



CHAPEL HILL TRANSIT
Town of Chapel Hill
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Chapel Hill, NC 27514-2401

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CHAPEL HILL TRANSIT PUBLIC TRANSIT COMMITTEE

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE MEETING AND AGENDA

NOVEMBER 21, 2024 – 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. (VIRTUAL MEETING)

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6. Adjourn	



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MEETING SUMMARY OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE PUBLIC TRANSIT COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 24, 2024 – 10:00 A.M.

Present: Marie Parker, Assistant Town Manager for Town of Carrboro
Randee Haven-O'Donnell, Carrboro Town Council
Jason Merrill, Carrboro Town Council
Camille Berry, Chapel Hill Town Council
Loryn Clark, Town of Chapel Deputy Town Manager
Chassem Anderson, UNC Transportation and Parking
Gordon Merklein, Associate Vice Chancellor for Real Estate and
Campus Enterprises at UNC
Chris Dobek, UNC Transportation and Parking

Absent: Melissa McCullough, Chapel Hill Town Council
Theodore Nollert, Chapel Hill Town Council

Staff present: Brian Litchfield, Transit Director
Nick Pittman, Deputy Assistant Director
Katy Fontaine, Transit Development Manager
Tim Schwarzauer, Business Services Manager

Guests: Fred Lampe, Becca Eversole-Robinson

1. Approval of August 29, 2024, Meeting Summary: Minutes Accepted by Committee.
2. Employee Recognition
3. Consent Items
 - A. September Financial Report: Provided to Committee.
4. Information Items
 - A. Electric Bus Performance Overview: Provided to Committee. A Committee member asked if we had studied if the topography of Chapel Hill has anything to do with the range? Topography doesn't seem to have an impact on the range compared with what other agencies are getting in terms of range. The range has increased with the newer purchases of electric buses. A Committee member asked if they are testing with the buses while they are empty? There are several tests that the manufacturers put the buses through according to Federal Guidelines and the testing is done with ideal conditions to get an average range on the battery.

- B. Holiday Schedule Update: Provided to Committee.
- C. North South Bus Rapid Transit Project Update: Provided to Committee.
- D. Project Updates: Provided to Committee. A Committee member asked if there are any bus stop updates? We are waiting on the Federal Grant money and DOT approval to come through to continue updating our bus shelters.

5. Departmental Monthly Reports

- A. Operations: Provided to Committee.
- B. Community Outreach: Provided to Committee.
- C. Planning: Provided to Committee.

6. Next Meeting – November 21, 2024 (10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - Virtual)

7. Adjourn

3A. North-South Bus Rapid Transit – Cost Sharing Agreements with NCDOT for Property Acquisition, Utility Relocation, and Construction of Bus Lanes.

Action: Approve staff to submit cost share agreements to Chapel Hill Town Council.

Staff Resources: Katy Fontaine, Transit Development Manager

Caroline Dwyer, Transit Planning Manager

Background

In 2021, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) began work on the I-40 Widening Project in Orange County (STIP project I-3306A). This project widens 11.4-miles of I-40 from four lanes to six lanes and modifies several interchanges in the project area to “relieve peak hour congestion on I-40” and “improve the traffic flow and continuity between the existing eight-lane section at the beginning of the project (I-85) and the six-lane section at the end of the project (Durham County Line)” (<https://publicinput.com/I-40-Orange-County>).

The proposed interchange improvements (STIP project I-3306AC) at NC 86 and Eubanks Road, south of I-40, coincide with the northernmost section of the North-South Bus Rapid Transit (NSBRT) corridor. Transit staff, and their NSBRT design consultants, have been coordinating with NCDOT District 7 design and engineering staff for nearly a year to ensure the planned I-3306AC project aligns with the draft 60% design plans for NSBRT. This collaboration has benefitted both NCDOT and Chapel Hill Transit in several important ways:

- NCDOT has been able to use existing surveys conducted for NSBRT, saving their project considerable time and money (and generating good will).
- Transit will realize time and cost savings by integrating the construction of the bus lanes into NCDOT’s project (i.e., we will only be responsible for the marginal cost of the additional right of way acquisition and bus lane construction on the corridor segment between Weaver Dairy and Eubanks Roads).
- Town staff and NCDOT worked closely over several design iterations, ensuring bicycle and pedestrian safety were prioritized in a section of roadway where there have been serious pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

NCDOT’s project is on a significantly shorter timeline than NSBRT and right of way purchases and construction activities are expected to precede NSBRT construction by several years. The bus lanes will be built as part of the I-3306AC project and striped as a roadway shoulder until they are joined to the larger NSBRT corridor during that project’s construction.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) extends “pre-award authority” for some project expenses (i.e., right of way acquisition). Other project costs (i.e., construction) are only reimbursable if they are spent *after* execution of a formal grant agreement. In some cases, Transit can request, and FTA may issue, a “Letter of No Prejudice” (LONP) for certain expenses, exempting those specific project expenses from eligibility restrictions.

