

QUESTIONS FROM THE GREATER TRIANGLE COMMUTER RAIL WEBINAR

In November, GoTriangle hosted a webinar on the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project and invited participants to ask questions. Some questions were answered live during the presentation, which you can find [here](#).

Here are other questions asked during the webinar and answers provided by GoTriangle. Some questions were omitted because of redundancy.

Q: I live near the Ellis Road stop, and I was wondering how the commuter rail will be connected to the surrounding housing. Right now there's not sidewalks or many bike lines to get to the planned stop spot. It would be great to get to the stop without getting in my car.

ANSWER: GoTriangle will work with local jurisdictions to plan improvements to bike and pedestrian access in each station area.

Q: Where does the Town of Apex fit into this scenario? Spur line? Shuttle bus? It's quite a drive into Morrisville or Cary from Apex to access the rail line.

ANSWER: GoTriangle's fixed-route bus service currently serves Apex and Holly Springs with Route 305, and there are plans to add another route between Apex and the Regional Transit Center soon. In addition, the Town of Apex is about to begin its own local transit service so bus service will be expanding in ways that increase access to the commuter rail stops over the next few years. The Town of Apex is also working with NCDOT to plan for potential rail service in the S-Line corridor, which will run as far north as Henderson and as far south as Sanford.

Q: It looks like you're planning on using really heavy diesel-powered locomotives? I was hoping we would have some sort of light rail type cars that might be electrically powered. Especially in light of moving toward electrical vehicles in this country.

ANSWER: This corridor is not electrified (like Northeast Corridor or Caltrain) so current plans do not anticipate electrically powered trains. As technologies evolve, new opportunities for increased energy efficiency, battery power or alternative fuels will be explored.

Q: Will fares be universalized so that each mode does not require a separate purchase?

ANSWER: We anticipate the creation of universal passes and a mobile-ticketing platform that will work on all forms of transit in the Triangle, including buses, bus rapid transit corridors and commuter rail.

Q: Any stations north of downtown Raleigh such as 5 Points, Crabtree, Capital Blvd, Wake Forest, etc?

ANSWER: The Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project would be built within the existing NC Railroad corridor, which does not go through the points mentioned. Transit plans include a substantial increase in bus service over the next 10 years, and creating access to commuter rail stations will be an important part of that investment. NCDOT is planning rail service in the S-Line corridor, which could serve areas north of downtown Raleigh. The long-range plan for the region includes service to Wake Forest.

Q: Infrastructure Bill: What impact will the recently passed national infrastructure bill have on this project? For example, will it increase the chances of getting more federal funding?

ANSWER: The infrastructure bill could create opportunities to work with our partners to fund safety and/or capacity improvements in the rail corridor more quickly, making commuter rail service more affordable.

Q: How many times a day will the trains run?

ANSWER: Previous studies have found that a schedule of 40 trips a day would be the most effective, but the current feasibility study could refine that estimate. Those 40 trips would be eight during morning peak hours, two in the afternoon, eight during evening peak hours and two later in the evening in each direction.

Q: Has NCDOT or the state offered any funding to the project?

ANSWER: GoTriangle is closely monitoring state transportation funding mechanisms and will apply as state funding opportunities become available. NCDOT has funded improvements in the rail corridor that benefit existing passenger service in the corridor and would benefit potential future commuter rail.

Q: Has the City of Raleigh committed to participate in funding?

ANSWER: Local funding for the commuter rail project will come primarily from the half-cent sales tax dedicated to transit that Wake County voters approved in 2016 and that Durham County voters approved in 2011.

Q: I work at UNC, and I'm aware that this project won't connect rail to Chapel Hill. Any thoughts on how other public transport projects might complement the rail project so that folks could get from the Ellis Road stop (or any stop) to UNC?

ANSWER: GoTriangle currently runs Route 800 between Chapel Hill and the Regional Transit Center, which is slated to be relocated close to the commuter line's planned RTP stop.

Q: NYC has 2 million riders a day riding their subways. I know we are not at that population, but we are obviously growing very quickly. Should we be planning a system that can handle more than an estimated 7,500 people a day?

ANSWER: The commuter rail will form the spine of a regional transit system that also includes bus rapid transit, expanded bus service and on-demand last-mile connections. Ridership estimates for all modes of transit from Phase I of the current study indicate that this multimodal regional system will have average weekday boardings of over 150,000 per day by 2040. Commuter rail trains will have the capacity to accommodate significantly greater ridership than currently estimated.

Q: I was expecting there might be a station close to "big" Wake Med. Is there still any chance that could happen?

