



October 22, 2018

Mr. John Tallmadge, Interim LRT Project Director  
GoTriangle  
PO Box 13787  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709

Dear John,

Thank you for attending DDI's October 18th board meeting and engaging our board on the current Light Rail Transit Project status and issues. As the advocate for equitable economic development and growth in downtown Durham, DDI has long supported the LRT project and encourages GoTriangle and its partner agencies to address issues critical to the success of both the LRT investment and the continued economic vibrancy of downtown. As the DO LRT project advances, it is crucial that GoTriangle continually engage the businesses, organizations and residents located in central Durham and its adjacent neighborhoods.

DDI's Downtown Master Plan, approved by the City Council in 2017, highlights a concern that the city's current reliance on single occupancy vehicle trips is decreasing the quality of life for Durham's citizens and creating demand to build more parking and expand roadways in an attempt to mitigate congestion. These policy responses will only increase pollution and decrease the quality of life and experience in downtown. Transportation alternatives, like light rail, will bring more people downtown without using valuable land to park cars, or adding lanes of traffic.

This letter – our official position on DO LRT as presented to us at our board meeting – reiterates our support for the LRT project serving downtown. Done correctly, the LRT can be a key investment linking downtown with NC Central University, Duke University, UNC-Chapel Hill and neighborhoods across Durham and Orange counties. DDI is especially encouraged by two specific changes that are now proposed and that DDI has long advocated:

1. The addition of the Blackwell/Mangum station best serves the heart of downtown, the seats of city and county government, and popular entertainment venues like the Durham Performing Arts Center and the Durham Bulls Athletic Park. These two entertainment venues alone serve over one million visitors annually, many of whom cross the rail corridor to access parking, lodging, or restaurants before and after events. In addition, we strongly believe this station will serve more than 19,500 current and future employees of existing and growing businesses downtown.

[downtowndurham.com](http://downtowndurham.com)

115 Market St, Suite 213 Durham, NC 27701 T: 919-682-2800 F: 919-682-1980

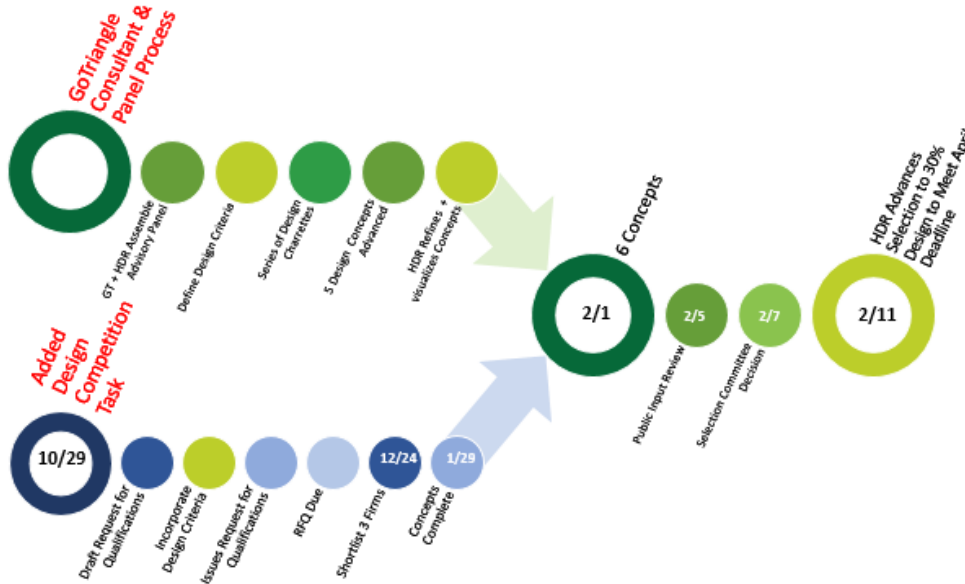
2. The conversion of Ramseur Street from its current one-way eastbound operation to two-way operation. As the southernmost portion of the downtown loop, this conversion is a key element for the restoration of Durham's historic street grid and return to two-way streets appropriate in a walkable downtown context. We strongly encourage that this conversion extend at least to Main Street on the west. This is an important mitigation measure for the conversion of Pettigrew Street from its current two-way operation to one-way eastbound operation due to the LRT tracks.

However, DDI and its board also have concerns, especially as it relates to current at-grade crossings and potential impacts to traffic circulation, connectivity within the downtown core, and parking. Our organization is committed to learning from both the positive and negative impacts of past infrastructure investments and strives to apply that understanding to future decision making. Many of our concerns with DO LRT are rooted in a deep desire to avoid the further segmentation and separation of downtown Durham. Many of our concerns are inter-related, and we look forward to reviewing the Supplemental Environmental Assessment and related technical and financial reports and providing substantive comments when they are released in late October or early November. However, given the extremely tight scheduling constraints that are now placed on the project, we want to take this opportunity to highlight some of the larger issues raised by our members to give GoTriangle the ability to begin to address or clarify these issues as quickly as possible.

