

SECTION 1: Executive Summary

State of the Triangle

In the past decade, the Triangle has experienced an extraordinary rate of growth. Our current population is approximately 1.5 million, and we can expect an additional 1 million people over the next 30 years. These numbers confirm what we already know: the Triangle enjoys a robust economy and a high quality of life. People want to move here to build businesses, careers and families. At the same time, our rapidly growing economy and our low density development patterns have made our region one of the most sprawling, auto-centric regions in the nation. Our transportation system is straining under current demand and far from adequate to meet future needs. Residents across the region express frustration with long commutes, pollution, congestion and the lack of transportation choices.

For the past fifty years, our region has relied primarily on road-building to provide mobility. All projections indicate that our roads will become even more congested than they already are. The regions that we are competing with for new industry and better jobs are already investing in transit. For the Triangle to compete, we need a complete, multi-modal transportation system. We must take a new approach.

Recommendations

The Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC) has developed a Regional Transit Vision Plan for the Triangle to provide a framework for future investments. The recommendations reflect the complexity of our region, which requires multi-pronged, multi-modal strategies to building a complete transportation system. Map 1 presents three major categories of investments:

Enhanced Region-wide Bus Network:

Denoted by green lines. Expanded bus service throughout the region to connect communities and bring communities presently unserved by transit into a regional transit network.

What is the Regional Transit Vision Plan?

This plan recommends a high-quality, regional transit system to serve North Carolina's Research Triangle Region by promoting closer connections between our land use and transportation patterns and providing more travel choices for our growing population. The Vision Plan was developed by the Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC), a broad-based citizen group with 38 members from across the region.

The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (Capital Area MPO) and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) appointed the STAC to assist in the joint development of a plan for a regional transit system and to craft the transit component of their respective Long Range Transportation Plans, with a focus on major transit investments.

Improvements to local bus networks are also recommended; local transit providers will play a key role in locating and designing these service enhancements.

- High frequency, express service between the Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU) and downtown Durham, downtown Raleigh including the Convention Center, and the Cary train station park and ride
- Rush Hour Only service to outlying communities
- Enhanced bus service in core areas to support the rail and circulator investments
- A system of park and ride lots to be served by the regional network and the express service

SECTION 1: Executive Summary

- Enhanced transit access for pedestrians and bicycles around park and ride lots and bus stops

Circulators: Denoted by orange shaded areas. Circulators to provide flexible travel options within our major activity centers. Circulator zones are depicted at the conceptual level only, actual routes will be sited by the respective communities and MPOs. Initially all circulators are anticipated to be buses with potential future operations by modern street cars or trolleys depending on local conditions, communities and costs.

- RDU/RTP circulator connecting RDU to the Triangle Metro Center and other major activities areas in RTP
- Circulators in the downtowns of Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill/Carrboro and Cary

Rail Investments: Denoted by blue lines. The regional system is anchored by rail service that connects the region's principal centers of activity, serves our most congested corridors, and offers the greatest opportunities to influence development patterns.

- The segments connecting Durham, RTP, Cary, downtown Raleigh and north Raleigh will use diesel multiple unit (DMU) rail cars operating within existing railroad rights-of-way.
- The segment connecting Chapel Hill to Durham will use Light Rail Transit (LRT), electrically-driven rail cars on a new alignment.

These investments should be coordinated with the North Carolina Railroad Shared Corridor Track Expansion Study, which is investigating the feasibility, costs and operating standards for rush hour rail service on the Burlington to Goldsboro and Hillsborough to Chapel Hill/Carrboro corridors.

Implementing the Vision

The Regional Transit Vision Plan faces three significant implementation challenges that the region will need to address in bold and creative ways in order to achieve success: funding, land use, and leadership and governance. Or, put another way: dollars, development and decision making.

Dollars: It is clear that our present sources of transit funding are inadequate, and federal funding is uncertain. New local and state funding will be essential. Therefore the STAC recommends:

- ½ cent sales tax (5¢ per \$10 in purchases)
- \$10 increase in vehicle registration fee

If combined with existing local, state and federal funding, and debt financing of approximately \$600 million, financial models demonstrate that these revenue sources are adequate to build the Regional Transit Vision Plan.

