



## GoTriangle:

Durham Area Designers is committed to supporting the proposed Light Rail system between Durham and Chapel Hill, and commends GoTriangle (GT) on their continuing efforts to make this a reality. However, we have major concerns with the proposed light rail configuration through downtown Durham. The current GT staff-preferred alternative contemplates a stop on the west side of Alston Ave, a stop at the Durham Transit Center, and a Buchanan Boulevard stop that would be located well east of the street instead of immediately adjacent to Buchanan. We instead support a “preferred alternative” that modifies these stations to create an investment that is in keeping with Durham’s long-term plans, social justice goals, and good urban planning principles.

Based on our understanding of the process as presented by GT, the agency must adhere to a strict schedule in order to meet Federal funding requirements, and because of these schedule constraints, GT does not have time prior to the release of the draft EIS to incorporate all of the changes to the proposed station locations that we believe are needed. We understand that for certain changes, once the Record of Decision process is complete, GT will be able to reexamine and incorporate changes to the downtown Durham portion of the light rail transit line. It is imperative that deficiencies in the plan as currently drawn be addressed so that the tremendous investment in Light Rail does not conflict with Durham’s current and future land use plans.

We, therefore, request that GT make the following revisions to the alternative either prior to the adoption of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) or, if they are able to be addressed during Final Design, once the Record of Decision is complete.

1. The Alston Avenue station should be located on the east side of Alston Avenue, as in all prior plans. While there are design challenges to the eastern location, with shifts in the alignment similar to those now proposed west of downtown, the proper design approach and commitment from GT, NCDOT and local elected officials, a solution that meets the needs of important neighborhoods and insures future viability of a more extensive transit system can be achieved. The long-underserved Durham neighborhoods east of Alston Avenue have for many years been led to believe that the station would be east of Alston and would serve as the gateway to their neighborhoods and provide a direct connection to Downtown and job centers at Duke and UNC. There is abundant opportunity for station-related economic development in this location, which would spark a renaissance of the neighborhoods.

Locating the station on the west side of Alston Avenue results in a physical and psychological barrier that would be detrimental to East Durham. Stopping short of Alston Avenue cannot serve the Durham Housing Authority’s “Choice Neighborhoods Initiative” at McDougald Terrace or show a path to serve Briggs Avenue/Durham Tech or the Driver Street Corridor – a key economic corridor in Durham’s poverty initiative. Only light rail that

crosses Alston Avenue in this initial phase has a realistic opportunity to fulfill the planned extension to Briggs Avenue/Durham Tech and towards the Research Triangle Park.

2. It is imperative that if light rail is to occur in Downtown Durham that a City Center Station be created adjacent to Mangum Street. A station at this central location embodies the principles of good urban design, and was the one common recommendation of all three DAD design teams that participated in the Fall 2014 light rail charrette. A city center station would be within a “short walk” (1/4 mile) of the current and future center of economic activity and key downtown destinations such as City Hall, the County Courthouse, the Durham Bulls Athletic Park, and the Durham Performing Arts Center, all of which are more than a quarter mile along the street grid from the Dillard/Fayetteville or Durham Transit Center stations. Other key community destinations, such as the Durham Public Schools headquarters, the main library and the YMCA, are at the edge of a quarter mile walk from a City Center station, but are several hundred feet farther away from the Dillard/Fayetteville or Transit Center stops. An opportunity would be missed to align the light rail system with the geographic and symbolic heart of downtown Durham. This location is the epicenter of Downtown and is the focus of current and future development activities. Without a center city station, the GT would be ignoring Durham’s long held plans for creating a dense walkable downtown, and would subdivide the center of development to the east and west. In short, it would miss the mark. Further, this location provides effortless access for visitors to DPAC and the Government Center District and would create a highly visible gateway, unlike the proposed location at the bus station, which is far from the center and far from walkable. It has been argued that a station at this location would be too close to the latest proposed location at Durham Transit Station, which is why we would propose to move that station back where it has been proposed for years, as described below.

3. The Transit Center Station should be moved back to Duke Street on the the property already owned by GoTriangle, as it serves as a critical gateway to the Durham Innovation District and the bustling West Main Street Neighborhood. This property also has opportunity for development of retail and other commercial spaces on land already owned by GT. Its adjacency to the Amtrak, bus and future Commuter Rail Station will facilitate intermodal transfers. We have done a series of scaled drawings for this proposal which we are happy to share.

4. The Buchanan Station should be moved adjacent to Buchanan Boulevard to serve as an effective gateway to Duke’s East Campus, Trinity Park and the resurgent Burch Avenue and West Chapel Hill Street neighborhoods. It is important that the station be a visible and inviting gateway that links to neighborhoods to the north and south along Buchanan, overcoming the barriers of the Durham Freeway overpass to the south and the wide NCRR corridor to the north. A station immediately adjacent to Buchanan would encourage ridership and pedestrian access. The current proposed location is isolated from pedestrians from the surrounding neighborhoods, which would seriously diminish the opportunity to encourage walking to the station. There also is a tremendous opportunity to incorporate

the existing Duke Warehouse Building into the station design and preserve as much of the site for transit-oriented development as possible.

Our proposed changes work together to strengthen a system that aligns with Durham's long-held plans for its future, promotes ridership by providing more visible and accessible transit stations that meet the needs of existing neighborhoods, and will serve the region as it grows.

We want to ensure that even if some of the above revisions are not incorporated prior to the Record of Decision that there is a clear commitment to do so as final design documents are prepared.

The Durham Area Designers

CC:

Durham Mayor and City Council

GoTriangle Board

Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO Board