

**Statement to Council Committee on Lots 2 and 5 and Town Council  
Regarding the Viability of a Downtown Transfer Bus Transfer Station  
to be Included in Redesign Of Chapel Hill, North Carolina Lots 2 and 5**

**Robert P. Koontz and George Cianciolo**

The Town Council and Council Committee on Lots 2 and 5 and the Town Council should adopt a design that integrates a bus transfer station in the final design of Lot 2, i.e., ramps, openings, entrances and exits. The bus-transfer station need not overwhelm the design; if properly integrated, the station can drive the economic development and renewal of downtown. The bus-transfer station can always be turned into parking. The reverse is not easily accomplished, once concrete is poured.

**Advantages of a Downtown Bus Transfer Station**

The recently completed Chapel Hill Transit Rider Profile Survey has several compelling points in favor of a facility that attracts and discharges hundreds of passengers in the heart of downtown Chapel Hill.

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1. The average income of transit riders has increased since 1997, with the largest increase occurring in those reporting annual incomes over \$75,000. In 2003, "...the percentage of passengers with household incomes of \$39,999 or less is significantly lower, while the percentage of passengers with household incomes of \$75,000 or more [17.9% and 29.0%, weekly and weekend, respectively] is significantly higher than before fair-free service."
2. With a daily ridership in excess of 20,000 per day during the school year, it seems axiomatic to us that there is a large amount of discretionary income available that could be spent downtown during and after the university and business workdays conclude.  
"Based on a recent survey of Chapel Hill transit riders, approximately 4,000 passengers board or exit in the downtown Chapel Hill vicinity in a given weekday. This represents approximately 20% of the transit system's average weekday ridership."

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Because of proximity of a bus transfer station to downtown, even a quarter of these transfer riders could represent 1000 customers.

Arrivals and departures could be viewed on an electronic board, prominently displayed in the bus transfer station. Riders then would have the option of delaying to the next or several buses later and do shopping, dining, and viewing art displays during this time.

3. The significant advantage of downtown over Streets of Southpoint and other nearby malls is that the downtown has the most bus traffic. This advantage can be maximized with a Downtown Transfer Station incorporated into the design of Lot 2.

The Arlington County, Virginia Experience

There is an analog to having a Downtown Transfer Station in the Lot 2 design. Robert Koontz, Transportation Board Member, talked with a planner in Arlington County [Arlington County and the City of Arlington have a common planning department]. He provided documentation of Arlington's experiences along its two subway corridors: the Vienna line and the National Airport line, running through Arlington County, east west and north south, respectively.

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There has been significant growth of businesses and high-density residential buildings at these stops, with particular growth at Rosslyn, the transfer point of the Vienna and National Airport lines. There are several factors that affected this growth.

These were:

1. Arlington possessed a highly successful public transit system, i.e., the Metro subway system with two heavily lines crossing and intersecting in Arlington County, referred to above.
2. A conscious choice by Arlington planners to concentrate high-density housing and businesses at or near metro stations.

Arlington is an analog to our town, obviously, we're smaller-scale, but the same principles that Chapel Hill is pursuing in its long-term growth, i.e., downtown, Southern Village, and Meadowmont, all with business and residential housing in their cores, with less dense residential housing in nearby neighborhoods.

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Summary

We believe to rely solely on parking to increase the economic viability of downtown is unwise. If bus ridership continues to increase as we expect, bus riders using the downtown bus transfer station will also increase. As we noted earlier, it will be very difficult to change the design of Lot 2, after the concrete is poured.

While the picture of people driving downtown and sitting in an open area viewing art and sipping coffee is an attractive one, it is not entirely realistic. A more realistic picture is one of busy people going to and fro through the station, but after work or during the day - eating at a restaurant, stopping for coffee, shopping for groceries and other items, or viewing art or a movie.

**References:**

Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor: Early Visions (Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development, Planning Division, Arlington County, Arlington, Virginia: February 25, 1989)

Charles Zucker, et. al., The Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor Threshold of Opportunity: Mid-Course Correction (Arlington County Board and The Citizens of Arlington County, Arlington, Virginia: May 1989)

Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development Planning Division, and Master Planning Team. Year Review of Arlington County's Comprehensive Plan (Arlington County, Arlington, Virginia: July 2000)