



To: Russell Allen  
City Manager

From: Martin Stankus, AICP  
Senior Planner

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Planning Director

Date: 7/8/09

Re: Downtown Rail Transit Planning Update

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City Council requested an update on the various rail based transit planning activities in the downtown area. The following provides a general status of activity on the multiple transit related planning efforts currently underway.

- **Southeast High Speed Rail** - SEHSR is on an accelerated schedule to release their Tier II DEIS for the rail corridor from Richmond to Raleigh to meet ARRA funding application deadlines. The draft EIS is scheduled to be available for public review in late 2009. NCDOT staff has indicated that the rail service could be operating by 2015 if full funding is received. An alternative rail corridor into downtown is being considered that will use the Norfolk-Southern rather than the CSX corridor may help to reduce the impact on several downtown at-grade railroad street crossings. The Jones Street and Hargett Street at-grade rail crossings continue to present difficult challenges in retaining current vehicular circulation patterns.
- **Multi-Modal Transportation Center Plan and Development Strategy** – Preparation of a conceptual facility location and a development strategy for the surrounding area is nearing completion. Evolving transit technology, platform locations and stakeholder coordination has delayed aspects of the study necessary to bring the current planning effort to closure. The Multi-Modal Transportation Center (MTC) will allow for easy transfer between existing and proposed transit services and provide a landmark gateway to downtown Raleigh. An open house event will be held in early fall to present the findings of the study to the public with a final report provided for City Council review.
- **CAMPO Long Range Transportation Plan** - The Capital Area MPO 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan adopted on May 20, 2009 includes Light Rail Transit (LRT) service in the NCRR and CSX/TTA rail corridors linking North Raleigh to NW Cary, through downtown Raleigh. The LRTP also includes a commuter rail service from Clayton to Wake Forest projected for operation by 2025.

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- **Triangle Transit** - In order to implement the new LRT service identified in the CAMPO Long Range Transportation Plan, Triangle Transit is seeking a jurisdictional determination from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The outcome of this request will determine whether the proposed project qualifies as a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulated urban rapid transit system that would operate LRT vehicles in the railroad corridors. The use of LRT could permit alignment options around/over the downtown Wye and between the stations serving Downtown Raleigh and the Government Center. In anticipation of an outcome that would support the proposed LRT service, Triangle Transit staff is developing the scope for professional design and project management services to facilitate the transition of applicable portions of previously completed environmental analyses, planning and design work to the new North Raleigh to NW Cary LRT project. Timing of the solicitation of these services is dependent upon the status of the FRA ruling and legislation authorizing referenda for the ½ cent sales tax for transit.
- **NCRR Commuter Rail Study** - NCRR is undertaking a commuter rail ridership and market study. The 2008 cost study determined that it was possible to operate commuter rail service in the same corridor that currently carry Norfolk-Southern freight trains and Amtrak passenger trains, at improvement costs ranging from \$2.3 million and \$9.3 million per mile. The ridership and market study for the 140 miles of NCRR rail corridor from Goldsboro to Greensboro is seen as the next step in determining the cost-benefit potential for as many as four morning and four evening trains for commuters. A RFP is being prepared by NCRR and the study is expected to take six to nine months to complete.
- **South West St/South Saunders St Connection** - The feasibility of a grade separated railroad crossing that would connect South West Street and South Saunders Street is being considered. The connection will provide improved access from the Downtown West Gateway neighborhoods and I-440 to the future MTC area. A contract is being finalized with HDR to prepare viable horizontal and vertical alignments and cost estimates for a roadway connection over or under the existing railroad tracks. The grade crossing will also include sidewalks that will extend to the Downtown West Gateway greenway connection to the Dorothea Dix property. The study is scheduled to start later this month.
- **Amtrak Station** - City staff is exploring options to better serve Amtrak Station patrons west of downtown. Amtrak ridership levels have substantially increased and existing lobby, platform and parking facilities have become inadequate to serve the current passenger load. Opportunities to provide interim facilities are being explored for use until the MTC is available to handle long term expansion needs. Options for improving Amtrak service facilities will be included in the Multi-Modal Transportation Center Plan.
- **Downtown LRT Alignment Option** - City staff is exploring the concept of an alternative downtown LRT alignment option (East-West and North-South) with a passenger transfer point at the MTC. The east-west alternative would provide LRT service from points west through the MTC area along Morgan Street and New Bern Avenue to Wake Medical Center; one of CAT's highest ridership routes. A north-south alignment would follow existing rail corridors north of Raleigh to Garner and points south. The concept has been shared with Triangle Transit for their consideration.