ANSWER: The Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project will be built inside the existing NC Railroad corridor, which doesn't run near Wake Med, but Wake Med is a major destination that will be served by one of the four bus rapid transit corridors included in the Wake Transit Plan. Connections between commuter rail stops and BRT corridors will be a priority.

Q: Will the platforms be level with the train cars (no need to step up onto the train)?

ANSWER: The current study phase is looking at how best to meet and even exceed accessibility standards, including those required by law. The study will provide accessibility recommendations and analysis related to opportunities for level-boarding at commuter rail stations.

Q: Has there been any consideration of the possibility that disruptive transportation technologies (like autonomous taxi services, etc.) might make a commuter train obsolete in the near future?

ANSWER: GoTriangle will continue to explore new technologies for providing fast, reliable and efficient regional transit service, including new technology for improved first-mile/last-mile connections to stations.

Q: How "upgradeable" will commuter rail be for the future? Adding new lines along other rail corridors (N/S along CSX and Norfolk Southern corridors from Wake Forest to Apex & beyond for instance). Or "upgradeable" in the technological sense, becoming more high speed in the future?

ANSWER: GoTriangle will continue to work with our partners to explore opportunities for upgrades related to technology, capacity or new service. NCDOT is planning rail service in the S-Line corridor that could serve areas like Wake Forest or Apex.

Q: What is the address of the proposed East Durham station?

ANSWER: All of the proposed station locations outside downtown areas are still being studied and subject to change. Station sites will be finalized based on public input, land availability, site access and connections to bike and pedestrian networks in addition to local land-use regulations and rail-line engineering considerations. The North Carolina Railroad Company, the railroads that operate within the corridor, funding partners and local governments will have to approve the final selections, which also must meet federal environmental guidelines.

Q: I see there is a possible commuter station at Duke. Duke had step away from the light rail a year ago. Are they now on board with commuter rail?

ANSWER: Planning for the West Durham station will include last-mile connections to Duke. GoTriangle is working with institutional and governmental partners including Duke to ensure there is support for the project before moving forward with further planning and design.

Q: Will there be some new second tracking in some current single track areas and third tracking in some current double track areas to avoid some conflict with freight ? Maybe that's what Norfolk Southern is looking at. Also I know that Raleigh Union Station original plans seemed to show an extra station track for the commuter rail or an extra platform for commuter rail on one of the current station tracks.

ANSWER: We are working with partners including Norfolk Southern, NC Railroad Company and NCDOT to determine infrastructure requirements. Current studies indicate that commuter rail service would require a corridor with at least two tracks. Current plans assume an extra station track and separate commuter platform at Raleigh Union Station.

Q: Will the trains have engines and passenger cars or diesel multiple units? Also will the trains be diesel or some other fuel source?

ANSWER: Diesel-electric locomotives are a common way power is provided for trains, but GoTriangle will continue to explore other options like diesel multiple units. The feasibility study will provide information about which train types could be used in the corridor.

Q: What other regions can we look to where commuter rail has been built before bus service has met the needs of current transit riders? Nashville?

ANSWER: Many regions across the country pursue multiple modes of transit based on the need for fast, reliable and efficient service. Examples of regions that have both bus and commuter rail transit include Nashville, Austin, Northern Virginia and South Florida.

Q: I understand Hillsborough is going to get a new train station. What is the timing to build that station? And is there a plan to integrate that station into this system?

ANSWER: NCDOT, GoTriangle and the Town of Hillsborough executed a three-party funding agreement for the future train station in Hillsborough in February 2021, and the town has issued a request for qualifications for design/engineering. Design and permitting are expected to take at least two years. The funding agreement allows seven years for project completion. If elected officials approved plans and funding for it, extending the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail Project to Hillsborough would be possible.

Q: What is the defined purpose and need for the commuter rail?

ANSWER: Governmental bodies within the Triangle have been studying long-term transit solutions to increasing road congestion for decades. Rail-based transit service between Raleigh and Durham that would give residents an alternative to driving on crowded I-40 and NC-147 has been included in long-range transportation plans, which are updated and adopted by representatives from local governments every four years, dating back to the 1990s.

Congestion on I-40 is continuing to increase, and providing an alternative to driving during peak commuting hours reduces stress on the highway network for everyone who drives at those times. In addition, increasing mobility for our neighbors means a wider and better selection of jobs, increasing economic output and stable quality of life for everyone. The more people use mass transit, the fewer negative effects that growth will have on the environment. Another benefit of mass transit like the Triangle commuter rail line is that it allows municipalities to plan development around easy access to transportation networks and vastly reduces the need for people to drive cars. Such transit-oriented development can support local governments' plans for affordable housing, add to the number of jobs along the rail line and help grow the tax base that supports all of our critical public services.

