

**Date: June 27, 2020**

**To: Durham County Board of Commissioners**

**Through: Jay Gibson, General Manager**

**From: Katharine Eggleston, Chief Development Officer, GoTriangle**

**Subject: Greater Triangle Commuter Rail (GTCR) Study Update**

### **Executive Summary**

In March 2020, The Board of County Commissioners authorized the County Manager and Board Chair to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to express the roles, responsibilities, and cost share of the project management partners for the next phase of study for the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project. This memorandum provides an update on the study activities that have occurred to date, including approval and execution of the MOU by all eight parties and initiation of MOU activities.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board receive an update on the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Study.

### **Background**

The Board received updates on this project at its January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, and March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, work sessions. For the project to proceed, additional work is required to further define the project including; engage community members, municipalities, and institutional partners; better understand key project risks; and build consensus among, and seek formal endorsements from, funding partners, municipalities, railroads, and institutional partners.

Phase I of the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Study, found that there are two potential scenarios that may be eligible for federal funding, pending additional analysis including the Durham to Garner, and the Durham to Clayton scenarios. This study also refined ridership estimates based on the STOPS model and the Triangle Regional Model, and provided more definitive, but still planning-level, infrastructure assumptions and cost estimates for these scenarios.

The final results report for the Phase I study is online at the link below:

[http://goforwardnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/0098D\\_RPT\\_GTCR-Phase-I-Results\\_FINAL.pdf](http://goforwardnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/0098D_RPT_GTCR-Phase-I-Results_FINAL.pdf)

In March 2020, The Board of County Commissioners authorized the County Manager and Board Chair to execute a MOU to express the roles, responsibilities, and cost share of the project management partners for the next phase of study for the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project. The

MOU has now been approved and executed by all seven other parties, including GoTriangle, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro (DCHC) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Capital Area MPO (CAMPO), Wake County, Johnston County, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and North Carolina Railroad Company.

## **Issues and Analysis**

The current phase of study, targeted for completion in 12-18 months, includes:

- Facilitating proactive and comprehensive community engagement to share information and get feedback from the public.
- Refining what railroad infrastructure improvements and construction would be needed.
- Evaluating critical success factors to the project.
- Deciding, based on the findings of this study phase, whether to allocate additional local funding in Durham, Wake or Johnston counties to begin to implement the project and pursue federal funding.

Study activities are underway, with effort on the majority of the tasks described in the MOU having started in May and June. A brief update on key early tasks relevant to Durham is included below.

Coordination with City of Durham – GoTriangle has developed a detailed project schedule and coordination plan for each municipality in the corridor. Staff at GoTriangle and City of Durham met in June to discuss the schedule and coordination plan, and GoTriangle is finalizing the plan in July. The coordination plan includes a detailed schedule of activities relevant to Durham, a series of meetings and input opportunities specific to City of Durham departments for study activities that are limited in geographic scope, and a series of meetings and input opportunities for all municipalities in the corridor for study elements that are corridor-wide.

Community Engagement – GoTriangle staff is finalizing a plan for the first round of engagement during this phase of study, which is expected to occur in August/September 2020. GoTriangle and DCHC MPO staff are coordinating to align this engagement with the Durham Transit Plan engagement expected to occur on a similar timeline.

The goals of this engagement are as follows:

- To raise awareness and understanding of the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail study in Durham, Wake, and Johnston counties
- To inform the public on what aspects of the project are being studied in this phase, as well as the timeline for the current study, and how those findings will be made available to the public
- To obtain public feedback on the project metrics to be evaluated over the study period, including project benefits, non-monetary costs, and equity measures
- To identify who the most vulnerable communities are that the project will potentially impact and work to better identify strategies and tools to communicate and work with those stakeholders
- To promote regionalism and incorporate public comment periods that are open concurrently with projects moving towards implementation and ongoing investments across Wake and Durham Counties under the GoForward brand, and any other relevant concurrent planning

processes in Johnston county and/or Town of Clayton identified through coordination with their respective staff.

Study of Downtown Durham Engineering Challenges – Engineering and urban design challenges in downtown Durham have been identified as a key risk for the commuter rail project, both for cost and project viability. This task will include a limited scope of environmental screening focused on constraint mapping, and screening for historic resources and noise-sensitive receptors. The preliminary engineering analysis will include survey, track, private utilities, roadway, stormwater, structures, public utilities, traffic, and station siting, and will include development of visualizations and renderings to support stakeholder and community engagement. GoTriangle is coordinating with Durham City and County staff to schedule a kickoff meeting for this work within the next 30-60 days.

### **Alternatives**

The Board of Commissioners could choose not to receive an update on the study.

### **Staff Contact**

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### **Attachments:**

#### **Attachment 1: Presentation**