Funding Advance Project Activities

Transit has two available funding sources for pre-award activities – Orange County Transit Tax Revenue already allocated to NSBRT (\$4 million) in the Transit Plan and an FTA Project Development Grant (\$8.1 million).

Next Steps

Right-Of-Way Acquisition and Utility Relocation Activities

To save time and money, NCDOT and Transit staff are creating two cost sharing agreements that will be presented to the Chapel Hill Town Council and NCDOT for consideration and execution in the next few months.

The first agreement is the right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation cost share agreement, reflecting the marginal cost difference between NCDOT's planned project and adding NSBRT's bus lanes. FTA extends pre-award authority to Transit for both activities and all work will be conducted by NCDOT. NCDOT's most recent cost estimate for this agreement includes:

- Utility Relocation: \$535,800
- Right of Way Acquisition: \$338,650

Total: \$874,450

Funding Source: Orange County Transit Plan

Risk: The right of way purchase must be made prior to Transit executing an FTA grant agreement for NSBRT. This opens the possibility of purchasing right-of-way that isn't needed if the NSBRT project does not advance. Staff find that the benefits of purchasing the right of way outweigh the risks and recommend purchasing right of way. Using local funds for right of way purchase mitigates some of the risk by allowing more flexibility for right of way disposition, should it become necessary (as opposed to using federal funds with more stringent property and asset disposition requirements).

Construction Activities

The second agreement reflects Transit's share of NSBRT's bus lane construction costs. Construction activities are *not* authorized pre-award expenses, and Transit staff must request a Letter of No Prejudice from FTA for these specific activities. If issued, that agreement can be advanced for execution and payment made to NCDOT, with assurances that those expenses will be reimbursable. Staff are currently waiting to receive the construction cost share estimate from NCDOT, which we expect to receive soon. Once we receive the estimate, we will request the Letter of No Prejudice from FTA. If the LONP is approved, the cost share agreement will be sent to Council and NCDOT leadership for execution.

Construction activities are on a longer timeline than more urgent right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation activities. Staff anticipate this second agreement will be reviewed and executed in mid-2025.

Risk: The construction cost share agreement will likely need to be executed prior to execution of NSBRT's FTA grant agreement. It is possible that the bus lanes will not be needed and/or that Transit will not be reimbursed for their construction cost, should the NSBRT project not advance for any reason. Transit staff find that the benefits of proceeding with a construction cost share agreement outweigh the risks. Benefits include Transit only bearing NCDOT's marginal cost of bus lane construction.

3B. EZ Rider Advisory Committee Appointments

Action: 1. Receive information and approve committee appointment based on staff recommendations.

Staff Resource: Melissa Patrick, Assistant Operations Manager – Demand Response

Background

The EZ Rider Advisory Committee (EZRAC) serves as an Advisory Board for the Chapel Hill Transit Partners Committee. The Transit Partners appoint members to the EZ Rider Advisory Committee (<https://www.townofchapelhill.org/government/mayor-and-council/boards-commissions/board-membership-policy/ezrac-membership-policy>), based on staff and Advisory Committee recommendations. The Committee has a current vacancy and recommends appointing Ms. Katarina Karczewski.

Applicants

Following a recruitment process similar to those followed by the Town of Chapel Hill for Advisory Boards, one (1) application was received with the interest in serving on the EZRAC.

Staff received each application, consistent with the guidelines for the Committee:

- **Composition:**

- The EZ Rider Advisory Committee shall be made up of seven (7) members. Each Chapel Hill Transit funding partner (Town of Chapel Hill, Town of Carrboro and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) will have one (1) representative. Four (4) representatives will be EZ Rider customers, from organizations involved in issues that concern persons with disabilities or private citizens who advocate for the needs of persons with disabilities.

Ms. Katarina Karczewski

I am a long-time resident of Chapel Hill whose family members frequently use public transportation. While we don't use EZ Rider services, I recognize and respect this critical service in our community. I would really enjoy giving back to Chapel Hill in terms of my talents, skills and time.

Recommendation

- The EZ Rider Advisory Committee have reviewed Katarina Karczewski application and would like to make the following recommendation:
 - Katarina Karczewski will be replacing Bob Warren as his term ended on June 30, 2024. He agreed to remain on board until we were able to find a replacement.

4A. Bus Stop Improvement Plan Update

Staff Resource: Katy Fontaine, Transit Development Manager

Background

In 2020, Chapel Hill Transit initiated a bus stop improvement project to identify necessary improvements for the over 500 bus stops in our system – which includes Chapel Hill, Carrboro and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill campus. Our initial assessment demonstrated that many of our stops/shelters, most of which were placed prior to 1990, would benefit from improvements to make them accessible to customers of all mobility levels.

