

Date: February 3rd, 2020

To: Durham County Board of Commissioners

Through: Jay Gibson, General Manager

From: Patrick O. Young, AICP, Planning Director

Subject: Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Potential Next Steps

Executive Summary

This memo provides an update on upcoming decisions pertaining to the potential next phase of study for the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail (CRT) Project. The Durham Board of County Commissioners, the Board of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Organization (MPO), and the GoTriangle Board of Trustees will each be presented with two decision points at upcoming meetings:

- Amend the Durham County Transit Plan to fund the next phase of study for the commuter rail project to address key project risks and prepare the project for a subsequent decision on whether to proceed with project implementation
- Authorize a Memorandum of Understanding to govern the roles, responsibilities, and goals of the next phase of study

Recommendation

This report is provided for information only. Staff recommends that the Board of Commissioners receive an update regarding potential next steps for the commuter rail project and provide any comments and questions regarding the project. No further action is required.

Background

Preliminary results from the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Study, led by GoTriangle, were shared at the Commissioners' January 6 meeting. This study updates the alternatives analysis performed in 2011 of commuter rail transit in Durham and Wake counties, and evaluates the potential for including service in Orange and Johnston Counties. Specifically, the study refreshes planning-level infrastructure assumptions, cost estimates, and ridership projections. This is a preliminary study, which will help inform the affected jurisdictions on decisions on whether to pursue and invest in more detailed analyses. The results of this study are being presented to the local jurisdictions in the months of January and February with intent to receive feedback on whether or not to pursue further study. Potential decisions on whether to move forward with additional study are anticipated to occur in March.

Issues and Analysis

The commuter rail project is dependent on decisions from elected officials on whether or not to proceed with next steps. The next step would be additional study to prepare the project for a subsequent decision on whether or not to pursue project design and implementation, in addition to initiating the federal New Starts process. The following are major elements that would be addressed as a part of the next phase of study

- Public and stakeholder engagement, integrated with local plan updates
- Model railroad capacity using the Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) model
- Preliminary engineering to evaluate critical design risks (e.g. Downtown Durham grade crossings)
- Agreements with funding partners, municipalities, and railroads.

Alternatives

The Board of Commissioners could choose not to provide input.

Staff Contact

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Commuter Rail Update Presentation