



April 6, 2021

Katharine Eggleston, PE
Chief Development Officer
GoTriangle
4600 Emperor Blvd. Suite 100
Durham, NC 27703

Re: Downtown Durham Considerations – Commuter Rail for the Triangle Region of NC

Dear Ms. Eggleston,

Mounting evidence suggest that a passenger rail investment connecting west, central and east Durham to RTP, western Wake County, NCSU and downtown Raleigh, **if done well**, could link lower income neighborhoods and affordable housing locations to large and growing job hubs with fast, reliable transit. The key is “if done well.” This is especially true as this passenger rail system connects to downtown Durham. As this system is being designed and constructed, there are important considerations significant to how this project connects to and impacts downtown Durham.

Downtown Durham, Inc. strongly believes that the modeling study should proceed to fully inform GoTriangle and its partners of all of the possibilities related to ridership and use along this corridor. This information can lead to a more comprehensive design that takes into account most of the challenges related to adding a commuter rail line into an existing freight corridor.

In addition, DDI believes the following principles must be adhered to for a regional commuter rail project to succeed. We will use these principles throughout the planning, designing and implementation phases of this project to weigh and justify our support.

Leave It Better Than It Was Found

For too long, transportation and infrastructure “improvements” made in and adjacent to downtown Durham have been detrimental to Durham’s history and culture. Infrastructure should never tear a community apart, but rather build up and strengthen the connections between communities and their people. Given the scar that has been left on Durham – and especially downtown Durham – resulting from past infrastructure improvement projects, it is imperative that great care is taken with this project which will have a lasting impact on Durham. The planning and design of this project cannot further divide downtown from itself.

Every opportunity must be taken to ensure that the rail design does no harm, but rather works to bridge and reconnect downtown with its adjacent neighborhoods and communities. Placement of stations, laying of rail and connection to last mile options must be fully explored, designed and developed. The very nature of commuter rail should go beyond the movement of people from point to point and encompass the relationship and connection between station and community.

Build for the Future

There will be a considerable expense to build the commuter rail and a significant impact and disruption to downtown during construction, road closures and infrastructure improvements. The downtown of today is vastly different than it was 20 years ago and will be different 20-plus years in the future. Therefore, all efforts should be made to design and construct this project so that it addresses current as well as future demands, challenges and growth opportunities. This should include but not be limited to:

- 1) how modifications to downtown Durham's current street pattern of one-way streets and the downtown loop could be accomplished to ensure continued mobility and connection between commuter rail, vehicular and pedestrian traffic;
- 2) ensuring that commuter rail supports downtown's future economic growth at identified development sites, but also potentially creates future development opportunities; and
- 3) working in collaboration with Durham city and county leadership to ensure that commuter rail construction happens as seamlessly and concurrently as possible with future public infrastructure improvements, in order to reduce interruptions to vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and minimize negative impacts on businesses and residents.

Job Connector for All Jobs

The design should recognize that this project **must** meet the needs of all Durham workers. Recognizing that downtown Durham is home to a number of employers from corporate powerhouses, to nimble entrepreneurs of the gig economy, to locally and independently owned restaurants, merchants, artistic venues and entertainment centers, ridership will be just as varied. As such, service can't be restricted to the needs of the white-collar jobs of a typical 9-5 day. Rather, service must be robust and accommodate all of these important sectors of the downtown ecosystem, to include going later into the evening (well beyond 6 p.m. or even 7 p.m.), and expanding to weekends (with similar hours of operation). As a result of this increased activity between commuter and freight usage and the possibility of competing needs, the design should identify areas along the corridor where additional rail should be located to accommodate this increase in demand.

Beyond Downtown

Though it is located outside of downtown, the design, creation and placement of the East Durham station is vital to the overall success of this project. Commuter rail cannot just serve downtown, but must connect and serve central Durham, and as a result, connect downtown to

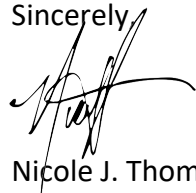
its residential workforce, while also connecting this workforce to other employment centers throughout the Triangle region. It has been determined that seven of the ten largest employment hubs in the region lie along the rail corridor. It is imperative that all residents within Durham have reliable and efficient means to access jobs in any of these hubs.

Robust, Intentional Community Engagement and Participation

For this project to progress and be successful, it is imperative that GoTriangle reach out to a variety of community and business groups and not only share relevant information on process, status, concerns and issues, but also request input, feedback and involvement. These information sharing and gathering opportunities should happen often and with regularity and should include numerous opportunities to have all groups in one setting to hear the issues and concerns from other parties so they may better understand the opportunities and challenges that might exist as this project is planned, designed and ultimately constructed. Siloed, last minute meetings and conversations will only raise concerns of a lack of transparency, exclusion of many voices and inaccessibility to GoTriangle and its contractors.

Commuter rail done well has the potential to be a significant economic driver for downtown Durham and beyond. We look forward to participating in a constructive and collaborative process as this initiative moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole J. Thompson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicole J. Thompson
President and CEO