

## **Recommendations Regarding the Bull City Connector Route Change**

The Human Relations Commission provides the following recommendations regarding the decision by the City Manager and City Council to change the Bull City Connector route in a way that eliminated the stops at the Durham Station, Duke South, and along Erwin Road.

We are thankful for SpiritHouse and GoDurham for presenting to us important and helpful information about the changes to the Bull City Connector route, particularly the changes eliminating the Durham Station and Duke South stops. We focused just on the impact of the elimination of these two stops in our review. A summary of our review of this information is attached.

We believe that the Bull City Connector is one of many ways in which the City can take action in a way that reflects its values. As the Human Relations Commission has said, one of the many things which makes the City of Durham a great place is that it is an open and accepting place.

We are concerned that the implications of the current route appear to value some members of the Durham community more than others, making the downtown area more accessible to some people and less accessible to others, particularly people of lower-income and people of color.

The City of Durham can and should ensure that the Bull City Connector is connecting Durham in such a way to make it easier for people to get to and from work, to get to their needed medical care, and to get downtown regardless if they are from Duke or NCCU. The current route runs contrary to each of these goals.

After review of all of the provided information, we make the following recommendations:

- 1. The BCC should focus on serving the Durham community, not primarily Duke.**
- 2. The BCC route should be restored or improved to again serve the Durham Station.**
- 3. The BCC route should be restored or improved to again serve Duke South.**

## Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Bull City Connector

Below we provide more background for each recommendation based on our review of the available information.

All documents reviewed by the committee can be found at this link:

<http://bit.ly/HRCBullCityConnector>

### **1. The BCC should focus on serving the Durham community, not primarily Duke.**

Seventy-five percent of the funding for the Bull City Connector comes from the City of Durham. Twenty-five percent of the funding comes from Duke. No other bus route in the city receives funding from Duke.

GoDurham noted to the City Council in December 10, 2015 that “this route is a partnership funded together with Duke University. This recommendation came through that conversation,” and that Duke expressed a desire for the BCC to reach further into Duke’s West Campus.

In addition, in a March 2015 Bull City Connector Advisory Committee meeting, a representative from the city’s Neighborhood Improvement Services noted “[c]oncern about the perception of the City favoring Duke with the BCC going to Duke and not to Northeast Central Durham.” The meeting notes reflect the response to this concern was to share it with the marketing team and “[t]he extension of the route to the west to Duke is paid for by Duke.”

While we appreciate the opportunity provided by the BCC to better connect the Duke and Durham communities, the service to Duke should not be at the expense of Durham residents who depend on quality public transportation for things such as getting to work and medical care. Prior to the change, only 26% of riders were Duke students or employees. In contrast, 41% of people who used the BCCC had no affiliation with Duke, and 16% had an affiliation of Duke because they were patients.

According to GoDurham, In the first four months following the route change, overall ridership declined by 30%, while ridership at Duke area stops increased 12%. While GoDurham recognizes that it is not fully clear what has happened to the people who used to ride the Bull City Connector but now do not, GoDurham reports there has been a decline in the Queen Street stop servicing Urban Durham Ministries

Given that its primary funding source is Durham residents’ taxpayer dollars, the Bull City Connector should not prioritize service to those who use public transportation as a luxury over those whose lives depend on it for things like work, medical care, and school. According to GoDurham data, the single largest reason for riding the BCC is to get to work (47%) and the second is for a medical visit (34%). Twenty percent of riders are using the BCC to get to school. All of these percentages increased between 2011 and 2015. A majority of all BCC riders are

employed (58%), another 17% are students, and 8% retired. A majority (57%) of BCC riders are African American.

In 2015, before the change, over half (52%) of BCCC ridership earn less than \$15,000 a year, 70% earn less than \$25,000 a year. By comparison, GoDurham, in its December 2015 presentation to City Council highlighted people who now utilize the BCC, such as two individuals in West Village and Westchester Apartments. A one-bedroom apartment in Whetstone rents for \$1,137 a month (over \$13,000 a year).

Finally, based on the information provided, there is a desire for the Bull City Connector to truly serve as a “connector” across the different communities seeking to access downtown. These concerns were voiced even before the route change was made. For example, at a 2014 Bull City Connector Advisory Committee meeting, the minutes reflect that attendees noted concerns such as:

- Route needs to go further east to serve Northeast Central Durham. Golden Belt is not East Durham.
- If it’s called a “connector”, NCCU needs to be on the route
- Extend to Alston Ave to serve NCCU
- Transit services need to be better marketed to NCCU students and employees
- Serve both residents and visitors in the downtown core
- A goal is to attract a diverse ridership.
- Connect homeless population from Urban Ministries to hospitals and important destinations with extended hours.
- Serve persons with disabilities.

## **2. The BCC route should be restored or improved to again serve the Durham Station.**

In the application for the federal funds which the City of Durham received to purchase the Bull City Connector buses, it did so with service to the Durham Station in mind. The application noted: “Two buses will connect the bus terminal and several activity centers within the downtown area.”

