



March 16, 2022

Katharine Eggleston, PE
Chief Development Officer
Go Triangle
4600 Emperor Boulevard, Suite 100
Durham, North Carolina 27703

Re: Downtown Durham Considerations—Rapid Rail for North Carolina’s Triangle Region

Dear Katharine,

This is a follow-up to DDI’s April 6, 2021 letter (attached) highlighting what we still believe to be important considerations in order for GoTriangle’s Wake-Durham Rapid Rail project to be successful. This letter reiterates our five expectations and seeks clarity and commitment from both Go Triangle and its local NCDOT and NCRR partners on each of them.

1. Job Connector for All Jobs.

What we mean by this: The first and most important consideration for a meaningful rail project is the service that it provides, both for Durham residents who want to reach jobs and services along the rail corridor and for Durham businesses whose workers would rely on rail access to avoid clogged Durham streets and parking decks.

Our concerns: The service level examined in the analysis so far – which focuses on traditional commuter-oriented peak hour service – is insufficient from three critical perspectives:

- a. It doesn’t align with hospitality, convention & visitor, and hospital system work shifts.
- b. It won’t serve many of the work and service travel needs of lower-income residents.
- c. It won’t be robust enough to generate ridership levels that curtail car traffic through downtown and nearby neighborhoods, many with lower income, Black and Brown residents.

A second concern is the service level examined was for a much different time and place. We are especially concerned that modeling done prior to COVID does not fully or accurately portray how hybrid and remote work will impact ridership.

Our expectations: All analysis include more frequent, all-day service that can serve the full range of users, not just traditional office employees, and that additional modeling be done to incorporate new “return to work” policies that will include hybrid and remote work.

2. Build for the Future.

What we mean by this: The rail project will be both costly and disruptive; it is crucial that the cost and disruption related to the capital investment occur only once, be ready from Day 1 for future expanded service levels (commuter and freight), and be designed to incorporate and support the related transportation projects that are part of Durham's transportation plans.

Our concerns: Work to date seems oriented to looking at a few infrastructure options for a peak-oriented service. In addition, there appears to be no consideration of how local infrastructure and transportation projects interrelate with the design and construction of commuter rail. It is difficult to see how local officials can approve moving into costly next steps without assurances that long term needs for diverse users have been addressed.

Our expectations: Prior to decision-makers being asked to support the next steps in the process, sufficient, detailed information be supplied to ensure that the more robust service described in the first section can be provided without additional capital cost and disruption. In addition, designs need to show the long-planned transformation of downtown's street network with safer, pedestrian and bicycle-supportive two-way conversions of one-way streets and the Loop.

3. Leave it Better Than it was Found.

What we mean by this: The railroad was instrumental to the founding of Durham, but has become a scar through Durham, dividing the downtown. The project needs to be an asset to the community and contribute to knitting the city back together while providing the safe and inviting walking and cycling environment on which downtown's economic success depends.

Our concerns: The work to date seems focused only on what is needed "inside the footprint" of the railroad ROW to make conditions better than they are for the railroads. To work with this mindset and at the exclusion of how this project will impact one of Durham's most important economic engines is unacceptable.

Our expectations: Equal time, effort, attention to design excellence and direct engagement with stakeholders needs to be given at this stage to make conditions better for those who will access the rail stations and cross the rail corridor, and to businesses that will depend on access and safe, inviting crossings. A related expectation is that the project leverage affordable housing and equity-centered small business opportunities in station areas.

4. Beyond Downtown.

What we mean by this: Downtown Durham is not an island; it is connected to, and intertwined with, the neighborhoods around it. The synergy that exists is important to the success of the entirety of downtown. DDI is committed to strengthening downtown's connection to its neighbors.

Our concerns: Although the central Durham engineering study, one of the project's tasks, stretches from the western terminus near the Duke and VA hospitals to the planned Alston Avenue station in East Durham, we have yet to be involved in discussions about the full segment, nor participated in meetings with other partners who also care about this section.

Our expectations: Design options for providing robust service from the West Durham station to and including the Alston Avenue station should be shared with a wide range of stakeholders so that they may understand potential impacts and trade-offs and contribute to a set of acceptable solutions for entering the next project phase.

5. Robust, Intentional Community Engagement and Participation.

What we mean by this: Durham investments, and especially transit investments in the wake of the discontinuation of the light rail project after the expenditure of tens of millions of dollars, need to be built on a foundation of trust. Trust is re-built from transparency, meaningful engagement by all interested parties and collaborative leadership.

Our concerns: Perhaps chief among all of our concerns has been what seems to be limited progress on our expectation from our April letter that “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.” We continue to believe, as noted in the April letter, that “siloes, last-minute meetings and conversations will only raise concerns about lack of transparency [and] exclusion of many voices.” In addition, we support Durham elected officials’ request for a complete accounting and in-depth explanation of the use of funds (total and by county) for the light rail project. We believe this reporting will contribute to more assurance from the Durham community in Go Triangle and the commuter rail project.

Our expectations: Our expectations remain as they were a year ago: numerous and regular opportunities where Go Triangle convenes all stakeholders to receive updates, hear and discuss issues and concerns, and provide feedback and input on next steps. These convening meetings MUST include ALL stakeholders – NCR, Norfolk Southern, Duke, NCCU, property owners, residents, etc. As a consequence of such dialogue, we would expect the result of this phase to be written documentation of clear, unambiguous “deal points” that commit everyone to robust service, one-time construction, neighborhood and user-centered design from West Durham to East Durham, and continuous, collaborative, meaningful engagement.

We are excited about this opportunity but cannot let our excitement blind us to the very important obligation and strong commitment that we have to and for downtown and its continued growth. We look forward to your response and are happy to meet in person to answer questions or discuss in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicole J. Thompson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicole J. Thompson
President & CEO