Q: Does NCRR own adequate right of way to accommodate addition of a second track in the corridor?

ANSWER: Yes.

Q: Thank you for answering the question about train frequency. Will this level of service continue through the weekend?

ANSWER: Current plans don't anticipate that the commuter rail line would run on weekends when it opens, but GoTriangle will continue to explore opportunities for expanded levels of service.

Q: Will a monthly pass be a ticket option?

ANSWER: We anticipate the creation of universal passes that work on all forms of transit in the Triangle, including on buses, bus rapid transit corridors and commuter rail.

Q: Has land for the stations and parking areas been negotiated?

ANSWER: All of the proposed station locations outside downtown areas are still being studied and are subject to change. Station sites will be finalized based on public input, land availability, site access and connections to bike and pedestrian networks in addition to local land-use regulations and rail-line engineering considerations. The North Carolina Railroad Company, the railroads that operate within the corridor, funding partners and local governments will have to approve the final selections, which also must meet federal environmental guidelines.

Q: Has anyone performed job growth/creation analysis?

ANSWER: The project consultant HR&A Advisors conducted an economic impact analysis for the commuter rail project that found that construction jobs created by the project through 2030 would add \$1.3 billion in personal income across the Triangle and \$1.9 billion to the Gross Regional Product. The study also found that the value of commuter rail operations would lead to \$850 million more in personal income growth by 2040 and \$3.7 billion by 2050. That translates to \$550 per Triangle resident by 2040 and \$2,050 by 2050.

Q: How many veto points are there in this process? Like, if one county decides it wants to back out, can the project still move forward? What is most likely to derail the project or prevent it from completing?

ANSWER: The project is in its final study phase before officials will decide whether to proceed into engineering and design and into the federal funding pipeline. Those officials include county commissioners in Durham and Wake counties, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO members, Capital Area MPO members and the GoTriangle Board of Trustees.

Q: Is Orange County aggressively pursuing extension to the proposed Hillsborough train station?

ANSWER: The long-range plan for the region includes service to Hillsborough, and GoTriangle will continue to work with Orange County and DCHC MPO to plan for future service in the region.

Q: Are you considering alternative delivery with a financing component such as DBF, DBFM, DBFOM?

ANSWER: GoTriangle is exploring opportunities for a range of alternative delivery methods.

Q: What's the status of the NEPA process?

ANSWER: GoTriangle has not completed environmental analysis of the project. Further planning and design would be needed to determine potential environmental impacts, and this

work is not included in the scope of the feasibility study. NEPA-related requirements will be addressed during the appropriate phase of the project.

Q: Where will the train equipment storage and maintenance facility be located? Will there need to be multiple, say, at each end?

ANSWER: The current study anticipates the need for one storage and maintenance facility and will provide an analysis of potential sites for the facility.

Q: How many riders per day?

ANSWER: Earlier studies have estimated that commuter rail would carry 7,500 to 10,000 passengers a day by 2040, and the current study will continue to refine this estimate.

Q: There is a north-south CSX line that runs from Raleigh through Wake Forest and goes all the way to Norlina. Was this line considered for the commuter rail? It goes through several north Raleigh areas. I almost never see or hear this line used. Could it be integrated into the commuter rail project in the future?

ANSWER: NCDOT is planning for rail service in the S-Line corridor, which could serve areas north of downtown Raleigh. The long-range plan for the region includes service in this corridor.

Q: Are you expecting any federal grants from the infrastructure bill to support the project?

ANSWER: Yes, the current study phase will help us determine whether the project can meet federal guidelines to receive grants for up to 50 percent of the total project costs, currently projected to be \$1.4 billion to \$2.1 billion. The rest of the costs will be shared by Wake, Durham and Johnston counties. Wake and Durham both have tax revenues dedicated to transit improvements. Current plans do not anticipate any state participation, but state money will be pursued and would offset local expenditures if it becomes available.

Q: Has it been discussed to open the rail (after the extra tracks have been laid down) between the stops that already have rail station stops (Raleigh, Durham & Cary) while building the stations at the other stops?

ANSWER: The current plan is to deliver commuter rail service between West Durham and Auburn or Clayton in a single phase.

Q: How soon will the feasibility study be finished?

ANSWER: We anticipate wrapping up work on the feasibility study in the first half of 2022.

