



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL

Associate Vice Chancellor
for Campus Services

Campus Box 1000, 305 South Building
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-1000
(919) 962-7244 FAX: (919) 962-0647

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chapel Hill Transit Public Transit Committee
FROM: Carolyn Elward and Derek Pearch, University Representatives
DATE: November 18, 2003
SUBJECT: Triangle Regional Transit Consolidation

This memorandum summarizes the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's concerns regarding the Triangle Regional Transit Consolidation/Implementation Plan, which contains recommendations and an implementation schedule for consolidating the existing Raleigh, Durham, Cary and North Carolina State University transit systems, Triangle Transit Authority, and our own transit system.

We believe that consolidation offers many advantages, such as joint planning, equipment purchasing, marketing, and potentially additional funding sources. However, we have four broad concerns with the report as presented.

Process

Our understanding was that the consultant was charged with studying the potential for consolidation of transit services in the region and with identifying advantages and disadvantages. However, the consultant's report is an implementation plan for consolidation. Less than a page of the report is devoted to a list of "consolidation benefits and pitfalls," which are not addressed in any detail. This move directly to an implementation plan for consolidation appears to have foreclosed in-depth analysis of the issues and provides limited opportunity for input into the framework for a consolidated system.

Governance

The consultant's desire to use the present Triangle Transit Authority enabling legislation to create the consolidated system has resulted in an unacceptable governance structure. The proposed governing board for the consolidated regional transit agency lacks adequate representation from the Chapel Hill Transit partners. The partnership between the towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill and the University is outstanding, and has resulted in a transit system that is the envy of many. With no fares, except from park-and-rides to athletic events, and the highest ridership in the state, the system has received national attention. The University has won national awards for its Commuter Alternatives Program, of which our fare free transit system is a key component. Yet our transit partnership is provided only one seat on the nine-member consolidated board.

The University community provides the largest number of transit riders in the region, and the University provides the highest level of per capita financial support. The University's Master

Plan, and subsequent Development Plan approved by the Town of Chapel Hill, both rely on the availability of transportation alternatives, including high quality public transit, to reduce the use of single occupancy vehicles. The University is well along in the implementation of the Development Plan; parking lots have been removed to create green space and building footprints. Without superior transit service, the University cannot attract and retain employees, and students cannot freely access the campus. Student learning opportunities are compromised, and research suffers. It is vital that all the members of our transit partnership have adequate representation on a consolidated board. The University would expect to have a seat if our transit partnership joins a consolidated system.

Service

Beginning January 1, 2002, the University, and the towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill, made a commitment to fare-free transit for University students and staff, area employers, residents, and visitors. The University community heavily depends on this commitment to meet its transportation needs, and expects expanded service areas and increased service frequency and hours. Areas in Durham County immediately outside the Chapel Hill Transit service area are experiencing rapid development, including multi-family housing populated by students, and there is a significant need for additional transit service to Chapel Hill from this area. There also is a significant need for a park-and-ride facility in the 15-501 corridor north of Chapel Hill. While theoretically a consolidated system would be better-positioned to address such needs than Chapel Hill Transit is alone, it is hard to see how these improvements will be made through the consolidated system presently envisioned. In addition, the Chapel Hill Transit partners have identified a number of desired service improvements within the present service area, which may not garner funding from the consolidated system because of Chapel Hill Transit's existing service levels. In the consolidated system, service in the present Chapel Hill Transit service area may at best stagnate while service in other areas is improved first. In addition, the University is acquiring additional park-and-ride locations, including potential locations near or just across the Orange/Chatham County line, which Chapel Hill Transit has agreed to serve. A consolidated service might not be able to provide this service.

Funding

The University is concerned that present Chapel Hill Transit funding sources including USDOT-FTA, NCDOT-PTD and the DCHC-MPO will be in jeopardy in a consolidated system, whether Chapel Hill Transit participates in the consolidated system or not. The consolidated system, as presently envisioned, does not provide for sufficient representation on the board to ensure that services vital to the University, as well as to Chapel Hill and Carrboro, would be funded. If Chapel Hill Transit does not join the consolidated system, it would be competing with this large regional agency for scarce transit dollars. In either case, large increases in partner shares may be needed to meet the future service needs of the University and the community.

In spite of these concerns, we recognize that some form of consolidated system could provide many benefits. We would like to look carefully at these opportunities with our regional neighbors, entering into a dialogue that would define a framework that is a win for all.