Development: In order to realize the full benefits of the recommended transit investments, the region, its communities and its development sector will need to do much more to ensure a development pattern that matches major transit investments and maximizes the opportunities for people to routinely use transit. Therefore the STAC recommends:

- Pairing transit service and investment with local government investment in transit-supportive development policies
- Existing land use policies on transit-supportive development be applied consistently

Decisions: Leaders and decision makers need to recognize that local interests are inextricably linked to regional interests as they cooperate in planning, funding and sequencing transit investment decisions. The STAC recommends:

SECTION 1: Executive Summary

- Greater accountability to voters by ensuring that elected officials serve in decision-making capacities for regional transit investments
- Encouraging continued cooperation between the MPOs
- Establishing a regional staff committee from the working group that supported the work of the STAC to consult, study and coordinate the completion of the Regional Transit Vision Plan

Why Invest in Transit?

Our auto-dependency has far-reaching impacts beyond our transportation system and threatens:

Our Economy: Increasing congestion and unreliability of travel times threaten our attractiveness to businesses and workers. Without a well-functioning transportation system that is reliable, cost-effective and time-competitive for commuters and freight, with a range of options for accessing shopping, medical service and entertainment venues, our overall competitiveness will decline. Fuel prices and the other costs of auto ownership and driving will continue to increase, draining individual households of financial resources. Increasing construction and roadway maintenance costs are draining communities of the financial resources needed to sustain basic services as well as the arts, cultural and natural resources.

Our Communities: Building and expanding roadways brings massive impacts on neighborhoods and rural landscapes. The air quality impacts of our increasingly high levels of ozone pollution generated from vehicle emissions are particularly hazardous for children and the elderly. The time drivers spend in traffic is unproductive and aggravating and takes time away from family and community activities. The separation between home and work by both time and distance frays the social fabric of our neighborhoods.

Our Environment: Continued expansion in the number of vehicles and the distances they travel each day will mean the region will face challenges in meeting federal air quality standards in the future. Reducing auto travel will also reduce our region's contribution to climate change by reducing our overall carbon footprint. Development has taken up land at a much higher rate than our rate of population growth, threatening open spaces and agricultural landscapes, and fragmenting natural habitats.

Our Future Mobility: By 2035, the population of those aged 65 and older in our region will grow from less than 10% to more than 15%. A significant number of people will continue or begin to live without a car, either by choice or necessity; this group increased from 27,000 to 29,000 between 1990 and 2000. Continuing to build and operate an auto-dependent transportation system will exclude these groups from full participation in the economic and cultural life of our region. At the same time, our current transit providers struggle to provide basic service and do not have funding mechanisms in place to meet the needs of our growing population.

The economic, demographic, environmental and social factors signal that a new approach to our transportation system is needed. Taking a fresh look at the Triangle's transportation issues, the STAC saw compelling reasons for giving transit a much larger role in our transportation future:

- Provide an alternative to costly and stressful auto travel, and potentially reduce congestion along key travel corridors
- Reduce the need for and cost of new roads and other infrastructure by optimizing the capacity of existing roads and providing an alternative to automobile travel
- Enhance access to existing and future employment, services, leisure, health, education, cultural and natural resources for everyone

SECTION 1: Executive Summary

- Encourage land use patterns that better fit with changing environmental and demographic factors and that allow us to better preserve open space, trails, farmland, and historic, culturally valuable and environmentally sensitive areas
- Reduce air and water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
- Improve our health by providing more opportunities to include walking and cycling in our daily routines
- Strengthen feelings of belonging, connection and community by creating shared public and private responsibility and investment for transit
- Demonstrate that we can think and act inclusively with vision, creativity and open communication

We have the opportunity to shape our transportation future by changing our transportation investment strategy. We can offer greater transportation choices, improve our environment and physical health, support the vibrancy of our economy, and preserve our quality of life. Success will require strong, sustained cooperative effort, and a commitment to making game-changing investments in building a transit-rich future.