**Blackwell/Corcoran Closure.** The issue generating the greatest concern is the proposed closure of the Blackwell/Corcoran Street crossing of the railroad in the heart of downtown. This is the most significant pedestrian and cyclist crossing in downtown Durham today, due to the heavy vehicle traffic on other roads and the uninviting Chapel Hill Street and Roxboro Road underpasses. Its significance will only grow with continued extensive development on both sides of the rail corridor. And the crossing is not merely of local importance: it is an existing link in the Maine-to-Florida East Coast Greenway, sitting between the American Tobacco Trail at the foot of Blackwell Street and the Durham Beltline Trail, which is under design. It is also part of Durham's smART corridor, the outgrowth of a community process to create a walkable, art-filled corridor linking neighborhoods south of downtown with neighborhoods to the north of downtown. Although not heavily used by cars, Blackwell/Corcoran is an important part of the north-south street grid, especially given limited alternatives. We strongly believe that given the importance of this crossing to downtown's residents, workers, visitors, and tourists, it is imperative that all consideration be given to keeping this crossing open in order to continue to support the vibrancy and vitality of downtown.

**IF** this cannot be done, then GoTriangle, working with downtown and its stakeholders, must commit to creating an innovative solution that goes beyond merely addressing the movement of people but that also delivers an iconic creation that flawlessly connects downtown. GoTriangle's current recommendation to mitigate the impact of this closure is to create a "signature pedestrian bridge" using a quick design process that uses a consultant bridge design team and a local advisory panel in order to meet project schedule targets. As mentioned above, DDI board and staff strongly believe that any outcome that closes this crossing must be replaced by **a signature civic space that provides a high quality and high capacity pedestrian and bicycle crossing.** To ensure the needed mitigation is of a sufficient level, GoTriangle should both commit more construction funding and add a task that would

incorporate design concepts from invited firms operating through a design competition format. The graphic below depicts how this could work in concert with a short schedule, using the same design criteria as the consultant. DDI is willing to work with GoTriangle to manage this design competition and elicit engaged and committed teams from the private sector. The end result will deliver a better product and a crossing we can all be proud of.



**At Grade Crossings in Central Durham.** Although the Blackwell/Corcoran crossing is of paramount concern, ensuring high-quality pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle passage at the other at-grade crossings in the central part of Durham is also of significant concern. Part of DDI’s mission is to extend the vibrancy of downtown to adjacent neighborhoods. Neighborhoods and businesses on the north side of the tracks will access stations on the south side along Buchanan Blvd., Duke Street, Mangum Street, Dillard Street, Fayetteville Street and Grant Street. Especially at Grant Street – where the Alston Avenue station platform will now abut the Grant Street/Pettigrew Street intersection – low income households on the north side need a significantly improved railroad crossing compared to the current condition in order to ensure equity along the line.

**Project Design for Restored Two-Way Streets and Traffic Circulation.** DDI’s Downtown Master Plan calls for the restoration of two-way operation of Gregson, Duke, Mangum and Roxboro Streets. Track, signal and gate designs should ensure that conversion of streets to two-way operation can be achieved with little to no cost or disruption and in a manner that meets railroad standards and practices that are common elsewhere. We need to better understand the reasoning behind the proposed conversion of Dillard Street to one-way operation southbound, and we note that if Blackwell is closed, Dillard converted and Mangum remains one-way southbound, the only northbound vehicle route into downtown will be Roxboro Street via an under-height and deteriorating bridge. Any future blockage, closure or construction of Roxboro Street would effectively cut off access to downtown from the south. The proposed street closures and changes seem likely to lead to drivers confronted with turn restrictions that will find them looping through a maze of streets south of the tracks.

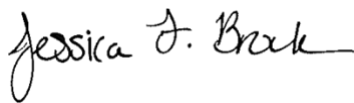
**Parking.** One of the key benefits of the LRT investment for downtown is the ability of workers and visitors to park at an LRT station outside of downtown and take the train to downtown. Our understanding is that as a cost-saving measure, the originally planned parking garage at the Alston Avenue station may not be built and that surface parking may be provided instead. Since this station serves as the “terminal” station for those coming from Wake County and RTP, we want to make sure that sufficient parking capacity will be provided to capture that market demand and that the final plan does not result in increased parking demand in downtown, lower ridership or the need for local government to subsequently provide more parking for the project. We encourage GoTriangle to look at how its joint development funding might be used for parking to serve both the LRT system and compatible uses adjacent to the Alston station, especially affordable housing.

**Promised Benefits.** Over the long planning process for the DO LRT, GoTriangle staff has consistently communicated to the community that the project would include tangible elements to enhance walkability and bikeability in station areas, relieve traffic congestion, contribute to affordable housing solutions and support economic development. DDI’s expectations are that tangible commitments to these key goals of the project remain in the project and that the project itself not degrade pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle circulation or opportunities for affordable housing and economic development.

Finally, the “look and feel” of a downtown is critical to its success. The rail corridor through downtown has long been a detrimental feature, negatively affecting both physical and visual connections not only in the heart of downtown, but up and down the corridor. The Light Rail Transit investment has the opportunity and the responsibility to be an investment that betters downtown and supports equitable growth, development, and vibrancy . A robust exploration of alternative concepts where street closures or conversions are proposed that considers effects along the length of the alignment through downtown should inform GoTriangle’s next steps.

Thank you again for your engagement with the DDI board. We encourage you to continue that engagement with DDI and downtown businesses. Please contact Nicole Thompson if you have any questions about these issues or if you are able to provide additional clarifying information so that DDI can begin to review as quickly as possible. We look forward to working with GoTriangle to ensure the best achievable investment to serve the equitable economic development and mobility needs of Durham.

Sincerely,



Jessica Brock, Board Chair  
Downtown Durham, Inc.



Nicole J. Thompson, CEO  
Downtown Durham, Inc.

cc: DDI Board