Q: We have freight (NS, CSX, Carolinian etc,) Amtrak and the planned CRT in that NCRR corridor. Who controls the safety systems along this important corridor? Is there say an "air

traffic controller"?

ANSWER: Norfolk Southern currently operates and maintains the safety systems in the corridor and dispatches trains in the majority of the corridor. CSX dispatches trains between Raleigh and Cary.

Q: Are there plans to accommodate a future increase in freight and commuter rail traffic? Ability to add a 3rd or 4th track? Or a separate corridor to eventually separate freight and passenger rail?

ANSWER: Regional long-range plans include additional commuter rail service. However, there are no plans for a separate corridor.

Q: How are communities that have been historically excluded from transportation improvements been included in these plans?

ANSWER: GoTriangle recognizes that communities of color, low-income communities, speakers of languages other than English, people living with disabilities and others have been historically excluded from the transit planning process in various ways. In order to address these inequities, GoTriangle works with community-based organizations to meet people where they are, in their daily lives, via sources they trust. The GoTriangle community engagement team has spent more than 430 hours distributing information about the commuter rail study at events in the community hosted by the Raleigh Housing Authority, Durham's Hispanic Heritage Festival, Oak Street Health, the Latin@ Community Credit Union, National Night Out, Durham PACs and others.

In addition, over 30 businesses have been canvassed with 58% identifying as Black or Hispanic owned, in an effort to reach their customers and employees specifically. Engagement efforts like surveys have a stated goal of reaching participation that mirrors the demographics of the community served and of collecting that data from respondents if they choose to share it.

Q: I assume there will be areas in the commuter trains to accommodate the cyclist commuters in case they want/need to take their bikes, instead of the "Park and Ride" option.

ANSWER: Absolutely. Passengers will be able to take their bikes on the trains or rack them at commuter rail stations.

Q: Will bus service be expanded or other forms of transportation to get people without vehicles to the commuter rail? Is the bus network going to be expanded with buses coming more often so people can actually get to these stations?

ANSWER: Yes, transit plans in Wake and Durham counties include investments in more bus service. GoTriangle also currently manages on-demand services that could be expanded to

serve some commuter rail station areas, and local jurisdictions are beginning to implement on-demand services (for example, Morrisville Smart Shuttle) that connect with regional transit routes.

Q: Why can't our transportation be run by one system? Rail and bus should be connected by one entity. Right now our Paratransit service is being contracted out by a company based out of the United Kingdom. The fixed buses are contracted out, too.

ANSWER: GoTriangle directly operates regional fixed-route and paratransit service and will continue to work with its partners to efficiently deliver transit service.

Q: If they're using the same rail as freight, will service be deprioritized over freight the same way Amtrak is?

ANSWER: Implementation of commuter rail would include the negotiation of an agreement related to on-time performance and reliability.

Q: How long would the shuttle ride to the airport be from the Morrisville stop? Would there be any plans to build dedicated roads between the station and the airport to help avoid traffic?

ANSWER: Today it would take 10 to 15 minutes by car to get to the airport from the Morrisville stop. GoTriangle will work with regional partners including RDU to plan a convenient transit connection.

Q: How realistic is the idea that the eastern terminus will be in Clayton? Why is this up in the air?

ANSWER: Johnston County, the fastest-growing county in the state, currently has no dedicated funding mechanism for transit improvements. County officials will use results of the current study to decide whether to pursue funding for extending the Greater Triangle Commuter Rail line to Clayton.

Q: Park and ride lots still encourage one to drive. There should be a more robust transportation system. How does GoTriangle plan to combat that issue?

ANSWER: Park-and-ride lots facilitate use of transit by individuals who live outside station areas and can significantly reduce trip lengths and miles traveled by personal automobile. Park-and-ride lots are just one way to access commuter rail. We'll continue to work with our partners to build an exceptional regional transit network that connects to commuter rail stations as well as infrastructure for safe and convenient access by walking and biking.

Q: I watched the recording of the station location presentation recently. I'm having a hard time understanding how the West Durham Station will work. Will cars and people cross the

tracks to a station located between 147 and the rails? There isn't much space between the rail and Main St. A station could be built near Food Lion but people would have to cross Main Street to get to the tracks. Could the underpass accommodate cars from Main to a station alongside 147?

ANSWER: Current plans anticipate that riders would board trains from a platform between two station tracks between the existing track and NC 147. Riders would access this platform via a pedestrian bridge over the tracks to Main Street. The location of the park-and-ride facility hasn't been determined.