham community. The on-board survey conducted in April 2011 revealed that reliability is a significant issue for current passengers. Triangle Transit distributed a survey to the general public in the spring of 2011, which revealed that riders and non-riders alike are interested in more direct and frequent services during high demand times of day and to high demand locations. In addition, Triangle Transit has received direction from the City to look at ways for the DATA services to attract choice riders.

The Draft Plan is a three-year strategy to improve service quality, to ensure that the network meets travel demands of Durham residents and workers, and to improve the efficiency of the system.

Issues and Analysis

The purpose of this memo is to inform City Council members about the recommendations in the Draft Plan and the public involvement activities that have been integral to the development of these recommendations. Included in the Draft Plan are three funding scenarios: the first generally continue existing revenue sources; the second scenario includes additional funding received through the implementation of the \$10 vehicle registration fee increases; and the third scenario includes additional funding through the levying of a half-cent sales tax for transit.

Significant public involvement has been occurring as part of Designing Better Bus Service in Durham. More than 50 public and stakeholder meetings and workshops have been conducted to collect feedback at critical stages in the process: Spring 2011, November-December 2011, January-February 2012. A Sounding Board was selected of twenty-five (25) members of the public representing diverse interests and backgrounds of the Durham community. The Sounding Board has met regularly throughout the length of the process with Triangle Transit and the consultant and will present recommendations to the City Council along with the Final Draft Plan in June 2012.

The fourth round of opportunities for public input began on March 21st with presentations on the Draft Plan at Durham Station. Two additional open house format meetings will be held on April 2nd at the South Regional Library and on April 3rd at the North Regional Library.

Feedback from customers, stakeholders and the public throughout this process has resulted in significant changes from the preliminary service proposals incorporated in this draft plan.

Key Recommendations

The draft plan will:

1. Improve customer safety by reducing overcrowding and upgrading bus stop environments
2. Improve service reliability by redesigning routes to improve on-time performance from 61% to 90% of all trips
3. Focus services to meet mobility needs by matching service frequency to demand. This means providing 15-minute daytime service (like the Bull City Connector) on the busiest route segments, and maintaining service on most lesser-used route segments by reducing it to once per hour
4. Support economic development by providing more direct service to major employment centers and educational institutions, like the Duke/VA medical centers, The Streets at Southpoint mall, Durham Tech, and Durham's public high schools.

The system improvements are described in three scenarios that each assumes a specific funding level.

Scenario One

Scenario One is the base scenario that assumes funding levels consistent with the current fiscal year transit budget. The improvements in Scenario One are focused on raising the on-time reliability of every route in the system. The draft plan also recommends increasing the frequency of service between downtown and The Village shopping center along the Holloway Street corridor and providing more direct service to Durham Tech, North Carolina Central

University and The Streets at Southpoint through route restructuring. The draft plan recommends shifting some services from the least used areas of the system to the most used areas of the system.

The recommendations would be implemented in three steps due to the time required to prepare for and communicate the changes to customers, and due to the inter-relationships among many route changes. The first changes would occur within 15 weeks of City Council adoption of the plan (in early October with a June 18 Council decision). The second set of changes would occur six months after City Council adoption of the plan (early January with a June 18 Council decision). The third set of changes would occur at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2014.

Despite considerable improvements in the quality and directness of service, the Scenario One recommendations result in a reduction in total service of just under 4% from 185,250 revenue hours of DATA bus service provided in the current fiscal year to 178,200 revenue hours provided in FY2014. The impacts on FY2013 are less because the changes would be implemented mid-year, resulting in partial year reductions in the number of revenue hours.

Scenario Two

Scenario Two adds 15-minute frequent service between downtown and North Carolina Central University. It also provides new or improved commuter service to the largest employer center in the city at the Duke and VA medical centers. New commuter hour routes would connect workers from south Durham, from Durham County Stadium, and from Rougemont. Service between Chapel Hill, Duke/VA, and Downtown Durham would be upgraded to every 15 minutes during morning and afternoon commuting times and 30 minutes during the middle of the day. Scenario Two would also include improvements at 30 bus stops and the creation of three park-and-rides served by the new commuter routes.

Implementation of Scenario Two would be accomplished over a three-year period relying on new funding from a \$7 vehicle registration fee increase levied by the County and a \$3 vehicle registration fee increase levied by Triangle Transit. With the full implementation of Scenario Two, an additional 18,500 revenue hours of service would be provided on DATA routes. This is a 10% increase from current levels.

Scenario Three

Scenario Three adds to the creation of a frequent bus network by providing 15-minute daytime service in three additional corridors, connecting Northgate Mall (Route 1), Durham Tech (Route 8), and Durham Regional Hospital (Route 4). It also expands the hours that service is provided. Triangle Transit would extend Saturday service hours until 11pm and begin to provide Sunday service between 7am and 7pm. DATA would extend Sunday hours to 9pm. A new commuter connection to the Duke/VA Medical Centers would also begin from northern Orange County. Several other DATA routes would see improvements in the frequency of service or the hours provided. Scenario Three would also include funding for improvements at 170 bus stops, and along the three most heavily travelled transit corridors (i.e., Holloway Street, Fayetteville Street, and North Roxboro Street). Finally, it would include the creation of four Neighborhood Transfer Centers and an additional park-and-ride.

Implementation of Scenario Three would be accomplished over a three-year period relying on new funding from a ½-cent sales tax increase levied by the County. In November 2011, 60% of the voters of Durham County supported such an increase. The Durham County

Commissioners have pledged to await the outcome of a similar referendum in either Orange or Wake County before levying the sales tax in Durham.

With the full implementation of Scenario Three, an additional 34,800 revenue hours of service would be provided on DATA routes. This is a 19% increase from current levels.

Alternatives

This is an informational agenda item and thus an alternative is not needed.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with this agenda item (i.e., holding a public hearing on the Designing Better Bus Service in Durham Draft Plan). The service changes ultimately approved by City Council will have a financial impact that will be addressed through the budget process.

SDBE Summary

Due to the nature of this agenda item, an SDBE summary is not needed.

Attachments:

1. Draft Plan for Designing Better Bus Service in Durham
2. Public Information brochures summarizing the Draft plan