Following a review of the assessment, the Transit Partners Committee identified the following priorities for future improvements:

- Upgrade existing stops with shelters to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.
- 120 shelters at 100 stop locations (some locations have more than one shelter).
- Coordinate improvements with existing development projects and/or planned sidewalk/greenway improvements.
- Address safety concerns and customer concerns.
- Target improvements along routes that serve neighborhoods/areas where public housing and community services are located.

Since the initial assessment 29 stops have been improved by Chapel Hill Transit and 7 stops have been improved as part of development projects and/or infrastructure improvement projects. The cost of improvements per stop can range from \$14,000 to \$150,000 depending on the site and needed improvements. The average cost of improvements for a stop with a shelter is \$35,000 plus the cost of the shelter.

Staff is currently working with our contractor to develop a bid package of stops for construction. This includes stops along West Franklin Street and Ephesus Church Road. Our contractor is also working on property acquisitions for several locations, including Jones Ferry at Barnes Street. Staff anticipates including some of these stops in the upcoming bid package. The bid package will be posted in early 2025.

Additionally, staff is currently working on a contract to install a shelter at Homestead Road at Seymour Center. This site is being improved in coordination with our Affordable Housing department and Orange County. Construction is anticipated to be complete by the end of the year.

In 2023, Chapel Hill Transit was awarded \$2.16 million in federal grants to construct improvements at up to 60 stops. Our primary focus will be on making stops accessible to customers, with additional focuses on safety. These investments are critical for our customers and consistent with our goal of having all bus stops be easily identifiable, safe, accessible, and a comfortable place for customers to wait for buses, the Town of Chapel Hill's mission of building a community where people thrive and the Chapel Hill Town Council's strategic goal of "Connected Community". This funding will be allocated to unfunded stop improvements from the 2020 bus stop audit and stop improvements prioritized by the 2024 bus stop audit.

2024 Bus Stop Audit Update and Next Steps

Staff recently completed an updated bus stop audit. The audit identified current site conditions, amenity locations, and safety concerns. Using this information, staff is developing a bus stop improvement plan. This will allow us to prioritize bus stop improvements based on locations, safety concerns, and ADA improvements. The goal is to create a five-year plan, including funding needs, that can be shared with the Partners, with contingency plans for emergency improvements. Staff will provide an update on stop improvement prioritization at the January Partners' Committee meeting.

4B. High-Capacity Transit Corridor Feasibility Study Update

Staff Resource: Caroline Dwyer, Transit Planning Manager

Background

Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization's (DCHC MPO) FY25 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) allocates funding for Chapel Hill Transit to conduct a *High-Capacity Transit Corridor Feasibility Study*. The Study will be a collaborative effort between the Town of Chapel Hill and the DCHC MPO, with critical project support and input from MPO members and local and regional stakeholders. A primary goal is creating a blueprint for coordinated planning, funding, and implementation of regional high-capacity transit projects in the DCHC MPO area supporting and advancing goals and objectives included in the 2055 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Study Goals

More specifically, the *Chapel Hill Transit High-Capacity Transit Corridor Feasibility Study* will:

1. Identify and prioritize candidate corridors for feasible high-capacity transit connections (including but not limited to express bus service, bus rapid transit, bus on-shoulder access, stop consolidation, transit queue jumps, etc.) in Chapel Hill Transit's service area.
2. Assess opportunities for high-capacity transit connections to regional destinations including Durham County, Chatham County, and Alamance County, a stated priority of all regional stakeholders.
3. Develop a phased, action-oriented implementation plan for improving inter- and intra-regional high-capacity transit operations by the year 2055, focusing on actionable strategies generating early wins and buy-in from the community and elected officials.

Project Cost & Timeline

The total cost of the project is \$300,000, with \$240,000 (80%) coming from federal funds (STBG-DA) and \$60,000 as a local match provided by Chapel Hill Transit. **This project is anticipated to commence in early 2025 and be completed in 10 months.** Regular status updates will be provided to the Partner's Committee over the course of the project.

Scope of Work

The *Chapel Hill Transit High-Capacity Transit Corridor Feasibility Study* includes the following tasks:

1. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

- a. Project Management
- b. Project Kickoff Meeting and Progress Meetings

- c. Coordination with Project Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
- d. Community Outreach & Information
- e. Study Webpage
- f. DCHC MPO Technical Committee and Board Updates

2. HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSIT CORRIDOR ANALYSIS

- a. Preliminary Identification of Candidate High-Capacity Transit Corridors
 - i. Plan and Policy Scan
 - ii. Candidate Corridor Evaluation Methodology
- b. Candidate Corridor Evaluation & Refinement
- c. Identification and Assessment of High-Capacity Transit Service Models for Candidate Corridors

3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

4. FINAL DELIVERABLES

- a. Draft Feasibility Report & Implementation Plan
- b. Final Feasibility Report and Implementation Plan Submission
- c. Public Information Product(s)

5. LINK TO RFP

<https://www.centralpinesnc.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/RFQs-RFPs/cht-hcts-rfloi-final-11132024.pdf>