Prior to the change, the Durham Station was the most frequent stop on the route – accounting for 58% of BCC riders. Based on the information provided, it clearly appears there was concern about the loss of the Durham Station, even prior to the route change.

In a GoDurham memo summarizing public input from May and June 2015, including over 200 comments regarding the Bull City Connector and two meetings conducted at Durham Station itself, there was no indication that the community sought to eliminate the Durham Station or Duke South stops. The only comments in support were summarized as (1) even though Trent Dr is the most convenient to accessing Duke’s West, the Research Dr could be a good substitute, and (2) that it would reduce the commute time between Corcoran St and Duke’s West Campus.

In fact, there was overwhelming opposition to the proposed route changes, summarized in the memo as the following comments:

- I don't understand why the BCC would discontinue one of the most used stops (namely Durham Station). This is also the stop that allows BCC riders to connect most easily to other transit systems (DATA aka "Go Durham) and whatever TTA is called now. I have used the BCC to go to American Tobacco and to the DPAC. I would, most likely, no longer take transit with the added walking (and, I might add, pedestrian unfriendly crossings of the downtown loop) from the loss of the Durham Station stop. This appears to turn the BCC from something that serves the community to something that easily allows Duke students to go downtown and come back. That doesn't seem in keeping with the mission of transit in the triangle.
- I prefer the BCC from the Durham Station to Duke because it is not crowded.
- I would say no to the loss of Durham Station. If it's dark out, it can be scary for single women to transfer to another bus, especially if there is lag time between transfers.
- There are a LOT of Duke employees that use the BCC. This will be a huge inconvenience and cause a lot of problems for Duke employees. The 6 has a tendency to be late.

Furthermore, in findings presented in a July 2015 quantitative survey of BCC riders, BCC riders rated the BCC very highly on the following categories (with the BCC ranking higher in these categories than the over all DATA /GoDurham system):

- Speed of ride to destination
- Connections between DATA and other local buses
- Connections between DATA buses
- Frequency of service
- Buses running on time

Despite these public inputs, the memo provided by GoDurham in June 2015, regarding final recommendations for the BCC route changes stated the following: "Add service to Duke Hospital North, VA Hospital, Research Drive and Erwin Square on Main St; streamline the route to stay on Main St; eliminate Durham Station, Duke Hospital South and Erwin Rd bus stops." In our review, this recommendation does not seem supported by the public input obtained during the process.

Additionally, all but one other GoDurham buses stop at the Durham Station, so it is a disservice that the BCC does not. As just one example, NCCU students can take GoDurham's Route 5 for free to Durham Station. When the BCC connector was first announced in 2010, NCCU advertised the ability to connect to Downtown Durham via Route 5 and the Bull City Connector. Now that the BCC no longer stops at the Durham Station, this increases barriers to connecting to other parts of downtown and Duke by having to cross under railroad tracks from Durham Station to reach the closest BCC stop.

This concern of walking between Durham Station and the closest BCC stop was flagged early in the process, even before the change. As noted by a Durham County representative in the

March 2015 Bull City Connector Advisory Committee meeting, “The Chapel Hill St underpass is dark and uninviting. It’s not a nice walk for people arriving to Durham Station and then looking to get on the BCC.”

SpiritHouse also presented visual information regarding the challenges presented by having to walk from the nearest downtown bus loop. The walk is not pedestrian friendly, and even less so at night. SpiritHouse also presented feedback from current riders confirming this challenge. As one rider noted, “It looks like one block but it feels like a lot more because you have to walk down the street, yeah you have to cross the busy street, you have to go under the bridge.” Another noted it makes transferring more difficult, and in fact “ridiculous” because “you can’t get a connection from one of the regular DATA buses to the BCC anymore, like you’re adding 20 to 30 minutes to your trip.”

GoDurham acknowledges that they have not to date addressed the challenges of transfers between BCC other routes, and they recognize it will be a long and difficult process. They also recognize that they do not plan to reinstate the routes that used to travel along Main Street but were removed in order to accommodate the BCC.

### **3. The BCC route should be restored or improved to again serve Duke South.**

Prior to the change, the Trent Dr. stop at Duke Hospital South (Duke South) was the third most used stop on the route, effecting 280 people and 19% of the BCC’s total boardings, reflecting the significant use of the BCC to increase access to medical care.

GoDurham stated that customers can now use Route 6 or Route 6B, or use alternate stops that will be placed on Erwin Road at Trent Drive. SpiritHouse presented information demonstrating the walk now necessary from the closest BCC stop to the Duke South clinic.

Similar concerns were echoed by the Durham Convention and Visitors Bureau at the Bull City Connector Advisory Committee meeting in March 2015, noting, “concern about ¼ mile walk to Duke South, especially given mobility issues for those going to the hospital.”